

The Ecumenical Creeds

The Reason They Came To Be

The Ecumenical Creeds

- In this presentation, we will:
 - Identify several of the Christological heresies that arose within the first four centuries.
 - Present the reason for the formation of the ecumenical creeds.
 - Review the English translations of 3 ecumenical creeds (Nicene Creed, Apostle's Creed, and Athanasian Creed).
 - Share the initial response to the formation of the Nicene creed.
 - Present several reasons that people use for rejecting the Trinity.

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- Despite the teachings of the apostles, Christological heresies began to arise beginning in the first century.

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- Between the 1st and 4th centuries, some of these heresies included:
 - **Adoptionism** – Yeshua was not born divine but was adopted later as the Son of God.
 - **Apollinarism** – Yeshua had a human body but a divine mind instead of a human soul.
 - **Arianism**– Yeshua is not of the same substance or essence as the Father.
 - **Docetism** – Yeshua’s physical body and crucifixion were an illusion.
 - **Gnosticism** – A certain kind of knowledge was needed to leave the material world and go to a spiritual universe called the pleroma.
 - **Nestorianism** – The human and divine persons of Yeshua are separate.

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- Early church fathers such as Ignatius (1st – 2nd century), Justin Martyr (2nd century), Irenaeus (2nd – 3rd century), and Tertullian (3rd century) taught what had be passed down to them – that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were One.

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- Tertullian – Apology, chapter 21:
- *“We have been taught that He (Word) proceeds forth from God, and in that procession He is generated; so that He is the Son of God, and is called God from unity of substance with God. For God, too, is a Spirit. Even when the ray is shot from the sun, it is still part of the parent mass; the sun will still be in the ray, because it is a ray of the sun – there is no division of substance, but merely an extension. Thus Christ is Spirit of Spirit, and God of God, as light of light is kindled.”*

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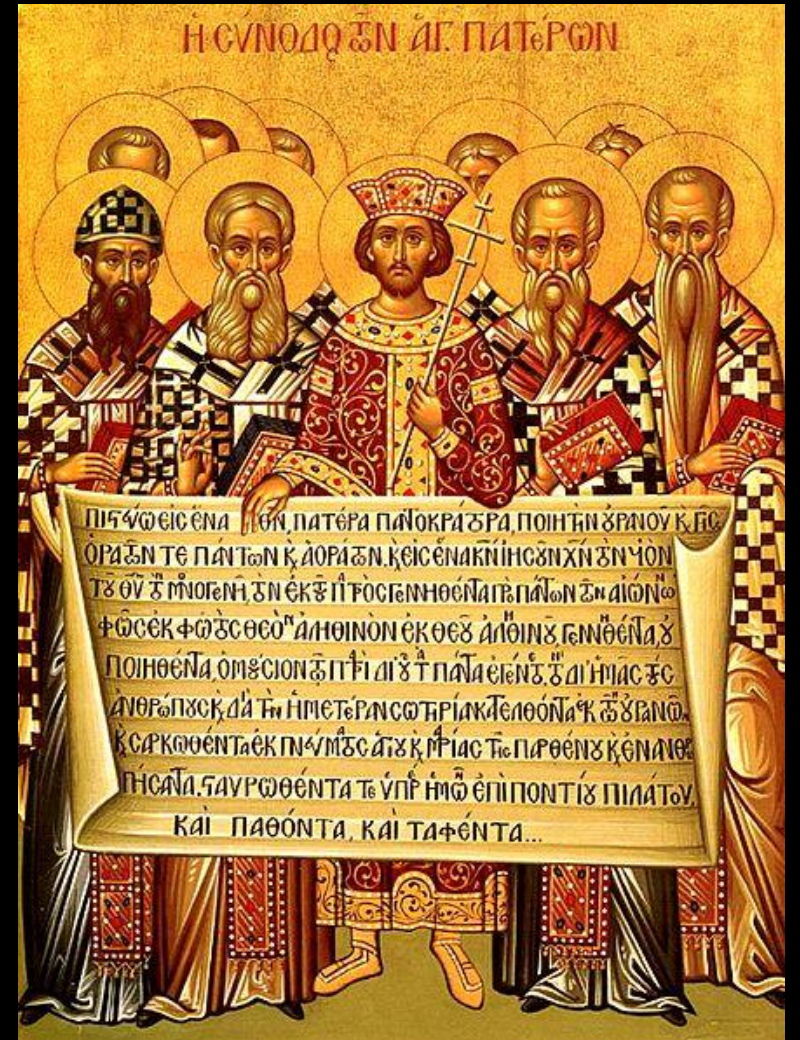
- Arius, a Libyan priest of Alexandria (256-336 CE); Eusebius of Nicomedia; Maris, Bishop of Chalcedon; and Theognis of Nicaea were disciples of Lucian of Antioch. Lucian's teachings, which were a compromise between Modalism and Subordinationism, are believed to be foundational to what became known as Arianism.
 - Subordinationism is the belief that the Son and the Holy Spirit are subordinate to God the Father in nature and being.
 - Modalism (Sabellianism) is the belief that God appear in three modes or forms – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – but that God does not exist in all of these modes at the same time.

