



grow. pray. study.

June 1, 2025

Controversy, Christ and the Nicene Creed

Colossians 1:15-20 (NRSV), John 1:1 (NRSV), and John 14:9 (NRSV)

Jesus: Eternal Word, Not Created Being

MONDAY 6.2.25 John 1:1-5

1700 years ago, Arius, a Libyan priest, concluded that Jesus was subordinate to God, not eternal. Bishop Alexander of Alexandria opposed Arius' teaching. Emperor Constantine, a Christian convert, didn't get all the theological issues, but feared the controversy might divide his empire. He called around 300 Christian bishops to a council at Nicaea (near the Black Sea in modern Turkey). Almost unanimously, those bishops accepted the [Nicene Creed](#), based on the Scriptures we'll study this week.

- "In the beginning" reached back to [Genesis 1:1-3](#), to the inexplicable beginning of time and space. Even today science is just scratching the surface of that. But John didn't say the Word [i.e., Jesus] "began" in the beginning; he said the Word "**was**." In short, Jesus has always been here and will always be here. Based on John's witness, the Nicene Creed said Jesus was far more than just a good man. He is eternal; he is God. In what ways does that shape and deepen your faith?
- John daringly linked Greek and Hebrew ideas. Greek thinkers thought "the Word" (Greek *logos*) was "the divine reason that orders the universe." * The Hebrew Bible said God spoke everything into being "in the beginning." It startled both cultures (cf., [1 Corinthians 1:23](#)) that for John and other Christians, "the Word" was not abstract, but the actual person of Jesus of Nazareth. In what ways does Jesus, God in human flesh, show you more clearly what God is like?

Prayer: Lord, you were (and are) light to our darkness. You came to restore and uplift your entire creation. Help me play my humble part in that vast, saving mission. Amen.

* NIV, *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook (p. 9218). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

Jesus: Truly Human, Completely God Always

TUESDAY 6.3.25 John 1:14-18

Ancient pagan gods were uncaring toward humans. Christians said “the Word” was different. “The Word became flesh”—neither Greeks nor Jews believed God could bridge a gap that wide. Based on today’s text, the bishops at Nicaea said the light was fully God, one of us yet vastly more than just one of us. “In Jesus, the fullness of God’s glory, God’s loving character—in today’s terms, his ‘heart’—is finally revealed.” *

- The poetry of Genesis said “in the beginning” God made the world, and declared it good ([Genesis 1:31](#)). But many widely accepted philosophies in John’s time, such as Philo’s, said the physical world (“flesh”) was so corrupt and evil that a truly good God could have no contact with it. In what ways did Jesus, the Word who “became flesh,” cast light on what it means for you to be fully human? How did the Nicene Creed unambiguously affirm that important belief?
- Being born is the way each one of us enters the world to begin a new life. John, taking his cue from Jesus (cf. [John 3:3-8](#)), said the type of life Jesus offered to everyone is so fresh and filled with divine energy that it’s like being born anew as a child of God. When did your spiritual journey start? In what ways has walking with Jesus given you a whole new life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for becoming flesh and for giving me the authority and power to be born anew as a child of God. Thank you for my new life. Amen.

* NIV, *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* (p. 9220). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

God’s True Image: Christ Before Time Began

WEDNESDAY 6.4.25 Colossians 1:15-20

The apostle Paul was part of a growing, thriving Christian community. One key to his vast impact on the community’s faith was that he joined in the Christians’ expressions of their shared faith in Jesus. Scholar J. R. Daniel Kirk said Colossians 1 was “probably an early Christian hymn. It uses language for humanity from Genesis 1 to describe the preexistent Christ.” * That potent (and very early) expression of Christian faith shaped much of the Nicene Creed’s language.

- Passages like today’s show that Christians did **not** take centuries to begin speaking of Jesus as God. Scholar Larry Hurtado said, “In historical terms we may refer to a veritable ‘big bang,’ an explosively rapid and impressively substantial christological [i.e., study of Christ’s identity and meaning] development in the earliest stage of the Christian movement.” ** Paul likely sang this profound hymn. What songs have helped shape your faith and sharing?
- Scholar William Barclay wrote, “The object of [Jesus’] coming was... to bridge the chasm between God and man.... The initiative in reconciliation was with God.... God’s attitude to [people] was love, and it was never anything else.” *** The Nicene Creed clarified some of the mysteries about Jesus’ divinity to refute Arius. Paul simply quoted the hymn which said Jesus gave the early believers new life. In what ways has serving Jesus changed your life for the better?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Paul and those early Christians believed what the Nicene Creed later said: “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God.” I join them in that faith and loyalty. Amen

* J. R. Daniel Kirk, study note on Colossians 1:15-20 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 383 NT.

** Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, p. 135.

Jesus Chose Servanthood Over His Divine Rights

THURSDAY 6.5.25 Philippians 2:5-8

The apostle Paul knew, and the Nicene Creed reflected, that Jesus was not the kind of “king” people expected. He was not the sort of “savior” human wisdom wished for. He was not “God with us” in the way we might expect. Today’s reading, likely from an early Christian hymn, did not fixate on Jesus’ power or majesty. It stressed that he was ready to “empty himself” (the Greek verb in 2:7) for us. Jesus could have clung to divine rights but didn’t. He came to serve, even to suffer.

