

Arbor Foundations
9 – How has God Preserved his Church?
Nov 11, 2018

Key Ideas:

Councils of the Early Church

God preserved the early church through faithful men who fought for biblical truth and orthodoxy sometimes at great cost to themselves.

- 1- Jerusalem Council (ca. 50 AD)
 - a. Key figures: James, Peter, Paul, Barnabas, Judas (Barsabbas), and Silas
 - b. Misconception of the Christian Faith Addressed: Acts 15:1, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”
 - c. Summary: The Holy Spirit has fallen on the Gentiles as well as on the Jews with no distinction of circumcision or law-keeping; indeed, “we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (Acts 15:11).
 - d. For more information: Acts 15, Amos 9:11.

- 2- First Council of Nicaea (325)
 - a. Key figures: Athanasius; St Alexander of Alexandria, Constantine, Hosius of Cordova
 - b. Misconception of the Christian Faith Addressed: Arianism –Believed by the theologian Arius, Arianism teaches that Jesus was the first creation, and not God himself.
 - c. Summary:
 - i. Affirms deity of the Son by describing him as being of the same substance of the Father and calling him the “true God”;
 - ii. Affirms that the Son is not a creature, but was eternally begotten of the Father, begotten, not made;
 - iii. Places the discussion of the nature and identity of Jesus firmly within soteriological discussions.

- 3- First Council of Constantinople (381)
 - a. Key figures: Theodotus 1, the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Naziansus, and Gregory of Nyssa – Basil’s brother)
 - b. Misconceptions of the Christian Faith Addressed:
 - i. Apollinarianism – Deriving its name from Apollinarius, Apollinarianism affirms the deity of Christ, but states that the Son merely took on a human body, but not a human soul

- ii. Pneumatomachians – Similar to Arianism, Pneumatomachians thought the Holy Spirit was merely a created being.
 - c. Summary:
 - i. With a careful distinction between nature and person, the church affirmed two natures in Christ.
 - ii. Affirms that Christ assumed a complete humanity – body, soul, mind, and not a body alone.
 - iii. Affirms that the unified active subject (person) of the two natures is the person of the Divine Son.
 - iv. Adds clarification to the nature of the Holy Spirit lacking in the original Nicene Creed.
- 4- Council of Ephesus (431)
- a. Key figures: Cyril of Alexandria, Eusebius, the Cappadocian Fathers (to a lesser extent than above)
 - b. Misconception of the Christian Faith Addressed: Nestorianism – Nestorianism states that a human person and a divine person are united at the time of the incarnation.
 - c. Summary: Re-affirms the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, condemned Nestorianism, and proclaimed that Mary was the *Theotokos* (“Bearer of God”) but as more a statement about the nature of Christ than Mary.
- 5- Council of Chalcedon (451)
- a. Key figures: Marcian, Anatolius of Constantinople, Leo I, Theodoret
 - b. Misconception of the Christian Faith Addressed: Monophysitism - Identified with Eutyches, monophysitism (mono = one; physis = nature) believes that Christ’s human nature was absorbed into his divine nature, such that a unique third type of nature (mostly divine) is produced (*tertium quid*).
 - c. Summary:
 - i. Affirms that Christ was fully God and fully man;
 - ii. Affirms that the person of the incarnation is God the eternal Son;
 - iii. Affirms that the human nature of Christ does not possess a second person;
 - iv. Affirms that the natures of Christ do not form a union together, but rather, the properties of each nature are retained;
 - v. Affirms that Christ’s full humanity entails that he possess a human soul and psychology.

Creeds

God has preserved his church through faithful summaries of biblical truth.

1- Nicene Creed (381)

Nicene Creed: 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 and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. 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. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic 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.

2- Chalcedonian Creed/Definition (481)

Chalcedonian Definition: "In agreement, therefore, with the holy Fathers, we all unanimously teach that we should confess that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son, the same perfect in Godhead and the same perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, the same of a rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father in the Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us in Manhood; like us in all things except sin; begotten from the Father before the ages as regards his Godhead, and in the last days, the same, because of us and because of our salvation, begotten from the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, as regards his Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, made known in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the differences of the natures being by no means removed because of the union, but the property of each nature being preserved, and coalescing in one prosopon and one hypostasis - not parted or divided into two prosopa, but one and the same Son, only begotten, Divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets of old have taught us about Him and the Creed of our Fathers has handed down."