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- Arianism is named after Arius, who we've just said was a disciple of Lucian of Antioch.
- Arius' doctrine denies that the Son is of one substance, nature, or essence – is consubstantial – with God. So, the Son is not like God; He is not equal in dignity, nor co-eternal, nor within the real sphere of Deity.
- Arius also taught that the Son is only such as a figure of speech, and the Logos/Word is only the attribute, or Reason, that belongs to God's divine nature.

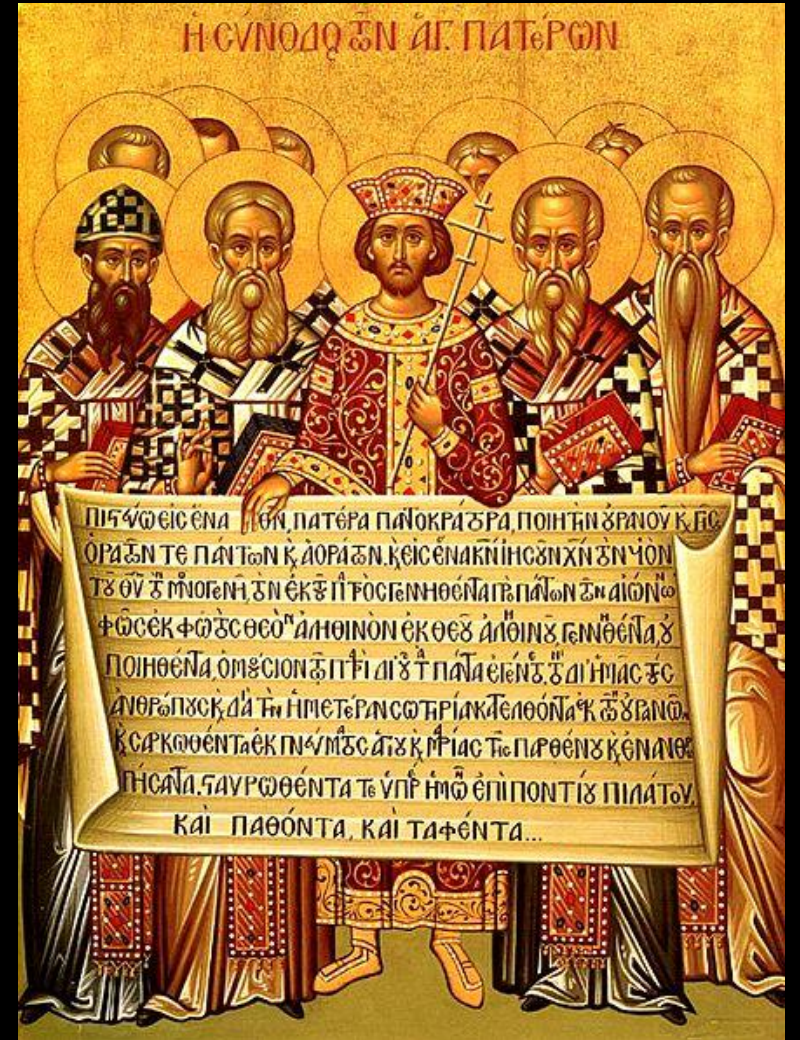
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- In order to come against the heresy of Arianism, which taught that Yeshua was not of the same substance or essence as the Father, the Council of Nicaea met in 325 CE to formulate the first creed in an effort to define correct belief regarding the nature of God.



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- The Nicene Creed was later revised at the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE.
- Though often called the Nicene Creed, it is also known as the Constantinopolitan Creed or the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.



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- There are two other creeds we should be aware of:
 - The **Apostle's Creed** -- It was mentioned in a letter to Pope Siricius that was written by Ambrose from a Council in Milan in 390 CE.
 - The **Athanasian Creed** – It was believed to have been authored by Athanasius of Alexandria (~296-373 CE) who had disputed with Arius of Alexandria over the nature of God. The creed was likely solidified into its final form in the late 5th to early 6th century CE.

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- Let's take a look at these creeds to see what they say.
- Bear in mind – in these creeds, the term “catholic” is from the Greek word *katholikos*, which means “universal.”

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Nicene Creed	Apostles' Creed
<p>We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of <i>heaven and earth</i>, and of all things visible and invisible;</p> <p>And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the <i>only-begotten</i> Son of God, begotten of the Father <i>before all worlds (aeons)</i>,</p>	<p>I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth.</p> <p>I believe in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord.</p>

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Nicene Creed	Apostles' Creed
<p>Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;</p> <p>by Whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down <i>from heaven,</i></p> <p>and was incarnate <i>by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,</i> and was made man;</p>	<p>He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary,</p>

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Nicene Creed	Apostles' Creed
<p><i>he was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.</i></p>	<p>He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended to the dead. On the third day he arose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.</p>

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Nicene Creed	Apostles' Creed
<p><i>And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.</i></p>	<p>I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.</p> <p>(ICET)</p>

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- These two creeds, the Nicene and Apostles', present the idea that the Father and Son are of one substance with each other. In addition, it says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.
- As far as the Holy Spirit goes, this was the power that made Messiah incarnate.

