

Lesson 3

THE ONE TRUE GOD

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Over 95% of the world's population believes in a "higher power." But does that mean that they worship the same God we worship? In this lesson we will look at how the Bible describes the one true God. As we do that, hopefully we will answer the following questions.

- ◆ How can someone know there is a God?
- ◆ What do we mean when we say we have a "Triune God"?

HOW CAN SOMEONE KNOW THERE IS A GOD?

Please read the following passages and then answer the corresponding questions.

Psalm 19:1-3 *The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.*

Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, *being understood from what has been made*, so that men are without excuse.

Romans 2:14,15 Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

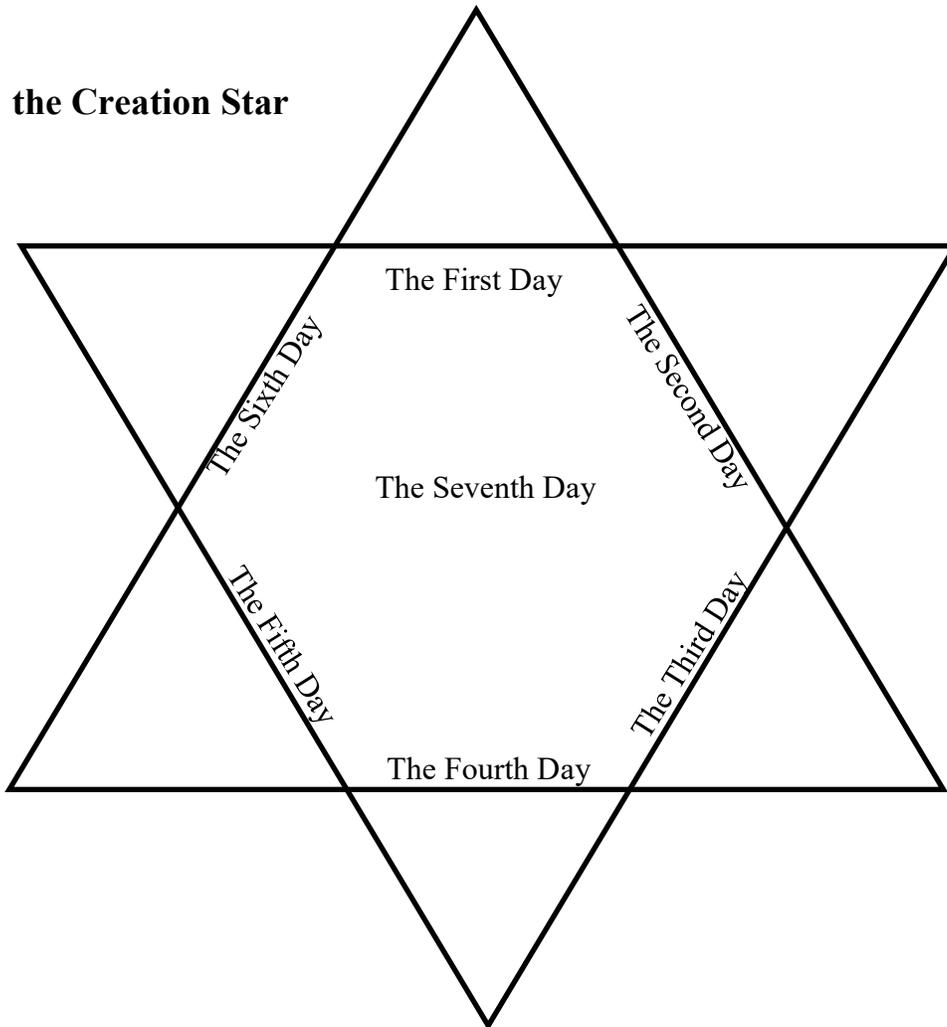
Psalm 14:1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

- 1) According to the italicized portions of those verses, what is one way that people can tell that there is a God?
- 2) According to the underlined portions of those verses, what is another way that people can tell there is a God?
- 3) What does the Bible call someone who says "There is no God!" in spite of all this evidence?
- 4) (Not based on the passages) Do you know the difference between an "atheist" and an "agnostic"?

