

Maranatha Bible Church 2020

Equipping Hour: Church History II (Early 4th – 590 AD)

Week 3: The Church, Government, Compromise and Heresy Part 2

Now that the church had less persecution from the government and more time to focus on doctrine, more and more arguments and councils were about to begin. This was a time of great theological growth in the church as beliefs were beginning to be refined and doctrines properly taught. Some of their beliefs were changed, as they had time to process Scripture, and new beliefs and heresy's came forward.

We are going to see the church define the Trinity, nature of Christ, anthropology and the doctrine of salvation. Arguments and refining are good for the church. Starting back Paul opposing Peter (Gal. 2), the church has always had to stand against heresy within her walls. This is no different today as the church seeks to rightly interpret and apply passages like Romans 13 (obey the government) in light of Hebrews 10:23-25 (not forsaking our own assembling as a church).

Constantine (306 - 337 A.D.)

Council of Nicaea (May 30th 325 AD)

- 1) Constantine summoned this council, which ruled against Arianism (a heresy that denied that Christ as the Son of God was coeternal with the Father).
 - a) It was the emperor's edict which gave *legal* force to the Nicaean decision.
 - b) This is massive, this would be the government showing rule and reign over the church.
 - c) Not only did he call the council together, but he also ruled for it.
- 2) Previous council's that had no interference from the government:
 - a) Jerusalem Council or Synod (Acts 15)
 - b) Council of Ephesus (193 AD)
 - c) Council of Carthage (251, 255, 256 AD)
 - i) All these Councils were called by church leaders...
- 3) The Council of Nicaea set a new precedent that the Emperor has power over the church.
 - a) Not only that, it was the first "ecumenical" or worldwide council of the church.
- 4) There were some 230 bishops from around the world who came to Bithynia to discuss how to define the nature of Christ and the character of His work.

- a) Arius, a man from Alexandria, Egypt, who said that “If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence; hence it is clear that there was when the Son was not. It follows then of necessity that he had his existence from the non-existent.”¹
- b) While it is clear that Arius had much reverence and awe for God the Father and Jesus, he held that Jesus, taking some traits from the Father, was less than Him.
- c) There were three positions which were noted:
 - i) 1) Jesus was of a different essence from the Father (Arius); 2) Jesus was of the same essence as the Father (Athanasius); 3) Jesus was of a like essence to the Father (a compromise position)

Athanasius (295 – 373 A.D.)

- 5) “Arius’s arch opponent was Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, whose personal secretary was Athanasius. Athanasius played a small but important role at Nicaea. But for the next forty-five years, he defended the Nicene formula. He taught that the members of the Trinity are coequal, coessential, and coeternal. He powerfully linked the doctrines of the Trinity and salvation. From Scripture he argued that God created humanity in His image, but through sin, humanity abandoned Him and His image. Thus a new creation was necessary, and only God could be the Savior of fallen humanity. No man could possibly provide this needed redemption. For Athanasius, then, the deity of Jesus Christ and the salvation of fallen humanity were inextricably linked. This Apologist was willing to suffer any punishment or persecution to defend that crucial bond, for to deny the deity of Jesus was to emasculate the Gospel.”
 - a) Athanasius was constantly under threat of persecution as many believers followed Arius.
 - i) In his 45 years of defending the deity of Christ, he was exiled 5 times by four different Emperors and even disobeyed an order from Emperor Constantine to restore Arius back to the church for the sake of fellowship.
 - ii) How many of us would stand alone, against those more powerful, to make sure this (or any) vital doctrine would not be done away with?
 - b) In 367 AD, Athanasius inadvertently set the foundation for what we know as the canon of Scripture. The New Testament that you hold in your hand was fully referenced by him in a letter on Easter and he used the word canonized to refer to the list.
 - c) Roughly 100 years before, in Origen’s Homilies of Joshua, he also states that the 27 books are in the New Testament and speaks as if the canon is closed.

¹ Noll, Mark *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* Logos ed. P. 45

- 6) The council would declare Arius a heretic and conclusively decide on what we confess even today; “Jesus was begotten, not created” and “true God from true God.”
- 7) It was from this council that Constantine is noted as saying “Let whatsoever I will, be that esteemed as council.” Essentially saying that the word of the emperor is at least equal to the word of God.
 - a) While not all of Christianity adhered to what Constantine said, it would set the tone for centuries as the emperor now sought to be *over* the church and no longer *in* the church.