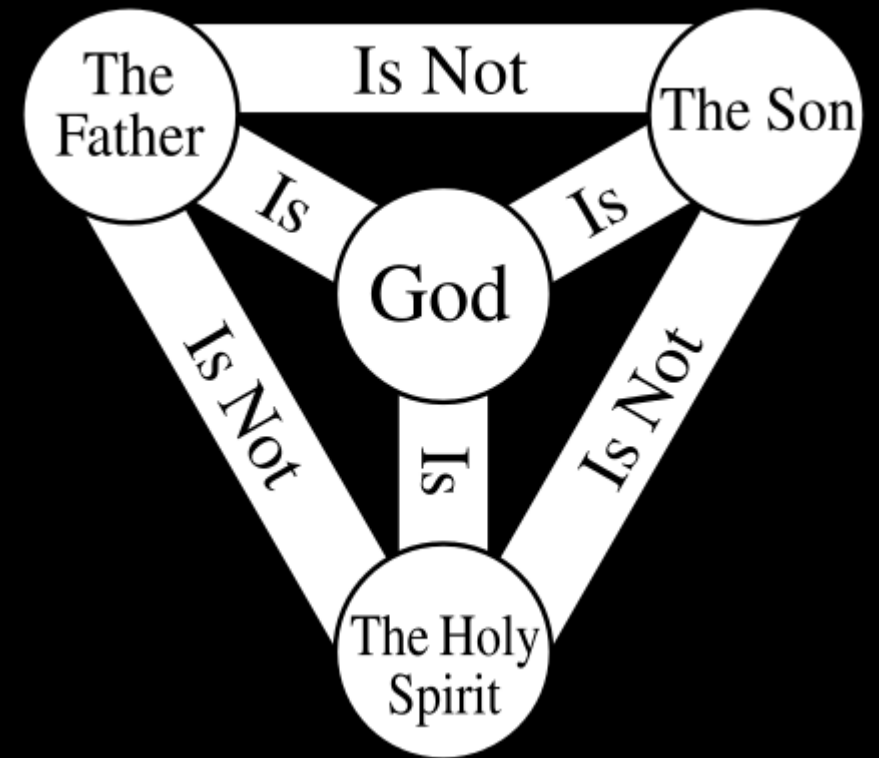
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- As you have seen, the Nicene Creed and the Apostle's Creed are quite similar.
- Let's now look at the Athanasian Creed which is more detailed.

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Athanasian Creed

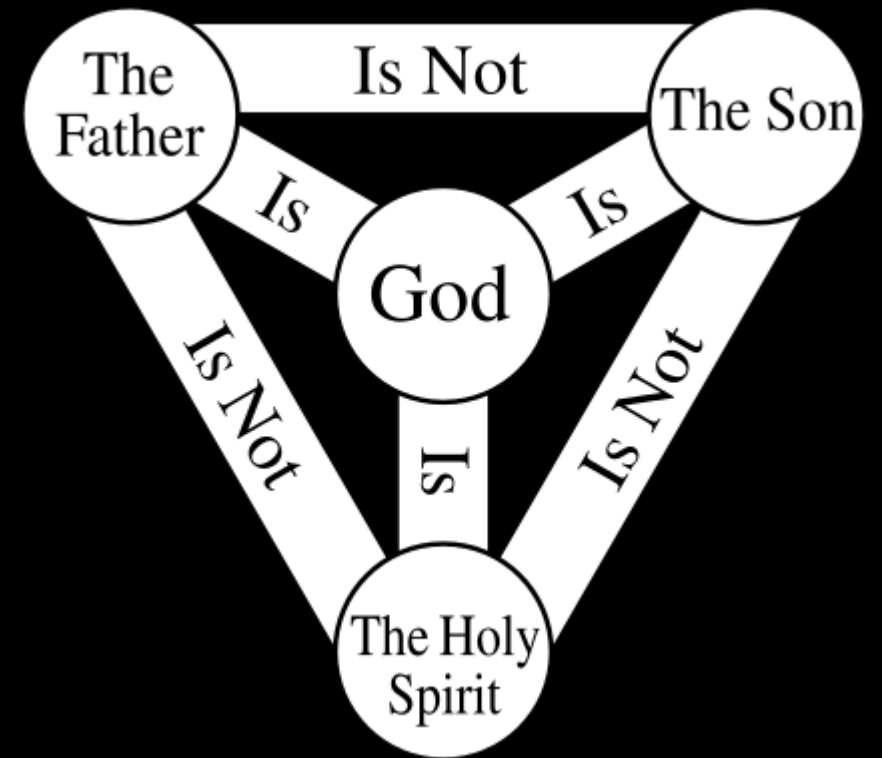
Whoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith unless every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. **And the catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost.**



