

Bless the Lord, O My Soul
Nicene Creed—Part 1

Daniel Cote

In this sermon series, I will be preaching through the key affirmations of the Apostle's Creed, dating to the second century, which we recited in unison this morning and is commonly referred to as the Old Roman Creed. Today, we will focus on the first line, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," which affirms the existence of the Creator. I will begin with a brief description of what nature reveals about God, and then consider how he interacts with you and me, as revealed in Psalm 103. But first, a bit of humor at the atheist's expense.

A young lady came home from a date looking rather sad. She told her mother, "Arthur proposed to me an hour ago." "Then why are you so sad?" her mother asked. "Because he also told me he was an atheist. Mom, he doesn't even believe there's a hell." Her mother replied, "Marry him anyway. Between the two of us, we'll show him how wrong he is."

Atheists contend there is no God, but is that reasonable? Is that rational? Does that make sense? Let me ask you this: what do we see all around us? I see people, if I go outside, I can see vast continents, oceans, and grandeur beyond my understanding; and in the night sky, vast bodies in space, and trillions of stars. The atheist believes that nothing brought the universe into existence. The problem for atheists is that nothing has no power to produce anything. It is not possible for nothing to create something; therefore, there must be a Creator. As C.S. Lewis observed, if ever there was a time when there was nothing, there would still be nothing now. Since there is something now, that is, the universe, life, grandeur, and beauty, there must be a Creator.

So what do we learn about God merely considering His creation of the universe and beings who know right and wrong? The Creator must have great power, wisdom, and knowledge to make something as vast as the universe and as complex as life. To give us an idea of the vastness of the universe, consider the Parker Solar Probe, which is on a mission to gather data about the Sun and travels at 430,000 miles per hour. It is the fastest thing humans have ever built, and even it would take 6,600 years to reach the nearest star, Proxima Centauri, which is 25 trillion miles away. To get to the edge of the universe, it would take the same probe 73 trillion years to reach it. I know that is a lot of math, but it speaks to the fact that our Creator has power and capabilities at a level inconceivable to humans and far beyond our understanding.

Moreover, the Creator had to exist before the creation of the universe, or He could not have brought it into existence, leading to the conclusion that He is outside of space and time, meaning that He is eternal. The artist must exist before and apart from the painting, or he could not make the painting. In the same way, God existed before the creation of time and space; thus, He is timeless and spaceless and, therefore, eternal.

Furthermore, our Creator has imbued us with a sense of right and wrong and an understanding of what is good, and so He is the author of morality in us. He must be personal because He has designed a habitat perfectly suited for His creatures, and He has imparted uniqueness to each one, fashioning DNA that sets each individual apart.

Just from this brief consideration of the matter of what nature reveals about God, we conclude that the Creator, God, is immensely powerful, wise, knowledgeable, personal, and

eternal. Shouldn't what is revealed in nature about the Creator prompt individuals to seek more knowledge about God?

Millions of people spend countless hours researching family trees, mailing DNA samples, and searching old records to discover where they came from. Television programs devoted to ancestry have become enormously popular because people long to know their roots and heritage. We instinctively sense that understanding our origins helps us understand our identity. In the same way, we should be drawn to learn more about the One who created us, to understand how we fit into His overall eternal plan.

I think every human wonders where they come from and why they are here, but strangely, atheists suppress their curiosity about the matter. But for the open-minded, what we learn about God in creation should give us a thirst to know more about God. God has given us the Bible for this purpose, and we will consider what the Bible reveals about God and His attributes another day this summer, but much is revealed in nature. Today, we will learn about God's love and concern for His creatures in one of the richest texts in the Bible on that matter, Psalm 103.

We are completely dependent on God

Not one second of our entire existence are we not dependent on God. On a January night in 2023, the world of professional football was rocked. In the middle of a nationally televised game, Damar Hamlin collapsed on the field after suffering cardiac arrest. Players dropped to their knees. Coaches stood in stunned silence. Fans in the stadium and millions watching at home realized in an instant that something far deeper than a game was unfolding.

What followed was a global moment of prayer and fragility. A young man in peak physical condition was suddenly face-to-face with the limits of human strength. Medical teams worked urgently, while family and teammates waited with uncertainty hanging in the air. In the days that followed, Hamlin's recovery became a widely shared testimony of gratitude and faith. He repeatedly pointed to God's mercy and the power of prayer in sustaining him through the crisis.

Psalm 103 speaks directly into moments like this: "As for man, his days are like grass... but the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him" (vv. 15–17). Life is fragile, strength is temporary, and control is limited — but God's mercy is enduring, His compassion is near, and His sovereignty never fails (v. 19).

Our Scripture reading and sermon text is Psalm 103 in its entirety. Psalm 103 is a Psalm of David and is one of the richest descriptions of God's Character in all of Scripture. In the opening line, David calls his own soul, which is his being, to bless the Lord and His holy name. David continues to remind himself and his readers of the personal mercies of God, His compassionate character, His everlasting rule, and His sovereignty over all creation. In blessing God, David is declaring His goodness and making known his gratitude toward God, and throughout the psalm, he encourages those who read this psalm, or hear it, to do the same.

The mercies and benefits of relationship with God (vv 1-5)

In the psalm, David progresses through four themes or movements. First, in verses 1-5, David remembers the personal mercies of God and forgets none of the benefits of his relationship with the Lord, which he proceeds to describe. As we will see, the benefits of a relationship with the Lord are wonderful and overwhelmingly positive. But what is the basis for

a proper relationship between a human and God? Proverbs 9:10 informs us that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom....”

In our me-centered culture, we recoil at the idea of fearing anything. You might remember the bumper stickers, which you might still see today, that read “No Fear.” They originated from a 1980s clothing brand and communicate courage without hesitation, independence, self-reliance, and defiance of authority. In contrast, Proverbs 9:10 reveals a deeper truth: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Real wisdom is not the absence of fear, but rightly ordered fear—reverent awe of God.

When we fear the Lord, we do not even need to fear death. If you fear God, it means that you believe in Him. If you believe in Him, He promises you eternity in heaven. As Jesus says in John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Darth Vader is kind of scary, according to my grandchildren. But no one fears Darth Vader or any other fictional character because they are not real. Yet fear of God is entirely appropriate because He is real, and He will righteously judge every member of the human race, and unless you have been washed in the blood of the lamb, by faith in Jesus, you will be separated from your beautiful Creator for all eternity.

The “fear of the Lord” in Scripture is not cringing terror, but a posture of reverent awe, humble trust, and obedient love before the living God. It is consistently presented in the Bible as both right and wise, and from the fear of the Lord flows a multitude of blessings. When you fear the Lord, it means you depend on the Lord; it means you have faith that God is real and your dependence on Him is well placed, because as Jesus says in Matthew 6:26, “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?”

And a few verses later, Jesus says in verse 30, “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith!”

The wise fear the Lord. So what are you worrying about? If you have faith in God, you really have nothing to worry about in this chaotic, broken, violent world. Everything will turn out fine if you fear God and believe in Him, even if this does not become clear until you enter eternity.

So let’s continue to consider what David is teaching us in the first five verses of our psalm. David describes the personal mercies of God. He pardons all your iniquities, and He heals all your diseases. God has crafted the human immune system, which naturally takes care of and heals us of the vast majority of what ails us. Has God ever answered your prayers for healing, or for someone you love? I’ve stopped counting. I’m sure numerous people you have prayed for have been healed, or restored, and given more years. God is not bound by humans to heal every disease, but every healing does come from Him. And when people die, it is because it was their time appointed by our sovereign God.

But David is just warming up. In this same section, he reminds us that God saves us from the pit, which is the grave, and through Christ grants us eternal life in heaven. God gave us life, sustains us in it, satisfying those who love Him with good things, and when it is over, He calls us home to be with Him, crowning us with lovingkindness and compassion. We need to have an attitude of gratitude for the life and opportunities that God has given us.

The compassion of God (vv 6-13)

Next in verses 6-13, David moves to describe God's compassionate character. David recalls God's covenant with Moses. The people of Israel were oppressed, and David reminds all who read this of the Lord's concern for them. When Israel suffered under slavery in Egypt, God was not indifferent. Exodus says, "God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant" (Exodus 2:24). After years of oppression, He raised up Moses to lead His people to freedom. Psalms 103:6-7 reminds us that the Lord still "works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed." God sees suffering and unrighteousness and remembers His people, and acts in His perfect time.

A man once complained to his pastor that he could not see God's blessings in his life. Everything seemed ordinary—same job, same house, same routines. The pastor handed him a notebook and challenged him to write down three gifts from God every day for one month. At first, the entries were simple: "food on the table," "a safe drive home," "a beautiful day," "my wife's encouragement." But as the days passed, his list grew longer and more meaningful. He noticed friendships he had overlooked, prayers God had quietly answered, strength during difficult moments, and countless small mercies he had taken for granted. At the end of the month, the man admitted to his pastor, "My life didn't change nearly as much as my eyesight did." Often, the problem is not that God has stopped blessing us, but that we have stopped seeing and noticing His goodness. Gratitude opens our eyes to the daily mercies of God that surround us every moment. How has God blessed you in recent months? I challenge you to make a list each day of blessings and answered prayers. Then you will grow in your understanding of God's compassion and graciousness toward you.

When we consider the perfect righteousness of God, how easily we fall into sin, we can only marvel that God is slow to anger, compassionate, and filled with lovingkindness toward us. Have you ever done something sinful or foolish in your youth, or perhaps when you were old enough to know better, only to later realize that God protected you from the disaster that could have resulted from your sinful, foolish act? I can remember several that would have probably changed the course of my life for the worse.

On September 11, 2001, the well-known pastor, John Piper had been scheduled to be on a flight that would have put him in the path of the day's terrorist attacks. He was preparing to travel for ministry, but a family situation caused an unexpected delay, and he did not board the plane as planned. That delay removed him entirely from circumstances that became catastrophic for thousands. Piper later reflected publicly that he saw God's providence in even small disruptions of ordinary plans—how something as simple as a change in timing can stand between a person and disaster. It is a reminder that God's protection is often quiet and unseen, working through ordinary interruptions that we would otherwise call inconveniences, but later recognize as mercy.

However, God's compassion has limits, as we see in verse 9, where David says He will not always strive with us, meaning that there will come a time when we will face the consequences for our sins. As Jesus says in Revelation 3:19, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent." Those who brazenly disregard God's moral code can expect to experience God's hand of correction, and in my experience, it might not be pleasant. But it will shape you and grow you as a child of God. It is best to repent and conform all your ways to God. But even then, as we learn in the same verse, God's anger will not burn

forever against those who love Him. As God promised Israel, through Moses in Deuteronomy 31:6, “Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you.”

I see verse 11 as the high point of the psalm, for as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness, toward those who fear Him. Three times, David says that the blessings of the Lord that He describes are for those who fear Him. At the power company, utility workers train new employees to respect high-voltage power lines. Fear does not make them weak; it keeps them alive. Those who treat the lines casually risk disaster. In the same way, the fear of the Lord is not cowardice but a healthy reverence for God's holiness, power, and authority.

