

Brothers, Stand Firm

Chapter 9 – Do We Still Need the Creed?

Two things every Christian man ought to know about creeds:

- Succinct statements of belief
- Inescapable

Chapter 10 – I Believe

Three chief articles of The Apostles` Creed

- God is the One Who Created Everything

Chapter 4: Of Creation ⁴

1. It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good.

2. After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it: and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.

- God is the One Who Redeems Sinners

Chapter 8: Of Christ the Mediator ⁴

1. It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Savior of his church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world: unto whom he did from all eternity give a people, to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

- God is the One Who Sanctifies the Redeemed

Chapter 13: Of Sanctification ⁴

1. They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them: the dominion of the whole body of sin is

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destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

2. This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man; yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part; whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

3. In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail; yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Chapter 11 – The logic of God

Four reconcilable facts of the doctrine of the trinity ¹

- There is one God.
- The Father is God.
- The Son is God.
- The Holy Spirit is God.

The essential Trinitarian teaching is biblically clear and simple ⁵

- The Father is not the Son.
- The Son is not the Spirit.
- The Spirit is not the Father.
- One God, three Persons who are all divine and distinct from one another, but still one God.

In the third century, a false teacher named Sabellius saw Jesus in this way – He said that Christ is the same essence as God but less than God. The word that Sabellius used to describe this relationship between God the Father and God the Son was *homoousios*, which means literally “of the same essence”. The word was crucial to the modalistic heresy of Sabellius. At Antioch in A.D. 267, the church condemned Sabellius as a heretic and repudiated the word *homoousios* and substituted for it the word *homoiousios*, which means “a like essence”. That one-letter difference changes the word from “same essence” to “a like essence”. The church was trying to say that Christ, as the second person of the Trinity, is not so far removed from the essence of God that He cannot be understood as God; rather, He is just like God. With the rejection of the term *homoousios*, Sabellius and his followers were condemned. ²

Brothers, Stand Firm

In the fourth century the church faced the most critical heretical crisis in her history up until that time. It originated with the heretic Arius. Arius believed that Jesus and the Father are one, in the sense of sharing the same purpose; he did not believe that Jesus and the Father share the same essence. The dispute that arose was so intense it became necessary for the emperor to call a council together to study the matter. The Council of Nicaea produced the Nicene Creed.²

Constantine, in effect, presided over this council. About 300 bishops were invited to participate, some of them still maimed from being tortured in imperial prisons as young men. Arius was there, supported by a variety of bishops. Alexander was there, supported by a variety of bishops, and by a deacon in the church – Athanasius. Athanasius would later become bishop of Alexandria and become the key defender of orthodoxy, he would actually be exiled five times, thrown out of his church and then called back, always defending the truth. Associated with Athanasius came the Latin phrase: Athanasius *contra mundum* – Athanasius against the world.⁵

The Nicene Creed declared that the only (Greek) word we can use to communicate the full deity of Christ is *homoousios* rather than *homoiousios*. The word that the church condemned in A.D. 267 it embraced in A.D. 325. The church reversed its view at this point because the threat of Sabellianism had vanished, but the danger of Arianism had become severe. To say that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one in essence but three in person is a dramatic affirmation of the formula of the Trinity.²

Constantine came up with the clinching theological argument. He said, “Either sign the creed or you’re exiled.”⁵

The Council of Nicaea did some other things: 1) it set the date of Easter; 2) passed regulations about the disciplinary life of the church – Any person excommunicated can only be received back into the church by the bishop who excommunicated him. Arius was excommunicated after Nicaea by Bishop Alexander. Years later, the emperor Constantine mandates Athanasius, now Bishop of Alexandria, to lift the ban on Arius. Athanasius refuses to do it, and subsequently gets deposed and exiled. So the ban was to be lifted, but on the night before, Arius dies. For another 50 to 60 years, Athanasius will go in and out of his office.⁵

The second ecumenical council of Constantinople in A.D. 381 reiterated what Nicaea had said about orthodoxy.⁵

The Nicene Creed³

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

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He 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; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And 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 world to come. Amen.

* The word “catholic” refers to the universal church.

- The fact that we can’t explain it (the Trinity) shouldn’t be such a huge surprise, should it? Most of the things we say about God really boil down to saying, “He’s not like us.” We are finite; God is infinite. We are time bound; God is eternal.⁵

References

¹ *Brothers, Stand Firm*, 2014, Steve Bateman, pp. 57-72

² *1-2 Peter*, 2011, Robert Charles Sproul, pp. 269-270

³ *The Reformation Study Bible*, 2015, pp. 2388-2389

⁴ *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms*, 1647

⁵ *A Survey of Church History*, W. Robert Godfrey