3- Athanasian Creed (ca 500)

- a. Named in honor of Athanasius though codified much after Athanasius' death, the Athanasian Creed is essentially a description of the Trinity.
- b. Summary:
 - i. Trinity: "So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord. And yet not three lords, but one Lord."
 - ii. Incarnation: "Equal to the Father, as touching His godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching His manhood; who, although He is God and man, yet he is not two, but one Christ; one, not by conversion of the godhead into flesh but by taking of the manhood into God; one altogether; not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person."

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one Eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one Uncreated, and one Incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet they are not three almighties, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord. And yet not three lords, but one Lord.

For as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge each Person by Himself to be both God and Lord, so we are also forbidden by the catholic religion to say that there are three gods or three lords. The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits. And in the Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another, but all three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved must think thus of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of the substance of his mother, born in the world; perfect God and perfect man, of a rational soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching His godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching His manhood; who, although He is God and man, yet he is not two, but one Christ; one, not by conversion of the godhead into flesh but by taking of the manhood into God; one altogether; not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For as the rational soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ; who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, He sits at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence He will come to judge the quick and the dead. At His coming all men will rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.

4- Apostles' Creed - A summary of apostolic teaching from unknown origin

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:

Who was conceived of 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 arose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

Amen.

Reformation

God preserved his church by raising up men who would fight for a return to the biblical teaching that man is saved by faith alone (sola fida) in Christ alone (solus Christus) by grace alone (sola gratia) according to Scripture alone (sola scriptura) to the glory of God alone (sola deo gloria).

- 1- 1483 Luther is born
- 2- 1505 Luther becomes Augustinian monk after surviving a terrible storm
- 3- 1509 Calvin is born
- 4- 1517 Indulgence crisis leads to nailing of 95 theses on the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg (read here: <https://carm.org/luthers-95-theses>)
- 5- 1518 Luther is charged with heresy, engages in the Heidelberg Disputation (read here: <http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php>)
- 6- 1519 Luther debates with Johann Eck at Leipzig for Scripture as the sole basis for Christian faith
- 7- 1521 The Diet of Worms in which Luther's unwillingness to recant requires him to live in exile translating the NT and continuing to lecture and write prolifically
- 8- 1523 Calvin goes to Paris for studies
- 9- 1526 William Tyndale publishes an English translation of the NT
- 10-1529 Ulrich Zwingli (predecessor of Calvin) and Luther meet to discuss different views of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist; no agreement is met
- 11-1530 The Augsburg Confession is written by Luther associate Phillip Melanchthon. This will become the cornerstone of the Lutheran Faith (Read here: <https://carm.org/augsburg-confession>)
- 12-1531 Zwingli killed during the Battle of Kappel
- 13-1533 "A Mighty Fortress is our God" published; Calvin converted
- 14-1534 Henry VIII becomes supreme head of the Church in England to justify his marital practices; the English Reformation then is fully underway
- 15-1536 First edition of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* published; Tyndale burned at the stake
- 16-1538 Calvin banished from Geneva
- 17-1541 Calvin welcomed back to Geneva
- 18-1545-1563 Catholic Counter-Reformation beginning with the Council of Trent
- 19-1546 Luther dies and is buried at the Castle Church
- 20-1549 First version of *The Book of Common Prayer* published in England
- 21-1555 Peace of Augsburg allows certain regions to tolerate the protestant religion
- 22-1559 Final edition of *Institutes* is published
- 23-1560 Publication of the Geneva Bible
- 24-1564 Calvin dies
- 25-1618-19 Synod of Dort (doctrines of grace) presented in opposition to Arminianism

Confessions and Catechisms of Protestantism

God again preserves his church through faithful summary statements of biblical truth.