Augustine (354-430)

- 1) From the time of the Apostle Paul to the great reformer Luther, Augustine stands as a bulwark of the faith and deserves to be mentioned with great men who influenced the church.
- 2) We know more about Augustine than any other person in this time because of his writings, especially *Confessions*, his autobiography concerning his conversion.
 - a) His mother was a devout believer, but his father was a pagan. Through his mother’s prayers, the Lord saw fit to convert him at the age of 32. His life changed and he became a pillar of the early church and is often referenced by Luther (who was an Augustinian monk), Calvin and countless others.
 - b) After years of struggle with personal sins, he came to the conclusion about man “You made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in You”²
- 3) Augustine’s biggest issue was how can God allow evil in the world. If God was good, why is there pain, suffering and death all around. In his work on the Trinity, Augustine also solved his personal struggle with the problem of evil.
 - a) For him, the Bible taught that God created the universe out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) and created humans and angels with a free will. Free will explained how evil entered into a good universe—Satan, some angels, and humans chose to rebel against God.
 - b) **Grace** was the only explanation of why God chose to redeem humanity through His Son.³
- 4) Augustine is known for many, many contributions to the church, both then and today.**
 - a) He held to **infant baptism** and it could be argued that, though not necessarily beginning with him, he certainly brought it to the forefront of the Christian church.
 - i) It was Tertullian around 220 A.D. that not only mentions infant baptism as a normal practice, but he also calls for their *sponsors* to aid them in their spiritual well-being.
 - (1) This is, perhaps, the birth of *god-parents* that we have today.

² *Confessions*, Book 1:1

³ James Eckman *Exploring Church History* pp. 34-35

- b) As the church was in an evangelistic mode in the first three centuries we find clear statements of the fact of adult baptism upon conversion.
- i) There was also the concept that baptism washed away all pre-baptismal sins. Hence there arose the practice of postponing baptism until one's deathbed in order not to commit post-baptismal sins which would have to be dealt with through penance.⁴
 - ii) Augustine believed that infant baptism washed away the stain of original sin. This would mean that he (and much of the church today) saw baptism as something much more than symbolic. They saw it as actually bestowing grace upon the person and accomplishing something in them.
 - iii) Infant baptism would become such a divisive doctrine within the church that in early medieval era in Europe to reject it would constitute a capital crime.
- c) He brought the **amillennialism** teaching into the mainstream thought of the church and from that point on, it was the only teaching for centuries.⁵
- i) Prior to Augustine, the amillennial belief was only believed by heretics as it was produced by allegorizing and spiritualizing the text. It never came from any literal exegesis of the Scriptures.
 - ii) While Augustine used a proper hermeneutic throughout all the other areas of Scripture, he chose to interpret Revelation 20 (and other O.T. prophecies) through an allegorical lens.
 - (1) This view of Eschatology would become that of the RCC and of the Protestant Reformers and most certainly continues widespread and strong in the majority of the church today.
 - iii) Augustine saw his age as the a conflict between the City of God and the City of Satan (or man). He believed that his present age was the age of conflict and that the world was $\frac{3}{4}$ through the present millennium. The church would be triumphant and usher in the final millennium where Christ rules and reigns.
 - iv) **Why did he believe this?** A faulty understanding of Revelation 20. He believed that some interpreters of his time (and before) had made the millennium kingdom out to be a time of carnal enjoyment. Where men and women, who had lived their holy lives on earth, could now indulge in all their fleshy desires.
 - (1) Rightly so, he stood against this doctrine...but unfortunately he abandoned the literal interpretation of a premillennial position and swung the pendulum too far.
 - (2) Calvin, agreeing with Augustine on most points of eschatology, erroneously adds to it by saying that those who hold (or had held to) to a premillennial position limits eternity. He said that to

⁴ <https://bible.org/question/what-are-historical-origins-infant-baptism>

⁵ Neither infant baptism nor eschatology were debated in the church until much, much later. He simply wrote about them and their practices. It is interesting to note that one man's belief can be the seedbed for false doctrine in the church 1600 years later.

hold to a literal interpretation of Revelation 20, one would have to believe that eternity was only 1000 years.

