

**CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER**

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>The Nicene Creed</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>	<b>16</b>		Gary L.W. Johnson
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**VERY GOD OF VERY GOD**

“It was the contention of the Protestant Reformers,” writes David Wells, “that Christian faith will always be misunderstood if the Cross is misunderstood. Or, to put the matter positively, those who understand the Cross aright, grasp the meaning of Christ aright and can then see the entire purpose of revelation clearly. For Christ and his Cross stand at the center of God’s disclosure of his moral will and saving ways in Scripture. Indeed, without the Cross we are without the magnifying glass through which his love and holiness are most keenly seen. To stand beneath the Cross is to stand at the one place where the character of God burns brightest and where his resolution of the problem of sin is sounded for all time.”<sup>1</sup> Times have changed. Wells goes on to diagnose this change, noting, “The Church, after all, is living in the late twentieth century, in a culture with no cognitive horizons and with a moral core that has crumbled. Should we not then use new languages for translating the Gospel into the contemporary vernacular, either the psychological or the contemporary? Do we not have to have at our fingertips all of the latest information about Baby Boomers and Generation X if we are to be relevant?”<sup>2</sup> He goes on to say, “Today, the Church does not share Paul’s confidence, it does not have his courage, and it is not bold. It cannot see the bankruptcy of postmodern culture, nor does it see that understanding sin in biblical terms unlocks so many of the painful dilemmas of life that would otherwise remain closed and inexplicable. It thinks, instead, that new strategies are called for, when all too often these strategies entail new evasions that make it look increasingly likely that the gates of hell will, indeed, prevail. And what it has forgotten is the greatness of God’s power to liberate people from their blindness and to remake life. Today’s churchly trendiness is really yesterday’s unbelief.”<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, respected sociologist James D. Hunter has observed the massive inroads pop-psychology has made in many Evangelical circles. Although attempts are made to dress this up with verses of Scripture, the result is decidedly unbiblical. “This is not an unconscious parroting of contemporary moral psychology. Evangelicals seek, rather, to co-opt the psychology for their own purposes, making therapeutic concepts subordinate to biblical wisdom. The premise is that psychology provides tools that are, by themselves, theologically and morally neutral but useful all the same when linked to the truths of Christian faith. Yet insofar as popular psychology provides the framing categories for this literature of popular guidance and admonition, it is the Christian worldview that undergoes a peculiar reworking.”<sup>4</sup> We see this blatantly on display in the *He Gets Us* ad campaign, where this Jesus bears no resemblance to the Christ of Scripture. No mention of the Cross or resurrection, and when the Cross of Christ is misunderstood, the Person of Christ will be also.<sup>5</sup>

Our Lord asked the Pharisees, “What do you think of Christ? Whose Son is He? (Matt. 22:42). Robert Reymond correctly notes, “Even though a significant portion of modern New Testament scholarship has urged major modifications in the church’s understanding of Christology, the average Christian can hardly be blamed if he expresses some hesitancy about a theological shift that discards the central feature (one person, two natures) of a doctrinal formulation that virtually all of Christendom for fifteen centuries has adjudged the doctrinal reflection of the teaching of Holy Scripture itself. I think all will agree that this is no

light matter. It is no small matter either that an outright rejection of incarnational Christology as such would require radical revision not only in Christology, but also throughout the entirety of Christian dogmatics, because of the interrelatedness of the doctrines of the Christian system one with the other. (For example, Trinitarianism would give way to Unitarianism; salvation would become a variant of philosophical existentialism or socio-religious humanism.) In fact, unless there are uncommonly sound reasons approaching the level of unimpeachability for such a shift, the average Christian is justified if he concludes that such a departure from the established faith of the centuries is grossly irresponsible.”<sup>6</sup> I fear, however, that the *average* Christian today (especially those who sit comfortably in many of our user-friendly, seeker-sensitive contemporary evangelical churches) is not the least bit interested in such things.<sup>7</sup> Michael Saward, a British evangelical, after surveying the state of present-day evangelicalism, would lament, “This is the disturbing legacy of the 1960s and 1970s. A generation brought up on guitars, choruses, *and home group discussions. Educated, as one of them put it to me, not to use words with precision, because the image is dominant, not the word. Equipped not to handle doctrine but rather to share. A compassionate, caring generation, suspicious of definition and labels, uneasy at, and sometimes incapable of, being asked to wrestle with sustained didactic exposition of theology. Excellent when it comes to providing religious music, drama, and art. Not so good when asked to preach and teach the Faith.*”<sup>8</sup>