People can know that there is a God by looking at nature or by listening to their conscience. We now want to see *what* people can know about God from these things. We'll start with nature.

The account of how this world and the universe came into existence is found in Genesis 1:1 - 2:3. Please use your Bibles to study this account, and on the chart below list the things that were created on the various days.

the Creation Star



The "Creation Star is meant to aid in memorization of the of the six days of creation. The opposite corners of the star correspond. For example, note what was created on the second and fifth day.

- 5) When you look at Genesis chapter 1 you notice a chronological rhythm throughout the the creation account. In verses 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, and 31 you read, "...and there was evening, and there was morning — the _____ day." With that in mind, how long does the Bible tell us God took to create the universe and everything in it?

Not everyone believes this, of course. The theory of evolution, while declining in popularity, is still a prominent teaching today. But understand that if you embrace evolution then you confess that portions of the Bible are erroneous. That puts you on a dangerously slippery slope. If the Bible is inaccurate about God creating the universe in six days, couldn't it be inaccurate about Jesus being the Savior? Couldn't it be inaccurate about salvation being by grace, apart from works? Couldn't it be inaccurate about there being a heaven. (For more information about the teaching of evolution vs. the Biblical account of creation, please see Appendix V.)

When you look at all of creation — the stars, planets, oceans, animals, insects, and mankind — you can see that there must be a God. The following passages describe some of God’s characteristics that you can see when you look at nature. Please read through those passages and then list those characteristics of God that we can see in nature.

Acts 14:17 “Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.”

CHARACTERISTICS

Psalms 104:24 How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

We said that people can not only learn about God from nature, but also from their conscience. The following passages describe what we can learn about God from our conscience.

Romans 1:32 They know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things *deserve death*, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Romans 2:14,15 Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, *their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing*, now even defending them.

Acts 16:29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

1 Corinthians 2:9 No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

1 Corinthians 12:3 No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

6) According to the italicized portions of those passages, what is the only thing about God that our consciences can tell us?

7) According to the underlined portions of those passages, what important piece of knowledge about God are we NOT able to obtain from nature or our conscience?

Therefore while we are able to learn about God from both nature and our conscience, the knowledge we get from these things is limited. We sometimes refer to this as “the natural knowledge of God.”

✓ **DEFINITION: natural knowledge of God** — The knowledge of God’s existence that can be obtained by looking at the wonders of creation or by listening to the conscience. This knowledge cannot reveal how we are saved.

For a truly satisfying knowledge of God we need to look somewhere other than nature or our conscience.

John 5:39,40 [Jesus said], “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.”

2 Timothy 3:15 From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

8) **Where is the only place where we can gain a truly satisfying knowledge of God — a knowledge that our relationship with God is good because our sins are forgiven?**

On the basis of what we have looked at so far, how would you answer that question, “HOW CAN SOMEONE KNOW THERE IS A GOD?”

Another aspect about God’s existence that we cannot learn from nature or from our conscience is that he is a “Triune God.” The next question we would like to consider is...

WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY WE HAVE A “TRIUNE GOD”?

It should be made clear that the term “triune” does not appear in the pages of the Scriptures. It is an “ecclesiastical term” — a word the church uses to conveniently describe a truth about our God that is recorded in Scriptures. We will look at that truth in this section of our Bible study. Please read the following passages and then answer the corresponding questions.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Romans 3:29,30 Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God.

9) **How many true Gods are there?**

But the Bible describes God in an amazing and marvelous way. Consider the following passages.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make man...”


Isaiah 6:8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”


10) **What seems grammatically incorrect about those Bible passages?**

The reason that the pronouns in those verses don't seem to match up is that they are trying to describe the indescribable, our God. For while we have one God, in his Word God reveals himself as three persons. Please read the following passages and then answer the corresponding questions.

Numbers 6:24-26 'The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.'