- 1- Augsburg Confession (1530)
 - a. Read here: <https://carm.org/augsburg-confession>
 - b. Also translated as the Augustinian Confession, presented by Lutheran Phillip Melanchthon.
 - c. This confession was written in hopes to defend the Lutheran faith, clarifying the position so that it might be more tolerable to the Roman Catholic Church.
 - d. The Catholic Church would respond with the Confutation, condemning 13 of the 28 articles while qualifying an additional 6.
 - e. Melanchthon would incorporate the Reformed (symbolic) view of the Lord's Supper in a later edition in 1540.
- 2- Heidelberg Catechism (1576)
 - a. Read here: <https://carm.org/heidelberg-catechism>
 - b. Introduced by Elector Frederick III of Saxony (Frederick the Wise) to codify a system of doctrines according to the Word of God such that teachers would not "adopt daily changes or introduce erroneous doctrine."
 - c. Though it does not function this way now, Frederick's original hope for the catechism is a bit catholic in its authority.
- 3- Canons of Dort (1619)
 - a. Read here: <https://carm.org/canons-of-dort>
 - b. Polemically written against the rise of thinking of Arminianism (named after Jacob Arminius) which concerned the nature in which believers receive the benefit of Christ.
 - c. Summary from RC Sproul (see more in a month):
 - i. Total depravity: (or radical corruption) mankind "suffers from corruption that pervades the whole person."
 - ii. Unconditional election: God's sovereign choice to elect whom he wishes for salvation.
 - iii. Limited atonement: (or definite atonement) Christ's death is effectual to save those who have faith in him, not mere potential to save whoever had faith in him.
 - iv. Irresistible grace: (or effectual calling) The Spirit's calling and regeneration of the believer is necessary before faith and repentance can occur.
 - v. Perseverance of the saints: (or preservation of the saints) "we persevere because we are preserved by God."
- 4- First London Baptist Confession (1644)
 - a. Read here: <http://www.reformedreader.org/ccs/h.htm>
 - b. Written as a defense of their assembly in the midst of growing fear that they would rebel against England in the same manner in which the Anabaptists in Germany.

- c. See beginning of the confession: “A CONFESSION OF FAITH of seven congregations or churches of Christ in London, which are commonly, but unjustly, called Anabaptists; published for the vindication of the truth and information of the ignorant; likewise for the taking off those aspersions which are frequently, both in pulpit and print, unjustly cast upon them.”
 - d. Had virtually fallen from popularity by 1680 such that one of the key subscribers to the 1689 had not even heard of it until after the 1689 was adopted.
- 5- Westminster Confession and Shorter Catechism (1647)
- a. Read confession here: <https://carm.org/westminster-confession>
 - b. Read catechism here: <https://carm.org/westminster-shorter-catechism>
 - c. Westminster Confession stems from the tumultuous time of the English Civil War. It would not be authoritative in England by 1660 with the restoration of the English monarchy, but is still prevalent in Presbyterian churches today.
- 6- Second London Baptist Confession (1689)
- a. <https://carm.org/1689-baptist-confession>
 - b. Based and edited off of the Westminster Confession while using phrasing from the first London Baptist Confession
 - c. The substance of the Second Baptist Confession, the preface reads, is “the same” but the “method and manner of expressing our sentiments doth vary.”
 - d. While the 1644 Confession is interested in explaining that Baptist are not Anabaptists, the 1689 is still interested in quelling persecution, but in this instance hopes to issue clarification of the similarities and differences between Baptist beliefs and those of Westminster.
 - e. This is the confession of this church, you can pick up a copy in the back of the auditorium.

So What?

“Those who do not learn from their history will be doomed to repeat it.”

God’s preservation of his people and his doctrine in the past gives us reason to hope in the midst of struggle now.

For Further Study

Olson, Roger. *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform*.

Shelley, Bruce. *Church History in Plain English*.

Sproul, R.C. *Reformed Theology: Understanding the Basics*.

Wellum, Stephen. *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*. (For a good treatment of the Christology in the councils)

<http://www.reformedreader.org/ctf.htm>

<http://protestantism.co.uk/timeline.html>

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-12/john-calvin-christian-history-timeline.html>

<https://www.visit-luther.com/reformation-heroes/martin-luther/a-timeline-of-luthers-life/>