A proper attitude toward God is crucial, since David calls his readers to fear the Lord three times (verses 11, 13, and 17) and declares God's blessing on those who fear Him. They will experience the compassion of the Lord as His children, and they will experience the lovingkindness of the Lord from everlasting to everlasting, which means for all eternity. These are the blessings, as we learn in verse 18, of “...those who keep His covenant and remember His precepts to do them.”

This accords perfectly with Jesus' teaching in John 14:15, where He says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” If you fear God, you obey his commands. If you love Jesus, you will keep His commandments.

Stand in awe of God's everlasting love (vv 14-18)

I want to go back to verse 14, where David describes God's understanding of our nature. He knows our frailty and weakness. He knows our frame, which means He knows our fragile nature, and He is mindful that we are dust, living on this planet for mere decades, and poof, we are gone, like the flowers of the field, that fade and die as the wind passes them. When we fear God, align our ways with His ways, and love Jesus by obeying His commands, we have nothing to fear, but as one of my seminary professors once said, the most dangerous place to be is outside of the will of the Lord.

What can happen when we operate outside of clear instructions? Consider the sobering true story of the 1977 Tenerife airport disaster, in the Canary Islands, where two 747 jumbo jets collided on a foggy runway after one aircraft began takeoff without proper clearance amid confusion and pressure. The result was a catastrophic loss of life; 583 people were killed. It illustrates the danger of acting outside clear instructions and regulations.

God calls us to live according to His instructions for our protection and to maintain our relationship with Him. Scripture shows the wisdom of living in God's will: “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:6). God's direction is not restrictive but protective—guiding us through confusion, pressure, and limited visibility. When we trust His voice over our own thinking or assumptions, we find safety, clarity, and life-protecting guidance.

Recognize God's sovereignty and bless him (vv 19-22)

David closes the psalm, making it clear that the Lord has no contenders (verse 19). He is the King of heaven, sovereign over all, making His will come to pass for all people, whether we loved and feared Him or not. Humans should bless God, for His lovingkindness, standing in awe of Him, but David also calls upon God's mighty angels to bless Him as they do His work.

It is interesting that David opens the psalm, calling on himself to praise the Lord and to bless His name, but as he closes the psalm, there is a recognition that praise of God should not be limited to humans, but should extend to all creation and the angelic hosts, whom He also created.

So, let's close and summarize. David begins and ends Psalm 103 with the same command: "Bless the LORD, O my soul." He is not speaking to a congregation; he is preaching to himself. Why? Because he knows how easily the human heart forgets. We remember disappointments, but forget God's faithfulness. We remember burdens, but forget His blessings. So David calls his soul to remember: God forgives all your iniquities, heals your diseases, redeems your life from the pit, crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, and satisfies you with good things.

The same temptation confronts us today. We can become so focused on what we lack that we overlook the countless mercies God has already given. Every breath, every provision, every answered prayer, every evidence of grace comes from His hand. Most of all, He has given us His Son, through whom our sins are forgiven and our eternity secured.

As we leave today, do not leave merely informed about God's character. Leave determined to remember His benefits and respond with worship. Let gratitude replace complaint, trust replace anxiety, and praise replace forgetfulness. Join David in saying with renewed conviction, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name." Amen.

The Begotten Son and Messiah Nicene Creed—Part 2

Daniel Cote

Imagine entering a room where a crucial Christian doctrine will be discussed and a conclusion made. It is A.D. 325. More than 300 bishops have gathered in the city of Nicaea at the invitation of Constantine the Great. Many carry the visible scars of persecution—missing eyes, crippled hands, and bodies marked by imprisonment. Only a few years earlier, these men had risked their lives for confessing Jesus as Lord. Now they face a different battle: not against the Roman Empire, but against a teaching that claimed Jesus was the greatest of God's creatures rather than God Himself. This was the heresy of Arius, known as Arianism, that threatened the church.

The question before them was breathtakingly simple: **Who is Jesus?** If Christ is merely a creature, then He cannot fully reveal God, cannot perfectly save sinners, and cannot rightly receive worship. But if He is "begotten, not made," eternally one with the Father, then our hope rests on an unshakable foundation. The answer reached at Nicaea was not philosophical speculation—it was a defense of the gospel itself. Everything depended on getting Jesus as revealed in Scripture right.

This summer, I am doing a series of sermons on the key affirmations of two of the great creeds of the church, the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. In my first sermon in the series a few weeks ago, I preached from Psalm 103 and the creedal affirmation, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," as stated in the Apostles' Creed. Today, we will focus on what the creeds affirm about Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity. But first, let me explain the purpose of creeds, the differences between them, and their origin.

The important ancient creeds of the Church

A creed is a summary of core Christian beliefs developed to teach and unify Christians in the essentials of the faith. One reason creeds were so important in the ancient world was that literacy rates were low. Literacy rates in the first-century Roman world are estimated to be 5-15%. Basic literacy among Jews was slightly higher due to Scripture reading and religious education in the synagogue, but it is still estimated to be below 20%. Consequently, the oral transmission of information was crucial, so creeds developed to teach people the core, non-negotiable beliefs of the Christian faith.

Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us. When Paul wrote these words in about AD 51, the New Testament was still being written, and so much of the teaching of the apostles was delivered orally. The word *tradition* refers to Paul's teaching, and more broadly to the teaching of the apostles, or that which was handed on by the apostles.

Now, we need to have a healthy skepticism about tradition. Jesus harshly corrected the Jewish leaders in Mark 7:8 for neglecting the commandments of God and holding to the tradition of men." There have been all kinds of bad traditions that developed in the church over the last 2000 years, including praying to the saints, veneration of relics, the purchase of indulgences as payment for sin, purgatory, celibacy of the clergy, and papal infallibility, to name a few.

The only tradition we should adhere to as Christians is the Apostolic Tradition, first, because Paul tells us so, and second, because the apostles and their close associates were taught by Jesus and inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the New Testament. And the ancient creeds specifically communicate the essentials of apostolic Christianity. So let's quickly summarize the creeds and their differences.

- The earliest creed is the Old Roman Creed, which we have read on occasion in this church, developed in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. It was divided into parts and used as a baptismal confession, much as we did today during Jared's baptism. It is the shortest and most concise summary of the apostolic faith. It is about 75 words long.
- The Apostle's Creed is slightly longer than the Old Roman Creed and was used in the 4th-8th century in the western church. It is an expansion of the Old Roman Creed and adds a few details about Christ, the church, and the guarantee of eternal life. It is about 115 words long.
- The Nicene creed is a much more detailed creed that developed from the eastern church baptismal confessions, clearly and explicitly teaching the divinity of Christ and the role and divinity of the Holy Spirit, and it is still only about 200 words long. It originated at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 to counter Arianism, a heresy denying that Christ was eternal and fully God.
- The Athanasian Creed is a significant expansion of the Nicene Creed and goes into much more detail about the two natures of Christ and much more fully explains the Trinity, but it is about 900 words long and therefore difficult to memorize.

Of the creeds, the **Nicene Creed** is most widely used because it clearly and concisely summarizes the core teachings of Christianity. Rooted in Scripture, it affirms the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, His saving work, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the future resurrection. Furthermore, it is brief, making it suitable for worship, teaching, and discipleship.

It is accepted by all Christians, Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed, and Evangelicals alike.

Distinction between the ancient creeds of the Church and confessions, declarations, and platforms

So, what about the reformed confessions written after the Reformation? Why don't we read those during worship every Sunday? What about the Savoy Declaration, the Westminster Confession, and the Second Helvetic Confession? These are far longer than the creeds; for instance, the Westminster Confession is 12,500 words and incorporates many theological assumptions and conclusions. These statements of belief go far beyond core Christian doctrines, teaching 5-point Calvinism, which contradicts the Bible in many ways; here are three examples of what is taught in the confessions.

- The confessions teach that humans do not have free will and that God meticulously determines all human actions, even causing sin, whereas the Bible teaches in Deuteronomy 24:15 and many other places that humans must make a choice whether to follow the Lord or pagan Gods, and in James 1:13 that God cannot tempt, condone, or be the cause of sin.
- The confessions teach limited atonement, the idea that Christ died only for the elect, whereas the Bible teaches in John 3:16 and many other places that Christ sent His Son to save the world, because God so loved the world, which means all people can be saved if they turn to Christ.
- The confessions teach double predestination, the idea that God creates some people in His image with the specific intention of sending them to hell, whereas the Bible in 2 Peter 3:9, and in many other places, states that God does not wish for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance.

We here at Second Congregational are Protestant and fully affirm the Reformation, but we have rejected the 5-point Calvinism that is embodied in the Reformation confessions. The problem with the Reformation confessions is that they go beyond the Bible, contradicting the Bible and the teachings of Jesus, and therefore have lapsed into the traditions of men and are rejected by the vast majority of Christians as a source of doctrine. We rightly reject these confessions because Paul says in 1 Timothy 6 that we must find our sound doctrines in the teaching of Jesus, not the theological speculations of men.

Creeds—yes, confessions no

In summary, and for good reason, we here at Second Congregational say yes to the ancient creeds, such as the Nicene Creed, because they are rooted in and supported by the Bible, and we reject the Reformation confessions because they contradict the Bible. We say yes to the Ancient Creeds and no to the Reformation confessions.

Creeds remain of great importance

The Nicene Creed is still of great importance in the church. The ancient heresy of Arianism was rejected by the church in A.D. 325, but its central idea persists in contemporary religion and culture. I touched on this another time, but here is a quick review. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus is the first and greatest creation of God rather than the eternal Son of the same divine nature.

The Mormons, also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, claim that God was once a man who progressed to divine status. They claim Jesus is the first spirit-child of

the Father and one of his wives conceived in some kind of sexual union. He, too, progressed to become another God, so according to their view, Jesus is not eternally divine. When it came time for Jesus' earthly mission, Jesus, according to the Mormons, was created by the sexual union between a flesh-and-bone God and Mary. This is all incredibly ridiculous and blasphemous.

Islam honors Jesus as a great prophet and Messiah, but denies that He is the divine Son of God. Islam completely rejects Christ's deity and the doctrine of the Trinity. Hindu's also reject Jesus as the eternal divine Son of God.

Beyond organized religion, popular culture often reduces Jesus to a moral teacher, social reformer, inspirational leader, or spiritual guide. While these views differ significantly from one another, they share a common thread: they reject what the Bible teaches about Jesus, which is fully affirmed in the Nicene Creed.

Psalm 2

So, let's turn to our sermon text from Psalm 2, which is a fascinating psalm written about 1000 years before Jesus was born. It is greatly prophetic in nature, and let us see what we learn there that is also found in the Nicene Creed. It is a psalm of David, as affirmed in Acts 4:25, and it describes the celebration at the coronation of the Messiah King in the presence of the rebellious people and nations of the world. The structure of the psalm is as follows:

- In verses 1-3, David is speaking, describing his prophetic vision. The nations rebel against God and His anointed, who is the Messiah. They desire to break the fetters and cords of God's moral law, and they want to do their own thing! Throughout the ages and in our time, the nations have done just that, and what a mess we have made of it! As Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way *which seems* right to a man, but its end is the way of death." How does David react to all this? David expresses his amazement that the nations are in rebellion, in uproar, devising vain things, which are plans against God that will never come to pass. The nations will never subvert the sovereign will of God, but they will surely try, right up until the very end, the Second Coming of Christ.
- In verses 4-6, God responds, laughing at the resistance, declaring that He has established His King over Zion, which is the kingdom of God. That King is the Anointed. The word translated as "*Anointed*" is the Hebrew word for "*Messiah*". In verse 7, we learn that God's King is also His begotten Son, so in these few lines of Scripture, we learn that God's King, His Anointed, the Messiah, and His begotten Son are one and the same person.
- Then in verses 7-9, the Messiah, the Anointed Son of God, speaks, recounting God's decree in eternity passed where God says to Him, "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware." These are God's words to the Messiah, His Son.
- Finally, in verses 10-12, David calls the nations to wisdom in the light of what has been revealed and calls the kings of the Earth to take heed and be wise, worshipping the Lord with reverence, and to do homage to the Son, avoiding His wrath, which may be soon kindled. David's final thought is the clearest and most direct statement of the gospel in the Old Testament, and it concludes, "How blessed are all who take refuge in the Son."