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Athanasian Creed

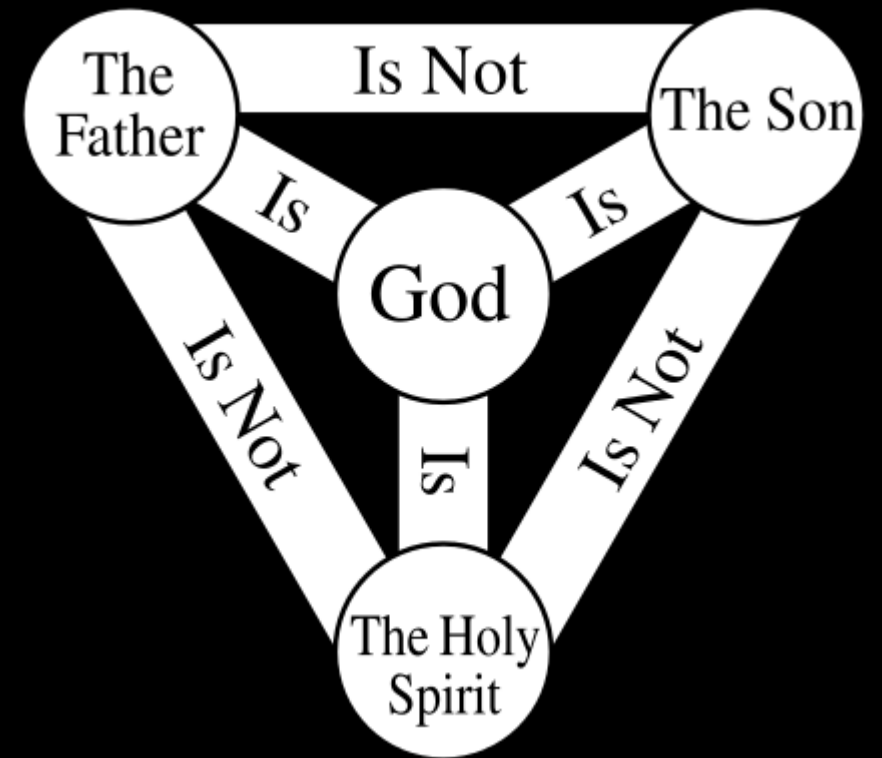
But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal.



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Athanasian Creed

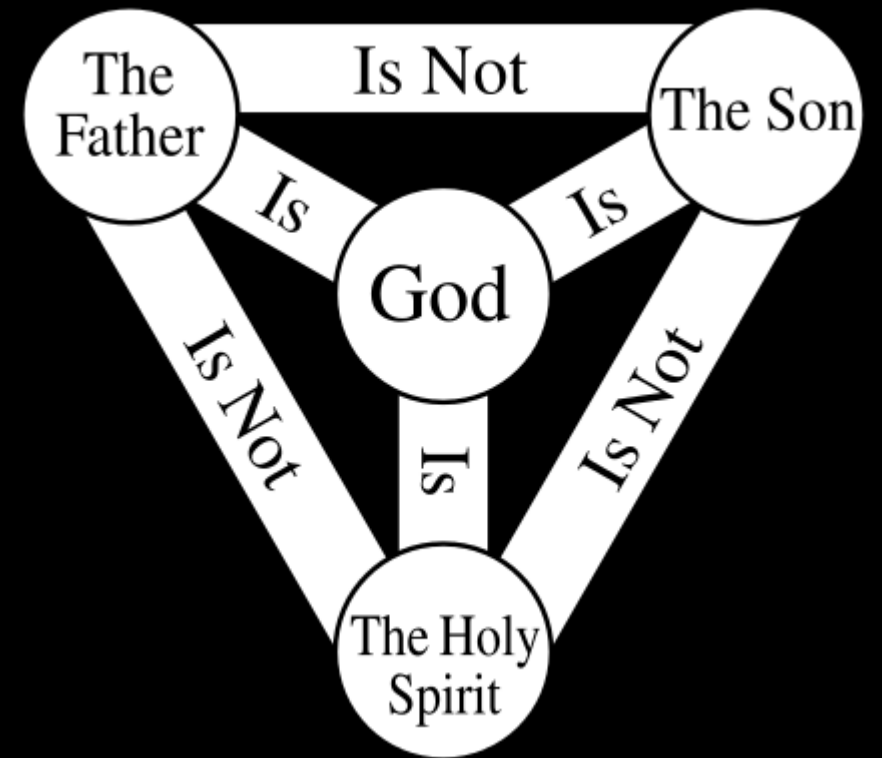
And yet they are not three eternal; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinites, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So, likewise, the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty.



