

Redeemer OPC, Hawaii

Adult Sunday School

The Apostles' Creed (4)

“Second Article - the Son”

- I. Introduction. Review: God the Father. One thing we did not address was the order of the Trinity. We ordinarily say that the Father is the first Person of the Trinity, the Son is the second Person, and the Holy Spirit is the third Person. The question often arises from this, especially in discussions about the Trinity with unbelievers and anti-trinitarians such as Jehovah's Witnesses, how can we say this and consider it not to contradict our claim about the three Persons that they are the same in substance, equal in power and glory. To answer this, we go back to the matter that we brought up, the truth of the ontological Trinity and the economical Trinity. When we speak about the ontological Trinity, we are referring to a matter of God's Being; that's what “ontological” means: having to do with being, drawn from a Greek word. In the matter of the one Being of God, the three Persons are each fully God and are the same in substance, equal in power and glory. We can add that those things that distinguish each of the Persons from the others are matters of the ontological Trinity: the Father is neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Spirit is eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son. That corresponds to what we mentioned last time, the *opera ad intra*, or operations within the Being of God: as Berkhof puts it, “Generation is an act of the Father only; filiation (which means being a son) belongs to the Son exclusively; and procession can only be ascribed to the Holy Spirit.” So, within the ontological Trinity, these *opera ad intra* indicate that there is a voluntary order in the Trinity of the Father as First Person, the Son as Second Person, and the Spirit as Third Person, yet without any subordination of essence, power, or glory. That then leads us to

understand the economical Trinity, or how God acts in ways outside of Himself that affect His creation. So we say that all three Persons are involved in every act of God, but because of that order in the Trinity, Scripture attributes certain acts more particularly to one Person or the other. Election and creation are attributed to the Father; redemption is attributed to the Son; sanctification is attributed to the Spirit. These are the *opera ad extra*, operations outside of God. However, the order in the ontological Trinity also means that in the economical Trinity, the three Persons have voluntarily assumed an order of willing submission. So, the Son as the Second Person voluntarily submits to the Father as the First Person, and the Holy Spirit as the Third Person willingly submits to the Father and the Son, so the will of God is carried out. It sounds complicated, but there is no contradiction or irrationality in it, and it doesn't have to be all that complicated. When a wife voluntarily and willingly submits to her husband in the order of the family, as God has taught in Scripture, we might call him the first person in the family and her the second person in how the family is to be operated, but that does not deny or contradict the fact that the two are both equally human, equally made in the image of God, and equally endowed with basic human dignity on account of the image of God in which they are made. In similar manner, the three Persons of the one God can willingly submit and carry out the acts of God that way, and still be the same in substance, equal in power and glory. All of this heavy theology does relate to what we are studying today in the second article of the Apostles' Creed. It begins...

II. I Believe in Jesus Christ.

A. The Identity of the Son. Notice that the full name/title was used, "Jesus Christ." It appears just like this 137 times in the NT, so one thing we can be assured of is that it is eminently Biblical. That is, of course, a very good qualification for a confession of faith. If you read through the much more extensive and detailed Westminster Confession of Faith, you will find many, many places where Scriptural language is

used within its statements of doctrine. But, we can think of other reasons that the writers of the Apostles' Creed would want to use the full name/title, rather than "Jesus" by itself or "Christ" by itself. It makes the identity of the Mediator and Redeemer certain, so there is no error about the Person one is confessing. He is that One who is sent by God from heaven as His Messiah, the Anointed One, who was clearly promised to be the Son of God. (READ Ps. 2.) He is also the One who was born of the virgin Mary as the descendant of David, clearly having a fully human nature. In this manner, He couldn't be confused with others of the days soon after the Redeemer's ministry who were also called Jesus. Some were named Jesus because their parents were believers and wanted to honor the Savior as well as to hope for His salvation for their child. Others may have been trying to use the name Jesus or take His name upon them falsely to claim to be Christian, or to claim to be the Lord Himself; a case in point is the false prophet Bar-Jesus who attempted to stand in Paul's way on Cyprus when taking the gospel to the proconsul (Acts 13:6). So, it was of value to make sure that everyone who was confessing the Christian faith was on the same page and referring to the only One upon whom faith can rest for salvation from sin and death and hell. However, there is...

