

LESSON 35 - THE NICENE CREED

What Beliefs Distinguish True Christianity From False Christianity?

By Brian S. Holmes

Copyright © 2021. Brian S. Holmes. MPowered Christian Ministries. All rights reserved. <https://MPoweredChristian.org>

Excerpted from: Holmes, Brian. “*Driveway Discipleship*” [The Empowered Christian Series] Clearwater, FL: MPowered Christian Publishing, 2021.

Permission for reuse by ABNSat, Trinity Channel, and their affiliates for use when provided free of charge.

Made available through a partnership with Missionary Church, Inc. <https://MCUSA.org>

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



What beliefs distinguish *true* Christianity from false Christianity? The early creeds, formal statements, or belief systems focused on the central message of Jesus’s followers: His divinity, lordship, and salvation through faith in His death and resurrection. In a previous lesson about 1st century Christian beliefs, we surveyed early creeds and hymns passed down orally, then quoted in the New Testament. In a previous lesson about 2nd century Christian beliefs, the Church encountered opposition and consolidated their beliefs in *The Apostle’s Creed*. This lesson we’ll examine the future challenges and controversies that provoked the creed to be expanded on in the 3rd century. The result was a statement called *The Nicene Creed*. It’s the single most important summary of beliefs that distinguish true Christianity from false Christianity. It is now over 1,600 years old!

Introduction to The Nicene Creed. In AD 313 the Roman Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan granting tolerance to all religions, ending Christian persecution and increasing religious debate. Arius, a priest in Alexandria, Egypt, began teaching that if God begat Jesus, then Jesus had an origin. He argued that if Jesus did not share in the same divine essence with the Father, Jesus was a lesser god. This controversy caused Christian division and brought chaos to the Empire. Constantine, a self-identified Christian, called together a council of church leaders in Nicaea in AD 325 to resolve the controversy and restore unity. The council overwhelmingly voted against Arian teachings (nearly 300-3). The council expressed its views about God, Jesus, and the Church in The Nicene Creed. Afterwards, a heresy about the Holy Spirit arose as a follow-up to Arianism. In response, further additions were made to the creed at the Council of Constantinople in AD 381 (this version shown). The Nicene Creed is shown in full below in red. Portions of the creed originating from the earlier 2nd century Apostle’s Creed are shown in blue.

The Nicene Creed. “WE BELIEVE IN ONE GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, AND OF ALL THINGS VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE.” To refute polytheism, “one” God was added to emphasize Christianity’s monotheism. There’s only one true eternal God, in all places, at all times. There are no other gods besides Him. Jesus is not a being that God created, to use or to help Him create everything. God alone is creator of everything. “WE BELIEVE IN ONE LORD, JESUS CHRIST, THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD, BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER BEFORE ALL WORLDS, GOD FROM GOD, LIGHT FROM LIGHT, TRUE GOD FROM TRUE GOD, BEGOTTEN, NOT MADE, OF THE SAME ESSENCE AS THE FATHER.” Jesus is neither a mere human prophet, nor is He a second lesser type of created demigod, angel, or spirit being. He has no beginning. He’s of the same divine nature as God. Yet, He has always been distinct from the Father. “THROUGH HIM ALL THINGS WERE MADE.” Jesus played a unique role in creation. God *spoke* the universe into existence

and Jesus *is* the logos/Word of God. “WHO FOR US, AND FOR OUR SALVATION, HE CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN: HE BECAME INCARNATE BY THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE VIRGIN MARY,” Jesus wasn’t conceived by natural coitus. He was conceived supernaturally in the womb, of a godly virgin named Mary, by the Spirit of God. He didn’t come to teach the way to God. He *is* the way to God. Because He loved us, Jesus humbled Himself and came into our world, to provide the way for our salvation. “AND WAS MADE MAN;” Another heresy taught Jesus was either God or some kind of spirit, but not human at all. But it is essential to believe, after His incarnation, He was truly God *and* truly man. Because of His humanity He adequately represents us. “HE WAS CRUCIFIED FOR US UNDER PONTIUS PILATE, AND SUFFERED, AND WAS BURIED.” Pontius Pilate was the Roman prefect of Judea from AD 26-36. Jesus was crucified by him the day before Passover, Friday afternoon, at Golgotha in Jerusalem, ca. AD 33. He died and was buried in Jerusalem, in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish council. The addition of “for us” emphasizes that it was for no other reason, than *for our sins*, that Jesus was crucified. “AND THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN, ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES;” The following Sunday God rose Him bodily from the dead. He wasn’t just revived. He was raised in His same body, with His body now transformed and eternal. He was first to be resurrected and glorified. This was the fulfillment of Isaiah 53 and many prophecies in the Old Testament. “AND ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, AND IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER.” After forty days, in front of many witnesses, He bodily ascended into Heaven. He now sits at the right hand of the Father, reigning as Lord over Heaven and Earth. “HE WILL COME AGAIN IN GLORY, TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD;” When Jesus returns He won’t come in secret, or as a human teacher or prophet, or in some subtle, spiritual way, unbeknownst to the rest of the world. He will come bodily, visibly, dramatically, in full glory and power. The entire world will know it and never be the same. The living and dead will be resurrected. Jesus will judge every single person; some will receive everlasting life, others everlasting death and torment. “HIS KINGDOM WILL HAVE NO END.” When He returns He will permanently establish His Kingdom on earth and never again will things return to a sinful or fallen state. “WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE LORD, THE GIVER OF LIFE, WHO PROCEEDS FROM THE FATHER [AND THE SON*] WHO WITH THE FATHER AND THE SON IS WORSHIPPED AND GLORIFIED.” The Holy Spirit is of the same divine essence as the Father and the Son. He’s not a lesser god, a created being, or a mystical “*force*” from God. He *is* God and not inferior in any way to the Father nor the Son. He is fully and truly God and worshipped and glorified as such. “WHO SPOKE THROUGH THE PROPHETS.” The Holy Spirit is the same “LORD” God Almighty (Yahweh). The New Testament’s Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God who spoke through the Old Testament prophets. “WE BELIEVE IN ONE HOLY CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH.” “One” and “apostolic” were added to reinforce the belief there’s only one true Church, of which Jesus is the head, consisting of everyone born of the Spirit of God. It’s universal, global, timeless, invisible, and set apart. “WE ACKNOWLEDGE ONE BAPTISM FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.” “One baptism” reinforces the belief that it’s through our baptism *into Jesus* we receive forgiveness. God forgives everyone who has put their faith in Jesus’s death on behalf of their sins and spiritually died to themselves to live *in Him*. “WE LOOK FOR THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME. AMEN.” All who belong to Jesus will be bodily resurrected and receive eternal life with Him. This is the eternal hope we live for.

Let’s pray. Heavenly Father, help me live by faith. In Jesus’s name. Amen. (Recite Creed)

The Nicene Creed

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

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of the Father before all worlds,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
Who for us, and for our salvation,
he came down from heaven:
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,
and was made man;
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate,
and suffered, and was buried,
and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures;
and ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory,
to judge the living and the dead;
His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father *[and the Son]**,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who spoke through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

*This addition was made by the Western Church (Catholic/Protestant), called the filioque, in AD 589.

The rest of the the creed, in its AD 381 format, is agreed to by all orthodox Christians.

Visit <https://MPoweredChristian.org/Church-Creeds>

for more information about Church Creeds