

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

A Short Course on Church History

Constantine, Controversy, and Councils: AD 312-500

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16:18 ESV

TELL THE COMING GENERATION

PSALM 78:1-8 ESV

- ¹ Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth!
- ² I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old,
- ³ things that we have heard and known,
that our fathers have told us.
- ⁴ We will not hide them from their children,
but tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.
- ⁵ He established a testimony in Jacob
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our fathers
to teach to their children,
- ⁶ that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,
and arise and tell them to their children,
- ⁷ so that they should set their hope in God
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments;
- ⁸ and that they should not be like their fathers,
a stubborn and rebellious generation,
a generation whose heart was not steadfast,
whose spirit was not faithful to God.

Our children need to know what God has done, not just in biblical history and in your life, but in _____ history. To be a Christian is to be a part of history. And to grow as a Christian is to be a student of history.

“What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. **Guard the good deposit** that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” II Timothy 1:13-14

EARLY CHURCH FATHERS:

Constantine (272-337 A.D.):

Constantine issued the Edict of Milan (313), which granted Christians the right to worship, restored to them their properties and churches, and allowed them to be compensated for other losses they had suffered under persecution.

In just one year the Roman Empire goes from being a _____ of the church to being a military _____ of the true church.

Constantine left a _____ legacy for the church.

Ambrose, bishop of Milan (340-397 A.D.):

Ambrose left perhaps his greatest legacy by serving as a mentor to _____.

Jerome (347-420 A.D.):

In 374, Jerome went to Rome to serve as secretary for Pope Damasus. During his time there, Damasus commissioned him to make a new translation of the biblical texts into Latin. When Damasus died, Jerome moved to Bethlehem and completed the _____, which became the standard translation used by the Roman Catholic Church.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.):

The most influential and important of the Fathers was Augustine of Hippo. It has been said that all of Western theology is a footnote to the work of Augustine. No other writer, with the exception of the biblical authors, has had more influence on Christendom.

Augustine's work on the Trinity became very influential in the history of Christian theology. His book *Confessions* is considered by many one of the most important autobiographies ever written. In *City of God*, he reminded the church that though the kingdoms of this world may rise and fall, the kingdom of God will never end.

"Our hearts are restless, and do not rest until they find their rest in Thee."

- Augustine

FOUR QUESTIONS AND FOUR COUNCILS:

Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." (John 1:1-2)

This council answered the question, “is Christ divine?”

The controversy of Christ’s divinity began around 318 in the city of Alexandria. In the city of Antioch was a man named Arius. Arius promoted “Arianism,” which is a belief that denies the _____ of Christ. According to Arius, God the Father _____ is eternal and uncreated.

In the year 321, Bishop Alexander expelled Arius from the city. Yet Arius’ popularity grew while he was in exile and soon the entire Roman Empire became involved in the Christological debate. At the Council of Nicea in 325 AD, the church officially recognized that the Father and the Son are “of the same essence.”

Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.)

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being **born in the likeness of men**. And being found in **human form**, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”
- Phil. 2:5-8 ESV

This council answered the question, “is Christ human?”

The Council of Constantinople in 381 affirmed the full divinity of all three persons of the Trinity as well as the full humanity of Christ. This Council also slightly modified the Nicene Creed to give us the version we have today.

Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.)

This council answered the question, “if Jesus is both God and man, how are these two elements related to each other?”

The Council of Ephesus affirmed the dynamic interchange of the two elements in the person of Christ.

Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.)

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,... - 1 Tim. 2:5

This council answered the question, “what language or terms do we use to describe Jesus?”

The Council of Chalcedon affirmed Jesus as fully divine and fully human. God used the Council at Chalcedon to affirm a biblical view of Christ, and to establish barriers preventing us from speculating beyond that biblical view.

For the past 1,500 years, right up to the present day, virtually all orthodox Christian theologians have defined their “orthodoxy” with reference to the Council of Chalcedon.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose 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.

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

**meaning the universal Christian church—all believers in Jesus Christ*

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.
And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.