### **Review:**

1. There is but *One* God, and God is *one – indivisible*.
2. Within the one indivisible divine Being, there exists eternally *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*. Each person possesses the whole essence of Deity, and each is a distinct person.
3. This distinction is a personal one in the following senses:
  - a. The use of the personal pronouns I, You, He;
  - b. A concurrence in counsel and mutual love;
  - c. A distinct order of operation.
4. Having said this, we must remember that in the Godhead there is but *One King, One Intelligence, One Will*, and that the three persons eternally co-exist in all that pertains to the Godhead.
5. Although the three persons of the Trinity possess equally all of the divine attributes, etc., they nevertheless are revealed in Scripture in a certain order and operation.
  - a. Of subsistence inasmuch as the Father is neither begotten nor proceeds, while the Son is eternally begotten by the Father, and the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son;
  - b. Of operation, inasmuch as the first person sends and operates through the second, and the first and second operate through the third.

Hence, the Father is always set forth as the first, the Son as the second, and the Spirit as the third. This does **not** imply rank or dignity, but order. The doctrine of the Trinity is not a simple doctrine, nor one that we can easily comprehend, because God is Himself incomprehensible. We should expect that the profound truth concerning the Godhead should be veiled in mystery. The doctrine of the Trinity is a *suprarational* (not *irrational*) doctrine. It is beyond our limited minds to be able to grasp how God can be *one* and yet *three*.

Philip Cary, in his excellent work, points out: “The translation of the Creed in older versions of the Book of Common Prayer and elsewhere uses the phrase *very God of very God*, which can be confusing to people who don’t know Latin. *Very*, in this translation, is just an old word for *true* (from the Latin *verus*: *true*, like the Latin *veritas*: *truth*). The word *of* can also be confusing; as it is used here and throughout the Creed (in the older translations) it means *from*. It indicates origination, one thing coming from another. Both the Father and the Son are designated *true God* in Scripture. John tells us in his first letter that the Son of God has come so that *we may know him who is true* and adds, *We are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life* (1 John 5:20). And in the Gospel of John our Lord himself, praying to his Father, says his disciples have eternal life because *they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have*

sent (John 17:3). Yet once again, heretics can misunderstand. They can argue (and in the ancient world, they did argue) that because Jesus Christ is sent by the Father, he must be a servant who is less than the one who sent him. For once again, in pagan usage, *true God* might merely mean *truly divine*, and that need not mean *equal to the supreme divine First Principle, the Father of all*. So the Creed will make one more attempt to clarify matters, introducing a crucial distinction.”<sup>9</sup>

- I. **THE MESSIAH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.** That the Messiah was to be human was clearly revealed in the Old Testament and understood as such by the Jews. He was to be the Son of David after the flesh. But the reluctance to acknowledge the Messiah’s Deity (with all of the force that the Old Testament teaches this truth, cf. Matt 22:41-45) can only be attributed to the blinding effect of sin and Satan (cf. 2 Cor. 3:14-16; 2 Tim. 2:26 – esp. 2 Cor. 4:3-4).
  - A. **Divine Attributes Predicated To Christ.** Cf. Gen. 18:2, 17; 28:13; 32:9, 31. This person is called YHWH, and at the same time an *angel* or *sent one* – comp. with Gen. 31:11, 13; 48:15-16; esp. Ex. 3:14-15 comp. with Acts 7:30-35 and Ex. 13:21; 14:19 and 20:1-2 comp. with Acts 7:38.
  - B. **God (The Father) Has Never Been Seen.** Cf. Jn. 1:18 and 6:46. How can this be explained except by the Deity of the Son? He has been seen (1 John 1:1, 2) and sent (Jn. 5:36). Cf. also Zech. 2:10, 11; esp. Isa. 6 comp. with Jn. 12:39-41. He is expressly declared to be eternal, cf. Mic. 5:2 and Isa. 9:6, 7 comp. with Mt. 4:14-16; 2:6 and Jn. 7:42.
- II. **THE OLD TESTAMENT AS CITED BY THE NEW TESTAMENT.**
  - A. Ps. 45 – considered by the Jews to refer to the Messiah and applied to Christ in Heb. 1:8, 9.
  - B. Ps. 110 – Jesus declared that this Psalm referred to the Messiah (and the Scribes and Pharisees did not disagree), cf. Mt. 22:43, 44. The Epistle to the Hebrews attaches it to Jesus, cf. 1:13; 5:6, 7:17, 10:13 comp. with 1 Cor. 15:25 and Acts 2:32-36. Ps. 110 is the most frequently cited Old Testament text in the New Testament.
  - C. Ps. 102 – things that only God possesses are nonetheless ascribed to Jesus in Heb. 1:10, 12.
  - D. Ps. 2 – cited by Paul in Acts 13:33.