That is the basic outline of Psalm 2. Let's add a few important details. As we have seen, there are three speakers in Psalm 2: David, God the Father, and the Anointed of the Lord. Now, as I mentioned, the Anointed of the Lord is the Messiah. He is also the King of Zion. Zion is another name for Jerusalem, in particular, the Temple Mount. But we also see in the psalm that the Messiah is the begotten Son of God who will inherit the nations to the ends of the Earth.

Verse 9 describes the King's dominion over the nations, and it is complete. He will rule them with a rod of iron. The word translated as "rod" also means "staff" or "scepter." Iron was the strongest material in the ancient world, implying that the Messianic King's rule will be absolute. Jesus did not rule over the nations at His First Coming, but that will take place at His Second Coming, as described in about 20 Bible passages in Revelation 19, Matthew 25, Daniel 7, Isaiah 2, 9, and 11, to name a few.

The following will be a review for some of you. The English word Christ derives from the Greek word Christos, which means Messiah. Jesus is called Christ because Christians believe He is the Messiah of the Old Testament, anointed by God to bring salvation to the world (Matthew 16:16). So, why do we believe that Jesus is the Messiah? Simply put, He fulfilled dozens of Old Testament prophecies about the nature of the Messiah and His ministry on Earth at His First Coming, and these prophecies will continue to be fulfilled at His future Second Coming.

So, the Anointed of the Lord is God's King in Zion, who will rule there at His Second Coming on the throne of David. He is the Messiah, who has been revealed through His prophetic fulfillment as Jesus, and He is also the begotten Son of God. The Apostle Paul makes that same connection in our Scripture reading from Acts 13:32–33, saying "that God has fulfilled this *promise* to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You.'"

Understanding what it means that Jesus is the begotten Son of God is crucial to everything that we believe as Christians. That Jesus is begotten of God means that He is of the same nature and essence as the Father. When humans beget, they produce humans. When God begets, He begets God, and as the begotten Son of God, we would expect that Jesus possesses the same divine nature as God the Father.

In contrast, we are created beings, made from the dust of the ground. After God had formed the Earth, He made our first parents, Adam and Eve, from the dust of the ground, which contains the Earth's basic elements. But Jesus was begotten of God before the universe, time, space, and life were created in eternity past, so like the Father, Jesus has no beginning because He is outside of time. He clearly intervened in the space-time universe, but He existed before it. Let's consider some important Scriptural passages that affirm this.

Of the Gospels, John's Gospel provides the most detail regarding the begotten nature of Jesus. John writes in the first five verses of his gospel,

John 1:1–5

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

A few verses later in the same chapter, John writes in verse 14:

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John calls Jesus the Word. The prophets revealed the written word of God, but Jesus is the incarnate Word of God, and through Him we find the most perfect revelation of God. This is why Jesus says in John 14:9, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Just as words reveal thoughts, the incarnate Word, Jesus, perfectly reveals the Father, because the Son is the begotten of the Father and therefore fully God.

The Nicene Creed's declaration that Jesus Christ is "begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father" is deeply rooted in the teaching of John's Gospel. John begins with the majestic affirmation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Before creation existed, the Son already was. He is not part of creation but the eternal Word through whom "all things were made" (John 1:3). If all created things came into existence through Him, He Himself cannot be a created being.

John further describes Christ as the Father's "only begotten Son" (John 1:14, 18; 3:16). The Nicene Fathers understood this language to be speaking not of a beginning in time but of the Son's unique and eternal relationship with the Father. The Son shares the Father's very nature while remaining distinct in person.

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus claims equality with the Father. He declares, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), and teaches that all should "honor the Son just as they honor the Father" (John 5:23). He also prays of the glory He shared with the Father "before the world existed" (John 17:5).

Thus, the Nicene Creed summarizes John's witness: Jesus Christ is eternally God, distinct from the Father, yet fully sharing the Father's divine essence—begotten, not made. Our salvation depends on this truth. Only One who is truly God could perfectly reveal the Father, bear the infinite weight of our sin, conquer death, and receive the worship due to God alone. The word *begotten* is not a statement about Christ's origin but a declaration of His eternal deity and unique relationship with the Father. Jesus certainly deserves our admiration, but he also deserves much more; our complete allegiance in a relationship that will bring us joy and hope in the darkest times.

A powerful example of joy and comfort in complete allegiance to Christ is seen in the life of Richard Wurmbrand. Richard Wurmbrand (1909–2001) was a Romanian pastor who endured fourteen years of imprisonment and torture under the communist regime for preaching Christ. After his release, he founded The Voice of the Martyrs to support persecuted Christians worldwide.

While imprisoned and tortured, he spent years in solitary confinement, cut off from normal human support. Yet he later testified that in those dark cells he experienced a deep, sustaining joy in Christ. He preached to himself, sang when forbidden to speak, and came to know the nearness of Jesus in suffering. Wurmbrand said he learned "to be happy in prison," not because suffering was good, but because Christ was present and sufficient, proving that full allegiance to Jesus brings unshakable comfort. His steadfast faith and joyful endurance remain a powerful testimony to Christ's sustaining grace amid suffering.

As we come to the close of this message, remember that the confession, "**begotten, not made,**" is not merely a line in an ancient creed. It is the reason for our hope. If Jesus were only a remarkable man or the highest of created beings, He could inspire us, but He could not save

us. A creature cannot bear the infinite weight of the world's sin. A creature cannot conquer death for all who believe. A creature cannot reveal the Father perfectly or receive the worship of heaven. But Jesus is no creature. He is the eternal Son of God, one in essence with the Father, who became flesh for our salvation.

That means the cross is sufficient, the resurrection is victorious, and Christ's promises are absolutely trustworthy. The One who calls you to follow Him is the same One through whom all things were made and by whom all things are sustained.

We should certainly admire Jesus, but our relationship with Him must not end there. Bow before Him in worship. Trust Him without reservation. Love Him with all your heart, and follow Him in all your ways. If He is the eternally begotten Son, then He deserves nothing less than your complete allegiance. And if you belong to Him, take courage: the eternal Son who gave Himself for you now reigns forever and will never let you go. And you will live in His presence for all eternity. Amen

God's Love for All

Daniel Cote

Nicene Creed—Part 3

Back in the days before cell phones, a woman who traveled abroad without her husband got to Paris and found a fabulous bracelet she'd been looking for. So she sent a wire back home saying, "I have found this beautiful bracelet, one I've been looking for all my life. It only costs \$7,500. Do you think I can buy it?" Her husband wired back a short but firm reply: "No, price too high!" And he signed his name. But in the transmission, the comma between **No** and **price too high** was left out, and the message read, "No price too high." The woman was thrilled! But things did not go so well for her husband. Omitting that comma almost put that guy in a coma. Some people never worry about the cost, but today is a day when we should consider the cost of our freedom, both our Earthly freedom, and our eternal freedom.

The Nicene Creed devotes more words to Jesus than to any other person of the Trinity because Christianity stands or falls on who Christ is and what He accomplished. The Creed summarizes the gospel and affirms the following about Jesus:

Who, for us men 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;

Now, the virgin birth comes up every Christmas, so I will not focus on that today. We will consider the creedal affirmations about the Holy Spirit in a future sermon. I have preached on the resurrection recently, and a concise 12-page defense of the resurrection is available in my book.

Today, I will focus on that little phrase, "for us men," because it captures the heart of Christianity. Jesus did not merely teach truth or provide an example. He came in love to rescue sinners. The Nicene Creed tells us what Jesus did, but Colossians 1:13–23 explains exactly what Christ accomplished for humanity and can be divided into four sections. But first, a historical note on Pontius Pilate.

For centuries, skeptics questioned whether **Pontius Pilate** was a real historical figure. That changed dramatically in 1961 when archaeologists excavating the ancient theater at Caesarea Maritima discovered a limestone inscription bearing his name and title: "Pontius

Pilate, Prefect of Judea." Additional evidence comes from first-century historians Flavius Josephus and Tacitus, both of whom independently mention Pilate's governorship and his role in the execution of Jesus. Together, archaeology and multiple ancient historical sources strongly confirm that Pontius Pilate was a real Roman official who governed Judea during the time described in the Gospels. Once again, the skeptics got it wrong.

Now, let's turn to our sermon text. In the first section of our sermon text, composed of the first two verses, we learn that God's love rescues us from eternal darkness through the incomparable Christ. Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, humanity has been in the domain of darkness, alienated from God because of sin, for the reality is that none of us is without sin, because no mere mortal has ever kept God's moral law perfectly. As we have said on many other occasions, our good and perfect God cannot turn a blind eye to the transgression of His moral code that flows from His righteous nature. Our sins must be paid for, or God's moral law and the moral universe He created are a sham. God's perfect nature demands justice.

Through God's love revealed in Christ, God has liberated believers from the domain of darkness and from eternity in hell and transferred them to the kingdom of His beloved Son. As we learned last week in our sermon text from Psalm 2, God has installed His King in Zion, and He is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Paul continues in verse 14, reminding those who read or hear this letter that it is through God's beloved Son that we have redemption and forgiveness of sins. It is this redemption that frees us from the power and consequences of sin.

After the Korean Armistice was signed in 1953, thousands of prisoners of war who chose repatriation crossed the Military Demarcation Line during Operation Big Switch. As they stepped across the line, they passed from the authority of the nation that had held them captive back under the protection of their own country. That crossing marked a real transfer of allegiance, citizenship, and legal authority. Paul uses similar language in Colossians 1:13: "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son." Salvation is more than forgiveness; it is a change of kingdoms.

Through Christ, believers are no longer under the tyranny of sin, Satan, and death. God has transferred them into the reign of His beloved Son, where they live under a new King, enjoy new privileges, and possess the certain hope of eternal life. Just as those prisoners left one realm forever when they crossed the line, so Christians have been brought by God's grace into an entirely new kingdom.

So what about you, have you received your transfer to Jesus' kingdom by giving your life to Him by placing your faith in Him? If not, the time to do it is now, because tomorrow is not guaranteed; in fact, this afternoon is not guaranteed for any of us.

A lifeboat launched into stormy seas is sufficient to rescue everyone in the water, but those who refuse to board perish. Christ's sacrifice is fully sufficient and sincerely offered to all; its saving benefits are received by those who trust Him.

Moving to the second section of our text in verses 15-18, we find what theologians believe to be an ancient hymn, a song of praise, proclaiming and celebrating the supremacy of Jesus Christ. The One who died for us is the author, creator, and sustainer of all things. Let's consider the superlative things Paul writes about Jesus.

