

The Nicene Creed

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- [0 : 00] I want to begin with a question. What have a Roman emperor, 318 Middle Eastern bishops, and a small town in the northwest of Turkey got in common?
- ! Well, in the year 325 AD, the Roman emperor Constantine called together a council of bishops to meet in the town of Nicaea in present-day Turkey.
- And he called them there to regularize the church's position on who Jesus is. The result of the council was the Nicene Creed, which is the foundation stone statement around which all Christians of whatever persuasion are agreed.
- And this year, 2025, is the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed. And so, over the next few sermons, I want to unpack its central teaching.
- For those of us who are new to Christianity, this will help you to understand the basics of the Christian faith, so that you may join us in confessing your belief in this one God.
- [1 : 10] And for those of us who have been Christians for many, many years, this will reinforce the basics of the faith and to reset your own confession of faith.
- So, this morning, probably for the first time in our church's history, we're going to recite together the Nicene Creed, as opposed to the Apostles' Creed. The Nicene Creed is far more authoritative and far more fundamental to our faith.
- So, we ask, Christian, what do we believe? We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.
- We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.
- Through him all things were made. For us men, and for our salvation, he came down from heaven. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary and was made man.
- [2 : 34] For our sake, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day, he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.
- He 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, and 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. With the Father and the Son, he is worshipped and glorified.
- He has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy, Catholic, and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
- We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen. Thank you. This morning, I want us to consider together the first statement of the Creed.
- [3 : 49] We believe in one God. And I want us to think about it word by word. Not a normal sermon. Word by word.
- First then, notice that the Creed begins not with I, but with we. We believe in one God.

Christianity is not a solo religion. The life of faith is to be lived in community with other Christians. There are no lone wolf Christians.

We belong together as one family, one church. If you want to be a Christian, you must be ready to live in community with others.

To love and serve others. And to be loved and to be served by others. Christianity is community. The word we is important.

[4 : 47] It's very important. We live in an individualistic society where everyone makes up their own rules and everyone follows their own religion.

But has it made us happier? Not at all. We have never been so unhappy.

And if that's you today, I'm happy and confused. The Christianity of Nicaea is for you. Because this is a community faith.

A we believe in God. Well, the next word is the word believe. Believe. Much has been talked about concerning this word.

What does it mean to believe something? And most of the talk, in my opinion, generates far more heat than light. All of us know what believing something is.

[5 : 43] Atheists tell us they believe in nothing. But they believe in themselves, do they not? The reality is that we all believe in something. Also, atheists will tell you that believing something is of a lower level of certainty than knowing something.

Let me ask you a question. Do you believe in love? Do you believe in love? Is your belief in love of any less value than your knowledge of anything else in your life?

In my opinion, to say that you believe something is actually the least complicated of all the phrases in the creed. But there is something about that word believe to which I wish to draw your attention.

For the Nicene Fathers, what they believed was not a private matter. They publicly confessed what they privately believed. If we believe in one God, we must be willing to publicly confess our belief.

If you believe in the one God proclaimed in the creed, do not keep it to yourself. Publicly profess your faith. If you haven't told anyone else that you're a Christian, then this is an opportunity for you to change that.

[7 : 05] After the service, tell me or someone else that you know to be a Christian here, that you believe these things to be true, and that you believe in this one God.

We believe. I'll leave the word in to the end. We believe, according to the Nicene Creed, in God. We believe in God.

Again, atheists will tell us they don't believe in God. More accurately, I would suggest, respectfully, that they choose not to believe in the God Christians do.

Because every person on planet Earth believes in a God or gods, whether they choose to admit it or not. A person's God is what they choose to put first in their lives.

Let me say that again. A person's God is what they choose to put first in their lives. A person's God is what they bow down and worship and what they devote their lives to.

[8 : 11] And when you put it like that, everyone worships some kind of God or another. In Glasgow, many people worship the God of Rangers or Celtic. Spend all their money following their team.

And their entire mental energy is devoted to how their team is fading in the league. Others worship the God of prosperity and career, devoting their lives to the pursuit of more money and higher position in the company.

Still others put comfort and happiness first in their lives. Still others, the pursuit of pleasure and status. I've met people for whom being in a relationship has become their God.

Working as I did in academia for many years, I met many others for whom academic achievement and excellence came first in their lives. Before their marriages, before anything else.

Let's take the God of self-image. The God of self-image. It becomes someone's God when they choose to put it first in their lives.

[9 : 17] Self-image, or how someone appears to others and to oneself, has always been a fickle and merciless God. But it's a God to which many young people in our day and generation are drawn.

Their social media profiles bear no resemblance to reality at all. While they present themselves as beautiful, successful, healthy and fulfilled, on the inside they are hopeless and lost.

How tragic. The lens to which the God of self-image drives its worshippers is insane, far stricter than any other religion on earth.