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Athanasian Creed

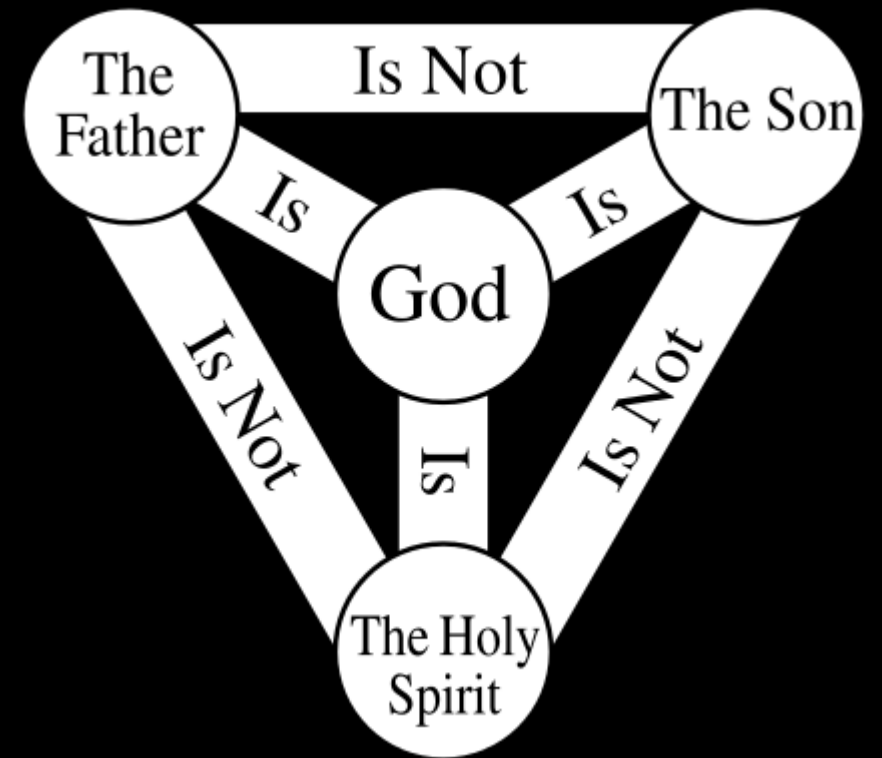
So the Father is God; the Son God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; **So are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords.**



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Athanasian Creed

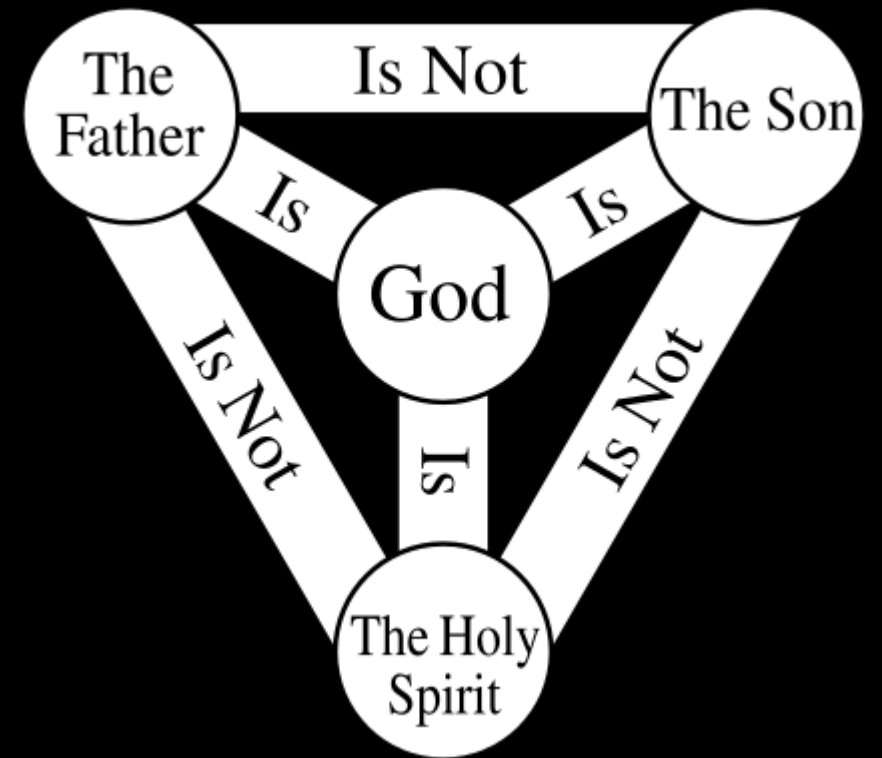
The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another.