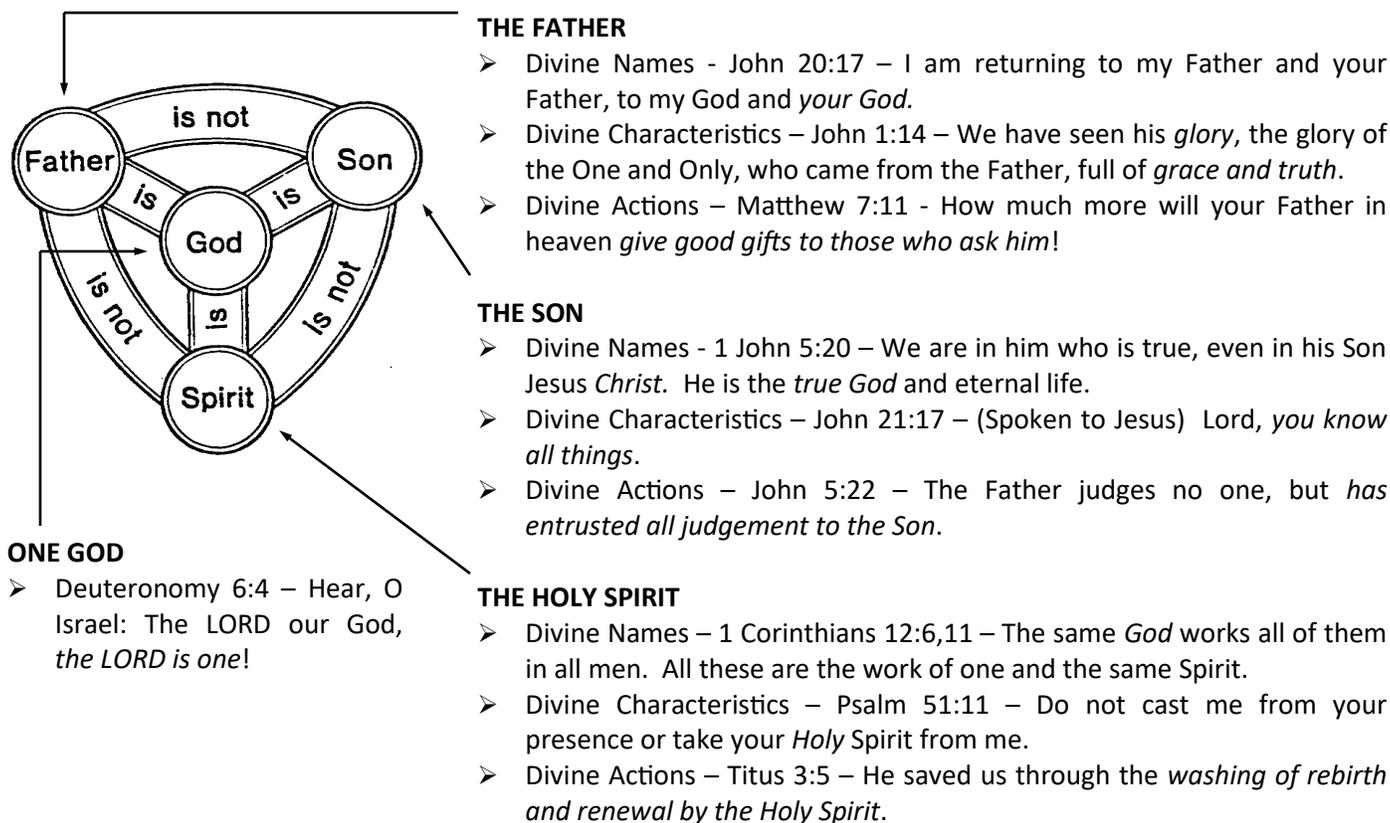
Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God [*i.e.*- *God the Father*], and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

11) Who are the three persons of the Trinity?

The concept of a "three-in-one" God is impossible for our minds to grasp, yet we believe it because it's what God's Word teaches. We use the word "triune" since it conveniently expresses this incomprehensible truth. "Tria" means three. And "unus" means one.

The following diagram is a way of picturing our Triune God. It illustrates how each person of the Trinity is named in Scripture, has divine characteristics, and does things only God could do. It shows that each person of the Trinity is distinct from one another, yet all our God — the one true God. This diagram can serve as the answer to our question, "WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY WE HAVE A 'TRIUNE GOD'?"



1 Corinthians 2:14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Job 36:26 *How great is God*—beyond our understanding!