- First, He is the image of the invisible God, meaning that He is the perfect representation of the invisible God. The true nature of God is made manifest in Jesus, and as Jesus says in John 14:9, "he who has seen me has seen the Father."

While we cannot see God, Jesus fully reveals the Father in a tangible and complete way through His incarnation.

- Second, Christ is the firstborn over all creation. Some could misinterpret “firstborn” as meaning Jesus was a created being, but that can’t be because Paul says in verse 17 that Christ is before all things. In the context of the passage, that Jesus is the firstborn over all creation means that He has first place or preeminence, and given all that was said last week about the biblical truth of the eternal begotten nature of Christ, there should be no confusion. Christ with the Father is the first cause of all things, beginning in eternity past.
- Third, verse 16 makes it plain that Christ is the creator of all things in heaven and on Earth, visible and invisible, thrones and powers, angels, no matter what exists in this universe, Christ is the Creator of all things with the Father.
- Fourth, and next, is the answer to why anything exists right now, and that is that is Christ is at present holding all things together. How does He do this? We do not have perfect knowledge on this matter, but there are four fundamental forces in nature, and Christ must be the source of these forces that hold the universe together. One of the greatest discoveries of modern physics is that the universe depends on four fundamental forces: gravity, electromagnetism, the strong nuclear force, and the weak nuclear force. Gravity holds planets and galaxies together. Electromagnetism binds atoms and enables light. The strong force holds atomic nuclei together, while the weak force makes nuclear reactions and the sun's energy possible. Scientists can describe these forces with remarkable precision, yet they cannot explain why they exist or why they remain so perfectly ordered. Colossians 1:17 gives the deepest answer: "In him all things hold together." Christ is not merely a spectator of creation; He is not merely the agent of creation; He is its continual sustainer, upholding every law and force that keeps the universe from dissolving into chaos or nothingness.
- Fifth, Christ is the head of the church, not merely by title, but by example and by demonstration of divinity by fulfilling the Messianic prophecies and by resurrection from the dead. Dead men stay dead, but the grave could not hold the Son of God. Jesus Christ is uniquely qualified to reconcile God and humanity because He is both fully God and fully man. Theologians refer to the dual nature of Christ as the hypostatic union, conveying the thought that he is simultaneously fully God and fully man. The prefix hypo means beneath, as a hypodermic needle goes beneath your skin. So in the hypostatic union, the church fathers and theologians recognized that Christ had two natures, the human one that was his obvious state, and the divine one, perhaps less obvious, but fully manifested in the miracles He performed and the prophecies He fulfilled.
- Finally, Paul says that Christ is the firstborn of the dead. What on Earth does that mean? Simply this, Christ was the first raised from the dead, and His resurrection guarantees that every member of the church, every true believer, will one day be resurrected to eternal life in the presence of God. Jesus is the exemplar and proof of resurrection. In the spring, gardeners often look for the first crocus pushing through the last patches of snow. That first blossom is not the only flower to come—it is the

guarantee that countless others will soon follow. Christ's resurrection is like that, but infinitely greater. Colossians 1:18 calls Him "the firstborn from the dead," not because He was merely the first to be raised, but because He rose never to die again and opened the way for all who belong to Him. His empty tomb is God's assurance that every believer's grave will one day be empty as well. That is the promise that you have in Christ.

Take a moment to consider the nature of Christ revealed in this ancient hymn Paul included in the New Testament. The mercy and grace of God, made evident in the fact that He sent the co-Creator and sustainer of the universe to come and rescue you, should cause gratitude to well up in you.

Verses 19 and 20 comprise the third section of our text. Let me read those verses again. Paul writes,

¹⁹ For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

In Colossians Chapter 2, Paul says something similar in verse 9, where He writes, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." Christ is fully human and fully divine, and thus His sacrifice satisfies the justice of God. Only a divine, eternal being can guarantee eternal life to humans. It is in Christ that we will live eternally.

The cross demonstrates the justice of God because, as I said earlier, if He is truly just, He cannot overlook the sins of humans. It also demonstrates that God is holy and set apart from sin and therefore unable to condone sin. But the cross also demonstrates the love and mercy of God. Through the cross, God does not compromise justice, holiness, mercy, or love, which are among God's superlative attributes.

Because Christ is the perfect, sinless Son of God, by His sacrifice, He is able to reconcile man to God. In **1865**, after the end of the American Civil War, many families searched battlefields and military hospitals for loved ones who had never returned home. Reconciliation between North and South came at an enormous cost—more than 600,000 lives were lost, at a time when the entire population of the United States was only 35 million people. Almost 2% of Americans died in the Civil War compared to 0.3% in World War II. In the years that followed, virtually every family in the nation mourned the loss of loved ones, reminding the nation for decades that peace is never free. Colossians 1:19–20 points to an even greater reconciliation. Our peace with God was not purchased by diplomacy or compromise, but by the precious blood of His own Son. The cross reveals both the terrible cost of sin and the immeasurable depth of God's love, making peace where there had been eternal enmity.

Notice also that Christ reconciles "all things" to the Father; "all things" must include all people. So, the notion of limited atonement, that Christ died only for the elect, goes out the window in this verse.

The price Jesus paid on the cross was sufficient to reconcile all people to God, but that does not mean that all people will be reconciled to God. Some will reject Christ, and some will ignore Him. Just as Jesus says in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." The lifeboat is big enough, but some will refuse to get into the lifeboat. All can be saved, but not all will be

saved. Just as Paul says elsewhere in Titus 2:11, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men."

Yes, all can be saved, but not all will be saved because, as Paul says in the final section of our text (verse 23), it is necessary to continue in faith and the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul uses hyperbolic language to emphasize the gospel's universal applicability and rapid spread, saying in verse 23 that it was proclaimed in all creation.

When Pontius Pilate presented Jesus to the crowd, he asked one of history's most important questions: "What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matthew 27:22). The responses reveal the many ways people still reject Him. The religious leaders rejected Him because He threatened their authority. The crowd rejected Him because they preferred a political deliverer to a suffering Savior. Pilate rejected Him by refusing to choose what he knew was right, washing his hands while surrendering Jesus to be crucified. Even today, people reject Christ in similar ways—through pride, love of sin, fear of others, indifference, or endless delay. Few openly shout, "Crucify Him!" Yet every refusal to bow before Christ's lordship is a rejection of the One God sent to reconcile the world to Himself.

Applications

Let's consider a few brief applications of our sermon text.

- First, we are citizens of the kingdom of God, and Christ is our King. We owe Him our existence, now and eternally, and He deserves our full allegiance. We need to ask ourselves some tough questions. Is my life in any way still ruled by the values of the kingdom of darkness that I was formerly in? Do my speech, entertainment, finances, and relationships reflect allegiance to King Jesus? Do others see that my citizenship is in heaven? We need to do what it takes, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to align all that we do with the teachings of Jesus and God's moral law.
- Next, we need to give Jesus first place in every aspect of our lives. No one else has done for you, or could do for you, what Christ has done for you, so He deserves first place in your life. If someone watched your life for a week, would they conclude Jesus is your greatest love? He should be.
- Finally, you have been reconciled to God by the blood of Christ, and you have been transferred to the eternal kingdom of God. You have experienced reconciliation, and as a disciple of Jesus, you have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. The church doesn't exist merely to rejoice that we have been saved by Jesus; we need to proclaim the good news to others, so that they too may be reconciled to God. Our goal on this Earth should be to take as many people with us into heaven as we can. Go and make disciples my friends.

I will close with this. On the morning of **June 6, 1944—D-Day**—thousands of young American, British, Canadian, and Allied soldiers crossed the English Channel toward the beaches of Normandy. Many were barely out of high school. They knew the mission would demand enormous sacrifice, yet they went because millions of people in Europe lived under the oppressive rule of Nazi Germany. Their objective was not simply to win a battle but to put an end to the tyranny that threatened to spread across the world.

As the landing craft reached the beaches, the doors dropped, and soldiers charged into a storm of gunfire. Many never made it ashore. Others pressed forward despite overwhelming danger. Cemetery after cemetery in Normandy reminds us that freedom came at an

extraordinary cost. The nearly 10,000 white crosses stretching across the Normandy American cemetery overlooking Omaha Beach silently testify that liberation is never free.

That sacrifice provides a glimpse—though only a glimpse—of the greater deliverance described in Colossians 1:13–23. Paul declares that God "has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son." Humanity's greatest bondage is not to a foreign army but to sin, death, and the power of darkness. Left to ourselves, we could never escape that kingdom.

God did what we could not do. He sent His beloved Son, not merely to risk His life but to willingly lay it down. At the cross, Jesus entered the battlefield against sin and death. Through "the blood of his cross" (v. 20), He accomplished the decisive victory, reconciling sinners to God and opening the way into His eternal kingdom.

Americans rightly honor those who sacrificed to preserve liberty, and their courage deserves our lasting gratitude. Yet every earthly liberation is temporary. Nations rise and fall, and political freedom, precious as it is, cannot free the human heart from guilt or conquer the grave. Only Christ can do that. He is the image of the invisible God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the Head of the church, and the Firstborn from the dead. Because He lives, His victory is permanent.

As we remember those who gave their lives for our nation's freedom, let us give even greater thanks to the Savior who gave His life for our eternal freedom. Having been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of God's beloved Son, let us live as grateful citizens of that kingdom, joyfully serving the King who loved us and gave Himself for us. Amen.

He Is Reigning Now, and Will Suddenly Return

Nicene Creed—Part 4

Daniel Cote

A Sunday school teacher asked, "Why do we need to be quiet in church?" One little boy confidently answered, "Because people are sleeping." Now, I will certainly forgive you if you fall asleep during one of my sermons, but the greater danger is being spiritually asleep, or worse, spiritually dead. Psalm 110 is a message of great hope for the believer, but also a wake-up call to the world. It is easy to be complacent, but at this very moment in the spiritual realm, our Lord is preparing for His return with great power and glory. We don't know when, but the Bible teaches in Revelation 11:15 that history is moving toward the day that the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, and each passing hour draws us nearer to that day.

Every Christmas we celebrate the child laid in a manger. Every Good Friday we remember the Savior on a cross. Every Easter we rejoice in an empty tomb. But what is Jesus doing **right now**?

If you asked ten Christians that question, there would probably be a fair amount of silence and stumbling to produce an answer. We know He was born. We know He died. We know He rose again. We know He will return. But what Jesus is doing between His resurrection and His return is often neglected in the Christian faith.

For more than 1,700 years, Christians have confessed in the Nicene Creed: **"He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father."** Those are not merely empty words to recite—they describe the present reality that shapes every moment of history.

Jesus is not absent. He is not waiting passively for the end. He is reigning as King, interceding as our Great High Priest, and directing His kingdom from the throne of heaven.

No passage reveals that truth more powerfully than Psalm 110—the most quoted Old Testament chapter in the New Testament. Written a thousand years before Christ, it unveils the Messiah who would sit at God's right hand, rule in the midst of His enemies, serve as an eternal Priest, and one day return to judge the nations. Today we will discover why the ascended Christ is our greatest hope, our present King, and our coming Judge.