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Athanasian Creed

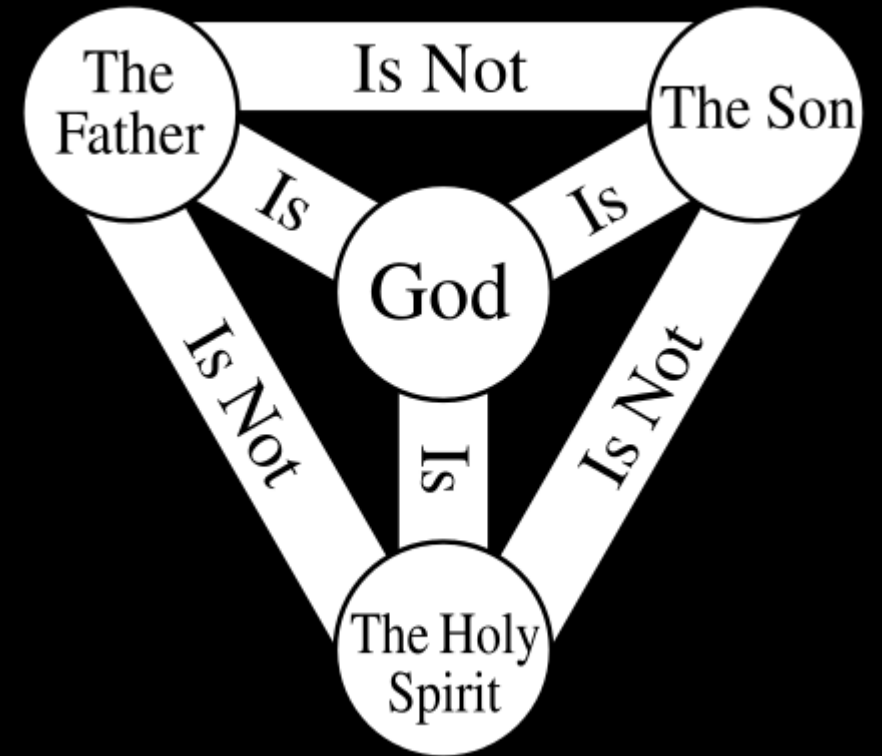
But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity. Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.



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Athanasian Creed

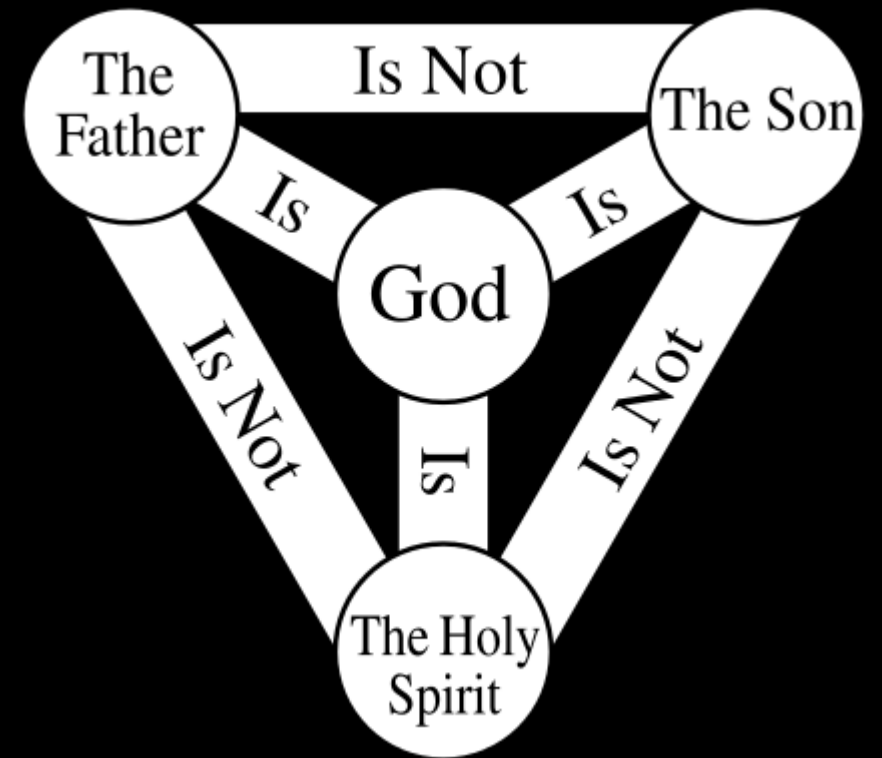
For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; **that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God of the Substance [Essence] of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the substance [Essence] of his Mother born in the world.**