Sometimes it costs its devotees their very lives as their dreams are disappointed and the cold hardness of reality kicks in. Well, at least we Christians are honest.

We put God first in our lives. He is the God in whom we believe. Those who deny that they believe in a God are fooling themselves. Of course they believe in a God.

[10 : 19] It just so happens that the God in whom they believe is very different from the God in whom we believe. So that then is the question. Who is the God in whom the fathers of Nicaea professed their faith?

Who is the God in whom the fathers of Nicaea professed their faith? Hindus, Muslims, and many other religions say that they believe in God. But surely the God in whom they believe is very different from the God in whom we believe.

If we ever hear someone saying that all religions are just different ways of getting to the same God, don't believe it. It's a complete lie. The God in whom we believe as Christians is very different from any other God worshipped.

So for a start, as for according to the Nicene fathers, we believe and worship one God.

One God. I don't know, and I don't even think they know, how many gods are worshipped in the Hindu religion. Our Celtic forefathers here in Scotland worshipped over 400 different gods.

[11 : 32] Likewise, the Egyptians of Jesus' day had hundreds of gods. As did the Vikings, the Romans, the Greeks. Modern-day Wiccans worshipped two gods, the god and goddess.

By contrast, we worship one God. The Shema summarizes our faith. Here, O Israel, the Lord our God is one.

We are what we call monotheists. We believe in only one God. The God in whom we believe has revealed Himself to us, as we've been singing, in His world and in His word.

We catch glimpses of His existence and His glory from the world in which we live, the world He created. We see His handiwork in the stars of the night. We hear His whisper in the wind.

We hear His shout in the storm. And intuitively, we know there is a God who made all this. But ultimately, we see Him in His word, the Bible. And in that word, He describes Himself to us.

[12 : 37] In Exodus 34 in the Old Testament, we read, These are His words. Again, in the unforgettable words of Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

We could go on through the whole Bible and learn who the God in whom we Christians believe is. He is no Greek-like stoic who has no interest in people's lives.

Rather, we read, Cast your burden on the Lord and He will sustain you. Later in the Bible, we learn, God is spirit.

God is light. God is love. And supremely, the one true and living God reveals Himself in the life and death of Jesus Christ, both in what Jesus said and in what Jesus did.

As we read through the four Gospels, we read about a Jesus who touches the untouchable and loves the unlovable. He gives the blind their sight. He heals the leper.

[13 : 58] He raises the dead to new life. Never a man was so righteous, so loving, so powerful, so faithful, so humble as Jesus Christ. And in all these things, God reveals to us the heart, His heart toward us.

More than any of that, Jesus gave Himself as a sacrifice on the cross, giving Himself to make peace between humanity and God by removing our sin and guilt.

This is the one God in whom we Christians believe, the God who reveals Himself in the Jesus who destroyed death by rising from the grave on the third day.

The Jesus who destroys despair by promising that anyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. The Jesus who destroys fear by promising the kingdom of God to any who shall trust in Him for salvation.

The Jesus who sends His Holy Spirit to fill us with joy, peace, and love. We believe in one God. But the Council of Nicaea was not called to decide on the nature of faith of the church or of the oneness of God.

[15 : 22] It was called in response to an urgent problem facing the church. Arius was an elder in the church in Alexandria, present-day Egypt.

He was an influential and popular churchman and writer. He believed, as does every other Christian, that there was only one God. But what Arius believed about the one God was very different from what the rest of the church did.

Up until then, Christian teaching held that there was only one God, but that this one God was a Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that there were three persons in one God.

But Arius taught against this. He maintained that the Son and the Holy Spirit, although similar to God, were not God. Arius' teachings were threatening the fourth century church, and that's why the Emperor Constantine, the first Christian emperor, gathered these 318 bishops in Nicaea to settle this dispute once for all.

We've already talked about God revealing himself through Jesus, the Jesus who himself claimed to be the Son of God.

[16 : 41] And then, of course, there's the Holy Spirit. Arius was opposed by two powerful men, Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, and Athanasius, another elder from Alexandria.

The Council of Nicaea in 325 AD unmistakably declared their position in the Nicene Creed.

The creed, every Christian, everywhere, has always believed, and must believe, in order to be called a Christian. It was not a tight-run contest.

Arius' position garnered two votes. At the Council of Nicaea, the Orthodox Historic Christian Position, 316.

The creed, as we've read it together, clearly declares at the beginning that we believe in one God, but there are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[17 : 48] The creed declares, we believe in one God, the Father Almighty. And then later, we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God.

Then later still, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life. Now, there are no pictures we can give of this. God is entirely one-of-a-kind, sui generis, one God, three persons.

It's a divine mystery. We must be content with that. But this doctrine of the Trinity, as proclaimed by Nicaea, is consistently taught by the Bible and was constantly believed by the early Christian church.

