

The Trinity

Biblical Foundation

1. Two heresies to avoid
 - a. Unitarianism (not enough threeness)—often appears as modalism, Sabellianism.
 - b. Tritheism (not enough oneness).
2. The doctrine of the Trinity is grounded in Scripture.
 - a. Old Testament: God is one (Deut. 6:4).
 - b. New Testament: God is a complex oneness (Incarnation and Pentecost).
 - c. Passages where all three members appear together as God (Matt. 3:16-17, 28:19; Jn. 3:34-35, 14:26, 15:26; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; Tit. 3:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:2).

Historical Development

1. Arius vs. Alexander of Alexandria (318)
 - a. Arius suspects that his bishop Alexander is a Sabellian.
 - b. Arius states that the Son differs from the Father, who alone is God in the fullest sense. The Son is a second-string deity, born of the Father before the beginning of time for the purpose of creating the world.

Arius believed the Son was created from nothing by the Father's will, before the beginning of time, for the sake of creating the world.
 - c. Arian Scripture: Col. 1:15—Son is the first-born of all creation; Jn. 14:28—“The Father is greater than I”; Jn. 17:3—“know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”
 - d. Alexander's side responds with Jn. 1:1 and Jn. 10:30—“I and the Father are one.”

2. The Council of Nicea deposes Arius (325)
 - a. Constantine wants his newly conquered empire to remain united.
 - b. Nicea eliminates Arianism by declaring that the Father and Son are *homoousios* (*homo*=same + *ousia*=essence).
 - c. Nicea ably says how Father and Son are one but does not yet have the vocabulary to say how they are three.

3. Final Resolution at the Council of Constantinople (381)
 - a. The Cappadocian theologians: Basil the Great, his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus.
 - b. The Cappadocians used Aristotle's distinction between primary and secondary substance to distinguish between the three and one within the Godhead.
 - 1) Secondary substance: *ousia* (there is one what in the Trinity). Here Constantinople retained Nicea's language that the Father and Son are *homoousios*.
 - 2) Primary substance: *hypostasis* (there are three whos within the Trinity). Here Constantinople went beyond Nicea, enlarging the church's vocabulary so they could account for God's threeness as well as his oneness.

Practical Application

1. Transcendence: God is holy (Ecclesiastes 5:1-2)

2. Immanence: God is love
 - a. Creation and redemption are appropriate acts for our triune God.
 - b. Reality is relationship.
 - c. This relationship is interdependent.
 - d. We thrive when we follow God's example and deny ourselves and serve others for Jesus' sake (Matt. 16:24; Phil. 2:5-11)
 - e. Creaturely analogies for Trinity: church (John 17:21-23) and marriage (Gen. 1:27).

The Nicene Creed (325)

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God

Begotten of the essence of the Father

God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made

Of the **same essence** as the Father through whom all things were made in heaven and earth

Who, for us men, and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, becoming man.

He suffered, and on the third day He rose and ascended into the heavens from which he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

We believe in the Holy Spirit.

But those who say:

Once he was not, or was not before his generation, or he came out of nothing, or assert that the Son of God is of a **different essence**, or that he is a creature or changeable or mutable....

The catholic and apostolic church anathematizes.

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)

We believe in one God, the Father almighty,

Maker of heaven and earth and all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God

Begotten of the Father before all ages

God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made

Being of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made

Who for us men and for our salvation

Came down from heaven

Was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man

Who for us was crucified under Pontius Pilate

Suffered and was buried;

The third day he rose, according to the Scriptures

Ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the giver of life

Who proceeds from the Father (and the Son) [*filioque*]

Who together with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified

Who spoke by the prophets.

We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins

And we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. Amen.