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Athanasian Creed

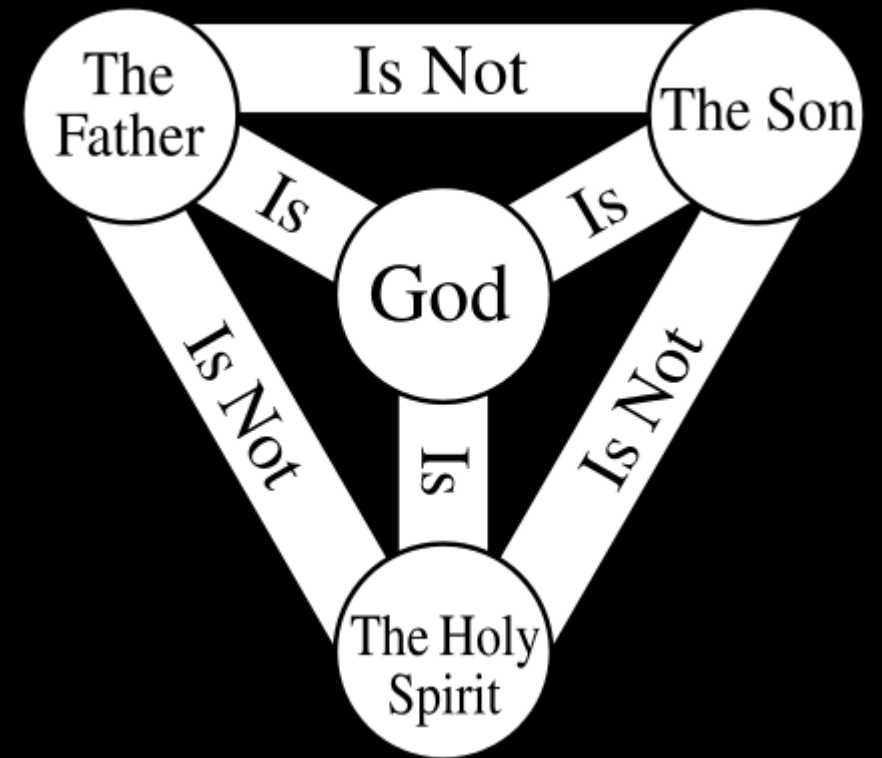
Perfect God; perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. **Equal to the Father, as touching His Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching His Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet He is not two, but one Christ.** One; not by conversion of the Godhead in flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of Substance [Essence]; but by unity of Person.



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Athanasian Creed

For as the reasonable 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 sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

