The Nicene Creed (Part Three)

The Theology of the Creed Continued

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I. Its Trinitarian Structure and Theology

A. The Creed doesn't just teach about the Trinity here and there, the Trinity its _____

i. 1st paragraph: _____; 2nd paragraph: _____; 3rd paragraph: _____

ii. The Apostles' Creed and most systematic theology books follow this same outline!

B. We know the Creed's outline is the Trinity, but what does it teach about the Trinity?

i. The _____ of Father, Son, & Spirit is central to the Creed's Trinitarianism.

ii. They all possess the same divine nature; they have the same divine attributes.

C. The Creed also affirms _____ between the persons (personal properties).

i. The Father's personal property is being unbegotten.

ii. The Son's personal property is being begotten of the Father.

iii. The Spirit's personal property is proceeding from the Father & the Son.

D. Why is this Trinitarian theology important?

i. First, because the Trinity is _____.

ii. Second, because the Trinity is how God is revealed in _____.

iii. Third, because eternal life is blessed communion with the Father, Son, and Spirit.

II. Its Doctrine of Christ and Salvation

A. This is where the Creed defends Christ's divine nature according to Scripture.

i. The Son is "of one substance with the Father."

ii. Son has all the same divine attributes as Father (like _____).

B. The Father and the Son have the same nature, but how are they different?

i. The Son is distinguished from the Father by his _____.

ii. We know *that* this is true, from Scripture, but we can't know *how* it's true.

C. Why should we care that the Son is true God of true God?

i. Because Jesus could not have _____ if he wasn't truly God.

ii. We owe an infinite debt, because we rebelled against an infinite God.

iii. So, Christ's death had to have infinite worth, to pay our infinite debt.

D. What did Christ do to save us?

i. "For us men and for our salvation…" → _____ he did, he did for us.

1. Jesus was humiliated and exalted for us and our salvation.

ii. And why is it important that Jesus was made man?

1. Christ took on a human body so that he could offer God human obedience.

2. And so he could offer God a human death on our behalf.

3. And because he is like us in every way, he can _____ with us.

E. He "was crucified for also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried…"

i. Why does it mention Pontius Pilate?

1. That's what Scripture says, but this also ties our faith to real _____.
2. And this establishes that Jesus's death was a _____.

ii. This whole phrase is building off of 1 Corinthians 15:3–4.

F. "Ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father."

i. Scripture attests to this all over the place, like in Acts 1:9 and Psalm 110:1.

ii. This means there's a man like us in heaven, acting as our _____

G. "He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom…"

i. This is thoroughly biblical too (Matt 16:27, 2 Tim 4:1, Luke 1:33).

ii. Christ's return, judgment, and eternal kingdom is our _____.

III. Its Doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the Church

A. The Creed closes by teaching us about the Spirit, and how he applies salvation to us.

i. "The Holy Spirit, The Lord and Giver of life."

1. This means that the Spirit is _____ to the Father and the Son.
2. The Spirit has the same divine nature & attributes as Father and Son.

ii. Why does it matter that the Spirit is God, equal with the Father and Son?

1. Again, because this is biblical! (1 Cor 3:17 & John 6:63.)
2. The Spirit's deity gives us _____ that he can & will give us life.

iii. "Who proceeds from the Father and the Son."

1. This is the Spirit's _____.
2. This is biblical too (John 15:26; John 20:22).

iv. "Who spoke by the prophets."

1. The Spirit was intimately involved in giving us the Bible (2 Pet 1:21).

B. Why does the Creed talk about the Church in connection with the Holy Spirit?

i. The Church is _____.

ii. And this follows Scripture: "There is one body and one Spirit… one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph 4:4–5).

iii. We believe "In one holy catholic and apostolic church."

1. There are 4 attributes of the church: Unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity.
2. These are attributes and _____, and an object of faith.

The Nicene Creed

(from the Trinity Hymnal, p. 846)

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

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the 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 sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And 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 worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Resources on the Nicene Creed

Kevin DeYoung, *The Nicene Creed: What You Need to Know about the Most Important Creed Ever Written*. A newly published brief introduction to the Nicene Creed (96 pages!).

Westminster Seminary California, “The Nicene Creed.” A podcast series, available everywhere you listen to podcasts.

Jackson Greer, “The Nicene Creed: Guiding Orthodoxy for 1,700 Years,” online article in Modern Reformation.

Carl Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative*. A great book about creeds in general, and their importance.

Appendix on the Double Procession of the Spirit and the *Filioque*

I. This is a debate between the Western Church (Latin speaking, today Protestants & Roman Catholics) and Eastern Church (Greek speaking, today Eastern/ Greek Orthodox).
   A. The Western church teaches that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, but the Eastern church says Spirit proceeds only from Father.
      i. In 589, at the council of Toledo, the Nicene Creed was edited to add "and the Son"—in Latin, *filioque*— so the Spirit "proceeds from the Father & the Son."
   B. This addition was the primary theological reason for the Great Schism in 1054, when the Greek speaking Eastern church split from the Latin Western.

II. What should we make of this debate and the doctrine of double procession?
   A. Basically, the *filioque* was the right doctrine through the wrong means.
      i. There was a language barrier between East (Greek) and West (Latin).
      ii. And the main objection from the East is that the Creed shouldn't be edited.
      iii. Many Western theologians at least agree that the way the Creed was edited was unideal—by a relatively small regional council.
   B. The Creed can and has been edited—for example, the original Nicene didn't say anything about the Holy Spirit, that was added at Constantinople (381).
      i. But Constantinople was received as an ecumenical council, with clear precedence and need for the addition to the Creed.
      ii. And *filioque* seems to change meaning when translated into Greek.
      iii. Further, plenty of Eastern theologians wrote things that would support the *filioque*, and plenty of Western theologians supported the Eastern view.
   C. So, the division caused by the addition to the Creed was unnecessary, but was exacerbated by poor communication and political tensions.

III. Scripture supports the view that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.
   A. Scripture not only calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of the Father, but also of the Son.
      i. Rom 8:9: "Anyone who does not have *the Spirit of Christ*…"
      ii. Gal 4:6: "God has sent the *Spirit of his Son* into our hearts."
   B. But the only passage that explicitly mentions the Spirit proceeding supports the Eastern view: "the Spirit… proceeds from the Father" (Jn 15:26).
      i. At the same time, it's clear from Jn 15:26 that Jesus sends the Spirit.
      ii. "The Helper… *whom I will send* to you from the Father" (15:26).
      iii. Compare 14:26: "The Helper… *whom the Father will send* in my name."
      iv. The Spirit is *sent* by Father and Son, but is that the same as proceeding?
      v. Sometimes it's assumed that they're the same, but that needs to be proved.
   C. Ultimately, our theological conclusions from Scripture support saying that the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.
      i. If the Spirit only proceeds from the Father, how does he relate to the Son?
      ii. But our disagreement with the Eastern church on this shouldn't divide us.
      iii. We're trying to say the same thing, so we shouldn't be too dogmatic.
      iv. Eastern theologians usually want to distinguish, and some say that the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son (rather than from Father and Son)
      v. We should be able to agree w/ that, it fits the intention of our Nicene Creed.
      vi. So, our version of the Nicene Creed is good doctrine with a messy history.