- 5) He also taught on the **Trinity** in *Treatise on the Holy Spirit*, and single handedly put a stop to any more debate on the Trinity in the future.
 - a) In it he saw the God of the Bible as an eternal, transcendent, infinite, and perfect triune God. In defining God as a Trinity in one essence, his work constituted the capstone of centuries of theological thought on the nature of God. There was little debate on the nature of the Trinity after Augustine.⁶
- 6) He fought against the Donatists (N. African heretical church movement) who believed that only the morally pure bishops could administer the sacraments. Furthermore, there can be no sin in the church as the church is the visible society of God's elect.
 - a) Augustine responded to them by saying that the **church is within the church**. Every church will be a combination of both the saved and the unregenerate.
 - b) He also taught that the validity of the sacraments was not dependent upon the holiness of the bishop but if they were administered within the true church.
 - i) To Augustine, the true church was simply the visible church, both the elect and non-elect.
- 7) Regarding his teaching on the **doctrine of salvation**, he also was the first to articulate the **doctrine of original sin, predestination and election**.
 - a) He affirmed the guilt and corruption of all humans because of Adam's sin and the absolute need for God's saving grace. Following Paul, Augustine formulated the doctrines of election and predestination that would powerfully influence Luther and Calvin centuries later.⁷
 - b) He taught that **salvation was totally caused by God**; man does not have a part to play.
 - i) This was because of his belief in original sin...that man is born with a sin nature. This would become what he fought Pelagius about through much of his latter life.
 - c) He articulated that even man's best choices are tainted by sin because all of man's constitution had been effected by sin.

Pelagius (350-425)

- 8) A British man who lived at the same time as Augustine and because of the unrest in Rome, he moved to N. Africa. He started what would be an assault on God-centered salvation by denying original sin and putting the power for man to be born again in man's hands.
 - a) He taught that man was born neutral, with the power to either sin or not sin.

⁶ James Eckman *Exploring Church History* pp. 36

⁷ Ibid.

- b) He also taught that human nature was capable of perfection and that the demands of God could be carried out by man because man had no original sin passed along from Adam. Pelagius was against predestination and perseverance, as they took power away from man.
- i) This teaching was obviously contrary to Augustine. According to Augustine predestination is the act of God from beginning to end. It is his act in his will and not based on foreknowledge of later merit in the elect. He has chosen the elect beforehand and the number of the elect is fixed. The perseverance of the elect in Christ to the end of their life comes not by their power but as a gift from God.⁸
- 9) In response, Augustine formulated detailed responses by explaining original sin, the doctrine of predestination and also election. His responses heavily influenced Luther and Calvin as they stood in the Protestant Reformation.
- a) Against the Pelagians, Augustine wrote thirteen works and letters from 412 until the end of his life. Even at the end he was writing a work against Julian, the bishop of Eclanum in southern Italy, who had become an effective spokesman and writer for the Pelagian movement. Augustine died before finishing that final work. In his anti-Pelagian works, Augustine affirmed that (1) Adam had immortality before his fall; (2) original sin is transmitted from Adam to all his descendants; (3) infants need baptism and remission of sins; (4) the grace of God is sovereign, and the will of man does not overcome the will of God; (5) every good work of man is the gift of the grace of God; and (6) perfection is not reached in this life—even the saints must confess their sins.⁹
- 10) Though Pelagius' teachings (referred to as Pelagianism) were continually condemned by various councils throughout the years, his teachings still live on today.
- a) The RCC hold to a modified Pelagian position, which came from Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century.
- b) As we will see in the future, Charles Finney and John Wesley were both also ardent supporters of Pelagius.
- c) Also, Arminian's are generally referred to as Semi-Pelagian in their belief because even though they do believe man was born in sin, they hold that he is not so tainted that he cannot pull himself out.
- 11) John Calvin, some 1000 years after Augustine, would write "Augustine is so wholly within me, that if I wished to write a confession of my faith, I could do so with all fullness and satisfaction to myself out of his writings."¹⁰

⁸ *Who's Who in Christian History* Augustine

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God*. By Calvin, John. Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association. p. 38.