Romans 11:33 *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!* How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

John 5:23 He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

Psalm 96:5 For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.

- 12) According to the underlined portions of those passages, what is the only way that we are able to believe in a Triune God?
- 13) We should not be alarmed by the fact that we cannot understand God's existence. According to the italicized portions of those passages, what comfort do we have in knowing that God's existence is beyond our comprehension?
- 14) According to John 5:23 and Psalm 96:5 is it possible to deny the Trinity and still believe in the one true God?

(Almost from the beginning of the Christian church, believers have stated their faith in the Triune God through brief statements known as creeds. The three best known and most widely used creeds are the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. All three can be found in Appendix VI.)

TAKING IT DEEPER

- A) Agree or Disagree — People could come to saving faith if they would only look closely at nature and listen to their conscience.
- B) Agree or Disagree — We have one God, but sometimes he acts like the Father, sometimes He acts like the Son, and sometimes he acts like the Holy Spirit.
- C) Agree or Disagree — Essentially all people believe in the same God. They only call him different names and worship him in different ways.
- D) Agree or Disagree — It is possible that God created the world by guiding the evolutionary process.
- E) Question: We said that there are three persons in the Trinity and that they all do divine things. Can we distinguish between the work of the Father, the work of the Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit?
- F) Question: Would it be proper to address a prayer to only one member of the Trinity?
- G) Question: What is the difference between these two groups?

Group A	Group B
Mormons	Baptists
Jewish	Lutheran
Muslim	Catholic

Appendix V — The Theory of Evolution

Many would like to see the creation vs. evolution debate as a conflict between religion and science, superstition and empirical fact. This presents a false antithesis. Christians are not opposed to science. They just do not place their faith in subjection to science. For example, although it cannot be scientifically proven that God exists, the Christian accepts God's existence not as theory, but as fact.

In addition to this, even some non-Christians believe evolution must be questioned as sound science. In fact, some have referred to the theory of evolution as "scientism." Scientism is a belief system that is based on limited findings from limited scientific inquiry. It is, in essence, a system of faith.

The comparison of the Biblical account of creation vs. scientism / evolution is summed up in this chart.

BELIEF	BIBLE / CREATIONISM	SCIENTISM / EVOLUTION
Time of creation	six 24-hour days	billions of years
Method of creation	God's Word and decree	chance
The existence of man	a special creation of God	an advanced animal
Man's purpose	to serve and honor God	to survive, serve self
Man's responsibility	to thank and obey God	none — but to please self

The Assumptions of Scientism

Scientism rests primarily on two main assumptions in its effort to explain the origin and maintenance of the universe:

1) *The unproven and unprovable theory that things are as they are because they have come through a long process.* It is inconceivable to the evolutionist that complex organisms (such as man) of today were not originally one-celled. He will also assert that these organisms originated from inorganic matter.

2) *Uniformitarianism.* This theory states that rates of change which are observable today and which can be calculated have always been the same in the past.

An example of how these two theories would be utilized could be the calculation of the erosion rate of a mountain. Suppose a mountain erodes at the rate of one inch per century, and it appears to have eroded 1,000 inches. According to the two theories above, the mountain *must* be 100,000 years old. However, the argument is based on the assumptions that 1) the process of the mountain's deterioration must have taken time, and 2) that the process of the mountain's deterioration must have been uniform and constant. Both theories are completely unprovable. If some unknown factor in the past had either sped up or retarded erosion, then there would be no way to determine the age of the mountain.

Another example of the way those two assumptions are used would be the "measuring tests" that have been developed to support the "great age theory" of the universe, such as carbon-14 dating, potassium-argon dating, and the uranium 235-lead tests. These tests all work on basically the same principle: that certain materials under certain conditions tend to decay and change into other materials. For example, potassium deteriorates into argon at a constant rate. If a given deposit of potassium and argon is found, the ratio of the two amounts found should indicate how long the process has taken place in that particular deposit. In most cases these processes have been measured in the hundreds of millions of years, if not billions.

