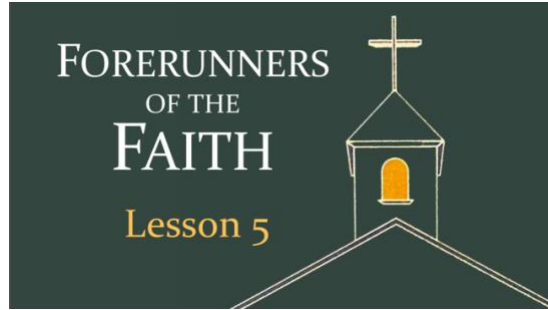


Forerunners of the Faith



Defending the Deity of Christ

Key Passage

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”

A Major Turning Point

- In the first few centuries of church history, Christians faced threats both from within (in the form of false teaching) and from without (in the form of persecution).
- At the beginning of the fourth century, Christianity was the target of imperial persecution by the Roman government.
- The situation dramatically changed when Constantine converted to Christianity in the year 312 at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge.
- The next year, he issued the _____ which brought peace and protection to Christians living in the Roman Empire.
- In _____, Constantine defeated Licinius, to become the sole ruler of the Roman Empire.
- This set the stage for the Council of Nicaea.

The Council of Nicaea

- In the fourth century, a new heresy threatened the church. It was called Arianism (named after a false teacher named Arius).
- Like modern Jehovah’s Witnesses, Arianism attacked the doctrine of the _____ of Christ, by claiming the Son of God was a created being.
- Standing against Arius was a man named Athanasius.

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- The controversy with Arianism resulted in the first empire-wide church council: the Council of Nicaea in 325.
- The council addressed a vital doctrinal question:
Is the Son of God co-eternal, co-essential, and co-equal with God the Father? Or is He a created being who is less than fully God?
- Three views were put forward at the council:
 - _____-ousios – “Of a different substance”
 - _____-ousios – “Of the same substance”
 - _____-ousios – “Of a similar substance”

Key Question

- Was the doctrine of Christ’s deity (along with the doctrine of the Trinity) invented in the fourth century?
- The answer to that question requires looking at both the biblical and historical evidence.

Biblical Authority

Scripture clearly teaches the deity of Christ. Here are ten lines of evidence that demonstrate that truth.

1. _____: In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah foretold the Messiah would be “Mighty God” (Isaiah 9:6; cf. Matt. 1:23). Other OT passages also imply the truth of the Trinity (cf. Gen. 1:26; 11:7; 19:24; Psalm 2:6–7, 12; Prov. 30:4; Isaiah 48:16–17; etc.).
2. _____: Jesus explained that He was with the Father in eternity past, before the world began (John 17:5; see also John 1:1-2; 6:62; 8:23; 16:28).
3. _____: By calling Himself “I Am” in John 8:58, Jesus identified Himself as Yahweh, the covenant name for God in the Old Testament (see also John 6:51; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).
4. _____: Jesus claimed authority over the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5) and over the ultimate destinies of people (John 8:24; cf. Luke 12:8–9; John 5:22, 27–29). He also claimed the authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:5–11).
5. _____: With nothing more than a word, Jesus calmed storms, cast out demons, and healed diseases and infirmities.

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6. _____: Jesus claimed possession of that which belongs to God alone, including the angels, the elect, and the kingdom of God.
 7. _____: The Old Testament forbids the worship of anyone but God alone (Ex. 20:3). Yet, the New Testament declares Jesus to be worthy of worship (Matt. 14:33; 28:9; Luke 24:53; Phil. 2:10–11; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:17). The clear implication is that Jesus is God.
 8. _____: Jesus applied divine titles to Himself. He called Himself the Son of Man, a title with divine implications (Dan. 7:13–14). He also called Himself the Son of God (Matt. 27:43; John 5:18; 10:46; 19:7).
 9. _____: Jesus explained that He is in perfect unity with the Father (John 14:9–10; cf. 10:30; 12:45). If Jesus were not co-equal with the Father, He could never make such a claim.
 10. _____: The rest of the New Testament writings, beyond the four gospels, repeatedly affirm that Jesus is God. The collective evidence from the New Testament provides an insurmountable case for affirming the deity of Christ (John 1:1; Acts 20:28; Rom. 9:5; 1 Cor. 1:24; 2 Cor. 4:4; Phil. 2:6; Col. 2:9; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:3, 8; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 John 5:20).
- The biblical evidence for the doctrine of the deity of Christ is overwhelming. It is the reason we embrace this truth.

Patristic Affirmation

- From their reading of Scripture, the early church fathers (who lived long before the Council of Nicaea) embraced and taught the deity of Christ.
- Their testimony provides a compelling historical witness to the church’s affirmation of this biblical doctrine.

Creedal Articulation

- The Council of Nicaea did not _____ or _____ the doctrine of Christ’s deity.
- It rather _____ and _____ the doctrine that had always been taught by the church going back to the time of the apostles and being established in Scripture.
- In response to claims that the Council of Nicaea determined the deity of Christ by a “relatively close vote,” the following points can be made:

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- First, this doctrine is determined by Scripture. The pastors at the Council of Nicaea understood that they were defending biblical truth, not inventing something new.
- Second, this doctrine was clearly affirmed by Christian leaders in the centuries prior to the Council of Nicaea, going back to the apostles.
- Third, it was not a “close vote.” Of the 318 bishops who attended the council, all but two signed the Nicene Creed, which articulated the biblical truth about the deity of Christ.

Standing Against the World

- Though the victory at Nicaea had been overwhelming, the controversy with Arianism still raged in the Roman Empire for another 50 years.
- In 381, at the Council of Constantinople, Arianism was finally defeated. An expanded version of the Nicene Creed was adopted, giving more detail regarding the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.
- Though he was only a deacon at the time of the Council of Nicaea (325), Athanasius spent most of the fourth century fighting against Arianism.
- He became the bishop of Alexandria just a few years after the Council of Nicaea (in 328).
- Athanasius was banished from his church no less than five times (for a total of 17 years) during his ministry career.
- At times, it seemed like he was all alone. He became known by the famous motto, *contra mundum* (“Against the world.”)
- The first time Athanasius was exiled (336–338) represents the challenges he faced in defending sound doctrine.
- Athanasius was accused of kidnapping another bishop (named Arsenius) and cutting off his hand for use in magical incantations.
- Nonetheless, he was still sent into exile when his opponents accused him of interfering with wheat shipments from Alexandria to Rome.
- He was able to return to Alexandria after Constantine died and his sons came to the throne.
- Athanasius would be forced into exile another four times because he refused to compromise on the doctrine of the deity of Christ.
- His legacy of faithfulness stands as a compelling example for us today, to take a bold stand for the truth.