- a) There is little debate that Calvin did not come up with the 5 points of Calvinism. They were fully and finally defined at the Synod of Dort some 50 years after his death. Furthermore, as previously stated by Calvin himself, he found this idea in the writings of Augustine and supported by Scripture.
- b) One of the differences between the two men was that Augustine taught that the reprobate are abandoned (or passed over) by God and left to the ruin due their sins, but Calvin insists the reprobate are rejected for no other reason than God willed it.
 - i) Calvin held to double-predestination, God active in both sending to heaven and hell. Augustine simply saw God as active in saving but passively allowing people to happily go to hell in their sin.

Council of Constantinople

- 1) Theodosius became Emperor in 380 and began a campaign to bring the Eastern Church¹¹ back to Nicene Christianity. Theodosius wanted to further unify the entire empire behind the orthodox position and decided to convene a church council to resolve matters of faith and discipline.
 - a) Gregory Nazianzus (Archbishop of Constantinople) was of similar mind, wishing to unify Christianity. In the spring of 381 they convened the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople.
 - i) Essentially, the Emperor and the Archbishop were on the same page.
 - b) The Council of Nicaea in 325 had not ended the Arian controversy which it had been called to clarify. Arius and his sympathizers were admitted back into the church after allegedly accepting the Nicene creed.
 - i) Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, the most vocal opponent of Arianism, was ultimately exiled through the conspiracies.
 - ii) After the death of Constantine I in 337 and the appointment of his Arian-leaning son Constantius II, open discussion of replacing the Nicene creed itself began. Up until about 360, ***theological debates mainly dealt with the divinity of the Son***, the second person of the Trinity.
 - iii) However, because the Council of Nicaea had not clarified the divinity of the Holy Spirit, it became a topic of debate. The Macedonians denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.
 - c) Nicene Christianity also had its defenders: apart from Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers' Trinitarian discourse was influential in the council at Constantinople.
 - i) Apollinaris of Laodicea, another pro-Nicene theologian, proved controversial. Possibly in an over-reaction to Arianism and its teaching that Christ was not God, he taught that Christ consisted of a

¹¹ The Eastern Church are places like Greece, Turkey, Russia, Syria. Western Church is also called the Latin Church or the Roman Catholic Church and include from Israel, across the Sinai and N. Africa, up through Spain, Ireland, Britain ending around Romania.

human body and a divine mind, rejecting the belief that Christ had a complete human nature, including a human mind.

(1) He was charged with confusing the persons of the Godhead and with giving in to the heretical ways of Sabellius.

ii) Basil of Caesarea accused him of abandoning the literal sense of the scripture, and taking up wholly with the allegorical sense. His views were condemned in a Synod at Alexandria, under Athanasius of Alexandria, in 362, and later subdivided into several different heresies.

2) For all the good this council did in affirming the Nicene Creed, it also made a statement *The Bishop of Constantinople, however, shall have the prerogative of honour after the Bishop of Rome because Constantinople is New Rome.*

a) This essentially set the East over and above the West and started a crack in the foundation of the universal church that would ultimately separate in 1054

Council of Ephesus¹²

1) In 431 Pope Celestine I commissioned Cyril of Alexandria to conduct proceedings against Nestorius, his longtime adversary, whose doctrine of two persons in Christ the pope had previously condemned.

a) When the Eastern bishops (more sympathetic to Nestorius) arrived and learned that the council summoned by Emperor Theodosius II had been started without them, they set up a rival synod under John of Antioch and excommunicated Memnon, bishop of Ephesus, along with Cyril.

b) When Pope Celestine pronounced his excommunication of Nestorius and ratified his deposition as bishop of Constantinople, the emperor abandoned his neutral position and sided with Cyril.

c) Perhaps as a rebuke to the rebels, the council also made the Church of Cyprus independent of the see of Antioch¹³. This council is known as the third ecumenical council of the church.

2) Nestorianism is still around today, mostly in the Middle East and some Chinese churches.

a) Nestorius argued that the Godhead joined with the human rather as if a man entered a tent or put on clothes. Instead of depicting Christ as one unified person, Nestorius saw him as a conjunction of two natures so distinct as to be different persons who had merged.