The fallacy of the entire procedure becomes obvious when a few factors are given special attention. First, it must be proved that the original deposit was pure potassium with no lead whatsoever — or at least the original ratio must be known. Obviously neither of these factors can be known since no scientist was there to record the information. Second, the uniformitarian is assuming that there has been no "leakage" of the deposit — that no lead has percolated into the deposit or that no potassium has leaked out. Unless this can be firmly demonstrated, the procedure cannot claim to be truly scientific. If the potassium-argon ratio has been quickly formulated as it now exists, what appears to be millions of years old might be only thousands. In short, a great deal of assumption lies at the foundation of these dating methods.

What is the Reason or Motive for Scientism & Evolution?

Apart from Scripture, scientism simply has no alternatives to choose from concerning the origin of the universe. If you reject the premise of a Creator God, as described in Genesis, what other options do you have? The assumptions of evolution are made simply because the universe *must* be old to account for its existence if there is no Creator God. There is no other explanation. You can see, therefore, that evolution is more than a mere set of propositions and statements. It is a total world and life view. In essence, it is a religion requiring as much faith as creation. The creationist says, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...” (Genesis 1:1). The evolutionist says, “In the beginning a mass of hydrogen exploded...” Neither are provable. Both are based on faith.

Why is this faith in evolution preferred by so many over faith in what Scripture tells us is true? Because the conflict between the Bible and scientism is not limited to explanations of the universe’s origin. If the evolutionist’s theory was true, then there never were two human beings who began the human race, since man emerged gradually from animal ancestry. Then there was obviously no disobedience in the Garden of Eden, no sin as defined by the Bible. What the Scriptures call “sin” would really be no more than a remnant of our bestial nature — times when we don’t act as evolved as we are. And if there is no sin, then there is no need for a Savior. Mankind is not sinful by nature, but is getting better and better as they evolve. Christ’s work was unnecessary. He is only a martyr, not a Redeemer. The doctrine of salvation by grace through the work of Christ *cannot* be harmonized to evolution. More than that, the whole of Scriptures state their agreement to Genesis. Christ himself referred to the creation account as historical fact. Therefore, the Scripture must be nothing but superstitious ranting if evolution is accepted as fact.

The conflict comes down to this. There are two faiths — creationism and evolutionism — and they cannot be reconciled. In the end, choices must be made. Either there is a God or there is not. Either the human race is composed of creatures who are subject to their Creator or they are sophisticated animals who are subject only to themselves. Either we are sinners in need of a Savior or we are only occasional beasts who simply need more evolutionary improvement to survive. Either Genesis is God’s Word or it is myth. Either Jesus Christ is a trustworthy Lord or he is a simpleton, or lunatic.

What about Compromise?

In the last decades an attempt has been made to combine the evolution and creation under the label of *theistic evolution*. The theistic evolutionist claims a belief in God’s creation of the universe, but he claims that God did so by guiding evolution over the course of billions of years. This contradicts the Genesis account of creation which establishes a rhythm of the 24 hour period — “and there was evening, and there was morning — the first day” (Gen. 1:5). Trying to combine evolution and creationism is perhaps the ultimate in superstition. It claims a belief in a God, yet it categorically rejects God’s Word.

Does Creationism Rest on a Solid Foundation?

Biblical creationism is a faith that rests solely on the Biblical account. In the final analysis we must conclude that if we are to know anything about creation — its date, process, order, or duration — then the Creator must tell us. The writer to the Hebrews explains it best. *By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible (Hebrews 11:3).*

This does not mean that creationism is incompatible with science, or that it rejects science. But as stated earlier, the Christian places his faith in science in subjection to his faith in God’s Word, not vice-versa. For example, while the Christian may accept that potassium or uranium decay at a certain, measurable rate, that is not in conflict with their faith. A logical assumption, made in faith, is that *God created the original deposit of uranium containing lead*. Therefore if you measured the lead / uranium ratio assuming that the deposit was, at one time, pure uranium, your estimation of the age of the deposit would be immensely greater than the true age. This assumption embraces the wonders of science without abusing the wonders of God’s Word.

The Christian embraces the teachings of science, for in them the Christian sees the beauty and order of God’s creation. But the Christian also ultimately understands that God is not bound to the laws of science. He called the universe into existence by his Word. He formed everything out of nothing at all. That is scientifically impossible, but it is nothing to our God!