In summary we note that the Messiah of the Old Testament was clearly identified in the New Testament as Jesus and that in the pages of the Old Testament two Persons, both having divine attributes are linked with the divine and incommunicable name of YHWH. One is the Sender, the other the Sent. One acts with a certain reserve and invisibility, while the other is visible and is referred to as *the angel of His countenance*, cf. Isa. 63:9 comp. with Col. 1:15 and Heb. 1:3. The title *Angel of YHWH* is so often applied that it at length becomes a proper name; cf. Mal. 3:1-3 and Isa. 40:3. John the Baptist declared that he was the *voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of YHWH*. Malachi teaches that a forerunner was to precede, when the Lord whom the Jews were expecting, event *The Angel Of The Covenant*, would suddenly come to His temple; He is clearly Deity, and John the Baptist pointed to Jesus Christ – cf. Mt. 11:10; Mk. 1:2; Lk. 1:76 and 7:27. Our Lord Jesus Christ was therefore the Angel of the Covenant, the owner of the Temple, the YHWH of Isa. 40:3, 5, whose glory John the Baptist announced. Thus, the various theophanies in the Old Testament not only disclose a personal distinction in the Godhead, but clearly show the pre-existence and Deity of the Son, Jesus Christ.

- III. **DIVINE ATTRIBUTES PREDICATED TO CHRIST.**
  - A. **Is the Father Eternal? So is the Son** – Micah 5:2; Jn. 1:2, 14; 8:58; Rev. 1:8, 11, 17, 18; 2:8; comp. with Isa. 44:6, 48:12.
  - B. **Is the Father Omnipresent? So is the Son.** Creation demands omnipresence – Mt. 18:20; 28:20 (comp. the phrase *tēs sunteleias tou alōnos* with Mt. 13:39, 40, 49 and 24:3 and 23:38).
  - C. **Is the Father Immutable? So is the Son** – Heb. 13:8 and 1:8, 10.

- D. ***Is the Father Almighty? So is the Son.*** Creation demands omnipotence – Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:17; Mt. 28:18; esp. Jn. 5:17-19, where Jesus declares that He does what the Father does. Comp. with Rev. 1:8, 13, 17; 2:8; 22:13, He is “almighty.”
- E. ***Is the Father Himself Incomprehensible While Comprehending All Things? So is the Son*** – Jn. 21:17; Mt. 11:27 (How can a creature possess this kind of knowledge?) comp. with Jn. 10:15. He is unsearchable in himself, Eph. 3:18, 19 and Col. 2:3.
- F. ***Is the Father Infinitely Good and Holy?*** (cf. Mt. 19:7 and 1 Sam. 2:2). *So is the Son* – Acts 3:14; Heb. 7:26; Jn. 1:14; 10:14.
- G. ***Is the Father the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of All Things? So is the Son*** – Col. 1:16; Jn. 1:3; Heb. 1:3; Jn. 1:4, 14:19; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 19:16. NOTE Dan. 7:14; 9:24-26 comp. with Lk. 2:28-38.
- H. ***Is the Father the Searcher of Hearts? So is the Son*** – rev. 2:18-23; Jn. 2:24, 25.
- I. ***Is the Father the Most High Judge of All? So is the Son*** – 2 Cor. 5:10; Mt. 25:31, 32.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the essential attributes of the Godhead are ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. ***DIRECT AND DIVINE WORSHIP IS PAID TO CHRIST.*** In this section our attention will be directed to worship of the Son and prayer that is addressed to Him.

- A. ***Worship.*** The principle word occurs some 60 times in the New Testament (Gk. *Proskuneō*). The basic meaning of *proskuneō* is lit. “to kiss.” It is translated in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew) *sāhāh*, meaning “to bow down.”
  1. 22 times it is used of worship offered to God the Father – cf. Jn. 4:20-24.
  2. 5 times it is used intransitively of Divine Worship – cf. Jn. 12:20.
  3. 15 times it is used of worship to Jesus Christ, cf. (1) Mt. 2:2, 8, 11 – by the magi; (2) Mt. 8:2 – by the leper; (3) Mt. 9:18 – by the ruler; (4) Mt. 14:33 – by the disciples after the storm; (5) Mt. 15:25 – by the women of Tyre; (6) Mt. 20:20 – by Salome; (7) Mt. 28:7, 9 – after the resurrection; (8) Lk. 24:52 – at the ascension; (9) Jn. 9:38 – by the man born blind; (10) Heb. 1:6 – by the angels; (11) Mk. 5:6 – by the possessed; (12) Mk. 15:19 – offered in mockery.
  4. 17 times of idolatrous worship condemned – cf. Acts 7:43 and 10:25, 26; esp. Rev. 19:10; 22:8, 9.
  5. 2 times of salutation to man – cf. Mt. 18:26, 29.

