

from the Greek word meaning “universal” – so the universal (or world-wide) church. *Orthodox* comes from Greek words meaning “correct belief” or “having the right opinion” and is used as a technical term for approved Christian teaching.

- By stressing a creed aren't we adding something to the Bible in an unhelpful way?
  - The language of this creed is largely drawn from the Bible. It has historically helped protect the church from error (Jehovah's Witnesses follow Arian teachings still today.) With such a large majority of the historic Church receiving this Creed as a blessing, we can view it as a true gift that God gave us through His leading in His Church.



**Goal:** Learn the Nicene Creed and listen to its teaching about God the Father, Son and Spirit.

**Schedule:**

Chap. 1 – We Believe	Sep. 14
Chap. 2 – Only Begotten	Sep. 21
Chap. 3 – One (Same) Substance	Sep. 28
Chap. 4 – For Us and for Our Salvation	Oct. 5
Chap. 5 – Who Proceeds from the Father & the Son	Oct. 12
Chap. 6 – One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church	Oct. 19
Chap. 7 – One Baptism for the Remission of Sins	Oct. 26

**Resources for Further Study:**

- **Class Book:** *The Nicene Creed: What You Need to Know about the Most Important Creed Ever Written* by Kevin DeYoung [Crossway, 2025]
- **Supplemental:** *The Nicene Creed: An Introduction* by Phillip Cary [Lexham Press, 2023]

## Introduction: Why the Nicene Creed Matters

### I. What is the Nicene Creed?

- A creed is a Bible-based summary of Christian teaching.
- The Nicene Creed is largely about who God is.
- It is the most widely used confession of faith in the world, and has been used for well over 1,000 years. It is recited in worship by Protestant Christians (Lutherans, Anglicans and many others), Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox.

Philip Cary: “*The Nicene Creed gives us the gospel. It gives biblical Christians the words for what we already believe. And when we profess the Creed, we join the global church throughout history in declaring the name and work of the one God—Father, Son, and Spirit.*” (inside cover)

### II. The Purpose of the Nicene Creed

- The Council of Nicea, (50 miles from Constantinople, modern-day Istanbul, Turkey), met in A.D. 325 and one of its purposes was to defend and define the orthodox Christian teaching concerning Jesus Christ and his Deity.
- Christian leaders (pastors, bishops, and deacons in attendance) had been appalled at the teachings of **Arius** (ca. 250-336) that minimized Jesus, making him less than fully Divine.
  - Arius argued that since Jesus was begotten this implies he had a beginning. (p. 17)
  - “There was a time when he was not.” (p. 17)
  - “The Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning.” (p. 18)
  - “For [the Son] is not equal, No nor one in essence with [God].” (p. 18)
- The way these leaders chose to minimize the impact of Arian teachings was to write a Confession of Faith to be used by the

church throughout the whole world.

- Before this time, creeds were local and oral, often recited along with the baptism ritual as questions for the convert to answer before being baptized.

Philip Cary: “*The Nicene Creed... aims to make absolutely clear that the Son of God is just as truly God as God the Father, equal to him in divinity, equal in eternity, equally omnipotent, and equally the creator of all things.*” (“The Nicene Creed: A Very Brief Introduction”, handout, p. 1)

- The Nicene Creed aims to **defend**, and to **define** biblical truth about the nature of God (theology). As we recite the creed, we **declare** this truth.
  - Martin Luther points out that the creed does not call for us to do things (Law), but rather it declares who God is and what He has done for us (Gospel). (cf. Cary’s book, p. 12)

### III. The Development of the Nicene Creed

- The original creed (Creed of Nicea) included five explicit anathemas directed against statements of Arianism. It also did not have as much content about the Holy Spirit or the church.
- After Nicea condemned Arius’ views, he continued to have influence – partly a result of competing politics. At one point the Arian side seemed poised to overthrow the faith of Nicea – with Athanasius (who had attended Nicea as archdeacon to Alexander of Alexandria, later becoming bishop himself) famously being “against the world” (*contra mundum*) in his ardent defense of Nicea’s homoousia terminology (and the Deity of Christ that it protected).
- At the Council of **Constantinople** in A.D. 381 adopted an expanded creed, as it affirmed that “The Faith of the 318 Fathers assembled at Nicea shall not be set aside, but shall remain firm.” (p. 24)

Kevin DeYoung: “*After the Bible, the Nicene Creed may be the most important Christian text ever written.... The Nicene Creed doesn’t merely merit the label ‘orthodox’; it summarizes and defines orthodoxy itself. Without exaggeration it can be said that every church and every Christian ought to know the Nicene Creed.” (p. 9, emphasis added)*

### IV. The Teaching of the Nicene Creed

- It is primarily about the Trinity and has three main parts: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Three key teachings about God:
  1. Jesus is the only-begotten Son of God
    - He is generated from God the Father, who communicates the essence he shares with the Son; but the Father does this eternally (outside of time).
    - The Father does not change – and has always been Father; as Jesus has always been Son.
  2. Jesus is fully human and fully God.
  3. The Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father [& Son]

– adapted from Cary’s article/handout, p. 3

### V. Clarifications Regarding the Nicene Creed

- The council of Nicea is the first council that is called an “ecumenical” council; the Council of Constantinople is the second ecumenical council. *Shouldn’t we avoid ecumenism?*
  - The word comes from *ecumene* (Latin) meaning “the whole inhabited world” and refers to a council intended for the church throughout the world.
- The creed refers to the “catholic church” and the creed is referred to as “orthodox”. Shouldn’t Protestants, and Evangelicals especially, ignore the creed just as we don’t fellowship with Roman Catholics or Eastern Orthodoxy?
  - These words have a lower case “c” and “o”. *Catholic* comes