Nicene Creed Emphasis

This summer we are working through the key affirmations of the Nicene Creed that lays out most of the core beliefs of our faith handed down by the apostles. As I said another time, the **Nicene Creed** is most widely used because it clearly and concisely summarizes the core teachings of Christianity. Rooted in Scripture, it affirms the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, His saving work, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the future resurrection. Furthermore, it is brief, making it suitable for worship, teaching, and discipleship, and, it is accepted by all Bible-believing Christians.

The Nicene Creed is still of great importance in the church because the heresies present in the early church keep getting recycled and repackaged at the leading of Satan for new generations, and they are alive and prospering in our time. The Bible teaches, and we believe, that the Son of God is Jesus Christ, who possessed two natures in one person, meaning that He is fully human and fully divine. We find strong emphasis of these facts in the Nicene Creed.

The section of the Nicene Creed that we will consider today is the underlined section that we read earlier, which affirms this about Christ: “[He]...ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.” To better understand these important affirmations about Christ, let’s begin with our sermon text.

Exposition of Sermon Text

Our sermon text, Psalm 110, is an important Messianic Psalm that Jesus interprets and applies to Himself. It gives us crucial insight into the culmination of Jesus' ministry following His ascension into heaven, which theologians refer to as the present session of Jesus, and they mean by that what Jesus is doing right now.

Psalm 110 was written by David, who begins the Psalm saying, “The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”” The first Lord mentioned in this verse is God the Father. The second Lord mentioned is someone greater than David because He is David’s Lord, who can only be Jesus since He is at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

It is helpful that Jesus interprets this verse for us. In Jesus' exchange with the Pharisees recorded in Matthew 22:41-46, we see that they understand the Messiah, who is the Christ, is the son of David, meaning He is a descendant of David. The Pharisees also seem to understand from this same passage in Matthew that the Christ is also David’s Lord. So Jesus asked the Pharisees in verse 45 a pointed question, “If David calls Him Lord, how is He his son?”

Well, the Pharisees didn’t have an answer for that question, and they never dared again to ask Jesus any questions. You see, the clear truth of Scripture is that the Messiah is David’s son, but He is also David’s Lord who was with the eternal God in heaven. Of course, that is exactly what Jesus claimed about Himself. That coupled with the proof supplied by His

resurrection and the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy validated His identity as the Messiah and Son of God. Jesus is making the point to the Pharisees that they should get that the Messiah is a descendant of David and that He is also the divine Son God.

So, it is clear that David's Lord mentioned in Psalm 110 is Jesus Christ, and the psalm conveys a conversation between God the Father and God the Son after Jesus' ascension into heaven and describes how God exalted Him. That conversation was revealed by the Holy Spirit to David. Among his final words, as recorded in 2 Samuel 23:2, David said, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue." So, God gave David His word for the people through the Holy Spirit.

In verse 1 of our psalm, God seats His Son at His right hand, which is a position of power and authority until the time is right for the Son to return to destroy lawlessness and rebellion on Earth. At a time that only God knows, David's Lord, who is the Son of God, will return, and God will make His enemies a footstool for His feet, which pictures complete subjugation of the people of Earth and the utter defeat of His foes.

So the Son must wage war to completely establish His kingdom on Earth. He reigns at present in heaven over creation and the church, but when He returns His dominion will be complete. This is exactly the picture we see in Revelation 19 at the Battle of Armageddon, where Christ's victory will be instantaneous and complete.

Moving to verse 2, the Son will wield the scepter of God, meaning that he will have the authority of God to rule over His enemies, beginning in Zion, which is geographically Jerusalem. Then in verse 3, we see that God's people will join in the battle freely in that day, but anyone who joins the Lord in battle must be holy and pure as the morning dew. If you are going to join the King in battle, you must be like the King who is holy and undefiled. Will you be ready? That is a challenge for all of us.

A soldier standing guard at his station must remain alert because the enemy does not always attack with a loud invasion; sometimes the greatest danger comes through a quiet disabling of the defenses. In the same way, Christians can slowly compromise with the values of the world—not through a dramatic rejection of Christ, but through small choices that weaken devotion, obedience, and witness. Psalm 110:3 describes God's people as willingly offering themselves in the day of Christ's Return with power. The true follower of the King does not drift with the world but gladly serves under the reign of Christ, removing sin from their lives, and so, he or she is always ready to join the cause of Christ. Are you ready? What are you doing to make yourself ready?

Moving to verse 4, God the Father makes an irrevocable decree appointing His Son to be a priest. This might seem to be a contradiction because Old Testament priests were descendants of Aaron. Jesus was a descendant of David, not Aaron. So how could He be a priest? The answer is found in verse 4, and it is that Jesus is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron. You see, the Levitical priests were priests by human descent, so they basically inherited the job. Christ's priesthood, like that of Melchizedek, was based in the divine declaration of God.

Long before Aaron was born, in the time of Abraham, as we learn in Genesis 14, God had a priest in the region of Jerusalem named Melchizedek who also ruled the region as king, whom Abraham once visited to offer tithes after defeating enemies in battle when he rescued his nephew Lot. In the Bible, we encounter Melchizedek in only three places: Genesis 14, Psalm

110, and Hebrews 5-7. Melchizedek was a priest but also a King, and in Jesus Christ we see that those two offices are united in one person. Melchizedek is a type of Christ, which means that he foreshadowed characteristics of Christ, but he is far surpassed by Christ. Melchizedek was mortal, whereas Christ is eternal. Melchizedek was not a prophet, but Christ is the supreme prophet who perfectly reveals God. So Christ is not only a priest and a king like Melchizedek, but He is also a prophet occupying all three biblical offices of prophet, priest, and king, and He is the only individual in history to do so. More on that in a moment, but let's continue in our sermon text.

Beginning in verse 5 through 6, the language in our psalm turns to the dark future that lies ahead for people and nations that have rejected Christ when He returns. Christ will destroy those who oppose God in the day of His wrath, judge the nations, filling them with corpses, and the leaders of the rebellion will not be spared. As we consider this passage, I'm reminded of the language of Revelation 19:15 where, at His return, Christ "treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty." The event described in Psalm 110 is the same event as the Battle of Armageddon that we find in Revelation 19; they are one and the same, and this is the judging of the quick and the dead referred to in the Nicene Creed.

Incidentally, the original meaning of the word quick was living, so when the Nicene Creed refers to the quick and the dead, it means the living and the dead.

Some might say, "Dan, that is really extreme. Is all that judgment really necessary? How could a loving God do that?" To which I would reply, God is perfect love, but He is also perfectly just. His Love and justice must simultaneously be satisfied.

We can be easily blinded to the evil that we see around us if we are not careful. When you plunge into cool water, it can be a shock to your system, but after a little while, your body will get used to it, and you will feel fine. The reality is that we are immersed in a very evil world, and if we are not careful and tuned in to God's Word, it will be easy for us to get used to it, and to stop seeing the evil all around us. When Jesus returns, He will take drastic action to remove moral corruption from the world to restore the moral order necessary for God's kingdom to fully reign upon the Earth.

I think we all know the world is filled with evil and spiraling downward fast, so I will only take a moment to highlight human depravity and evil all around us. The vast majority in our world live in open rebellion against God, rejecting Christ or worshipping idols. In a world of 8 billion people, there are about 2.5 billion Christians, but only about 40% of those believe the Bible is the authoritative word of God and seek to live according to it. The remaining 5.5 billion people have either rejected Christ, ignored Him, have never heard of Him, or are busily worshipping false Gods and idols. They are doing their own thing. How great a sin is it to reject or ignore the true God who gave you life and sustains you in every moment? It is a great sin!

Moreover, think of the godless communist regimes that historians estimate have killed upwards of 100 million people or more in their rise to power. Think of abortion and genocide that are rampant in human society. The shedding of innocent blood remains one of humanity's greatest sins. Who would deny that injustice, moral corruption, and oppression of the weak, poor, and disenfranchised are found throughout history and feature prominently in our modern culture? The returning King will uphold justice where earthly courts and governments have failed; He will remove all evil from the Earth, and that is why Christ will take righteous, drastic action at His return. In our time, Christ is reconciling hearts to God one by one. But when he

returns, all who do evil and reject God and His Son will be destroyed, and finally there will be godly peace upon the earth across the entire globe.

Christ's Threefold Office

As I mentioned earlier, Psalm 110 introduces the threefold ministry of Christ, and we need to further unpack that. Let me explain. In the Bible, as described in the Old Testament, those God called to guide and lead the people of God occupied three offices. There were prophets, priests, and kings.

- A prophet was a person who spoke for God and courageously communicated God's message for His people.
- Priests were of the tribe of Levi, set aside by God under the leadership of Aaron, the brother of Moses, and were the ministers and worship leaders of the nation of Israel who conducted worship rituals and sacrifices designed to show the people that atonement, or payment for sin, is necessary; furthermore, they represented the people before God.
- Kings were the rulers of nations or territories, and in Romans 13:1, we learn, "...there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."
- So in short, prophets were sent by God, the Aaronic priesthood was established by God, and kings were appointed by God.

Now here is the interesting thing. In the entire history of the Bible, there is no one who held all three offices of prophet, priest, and king except for Jesus. Moses was a prophet, but he was not a priest or a king. Aaron was a priest, but he wasn't a prophet or a king. David was a prophet and a king, so he held two of the offices, but he was not a priest. The mysterious Melchizedek mentioned in our sermon text was a priest and a king, but not a prophet. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were great prophets, but they were not priests or kings. Only Jesus fulfills all three roles.

In the most complete sense, Christ is a prophet in that He reveals God to us, He is a priest in that He reconciles us to God, and He is a King in that He rules over Creation and the people of God. Christ's earthly ministry and teaching are recorded in the New Testament, but theologians speak of Christ's present session when referring to His ongoing work after His ascension into heaven. Let's briefly consider how Jesus fulfilled the offices of prophet, priest, and king during His earthly ministry, and how He continues to fulfill those roles during His present session at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

- As a prophet on Earth, Jesus most perfectly revealed the Father, for He says in John 14:9, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father, and therefore, in the New Testament, we find the most perfect revelation of the Father to humanity in the life, ministry, and teaching of Jesus. And now, in His present session at the right hand of the Father in heaven, He continues to reveal God to the world through the work of the Holy Spirit who testifies about the truth of Jesus' teaching as we learn in John 15:26, and who exposes sin and humanity's need for Christ as Savior as we learn in John 16:8.
- As a priest on Earth, Jesus reconciled all who believe to the Father by His sacrificial death on the cross. And now, in His present session at the right hand of the Father in heaven, as we read in Hebrews 7, Jesus makes intercession or intercedes for us, as our advocate before the Father. Now in heaven, Christ is the righteous, undefiled advocate

for sinners. None of us is without sin, and according to Revelation 12:10, Satan is the accuser of the brethren, who are all believers, laying out our failures and sins before God, demanding our punishment. In those moments, Christ intercedes, or petitions the Father on our behalf to help and sustain His people on Earth throughout our lives.

- As a King on Earth, Jesus affirms in John 18 that He was born to be a king, and that His kingdom is not of this world. And now, in His present session at the right hand of the Father, He has been installed as the King over all creation, reigning in heaven now, but will suddenly return to subdue rebellion on Earth and fully establish His reign on Earth, returning as the King of kings and Lord of Lords as we learn in Revelation 19.