**NOTE:** In light of the fact that *proskuneō* is refused by men (expressly stated that *only* God is to be worshipped), the worship of Jesus Christ, which he accepted, is either explicit or implicit of His Deity.

- B. ***Prayer.*** Cf. Acts 7:54-60 comp. with Ps. 31:5 and Ecc. 12:7. Comp. also 1 Thess. 3:11 with 2 Thess. 2:16, 17. See also 1 Cor. 1:2 and comp. with Ps. 145:18.
- C. ***Worship of Christ and the Father Joined Together.*** Cf. Rev. 5:8-14 comp. with Rev. 22:1-3.

**CONCLUSION:** The Deity of Jesus Christ is not confined to those texts (whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament) that expressly assert and declare that Messiah is God. His human life, His supernatural birth, His character, and especially, His cross-work and triumph over death, unite with one voice to proclaim that “Christ . . . who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen” (Rom. 9:5). The deity of Christ is taught *explicitly* (in texts like Rom. 9:5; John 1:1-14; Titus 2:13) and *implicitly* (in the places where we concluded that Christ *must* be God because only God can do what Christ did). This is a critically important doctrine, one that Christians cannot afford to be indifferent about, much less to treat with disdain. Sadly, this pitiful state of affairs is manifested in a growing number of evangelical circles. David Tomlinson is indicative of this changing mood when he writes, “I am not saying that theology and doctrine are unimportant, far from it; but there is no evidence from the Bible that it is of ultimate importance. Doctrinal correctness matters little to God and labels matter less; honesty, openness and a sincere searching for truth, on the other hand, matter a great deal . . . God is ultimately unimpressed with our church pedigrees or our spiritual experiences or our creedal affirmations. St. Peter will not be asking us at the pearly gates which church we

belonged to, or whether we believed the virgin birth; the word *evangelical will not even enter the conversation*.<sup>11</sup> I disagree (and I think the history of the church would testify to this as well). The truth of the matter is this: It does matter how we answer the question, “What do you think of the Christ? Whose Son is He?” Jesus obviously thought it was important. Jesus elsewhere in the Gospels declared, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be; you will indeed die in your sins.” (John 8:23-24). John the apostle tells us, “Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” (1 John 2:22-27). “Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (2 John 1:9-11).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> D. F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why The Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Eerdmans, 1998), p. 205.’

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>4</sup> J. D. Hunter, *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age Without Good or Evil* (Basic Books, 2000), p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> The *He Gets Us* campaign is actually a form of Woke Christianity. What is this? “Woke Christianity, also known as *Conscious Christianity*, is broad-stroke terminology describing Christians who are intentionally conscious of oppression, racism, and injustice. Author and pastor Eric Mason says the term implies, “being socially aware of issues that have systemic impact.” Often compared to the wise virgins in Matthew 25, Woke individuals strive to stay “awake” to issues of social justice while waiting for the Bridegroom to return. Consequently, the term “Woke Christians” describes believers who subscribe, whether knowingly or unknowingly, to the alternative Gospels of Critical Theory, including Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its pseudo-Christian counterpart, Liberation Theology. Like all heresy, Woke Christianity is rooted in an element of truth (as in God’s opposition to injustice), but it encapsulates this truth with a convincing web of anti-biblical ideology and extremism. As such, scripture is either downgraded, stripped of its authority, or frequently ignored, as personal experience, like suffering or oppression, and personal enlightenment take center stage in crafting Woke Theology.” Lucas Miles, *Woke Jesus: The False Messiah Destroying Christianity* (Humanix Books, 2023), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> R. L. Reymond, *Jesus, Divine Messiah: The New Testament Witness* (P & R, 1990), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> This mentality was most recently illustrated by Gwen Shamblin a professing evangelical who authored *The Weigh Down Diet* (over a million copies sold) and who emphatically denies the doctrine of the Trinity. In an interview with *Christianity Today* (Oct. 23, 2000) and she said outright, “People don’t care about this. They don’t care about the Trinity” (p. 15).

<sup>8</sup> As cited by Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Banner of Truth, 2000), p. 254.

<sup>9</sup> P. Cary, *The Nicene Creed: An Introduction* (Lexham Press, 2023), p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> I have adopted this section from Edward Henry Bickersteth’s classic study *The Rock of Ages, or Three Persons But One God* (rpt. Kregel, 1957).

<sup>11</sup> As cited in Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 251.