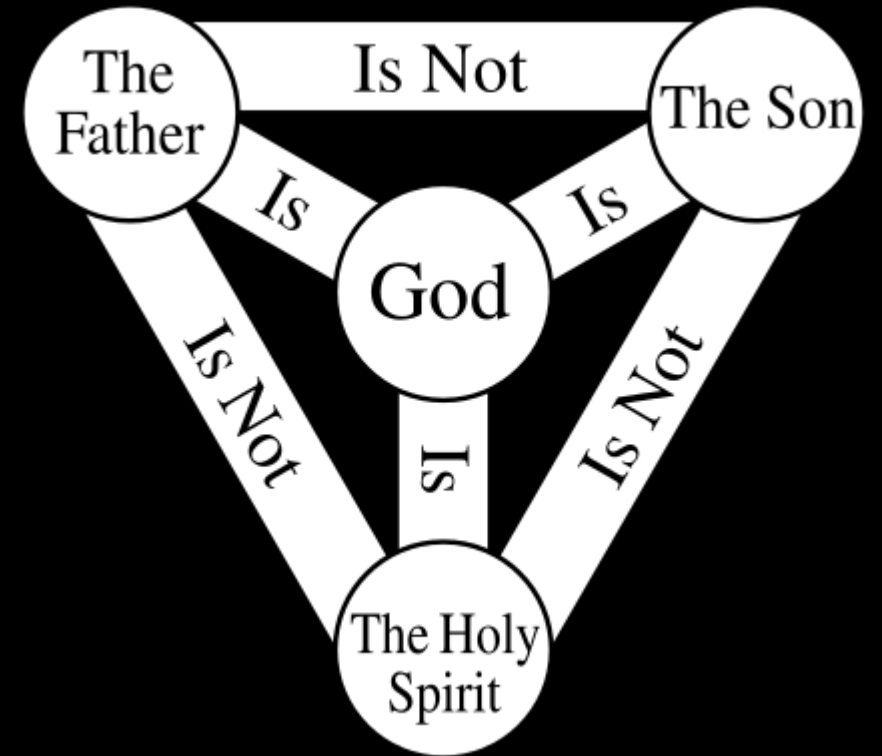


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Athanasian Creed

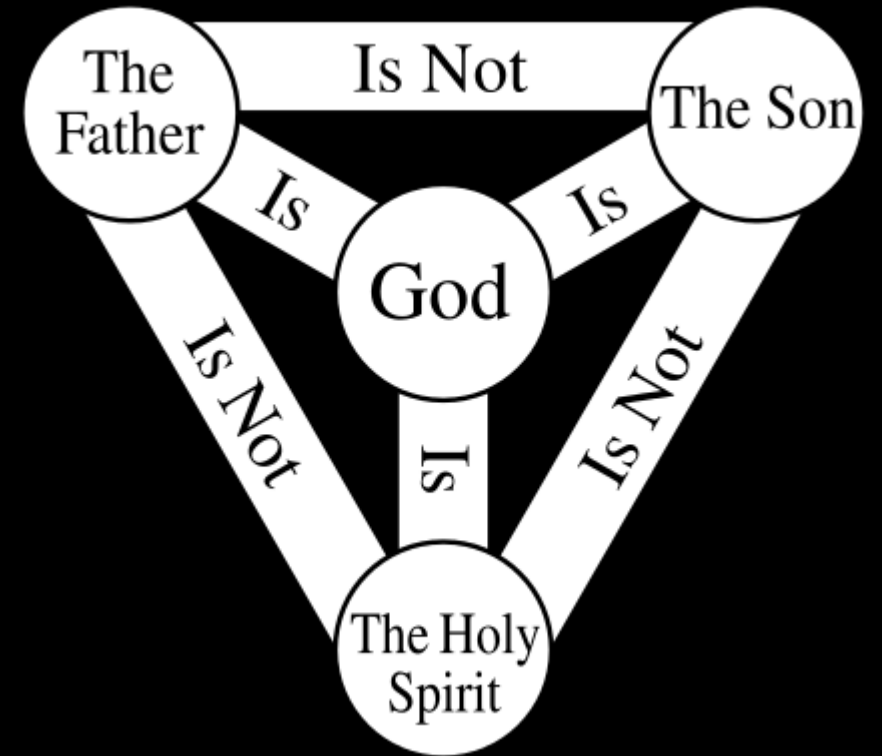
At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; And shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into eternal fire.

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



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- The Athanasian Creed is more detailed and is specific about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each being God – as being of one essence – but they are not equated with being each other.



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- The formation of the creeds did not solve the problem of heresy that the early church was facing.

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- The Story of Civilization IV, The Age of Faith:
- *Constantius (one of Constantine's son) took theology more seriously than his father. He made his own inquiry into the paternity of Jesus, adopted the Arian view, and felt a moral obligation to enforce it upon all Christendom. Athanasius, who had returned to his see after Constantine's death, was again expelled (339); church councils, called and dominated by the new Emperor, affirmed merely the likeness, not the consubstantiality, of Christ with the Father; ecclesiastics loyal to the Nicene Creed were removed from their churches, sometimes by the violence of mobs; for half a century it seemed that Christianity would be Unitarian, and abandon the divinity of Christ.*

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- The Story of Civilization IV, The Age of Faith:
- *In those bitter days Athanasius spoke of himself as solus contra mundum (against the world alone); all the powers of the state were opposed to him, and even his Alexandrian congregation turned against him. Five times he fled from his see, often in peril of his life, and wandered in alien lands; through half a century (323-73) he fought with patient diplomacy and eloquent vituperation for the creed as it had been defined under his leadership at Nicaea; he stood firm even when Pope Liberius gave in. To him, above all, the Church owes her doctrine of the Trinity.*

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- The Story of Civilization IV, The Age of Faith:
- *Athanasius laid his case before Pope Julius I (340). Julius restored him to his see; but a council of Eastern bishops at Antioch (341) denied the Pope's jurisdiction, and named Gregory, an Arian, as bishop of Alexandria. When Gregory reached the city the rival factions broke into murderous riots, killing many; and Athanasius, to end the bloodshed, withdrew (342).¹¹ In Constantinople a similar contest raged; when Constantius ordered the replacement of the orthodox patriot Paul by the Arian Macedonius, a crowd of Paul's supporters resisted the soldiery, and three thousand persons lost their lives. Probably more Christians were slaughtered by Christians in these two years (342-3) than by all the persecutions of Christians by pagans in the history of Rome.*

¹¹ Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, ii, 7-11

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- As you can see, there was serious disagreement concerning the doctrine of the Trinity that resulted in bloodshed.
- We should not want that to happen ever again.
- At the same time, people need to be as fully informed as possible on the subject of the nature of God, so they can decide for themselves what position they are going to take.

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- At this point in time, there are many who believe Yeshua is the Messiah, but they do not agree with the belief that Yeshua is God.

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- As mentioned in a previous presentation, there are a variety of reasons people give as “proof” that Yeshua is not God. Some include:
 - A doctrine with God consisting of multiple natures contradicts the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4).
 - Multiple persons in one God is illogical.
 - A teaching of God consisting of a multiple nature was not formed until the creeds were created in the fourth century.
 - The doctrine of the trinity is based on pagan, trinitarian gods.
 - The Son prayed to the Father and was submitted to the Father’s supremacy (subordinationism).
 - A doctrine with God consisting of a multiple nature is not explicitly stated in Scripture.

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- We will look at these ideas in the future presentation, *The Nature of God, One But Different*.
- In addition, we will consider what the early church father's believed, as well as what Scripture reveals about the nature of God.
- Before making your final decision concerning what you believe regarding this hotly controversial subject, please carefully weigh all of the information in this series carefully, and please do not allow your decision to become a source of major division in the body.

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THANK YOU!



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