- The *New International Reader’s Version* * used simple English to translate this hymn’s vision of the depth of Jesus’ descent: “He made himself nothing.... He appeared as a man. He was humble and obeyed God completely. He did this even though it led to his death. Even worse, he died on a cross!” Does that kind of “life path” strike you as a failure, or do you sense its power? How does this deepen your understanding of what it means to want to “be like Jesus”?
- Scholar H. C. Hewlett said humility means “the recognition of our true littleness as those dependent utterly on God.” ** That takes more than just yielding outwardly while being irate inside about someone else “winning” or getting a “perk” you wish for. How can Jesus’ type of true humility open your heart to valuing “God with us” in your own way of life? How did the Nicene words “For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven” reflect what Paul quoted?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, an old hymn says you could have called 10,000 angels to take you off the cross. But you chose to save me rather than cling to your own comfort or dignity. Grow your attitude in my heart. Amen.

Jesus, Being God Himself, Revealed God Perfectly,

FRIDAY 6.6.25 Hebrews 1:1-4

The book of Hebrews made a forceful contrast: God had spoken in various ways in the past, but Jesus was God's ultimate message to humanity. "Some may have been tempted to reduce Jesus' divine status to the status of a mere angel to better accommodate their synagogue critics.... Jesus, however, is greater than angels (Hebrews 2:5-18)." * Nicaea answered Arius' effort to reduce Jesus' status. Jesus was God's clearest, most complete self-revelation, because he **was** God.

- Scholar N. T. Wright summed up Hebrews 1:1-4: "God had for a long time been sending advance sketches of himself to his people, but now he's given us his exact portrait. With this idea... the writer invites us to look at the whole sweep of biblical history and see it coming to a climax in Jesus." ** Why is it vital to know Jesus as the climax of the "whole sweep of biblical history"? How can focusing on Jesus' life, teachings, and actions help clarify God's message for your life today?
- Jesus, "the imprint of God's being, maintains everything with his powerful message," while also carrying out "the cleansing of people from their sins." Jesus, the cosmic ruler of the universe, is also the personal Savior you can trust to forgive and cleanse you because he loves you with eternal, divine love. What specific area of your life feels most in need of Jesus' maintaining power or cleansing touch right now?

Prayer: God, you have always wanted your human children not just to know about you, but to **know** you. Thank you for coming as Jesus to give me the clearest picture of your powerful, loving, and forgiving heart. Amen.

* Zondervan, NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible (p. 10715). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

** Wright, N. T., Hebrews for Everyone (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 3). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

Nicaea Read Scripture Holistically (a wise model)

SATURDAY 6.7.25 John 14:28, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, John 10:30, 14:8-10

1700 years ago, 300 Christian bishops affirmed the [Nicene Creed](#). They needed to because Arius used today's first verse to claim Jesus wasn't truly eternal or fully God. The Creed rejected what we often call "proof texting." If all we had was the one phrase Arius used, it might seem to say Jesus was less than God the Father. But, in 325 or in 2025, that meant ignoring **many** texts like today's other three. Arius tried to make Jesus' words about his God-given earthly mission into an absolute: "The Father is greater than Jesus **in the sense** that the one who sends a messenger is greater than the messenger he sends. Note [John 13:16](#). Here the specific reference is probably to the coming of Jesus into the world, by which he accepts the limitations of humanity, including physical death. But after Jesus' death God will raise him to the position he had before he came into the world. Note [John 17:4-5](#), which indicates that after Jesus had finished the work on earth that the Father had given him to do, the Father restored him to the position that he had before the world was created." *

- Okay—that's heavy theology. It's tempting to see it as trivial hair-splitting. Pastoral scholar N. T. Wright showed that it mattered and still does: "Those who hear Jesus' voice and recognize it as the voice of 'their' shepherd will be safe for ever. He will look after them, and even death itself, the last great enemy, cannot ultimately harm them. The reason Jesus can be so confident of this is that the guarantee is his own unbreakable bond of love and union with the father, and the fact that the 'sheep' he owns are the ones the father has given him. Christian confidence about the future beyond death, in other words, is not a matter of wishful thinking, a vague general hope, or a temperamental inclination to assume things will turn out all right. It is built firmly on nothing less than the union of Jesus with the father—one of the main themes of this whole gospel." ** Are you grateful that Nicaea stood firm on Jesus' eternal identity?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you united God and humanity in your saving person. Thank you for making it possible for me to trust that God's forgiving love and transforming power can indeed work in me because of what you did. Amen.

* Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*. New York: United Bible Societies, p. 475.

** Wright, N. T., *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 156). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

Prayer Requests – [cor.org/prayer](https://www.cor.org/prayer) *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

To **the family** following the death of **Jan Heath**, who died 5/15/2025.

To **Julie Knedlik** following the death of **Cecelia Orcutt** (Sister), who died 5/24/2025.