

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Nicene Creed		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	42		Gary L.W. Johnson
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WHO PROCEEDS FROM THE FATHER AND THE SON

The creed wanted to strongly affirm the full deity of the Holy Spirit and does so, as DeYoung points out, in *three* ways. “First, the Spirit is called the Lord in the Nicene Creed. This is the title given to God in the Old Testament and the same title already given to God the Son. Second, the Spirit is called the giver of life in the creed. While a few human beings, empowered by God, were able to work miracles in the Bible, even raising the dead, none can truly be the giver of life in an ultimate sense except for God. Third, and most importantly, the Spirit is placed in the same rank as the Father and the Son. In Acts 12, Herod was immediately put to death when he, a mere man, received worship. But the Spirit is not a man. Neither is he a principle, a force, or a phantom. He is the third person of the Trinity, deserving of the same worship we shower on the Father and the Son. All three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – are equal in power, equal in honor and equal in glory. This equality can only be maintained if they are also all equal in the *stuff* of which they are comprised. No one person of the Trinity is more or less God than the other two.”¹ The Holy Spirit is called *The Lord*. What does that mean? “To say the Holy Spirit is the LORD,” observes Cary, “is to make it impossible to say he is merely an angel, as some theologians of the time wanted to say. It also makes it impossible to say that he is simply the energy of God working within us, or an aspect or attribute or quality of God. The Spirit of the LORD is not just a name for the presence of the LORD in us, for he is the LORD himself, a distinct being different from the Father.”² The question of the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit needed to be addressed.

It is in the discourses recorded in John that Jesus most copiously refers to the unity of Himself, as the Son with the Father, and to the mission of the Spirit from Himself as the dispenser of the Divine activities. cf. Jn. 10:30; 17:11, 21, 22, 25; 14:9; 15:21. His oneness with the Father is explicitly stated along with His eternity in Jn. 8:58; 17:5, 18; 6:62. In accordance with the underlying significance of the idea of Sonship in Semitic speech, the natural implication is that whatever the Father is, the Son is also, and the Jews clearly understood this. Cf. Jn. 10:33 and 5:16-18. Jesus being equal, or, rather, identical, with God was His teaching. How is this so with Jesus being in the world? Jesus said he came forth, *exēlthon*, not merely *from* the presence of God (The Greek preposition *apo* – Jn. 16:30; 13:3), but from *out of* God Himself (The Greek preposition *ek* – Jn. 8:42; 16:28). Jesus continually represents Himself as, on the one hand, sent by God, and as, on the other hand, having come forth from the Father. cf. Jn. 8:42; 10:36; 17:3. Jesus, likewise, stressed the interrelationship of the Spirit to the Father and the Son (Jn. 14:16-26). It would be impossible to speak more distinctly of three who were yet one, and yet, the oneness of these three is so kept in sight that the coming of this “another advocate” is spoken of without embarrassment as the coming of the Son Himself (v. 18, 19) – cf. also v. 20, 21 – and indeed as the coming of the Father and the Son (v. 23). Comp. also Jn. 16:5ff.

The Significance of Matt. 28:19 – Note the way in which this text is worded – it does not say “in the names (plural) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” nor does it say “in the name of the Father, and in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit” (as if we had to deal with three separate Beings),

nor does it say “in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (might be taken as merely three designations of a single person) – it rather asserts the unity of the three by combining them all within the bounds of the single Name, and throws up into emphasis the distinctiveness of each by introducing them in turn with the repeated article: “*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*” These three, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, all unite in some profound sense in the common participation of the one Name, but each with a distinct personality. The significance of the term “*name*” – The Jews did not think of the name, as we are accustomed to doing, as a mere external symbol, but rather as the adequate expression of the innermost being of its bearer. In His name the Being of God finds expression; and the name of God – “this glorious and fearful name, Jehovah thy God” (Deut. 28:56) – as a most sacred thing, being indeed virtually equivalent to God Himself; cf. Isa. 30:27; 59:19. As the sufficient representative of the majesty of Jehovah, it was a terrible thing to “blaspheme the Name” (Lev. 24:11; cf. also Jer. 14:19; Isa. 63:19; Dan. 9:18, 19). When Jesus spoke these words in Mt. 28:19, He was using language that carried high meaning among the Jews. What we have in this text is not the birth of the doctrine of the Trinity – the doctrine is presupposed – we are witnessing the authoritative announcement of the Trinity as the God of Christianity by its Founder. We conclude, then, that there are (1) three distinct persons – not abstract things – if the first two are personal, so is the third, (2) three co-equal persons, and (3) three who are essentially one, as the singular “name” indicates.