Christ Present Session

I hope you have gained a much better understanding of Christ's present session, but there is still more that He is doing right now. As I mentioned last time, as described in Colossians 1, Christ sustains and governs the universe, and is undoubtedly the source of the forces that hold our universe together.

Furthermore, as we read in our Scripture reading, He is the head of the church and rules over it. As we read in Hebrews 8:6, Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant rooted in His ministry and sacrificial death, which reconciles us to God. He also sends the Holy Spirit as exemplified in Acts 2:32-33, which resulted in the birth of the church, but this is just an example, because Jesus is at work through the Holy Spirit throughout history in the lives of billions of Christians and millions of churches, shepherding His flock, for as He says in John 14:18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" and in Matthew 28:20, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

So, the risen Christ is not absent from His church; He reigns over it now. In Revelation 2–3, He walks among the lampstands, symbolizing His continual presence with His people. He knows every church's works, faithfulness, struggles, and sins. With sovereign authority, He commands obedience, exposes compromise, calls for repentance, disciplines those He loves, removes unfaithful lampstands, which are unfaithful churches, and promises eternal rewards to those who overcome by faith. Christ governs His church through His Word and Spirit, strengthening the faithful, correcting the erring, and preserving His people until He returns in glory to consummate His everlasting kingdom.

Finally, among the things that I find most encouraging that give me much hope is knowing that the Master of the Universe, my Lord and Savior, is at work in heaven preparing a place for me, as He says to His disciples before His departure at Jerusalem in John 14:2, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you." That is a message of great comfort and hope that you can stake your life on. So, when you think you have a busy day, take heart; think of all that Jesus is doing. Think of how He loves you. Our Lord, Savior, and great high priest is diligently at work advancing God's kingdom and working all things for the good of those who love God.

Closing

Brothers and sisters, Psalm 110 brings us face-to-face with the greatest reality in all the universe: Jesus Christ is not waiting to become King—He is King now. The One who humbled Himself in a manger, suffered on the cross, and rose from the grave has been exalted to the right hand of the Father. He reigns with all authority, and His kingdom cannot fail.

He is our perfect Prophet, who reveals the truth of God and speaks words of life to His people. He is our great High Priest, who offered the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins and now intercedes for us before the Father. He is our victorious King, who rules over His Church, defeats His enemies, and will one day return in glory.

So lift your eyes above the troubles of this present age. The headlines may bring fear, the world may seem chaotic, and evil may appear to triumph—but heaven’s throne is occupied. Christ is seated. Christ is reigning. Christ is interceding. Christ is coming again.

Therefore, stand firm. Serve faithfully. Proclaim boldly. The King who saved you is the King who sustains you, and the kingdom He has promised is a kingdom that will have no end, and you, as a child of God, will dwell with Him forever. Amen.

The Trinity

Daniel Cote

Nicene Creed—Part 5

Opening

A pastor said to his congregation, “Next week I will be preaching on the sin of lying. To prepare, I’d like everyone to read Mark, Chapter 17.” The next Sunday he asked, “So, who read Mark 17 like I asked?” Every hand went into the air. The minister grinned and said, “Mark only has 16 chapters. Now, let’s talk about lying.” That has absolutely nothing to do with the sermon...I’m not even going to try to make it fit.

As we consider the Trinity, let's begin with an example of what the Holy Spirit can do in the life of a true seeker of God. August Hermann Francke was one of the most influential leaders of the German evangelical movement, but his remarkable ministry began with a transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Born in Lübeck, Germany, in 1663, he was a gifted scholar who studied theology at three Universities. Though he possessed extensive biblical knowledge, he later admitted that his faith had become largely intellectual rather than personal.

In 1687, while preparing to preach on **John 20**, Francke was seized by a troubling question: *Did he himself truly believe the gospel he was about to proclaim?* His theological learning could not quiet his conscience or give him assurance. After days of deep spiritual struggle, he cried out to God for mercy. The Holy Spirit brought him to genuine faith in Christ and filled him with a profound assurance of God's grace. Francke later described this as the decisive turning point of his life.

I know of another individual, living 300 years later, who was pursuing the Scriptures at first, on a purely intellectual basis. If the truth be told, he was a stealth Christian. I say he was a stealth Christian at first because very few people knew of his growing conviction of the truth of the gospel. That all changed for him, like Francke, when he was reading the New Testament through from cover to cover, and he reached John 20 and the same verses that challenged Francke, you know the part where John writes near the end of his gospel, saying:

John 20:30–31

³⁰ Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

At that moment the individual I am describing was overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit, overcome with repentance and conviction, filled with shame and emotion that he had ignored

Christ for so long, the one who had died to secure His place in heaven. That individual was me, and like Francke, I was never the same after that night in October of 1996.

So, how did Francke's life turn out? Five years after his true conversion, Francke became pastor of St. George's Church in Halle (Ha la). Moved by compassion for neglected children and the poor, he trusted God to provide as he opened a small school with only a few donated coins. That modest beginning grew into the renowned Francke Foundations, including orphanages, schools, a teacher-training institute, a hospital, a pharmacy, and one of Europe's largest printing presses.

Francke believed that genuine faith should produce both holy living and loving service. The Halle institution, founded with his leadership, trained pastors, teachers, and missionaries who carried the gospel throughout Europe, India, and North America. When Francke died in 1727, thousands of children had been educated, taught about Christ, and cared for through his ministries. His life demonstrates how the Holy Spirit can use the faithful conversion of one believer to ignite a movement that transforms churches, communities, and even nations.

So let's get started considering the person of the Holy Spirit and the Doctrine of the Trinity.

Three Persons but One God

The Christian understanding of the Trinity is that there are three persons and one God. One well-respected theologian, Millard Erickson, holds that the Trinity is the doctrine that the one God eternally exists as three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and that each person is fully God in their essence, while there is only one God.

My professor, Dr. Norman Geisler, said that while the word Trinity does not occur in the Bible, it is taught there. The logic of the doctrine of the Trinity is simple. Two biblical truths are evident in Scripture, the logical conclusion of which is the Trinity:

1. There is one God.
2. There are three distinct persons who are God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.ⁱ

Scripture teaches in Deuteronomy 6:4, one of the great truths of the Hebrew faith in the verse known as the Shema, which reads, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" As Christians, we fully agree, but also affirm that in that one God there are three persons who are God. Each person of the Trinity can be found in the OT, but it is in the NT that this crucial doctrine is made unmistakably clear.

In the OT, for example, in Genesis 1, God the Father creates the heavens and the Earth while the Holy Spirit was moving over the surface of the waters. In the first five verses of John's Gospel, we learn that Christ was with God in the beginning and all things were created through Him, so He was with the Father at creation.

As we have learned in the past few weeks, God the Father and the divine Son of God are present in Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are present in the OT, but their triune nature is made even more explicit in many NT passages, including our Scripture reading from Matthew 3:16-17, which says:

After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove *and* lighting on Him,¹⁷ and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

In this passage, all three persons of the Trinity are present. So, what defines a person and what assures us that each person of the Trinity is God? Throughout history, theologians and philosophers have focused on three characteristics required for personhood: intellect, emotion, and will. You all have these things, or you would be a robot.

Think about it: to be a person, you need a mind that can think, reason, remember, understand, and communicate. You need to be capable of emotions, which include love, joy, compassion, and grief, for example. You also need to possess a will, which is the capacity to choose, decide, or act. In Scripture, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit demonstrate intellect, emotion, and will, which means that each is a unique person.

God the Father possesses vast intellect and knowledge as evidenced in His magnificent creation of our universe. God's emotion is seen in His love for all humans as we read in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son." We are well acquainted with the fact that God has a will because whenever we pray the Lord's prayer, we pray that God's will be done.

It is not difficult for us to see that Jesus possesses the characteristics of a person because He lived and walked the Earth. His words are filled with knowledge and wisdom, and all things in the universe were created through Him, so His intellect is undeniable. We see Jesus exhibiting emotion, weeping at the death of Lazarus in John 11:35, and filled with righteous anger with the merchants who made the temple a place to sell their wares in Matthew 21:12. Jesus exercised His will in laying down His life for our salvation in John 10 and willingly traveled to Jerusalem, where He knew his death on the cross awaited Him.

When it comes to the Holy Spirit, it is safe to say that He is the most misunderstood person of the Trinity. Many people think of the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force, like the one in Star Wars, a mystical entity or feeling, or merely a source of extraordinary spiritual experiences. Others imagine Him as somehow less than the Father or the Son, or believe His work is limited to the miraculous gifts of the New Testament.

Scripture presents a far richer picture. The Holy Spirit is fully God, the third Person of the Trinity, who teaches, convicts, comforts, empowers, sanctifies, and glorifies Christ. He is not an optional addition to the Christian life but God's abiding presence in every believer, producing holiness, assurance, wisdom, and faithful service.

That the Holy Spirit is a person is obvious when we consider what Scripture teaches. The intellect of the Holy Spirit is seen in John 14:26 where Jesus says of Him, "...the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

In Ephesians 4:30, Paul tells the Ephesians to rid their lives of anger, theft, and coarse talk so that they will not grieve the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit can experience grief, it is clear that He possesses emotion. Then we see in 1 Corinthians 12:11 that the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to the people of the church according to His will, so He also possesses a will.

Many verses could be cited to show that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all possess personhood, and that they take on different aspects of creation and salvation. In his systematic theology, Dr. Geisler summarizes the roles of the members of the Trinity as follows: "The Father is the Planner, the Son is the Accomplisher, and the Holy Spirit is the Applier of salvation to believers."ⁱⁱ

This leads us to conclude that the persons of the Trinity are distinct individuals because they have unique roles, yet each is also God, possessing the same divine, eternal nature.

All Three Persons are God

In a recent sermon, we demonstrated that the Son is begotten of the Father and has the same divine, eternal essence as the Father. The divinity or Godhood of the Holy Spirit is affirmed by Peter in our second Scripture reading from Acts 5:1-6, where Peter calls out Ananias for lying to the Holy Spirit, which Peter equates with lying to God. Peter teaches here that the Holy Spirit is God.

Moreover, in our sermon text, the Holy Spirit gives eternal life to believers, exactly as the Nicene Creed affirms. Only a divine eternal being could possibly give eternal life to believers, so we see that the Holy Spirit is God.

To review, the core understandings that led to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity were these:

- First, there is one and only one God.
- Second, there are three persons who possess the same divine essence who are God, namely the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

That is what the Scriptures undeniably teach. So now we need to talk briefly about how the doctrine of the Trinity developed, because there is a lot of misinformation out there. One of the most popular misconceptions is that the doctrine of the Trinity was invented centuries after Jesus by the Council of Nicaea. Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* popularized this claim by suggesting Jesus' divinity was decided by a close vote. The reality is that only 2 bishops of the 318 at the Council of Nicaea refused to sign in affirmation of the Nicene Creed because of their Heretical views. Historically, however, Christians worshiped Jesus as divine long before Nicaea, as seen in the New Testament and early Christian writings.