Appendix VI — The Creeds of the Christian Church

Almost from the beginning of the Christian church believers have stated their faith in the Triune God through brief statements known as creeds. The word comes from the Latin word *credo*, which means “I believe.” The three best known and most widely used creeds are the Apostles’, the Nicene, and the Athanasian.

THE APOSTLES CREED

We do not know the author (or authors) of this creed, nor do we know the exact date when it was first used. The text as we have it comes from eighth century Gaul (southern France), although it is much like the so-called Old Roman Creed which was used in the Western Church already in the third century. Roots of this creed can be traced back to creed-like statements in the New Testament, for example, 1 Timothy 3:16 — *He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.* The tradition that each of the apostles wrote a line of the creed is not verifiable. But while the apostles did not produce it, this creed’s roots and teachings are certainly apostolic.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

THE NICENE CREED

We know more about the history of this creed. The first general church council met in Nicea (Greece) in 325 AD to deal with the teaching of Arius, who denied the deity and eternity of Jesus. The council stated its position by adapting a creed currently in use. This statement was further modified and finalized by later councils at Constantinople (381) and Chalcedon (451). In the ninth century the phrase, “and the Son,” was added to the words, “who proceeds from the Father,” in the statement on the Holy Spirit. This addition produced discord between the Eastern and Western Churches and was a factor in the separation of the two a few centuries later.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

It is quite certain that Athanasius, and early church leader from Egypt, did not write the Athanasian Creed. This work is not a creed in the usual sense, but rather a liturgical statement of faith, chanted regularly in the worship services. The creed is a strong defense of the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity-humanity of Jesus. The Athanasian Creed seems to have originated in the West around the fifth century. The creed is usually read annually on Trinity Sunday.

Whoever wishes to be saved must, above all else, hold to the true Christian faith.

Whoever does not keep this faith pure in all points will certainly perish forever.

Now this is the true Christian faith:

We worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, without mixing the persons or dividing the divine being.

For each person—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—is distinct,

but the deity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory and coeternal in majesty.

What the Father is, so is the Son, and so is the Holy Spirit.

The Father is uncreated, the Son uncreated, the Holy Spirit uncreated; the Father is infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite; the Father is eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal;

yet they are not three who are eternal, but there is one who is eternal, just as they are not three who are uncreated, nor three who are infinite, but there is one who is uncreated and one who is infinite.

In the same way the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty;

yet they are not three who are almighty, but there is one who is almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God;

yet they are not three Gods, but one God.

So the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit, is Lord;

yet they are not three Lords, but one Lord.

For just as Christian truth compels us to confess each person individually to be God and Lord,

so the true Christian faith forbids us to speak of three Gods or three Lords.

The Father is neither made nor created nor begotten of anyone.

The Son is neither made nor created, but is begotten of the Father alone. The Holy Spirit is neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeds from the Father and the Son.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.

And within this Trinity none comes before or after; none is greater or inferior,

but all three persons are coequal and coeternal,

so that in every way, as stated before, all three persons are to be worshiped as one God and one God worshiped as three persons.

Whoever wishes to be saved must have this conviction of the Trinity.

It is furthermore necessary for eternal salvation truly to believe that our Lord Jesus Christ also took on human flesh.

Now this is the true Christian faith:

We believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and man.

He is God, eternally begotten from the nature of the Father, and he is man, born in time from the nature of his mother, fully God, fully man, with rational soul and human flesh,

equal to the Father as to his deity, less than the Father as to his humanity;

and though he is both God and man, Christ is not two persons but one,

one, not by changing the deity into flesh, but by taking the humanity into God;

one, indeed, not by mixture of the natures, but by unity in one person;

for just as the rational soul and flesh are one human being, so God and man are one Christ.

He suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose the third day from the dead.

He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty, and from there will come to judge the living and the dead.

At his coming all people will rise with their own bodies to answer for their personal deeds.

Those who have done good will enter eternal life, but those who have done evil will go into eternal fire.

This is the true Christian faith.

Whoever does not faithfully and firmly believe this cannot be saved.