3) The ***doctrine of the Hypostatic Union*** is what came out of the Council of Ephesus.

a) Here is where the Greek speaking East and the Latin speaking West started, once again, to separate. Because of the language barrier, it was difficult to define the terms they both could agree on.

¹² <https://www.britannica.com/event/councils-of-Ephesus> 08/06/2020

¹³ The five sees (area of a bishop's jurisdiction) which oversaw the church: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem

- b) In Greek, Hebrews 1:3a reads “ὅς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτῆρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ”, meaning *and He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature.*
- i) Here the author of Hebrews uses the word in reference to the oneness of God. Both the Father and the Son are of the same “nature.” Jesus is “the exact imprint of his nature.”
 - ii) However, in early church discussions, as Greek thinkers tried to find agreeable terms with those who spoke in Latin, the word *hupostasis* came to denote not the sameness in the Godhead (God’s one essence) but the distinctness (the three persons). So, it began to be used to refer to something like the English word *person*. **Hypostatic means personal.**
 - iii) The hypostatic union is the personal union of Jesus’s two natures.¹⁴
 - iv) Jesus has two complete natures: one fully human and one fully divine. What the doctrine of the hypostatic union teaches is that these two natures are united in one person in the God-man.
 - v) Jesus is not two persons. He is one person. The hypostatic union is the joining of the divine and the human in the one person of Jesus.
- (1) Why does this theological truth matter? There are no other religions/faiths in which their ‘god’ humbled himself and became what he alone created. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, did this to restore our fellowship with God; and so much more.

Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.)

- 1) Roman Emperor Marcian summoned another ecumenical council to further discuss and clarify the divinity and humanity of Christ.
 - a) The wording of the Nicene Creed specifically condemned Arianism but it neglected to address the human aspect of Jesus’ identity, and so the theological pendulum swung the other way: new heresies emerged suggesting that Jesus wasn’t fully human.
 - b) The key affirmations of the definition reflected the main themes of the New Testament—that Christ was a united and integrated person, that he was both God and man, that his human and divine natures were not confused, and that these natures were harmoniously joined in a single individual.¹⁵

¹⁴ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-the-hypostatic-union> 08/06/2020

¹⁵ Mark Noll *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* p. 72

313 A.D. – 590 A.D.

- 1) There was a noticeable shift in the church from the days of persecution. After the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D., the church was now getting organized and structured.
- 2) There were five main places which ruled the “churched” world, Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. By the late 6th century, Jerusalem had lost favor because of unrest, Alexandria and Antioch were falling further into despair and would soon be overtaken by Muslims.
- 3) That meant that it was only Rome and Constantinople, the West and the East, which stood to rule the Christian empire.
 - a) When Constantine moved the capital of the empire to Constantinople in 330, he inadvertently took shifted the center of all politics away from Rome. In consequence, leaving the bishop of Rome the single most powerful person in the whole city and area.
- 4) When the Visigoths came to sack Rome in 410 A.D., it was the bishop who kept them from burning the city. When there were church disputes around the empire, they would first send for help from Rome.
- 5) In 476 A.D., when Rome finally fell, it would be the church that not only kept the city together, but would help Rome rise from the ashes.
- 6) When the fall of Rome, the medieval ages begins and continues until the 1400’s with the Renaissance and Age of Discovery.
- 7) Even though Rome fell, the Eastern Empire was still very much intact with their capital in Constantinople. This begins also begins what is known as the Byzantine Empire, or Eastern Roman Empire.
 - a) This empire would end in 1453 A.D. when the Ottoman empire breached Constantinople and besieged the city for 55 days.
 - b) The fall of the city removed what was once a powerful defense for Christian Europe against Muslim invasion, allowing for uninterrupted Ottoman expansion into eastern Europe.
 - c) The Ottoman period spanned more than 600 years and came to an end only in 1922, when it was replaced by the Turkish Republic and various successor states in southeastern Europe and the Middle East. At its height the empire encompassed most of southeastern Europe to the gates of Vienna, including present-day Hungary, the Balkan region, Greece, and parts of Ukraine; portions of the Middle East now occupied by Iraq, Iran and Lebanon.¹⁶

¹⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire> 08/07/2020