The Council did not create the Trinity; it clarified and defended biblical teaching against Arianism, which denied Christ's full deity. Nicaea affirmed what the church had already confessed from Scripture. When the Scriptures dropped in the first century, it is not surprising that it took some time for the church to fully comprehend all that we find in the New Testament. The Council of Nicaea of AD 325 properly interpreted the NT to recognize the full deity of Christ. It was the following Council of Constantinople of AD 381 that properly interpreted the NT to recognize the full deity of the Holy Spirit.

After the Council of Nicaea, belief in the Holy Spirit was affirmed in the Nicene Creed. The Council of Constantinople added these words about 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.*

The church leaders at the Council of Constantinople affirmed that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all worthy of worship because each is God, possessing the attributes and divine eternal essence of God. The doctrine of the Trinity was not invented at Constantinople; it had long been understood, but there, major conflict and false heretical views were rejected.

Trinitarian Illustrations

Theologians often say that the persons of the Trinity are coequal and coeternal. They are coequal, meaning that they are equal in essence and are equally worthy of worship. They are coeternal, meaning that they share the same eternal divine nature.

Now, in John 14:28, Jesus says, “The Father is greater than I.” How do we reconcile that with what I just said? Jesus is merely affirming that the Father is greater in position, role, or office, not greater in divine nature. Think about it this way: most of us have a boss or a teacher; even if you are retired, you might still have a boss, and they might be sitting next to you here in the sanctuary. Your boss holds a higher position than you, but you are still equal in human nature. It is that way with the Trinity, where each person is equal in their eternal divine nature, but the office of the Father is greater.

Bible teachers, scholars, and theologians have developed illustrations and analogies to try to explain the Trinity. Some are better than others, but all have their limitations, because God is beyond, above, and greater than creation. We are the created thing, and God is the Creator; we should not think that the created thing will ever be able to fully understand the Creator in this mortal life. God is infinite, and we are finite, so we need to accept that any attempt to explain or describe the Trinity will be limited and incomplete. But that doesn’t change the fact that we can take it to be factual because it is plainly taught in Scripture. Here are a few illustration of the Trinity:

- Think of a triangle that has three angles forming a single triangle. There are three angles, yet one triangle. Of course, the angles are not persons, but I still find that helpful.
- Think about multiplying three ones together. You will find that $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ and in a similar way, God is three yet also one. A really bad analogy is $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$, suggesting that there are three gods; that is tritheism, and that is what Muslims say about Christians claiming that we worship three gods because they do not understand the doctrine of the Trinity.
- Consider love; it is trifold. There is a lover, a beloved, and a spirit of love when considering humans, but we can also say that there is one love between them.

If those illustrations help you, wonderful. If they do not help you, you still must accept the Trinity because it is taught in Scripture. You may not understand how satellites work, but that doesn’t mean they don’t exist. In the same way, you may not understand how the Trinity works, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist.

How I think about the Trinity

Let me tell you how I think about the Trinity, and maybe it will be helpful to you. I think of the Trinity as three persons operating in accordance with one mind.

Now let’s say you have three individuals responsible for something. Eventually there will be some disagreement or discord, because they are not of the same mind. Let’s say they are deciding on what color to paint a house they own together. They might have different minds about the subject, which leads to differing emotions and wills about the matter.

But unlike the three individuals I just mentioned, the persons of the Trinity are in perfect agreement about everything, from creation to salvation. And that is supported by Scripture. In John 10:30, Jesus says, “I and the Father are one.” And again, Jesus says in John 5:19, that He only does what He sees the Father doing. In John 15:26, we see that both Jesus and the Father send the Holy Spirit to help believers and to accomplish their will in the world. The Father and the Son are not going to send a heretic to accomplish their work in the world, so we see that the Holy Spirit must be in complete agreement with the Father and the Son.

You see, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are completely synchronized and in complete agreement because they are of the same mind on everything, and so there is perfect unity in the Trinity. The Trinity is the perfect community of three eternal persons, and it is the community of God in one undivided nature. Can you imagine the joy and love that exists between the members of the Trinity? They are the perfect community in perfect relationship for all eternity.

Here is the amazing part. You are created in the image of God and have an innate desire to be in relationship with others. Imagine a person stranded alone on a beautiful tropical island with unlimited food, perfect weather, and every physical comfort imaginable. At first, it feels like paradise. But after weeks or months without another human being, the silence becomes unbearable. The greatest need is no longer food or shelter but companionship. We instinctively long to know and be known, to love and be loved. That longing points beyond ourselves to the God who created us for relationship—with one another and ultimately with Him. Personally, I can spend hours in study, writing, and reading, but I can't imagine doing that apart from relationship with others that makes my efforts worthwhile and helpful to others.

Understanding the Trinity, I believe, helps us understand our purpose on the Earth and how the church should function on the Earth. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are perfectly one. Believers are invited into fellowship with God, and in the church, among believers, there should be great unity and love.

Do you know the difference between unbelievers and believers? It is certainly not that believers never sin; on this side of heaven we will never be sinless. The difference between believers and unbelievers is that believers are in agreement with God that they are sinners and that sin is wrong and destructive; they are in agreement with God that His moral law is righteous and good.

You can't be in fellowship with God if you love and wallow in the things He hates. True believers strive to remove sin in their lives because they understand it is heinous and wholly unacceptable to our morally perfect God and destructive to the human soul. As Paul says in our sermon text, "for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

True believers overcome with the help of the Holy Spirit in preparation for eternal life in the presence of God, where God extends the community of the Trinity to include redeemed humanity who have trusted the Son.

John writes in Revelation 21:3-4 of our eternal home and union with God, describing that scene:

³I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

The dwelling place of God will be with those who love Him; He shall be their God, and they shall be His people; there is the relationship. And there will be no sorrow, tears, death, crying, or pain; only joy forever. That is the ultimate community, and that is where I want to be for all eternity.

Unfortunately, not everyone will make it into God's eternal heaven, as John cautions just a few verses later in verse 8 of Revelation 21, saying:

⁸ “But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Dear friends, none of us is perfect, and all of us sin. As I said, we will never be sinless, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will sin less and do everything possible to put sin to death in our lives.

Jesus says in John 14:15: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” As a believer, your destiny is indescribably wonderful. Paul describes the glimpse of heaven God allowed Him in 1 Corinthians 2:9, saying, “No *eye has seen, no ear has heard*, and no mind *has imagined* the things that God *has prepared* for those who love him.” As we look forward to our hope of being brought into the eternal community of believers, let us seek to conform all things to the example of Jesus. Heaven is open to anyone. Repent and believe in Jesus, and you will be saved. Amen.

One Lord, One Hope, One Church

Daniel Cote

Nicene Creed—Part 6

This is my final sermon on the Nicene Creed and the key things it affirms. Today we will consider what the creed affirms about the church when it says:

And I believe 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.

So, what is the church? How does the Nicene Creed connect to biblical teaching about the church? What is the role and work of the church? When was the church at its best, and when was it at its worst? What does the church foreshadow? And finally, how can we be faithful to our Lord at this local church in Winsted? I would like to deal with all those questions in our sermon today.

In the June newsletter, I included this quote from Christian philosopher Dallas Willard. Willard writes about the church, saying:

The church is not a gathering of people who have mastered spiritual things, but a community of disciples steadily learning from Jesus how to live in the kingdom of God every day. The true church exists to form people into Christlikeness, not merely to increase attendance or preserve institutions. Wherever believers genuinely follow Christ in humility, obedience, love, and truth, the living presence of God is at work among them.

We are to be a community of disciples seeking to be more like Christ every day. Our foremost commitment **must not be** preserving this beautiful sanctuary and our traditions, but following Christ as Willard says in humility, obedience, love, and truth. If we do that, I believe God will meet all our needs. If we fail to do that, nothing we do or contrive will sustain this church into the future.

Let's turn to our Sermon text and Scripture reading because they have much to say about the faithful church.

Sermon Text

Our Scripture reading and sermon text align nicely with the final section of the Nicene Creed that we are considering today. Four of Paul's NT letters, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, were written in his first imprisonment in Rome in AD 60-62. Paul's second imprisonment resulted in his execution, but during his first imprisonment, Paul was allowed, while under military guard, to live in his own rented quarters in Rome, receive visitors, freely preach the gospel, and write the four consequential letters I mentioned. Altogether, it was a very productive period in Paul's ministry, even though he was imprisoned.

At the opening of our sermon text, as he does in several places, Paul calls himself a prisoner of the Lord, although he is really a prisoner of Rome. So, Paul views his imprisonment in the light of his relationship with and service to Christ, showing that Christ is sovereign over all aspects of his life, including his prison circumstances. Paul views his imprisonment as part of his work as an evangelist and completely consistent with the sovereign will of God.

Truthfully, we may not have these important letters if Paul had not been imprisoned; prison gave Paul time to write. So, we see that God used adverse circumstances in Paul's life, as He does in our lives, to accomplish His good purposes in the world.

Paul implores his readers to walk in a manner worthy of their calling. The church at Ephesus was composed of Jewish and Gentile believers, who together had been saved by grace through faith in Christ. They were one body, and their personal lives needed to reflect that they were disciples of Christ. Their behavior also entailed the responsibility to live in unity as brothers and sisters in Christ. Earlier, in Ephesians 2:14-16, Paul stressed the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christians, because the cross of Christ had reconciled them into one body. Christ died so that in Him all Christians would be one body, with no factions or dissension.

The calling of the Ephesians was to live as true disciples of Christ, obeying His commands, and living in peace and harmony with their brothers and sisters on the same journey. But of course, this message was not only for the Ephesians; it is also for all Christians in all times, as it is for us now.

Unity is not easy, and humans often insist on having their own way. So how were the Ephesians supposed to achieve unity in a diverse church, filled with Jews and Gentiles, as well as diverse socioeconomic groups, that would have been present in Ephesus? Honestly, I think the challenge of the first-century church was far greater than in our time! Can you imagine Pharisaical, legalistic Jews and pagans who had recently worshipped the Roman or Greek mythical gods who were joined in one body when they came to faith in Christ? That seems like a hotbed for division, yet I believe the church was far more unified then than it is now.

Jesus prayed that His followers would "all be one" (John 17:21), yet since the Reformation the visible Church has repeatedly divided. The Reformation was clearly necessary for reasons I will describe in a bit, but Lutherans, Reformed, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Pentecostals, and countless independent churches eventually emerged, with many of these traditions dividing further into hundreds of splinter groups that weakened the church.

Some separations were necessary responses to serious departures from biblical truth. Yet not every division can be explained that way. Human pride and lack of humility have also fractured Christ's Church badly.

Christians have often elevated secondary doctrines, traditions, personalities, and personal preferences to the level of essential truth. Leaders have sometimes been more willing

to divide than to listen, forgive, compromise on nonessentials, or admit they might be wrong. Imagine a family whose children love the same Father but refuse to eat at the same table. Biblical unity does not require abandoning truth; it requires holding truth with humility, patience, forgiveness, and love—“being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit” as Paul says in Ephesians 4:3.

When we add humility, gentleness, patience, and tolerance for one another in love, we will preserve the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace that Paul speaks of in verse 3 of our sermon text.

In Christianity, the main things are the plain things, and those are the things you will find in the Nicene Creed and the statement of faith of this church, which are the essential, non-negotiable truths of the Christian faith that trace directly to the teaching of Christ and the Apostles.

In our Scripture reading, Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:20 that God’s household, which is the church, is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. Here is what that means. The prophets, through their prophecies, pointed to Christ and the nature of His ministry.