- B. The Later Value of the Statement. It is difficult to say exactly how much of the Bible's teaching about Christ that the writers of the creed understood in the middle of the second century. From our standpoint, many centuries later, the creed has increased in confessional value for us. We are many centuries past the Council of Nicea. We are many centuries past the Council of Chalcedon. When we confessing Christians use the term "Jesus Christ" today, we know that we confess that we are resting our faith on that One who is both fully God and fully man, who alone can be the Savior of sinners, the only Mediator between God and men. The matter of His

Deity was settled at the council of Nicea and confirmed at the Councils of Constantinople and Ephesus. The matter of the two natures, Deity and humanity, in one Person was settled at Chalcedon. It wasn't that no one knew or believed those truths before the councils were called, but that the councils established from Scripture that it was, and is, *necessary* to believe those truths about Jesus Christ rather than the alternative possible views, in order to be Christian and to be received and maintained within the membership of the body of Christ, the church. And to confess them after the councils declared those Biblical truths was to make a legitimate claim to have been saved by that Savior. So the creed has all the more value to us who confess it today, not only because of the declaration we make by it, but also because of the edifying reminder that it gives each of us when we do that we are believing in the right Savior, the divine/human One. That usefulness also extends into the next part of the article...

III. His Only Son. Let's follow that last part, then, with the statement of belief in...

A. The Son. Scripture is clear that we must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that we must believe in the Son of God, for salvation. Here we're not just thinking of His Deity, though that is not missing; it is being confirmed here, but moreso with the next term we'll see in a moment. But just considering and confessing that Jesus Christ is the Son says that you believe He is the only way to God and only way of salvation. We all can think quickly of a couple of Scriptures that confirm this. "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me"" (John 14:6). "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). So, we must believe *in* the Son, but there is the additional foundational point that we must believe that He *is* the Son. "Who is

the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also” (1 Jn. 2:22-23). This is John’s apologetic against Gnosticism’s denial of the Trinity and the Deity of Christ. So, in our day, this still stands as a confessional protection against anti-trinitarians and those who deny the Deity of Jesus Christ. Even Ps. 2, which we read earlier, confirms this point by thinly veiled inference. But this term involves another part that is heavily laden with theological significance and implications...

- B. The Only-Begotten. The modern English version of the creed says, “I believe in Jesus Christ, His “only” Son, our Lord.” But the creed was originally written in the same kind of Greek as the NT, koine Greek. It uses the same word that Scripture uses which is usually translated “only-begotten,” as for example in John 3:18 (READ). Newer translations often weaken this by using “one and only.” That fails miserably to capture what the term means. According to its use in the NT in describing Christ, all in the writings of John, it takes on a technical, theological meaning. The term is *monogeneis*. If you consider that carefully, you’ll recognize that “mono” means “only.” The other part of the term appears to be very like the word “generate.” And that is the basic meaning of it. It’s like saying “the only-generated Son of God.” And that is exactly the theological truth that John is getting at. This is where that explanation at the beginning of the lesson comes in, about the ontological Trinity. This is saying that Jesus Christ is the Son who is eternally generated of the Father. It gets at His personal distinction, that which makes Him in particular the Son and Second Person of the Trinity. Very significantly, John uses the term with a slightly different connection in John 1:18 (READ). “Only-generated ‘God,’” not ‘Son,’ this time, after saying ‘only-generated of the Father’ in John 1:14.

Whether the authors of the creed knew and understood this, we don't know. The writings of the early church fathers before the council of Nicea do indicate that they understood and believed quite a bit about the Trinity and the three Persons, because that is the doctrine they spent the most effort in defending against the heresies attacking the church during the second century. Did they have this much worked out? Probably not. But in confessing their faith in what Scripture teaches about the Person of Christ just in the basic terms they used by quoting those Scripture terms, they were not only safely staying within the bounds of what must be believed to be Christian, but also leaving later generations, like us, a creed that could only grow in its confessional value for our own hearts as we learned more from Scripture about the theological truth tied up in those terms. The last term, then, is...

- IV. Our Lord. Why not "our Savior"? These people were already Christians, and using this as a baptismal formula for those who were professing their faith. They understood, for one thing, that those who were professing their faith by means of this creed did not come to faith at that moment; they were professing the faith that God had already given them. So, they had a Savior who was also their Lord. That is significant because they apparently understood that Jesus Christ cannot be your Savior without also being your Lord. If they said, the same as we say, that Jesus Christ is our Lord, we are automatically saying in it that He is our Savior. This one simple statement puts the so-called Lordship controversy to rest, and shows that it shouldn't be a controversy. To say that Jesus Christ cannot be your Savior without also being your Lord does NOT imply that you are relying on your works for any part of your salvation. It is simply to say that when God saves someone, He gives him a regenerate heart, then instills faith in Jesus Christ in that heart so that salvation is a done deal. But in giving a born-again heart that trusts and loves Christ, a new kind of life is also given that loves Christ's law and desires to obey Him. And we know that to have Christ as Lord and see

obedience to Him taking place in our lives is to have evidence of saving faith in our hearts. And if you want to raise the challenge as to whether the statement is really Biblical—“I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord”—you need go no farther than Rom. 10:9-10, “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as *Lord*, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”