- I. **THE FILIOQUE CLAUSE.** The expression that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father *and the Son*” was not part of the original version of the creed. It was added by the Council of Toledo in 589. The Latin *filioque*, *filius* “son,” and *que*, suffix added to the end of a word to mean “and.” The language of the double procession comes from the Western (Latin speaking) version of the creed. The Eastern (Greek speaking) Church strenuously denied it, and this was a major reason for the Great Schism between East and West in 1054.

- II. **ITS IMPORTANCE.** The Eastern church declared that the creed should not be expanded except by an ecumenical council in which *all* branches of the Church (East and West) participate. The Third Council of Toledo the East said was not ecumenical! Phillip Cary, who’s work I have cited throughout this series, feels very strongly that he will not say the words “and of the Son” when he recites the creed.³ I personally agree with Wellum, who writes, “At issue was the proper way of distinguishing the divine persons. The Eastern Church argued that the Spirit’s single procession was from the Father *through* the Son, while the West spoke of the double procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son. Although these ideas are close, the West is on firmer ground for at least three reasons. First, Scripture teaches that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7, 12-15; Acts 2:33). Second, without the *filioque*, it is difficult to distinguish the Son from the Spirit if they both proceed from the Father and relate to him in the same way. Instead, the Son is *from* the Father (single relation of origin), and the Spirit is *from* the Father *and* the Son (double relation of origin). Third, the *filioque* reminds us that the Spirit’s work is not independent of the Son; instead, his work is to apply Christ’s work to us to the glory of the Father by making us alive and uniting us to Christ, not by acting outside of gospel realities.”⁴ Sinclair Ferguson (one of my former professors) argues that, “The eastern view, by contrast, contains within itself an inherent tendency to subordinationism in the manner in which it sees the deity of both Son and Spirit as derived from the Father. Within that context, the *double* procession appears as a threat to the unity of the Godhead. Conversely, the double procession doctrine appears to provide a two-fold theological advantage. It underlines the principle that God is in his very being what he reveals himself to be, so that the economic Trinity is a true, however accommodated, reflection of the ontological Trinity. It also indicates a relationship between the Son and the Spirit which is more than economical (just as the ideas of the generation of the Son *by* and the procession of the Spirit *from*, the Father indicate the nature of the relationship between the Father and both the Son and the Spirit).”⁵

CONCLUSION: Frances Turretin (1623-1687), the great Reformed theologian, wisely stated the matter, “Although the Greeks ought not to have been charged with heresy on account of their opinion, nor ought it to have been the occasion of a schism arising or continuing, still the opinion of the Latins may be properly retained as more agreeable to the words of Scripture and the truer. (1) The Holy Spirit is sent from the Son as well as from the Father (Jn. 16:7). He therefore ought to proceed from him because he cannot be sent by the Son unless he proceeds from him. (2) He is called the Spirit of the Son as well as the Father (Gal. 4:6). (3) Whatever the Spirit has, he has from the Son no less than from the Father (Jn. 16:13-15), and as the Son is said to be from the Father because he does not speak of himself, but of the Father (from whom he receives all things), so the Spirit ought to be said to be and to proceed from the Son because he hears and speaks from him. (4) He breathed the Holy Spirit on his disciples in time (Jn. 20:22). Therefore he breathed him from eternity; for temporal procession presupposes an eternal.”⁶

ENDNOTES

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *The Nicene Creed: Foundational Tools For Our Faith* (Crossway, 2025), p. 62

² Phillip Cary, *The Nicene Creed: An Introduction* (Lexham Press, 2023), p. 176.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁴ Stephen J. Wellum, *Systematic Theology: From Canon To Concept I* (B&H Academic, 2024), p. 703.

⁵ S. B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (IVP, 1996), p. 75.

⁶ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology I*, trans. G. M. Giger, ed. J. T. Dennison, Jr. (P&R, 1992), p. 309.