The apostles witnessed the ministry of Christ and proclaimed and propagated the gospel and all that He taught. This is the foundation of the church, but when a stone foundation was laid, it was aligned to the cornerstone, which is the first large stone of the foundation. Christ is that Cornerstone. It was God’s intent that the church be built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles, which are in complete alignment with Christ. The church is the holy temple of God that is built on that foundation, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:21-22, and we, as believers, are being perfectly fitted together by the Holy Spirit.

When to Divide?

So when should Christians leave a church or separate? There are legitimate reasons to divide. As I have mentioned before, many Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutheran, and United Church of Christ churches have abandoned historic Christianity. When churches abandon the Bible, deny the divinity of Christ, or His atoning death and resurrection, or promote morality that is contrary to the Bible, it is time for the true disciple of Christ to find another church.

When churches abandon or ignore the things that you find in the Nicene Creed and in our statement of faith, it is time for the true disciple of Christ to find another church.

When churches promote unbiblical sexuality, works-based salvation that is not rooted in Christ, deny the Scriptures, add their own unbiblical doctrines, or reject the clear moral truths found there, they have plotted their own course apart from God and the Bible, and have therefore broken from any fellowship rooted in Christ, and separated themselves from the true church. Then again, it is time for the true disciple of Christ to find another church.

When to Agree to Disagree?

So when should brothers and sisters in Christ agree to disagree while maintaining unity and fellowship? We must be completely unified in the essential truths found in the Nicene Creed and our statement of faith. Beyond that, Christians have been free to debate and form their own opinions about the non-essentials of the faith, such as when to baptize, the meaning of the Lord’s supper, various views of the end times, the nature and extent of human free will, predestination, and how that all works with the sovereignty of God.

Christians are free to ponder, contemplate, and postulate, with the understanding that no one has a perfect understanding of the infinite God this side of heaven, so we must all engage our brothers and sisters in Christ with humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and smothered with an overwhelming serving of love.

There is something both comic and tragic about Christians dividing over questions that have challenged the greatest minds for centuries. Calvinists and Arminians may worship the same Lord, trust the same cross for salvation, preach the same resurrection, and open the same Bible, but then separate over precisely how divine sovereignty and human freedom fit together.

The irony is that both sides confess an infinite God while possessing finite minds and limited interpretations of Scripture. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12 that we see “in a mirror dimly.” He means by this that, in our current, limited human state, our vision of the complete truth is obscured, yet Christians sometimes argue as though their favorite theological system sees everything perfectly.

Truth matters, but humility should increase with the greatness of the God we seek to understand. The harsh reality is that many will stand before God in shame that they had divided the church over non-essential theology that goes far beyond the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. Oh, how elusive peace can be!

Consequently, brothers and sisters, unite in the essential truth of the Christian faith, things that we are certain to be true. That is what we have chosen to do here at Second Congregational, and I believe that is what Paul is teaching in our sermon text, because there is only one Lord, one hope, and therefore only one true church. Denominations are the result of human pride, and it is very important to note that there will not be any denominations in heaven; only the true church.

The Church Through the Ages

Let’s move on to consider how the church has changed through the ages. The Nicene Creed proclaims the truth that there is one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. As I have noted before, the word catholic means universal; that is it. There is only one true church, built on the teaching of Jesus and the apostles as Paul says in Ephesians, and as our sermon text further affirms: there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. Yet the church as led by fallible humans has strayed over the last 2000 years from the teaching of Christ and the apostles, and consequently has failed many times to honor and glorify God and to advance His kingdom on Earth. So, let’s take a quick tour through church history and conclude with the mission for the church in 2026.

When we read Acts 2 describing the church in the first century, shortly after the resurrection, we find the purest form of the church, completely rooted in the teaching and guidance of the apostles. They were devoted to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of the bread, prayer, sharing what they had with others, praising God, and having favor with all people, meaning they were positively impacting their communities. This is the church we must strive to be.

The church’s finest hour was not in the 16th-century Reformation. No, the church’s finest hour is found in the first-century apostolic church fully aligned to Christ, its cornerstone.

As the church grew in the first and second centuries, elders were appointed to lead and teach Scripture in various cities and regions. This was necessary to maintain purity of doctrine, and we see Paul appointing elders to oversee the church in Acts 20, Titus 1, 1 Timothy 3, and

several other places. In Titus 1, Paul equates the positions of elder and overseer. So they are the same thing.

So, how did we get bishops? The Greek word for overseer is (ἐπίσκοπος) *episkopos*, which translates into English as *bishop*. So bishops are elders who oversee the church. In congregationalism, we refer to leaders as elders instead of bishops, and I would be the teaching elder of this church. That much is consistent with the apostolic Christianity that we want to emulate.

But it did not take long for the church to begin to go off the rails. In the second and third centuries, clergy leadership began to evolve into a separate spiritual class. But Peter teaches in 1 Peter 2:9 that all believers are priests, and unlike the OT saints, we have direct access to God. Believers do not need anyone else to help them access God. Through the work of Christ, we have open access 24/7 to our God. During that period, celibacy and abstinence were increasingly expected of clergy, even though Paul condemns those who prohibit marriage as false teachers in 1 Timothy 4:3.

In the third and fourth centuries, religious leaders began to wear special clothes that distinguished them from the lay people. By the fourth century, distinctive stoles or insignia identifying the office of the clergy began appearing. We see human pride creeping in as the clergy was becoming a special class, which is nowhere taught in the NT. Do we ever read of Jesus, Peter, or Paul wearing special clothes to identify their status? Certainly not. We have no indication that their dress was special.

When the Roman Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in AD 313 with the Edict of Milan, it was both a blessing and a curse. The blessing was that it ended persecution of Christians in much of the Roman Empire. But the curse was that it gave the church clergy special privileges and greatly increased their public status. Bishops became important public officials, some even exercising judicial and political functions, and they gained wealth, property, and influence.

In the 4th through 6th centuries, special clerical vestments and garb continued to emerge, differentiating bishops from lay people; the layers of hierarchy in church leadership expanded far beyond anything justified by the New Testament and the early church.

In the 4th and 5th centuries, the veneration of Saints and the collection of relics, which are bones, clothing, or objects used by the saints, became increasingly prominent. Devotion to Mary became explicit. So, during that period, the groundwork for praying to the saints and to Mary was laid, even though biblical prayer is to God alone through Christ, since Christ is the only mediator between God and man, according to 1 Timothy 2:5.

In the 5th and 6th centuries, the bishop of Rome developed as the pope and asserted himself as overall leader of the church, again a concept never taught in Scripture. This would eventually lead to the Great Schism of 1054 and the split of the western church centered in Rome and the eastern church centered in Constantinople.

In the 7th and 8th centuries, the elaborate sacramental system that the Roman Catholic Church still retains began to develop. The NT teaches only two sacraments, the Lord's Supper and Baptism, which were commanded by Jesus, while the Roman Catholic Church added five others.

In the 8th through 11th centuries, papal power expanded dramatically, accompanied by vast territories and military forces. Spiritual offices and appointments were given to the highest

bidder, even if they had no qualifications, in a practice referred to as Simony. Nepotism and sexual misconduct were rampant.

In the 11th and 12th centuries, Popes launched military campaigns in the form of the crusades, even though Jesus says in Matthew 26:52, "He who lives by the sword will die by the sword. Furthermore, in the same period, Popes sold indulgences to line their pockets and fund their building projects.

Indulgences allowed the purchaser a reduced penalty for sin and could even be applied to souls in purgatory. All these things are completely unbiblical. Purgatory is not taught in the Bible. Jesus and the apostles had no armies, no wealth, no territories, and no political power, and they taught that Christ's disciples should be holy because our heavenly Father is holy (1 Peter 1:15).

By the time Martin Luther visited Rome in 1510, courtesans flourished, and there was widespread involvement of supposedly celibate priests with prostitutes. Drunkenness and other behavior inconsistent with their vows was prevalent. Luther recalled that celebration of the Mass was mechanical and rushed, and Christianity had become commercialized to maximize profit through collections, the selling of masses, the sale of indulgences, and the veneration and sale of relics, pretending these things provided the pilgrim with spiritual benefits. This was perhaps the church's darkest hour, one that led directly to the long-overdue Protestant Reformation.

The evil of hell had invaded the medieval church, but God protected the true church; as Jesus says in Matthew 16:18, He will build His church and the gates of hell will not overpower it.

The Reformation was necessary and long overdue. It recovered the doctrines that salvation is by faith in Christ alone and that the church is to be solely governed by the Bible, not the pronouncements of popes who claimed to be infallible. The reformers correctly made the point that salvation is by faith in Jesus plus nothing else. In contrast, Roman Catholic theology teaches that salvation requires faith in Jesus, plus baptism, plus the Eucharist, plus confession, abstaining from mortal sin, church attendance, and the list goes on.

The reformers correctly made the point that the Bible alone is the only infallible authority of the Christian faith, and that the traditions and proclamations of the pope are inconsequential, but there is still much work to do to return the church to its true apostolic roots, and that must be our goal here in Winsted.

The Church Foreshadows Future Reality

The earthly church is a foretaste of the glorious future described in Revelation 21:1–6, which we read in our call to worship. John sees a new heaven and new earth where God dwells with His people, death is defeated, tears are wiped away, and all things are made new. This promise gives Christians profound hope and joy. Our suffering, grief, sickness, and loss are temporary; God has promised that they will not have the final word. The church cannot create this perfect world, but it can foreshadow it. When believers worship together, reconcile divisions, care for the suffering, welcome the lonely, and proclaim Christ, they give the world a glimpse of what is coming. We live with joy because we know how the story ends: God will dwell with us, sorrow will disappear, and Christ will make all things new. And once again, there will be no denominations in heaven; we will all be one.

The Mission of the Church

Let's close with this. Acts 2:42–47 gives us a picture of the church at its best: devoted to apostolic truth, united in fellowship, committed to prayer, generously caring for those in need, and continually pointing people to Jesus Christ. The first Christians did not merely attend worship together. They shared life together, and through their witness, “the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

We still see glimpses of that Acts 2 church today. During the devastating 2014 Ebola epidemic in West Africa, Christian physician Dr. Kent Brantly served with Samaritan's Purse at a mission hospital in Liberia. Brantly and his wife, Amber, understood their service as a Christian calling to serve God and others. While caring for Ebola patients, Dr. Brantly contracted the deadly disease himself.

After nearly dying from Ebola while serving others, Brantly eventually returned with his family to Africa—not to celebrity or comfort, but to serve as a medical missionary in rural Zambia. That is the spirit of Acts 2—not that every Christian must become a missionary, but every Christian is called to give themselves away for Christ, loving their brothers and sisters in Christ, loving their neighbors, and in so doing, demonstrating their love for God and bringing glory to Him.

The world has seen enough churches divided by pride, personalities, preferences, and secondary issues. We must show them something better. Let us be devoted to God's Word, dependent upon prayer, generous toward those in need, faithful in proclaiming the gospel, and overflowing with love.

We cannot recreate the first century, but by the power of the same Holy Spirit, we can embody the same faith today, handed down long ago by the apostles. Amen

ⁱ <https://lionandlambapologetics.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/The-Trinity-Geisler.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2: *God and Creation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003), 291.