In Genesis chapter 1, we read, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

God the Father, God the Spirit. And by His Word, God spoke the universe into existence, and God said, His Word, which is later revealed in John 1, to be His Son, Jesus Christ.

[19 : 00] So, even from Genesis 1, the truth of the Trinity is clearly taught. Through the Old and New Testaments, the truth of the Trinity is unmistakably declared.

The Nicene fathers were saying nothing new. They were merely restating the position of the Bible as taught by Jesus and by the apostles. Those who reject the clear teaching of the Bible and the historic church's position are modern-day followers of Arius.

They include Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Jews, and yes, even Muslims, who though they say they believe in one God, albeit their God is very different from our God, reject the doctrine of the Trinity.

But it's the doctrine of the Trinity which is the fundamental market of what it means to be a Christian. When a Mormon or JW turns up at your door and says, ah, a fellow Christian, you can say to them, you are not a Christian because you do not believe in the Trinity.

We believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now, why is this important? It's not just splitting hairs. Why is this important?

[20 : 20] There are a thousand million reasons why the doctrine of the Trinity is crucial and therefore why the Nicene Creed is the fundamental statement of the Christian faith as opposed to the Apostles' Creed.

Let me confine myself to just two. In the first instance, the Bible clearly teaches God is love. God is love.

Love presupposes you must have someone else to love. God is Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God the Father loves God the Son and loves God the Holy Spirit and so on. God cannot be love if He has no one to love.

It is the love of God for Himself as Trinity which is the foundation of His love for us and of our love for each other. No Trinity, no love.

[21 : 25] But secondly, the Bible clearly teaches that unless Jesus was God, His sacrifice on the cross would not have been enough to take away all our sins and to give us eternal life.

Unless He had been God, because He was God, His sacrifice on the cross is of infinite value. His blood, because it is the blood of God, can take away every sin and do for us what nothing else could.

That's why we can say we believe in the forgiveness of sins. And that's why, as we'll see hopefully on Saturday evening, the creed says of Him, we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God who for us men and for our salvation came down.

Because Jesus is God, He alone can give and bring salvation to anyone here who believes in Him. If Jesus was not God, we can have no assurance that our sins have been forgiven.

we can have no assurance or hope for the future. All we're left with is the prospect of a meaningless death. And after that, who knows?

[22 : 50] But because Jesus is God, we know that our sins are forgiven. We have hope for the future. and we know that our physical death is but the doorway to an eternal life in the presence of the God who, because He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, loves us infinitely, eternally, and unchangeably.

We believe in one God. The one God in whom we believe is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the God of love and of salvation.

No wonder so many people in today's uncertain world filled with lies and fake news are turning to Christianity for certainty, for meaning, and for hope.

On this coming Saturday evening, and I would urge you to come along at half past seven, we're going to explore what the Creed says about Jesus. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, who for us men and our salvation came down.

And in two weeks' time, we're going to examine what the Creed says about the Holy Spirit. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the giver of life. And then in three weeks' time, time to wrap up our mini-series, we'll consider what the Creed says about the church.

[24 : 18] We believe in one holy, Catholic, and apostolic church. But I've left one word to the end, the shortest word. We believe in or into one God.

We believe in one God. This little word, in, makes all the difference. The Nicene fathers did not say, we believe that there is one God.

They said, we believe in one God. There are many people who believe that there is only one God, but they do not believe in that one God.

They have not personally placed their faith and trust in the one God revealed in the Bible as the God of love and salvation, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Think about it this way.

When my children were in school and one of them would have an exam and they were very nervous, I would say to them as they were leaving the house, your mother and I believe in you.

[25 : 26] Your mother and I believe in you. By saying that, I wasn't questioning their existence. Rather, I was expressing to them that whether they did well or whether they did badly, we were on their side.

That even if they came home crying because the exam was so hard, we were there for them. That we wouldn't love them any more or any less. To say, I believe in you is to nail your colors to the mast and to declare your unconditional loyalty and love.

And in the same way, to say we believe in one God is not just to believe that there is only one God, but to pledge to Him our unconditional loyalty and love.

It is to nail our colors to the mast and say, we are worshippers of this one God. We have faith in this one God. We put Him first in our lives before our self-image, before our prosperity, before Rangers, before Celtic, before anything else.

In 312 AD, the Emperor Constantine did this very thing when he became a Christian. Previous to him, the Emperor Diocletian had been a persecutor, a vicious persecutor of the church.

[26 : 52] Many of the bishops who attended the Council of Nicaea still carried with them the scars of their torture at the hands of Diocletian. They had proved their loyalty to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

They had put Him first in their lives. They put Him before their own comforts, before their own health, before their own safety. And that's what we've all been challenged with today.

when earlier, we recited the Nicene Creed together. Did you really mean what you said? Did you really mean what you said?

