

Athanasius and Basil

by Michael Haykin

This sermon explores the significance of the 4th century in Christian history, particularly the rise of Arianism and the formulation of the Nicene Creed.

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Scripture: Matthew 5:21

Topics: "Church History", "Trinity Doctrine"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the consequences of the church being wedded to the state in the 4th century. They argue that while the exact consequences were not clear at the time, it was ultimately not a good thing for the church. The 4th century marked a turning point in church-state relations and set up a model that lasted until the 18th century. The speaker also highlights the importance of the struggle for the deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the 4th century, emphasizing the need to adhere to the biblical truth expressed during that time.

Transcript

Well, I'm sure I expressed the feelings of apologia when I expressed thanks to you for having come out tonight and in previous weeks. And we have been thinking about the history of the Church, and our story has been brought up until the 4th century. And in the previous two weeks, we have looked at something of the way in which the early Church began amidst persecution.

We tried to set the context of the history of the early Church in the social, political, economic, and larger context, as it were, of the Roman Empire. And it's always very, very important to see that larger scene, as it were, in which the Church has travelled. And we saw how the Church came into conflict with the Empire, and there was persecution.

And then we saw also something of the threats from within, not only the struggles from without with the persecution of the Empire, but also the struggles within. And we saw the struggle regarding monsonism, and it opens up the question of the nature of the canon. And something we want to look at tonight, monsonism pleading, in many respects, for an open canon.

We also looked at what was a more dire problem, really, the problem of Gnosticism, and the Church's struggle against a way of thinking that denied some cardinal aspects of the Christian faith. And again, that has bearing upon the second lecture tonight, the issue of the canon, because Gnosticism wanted to reject

the entirety of the Old Testament, portions of the New, and add, actually, to the New Testament some of their own creations and writings. And then last week, we looked at the whole scenario of what developed in the early fourth century.

How the Church moves suddenly, and it is suddenly, it's not slowly, it's suddenly, from a position of being persecuted to a position of influence and power. From a position where it was dangerous to be a Christian in the Roman Empire, where the Church is now well on the way to becoming the dominant power in the Empire. And by the end of the fourth century, it would be dangerous to be a pagan.

And we saw how the central figure in that transformation, at least from a historical vantage point, is the man who, and his embrace of Christianity, about which historians are divided, certainly has some very, very significant long-term development or impact. And the impact of that embrace of Christianity is still with us today. And one would say that from the vantage point of the late twentieth century, Constantine's embrace of Christianity and the union of church and state that it affected had negative long-term consequences.

At the time, it was not clear, and I would argue that it was not exactly clear what those consequences would be, but as history unfolded, it was probably not, in terms of the larger percentage, it was probably not a good thing. The Church found itself wedded to the Roman Empire. Well, the fourth century is a very important century.

It's a turning point in the history of church-state relations. It sets up a model of church-state relations that prevailed in the West down, definitely, to the eighteenth century, and its consequences are still with us. Tonight, we want to look at two other aspects of the fourth century, one that is very, very important, that deals with the Godhead, and the struggle for the deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit, the defense of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the landmarks that are laid in the fourth century are still landmarks that we need to adhere to today, because they express Biblical truth.

Please do not go away from these lectures this evening, which elevate the 19th Creed, which was to the status of Scripture. It is not Scripture. But it capsulizes, or summarizes, in a compact form, the Biblical witness to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

And one of the great, I think, failings, and it's being changed in some respects, one of the great failings of evangelicals in our day has been the neglect of the doctrine of the Trinity. We've taken it for granted, we've assumed it, and we should not have done so. The other lecture this evening is focused on the canon.

And our thought there is going to be centered upon the evidences within the Scriptures themselves of authority. And if there's one word that sums up the approach I want to make to the canon, it is that word, the authority of the New Testament. But first, though, in the first hour, the doctrine of the Trinity and its defense by Basil of Caesarea and Athanasius of Alexandria.

Now, one of the things that is central, and I want to begin with a Biblical basis, one of the things that is central to the proclamation of the Gospel in the first century is the affirmation, or the assertion, that Jesus is Lord. Romans 10.9, Paul asserts that salvation is rooted in this very fact, that one asserts, or affirms, or confesses Jesus is Lord, and that God has raised Him from the dead. And there are those in our day who, when they approach this word, do so fairly skimpily.

They see it rather as a synonym for boss or master. But the word Lord, in the context of the early Church, has much deeper significance and richer implications. For instance, to confess Jesus is Lord is to confess that He is the one who bestows the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2. I'm going to be giving a number of references. Some I will read, but others I will just cite the Biblical text and chapter and verse. Acts 2, verse 32 to 36, where the Apostle Peter is explaining what has taken place in the descent of the Spirit.

It is a fascinating passage, because Peter says almost next to nothing about the Spirit. His sermon is filled with Christ. And what he says is that this is the result of God having raised Jesus from the dead, and made Him Lord and Christ.

And as Lord, He has the power to give the Spirit. Now, any Jew raised and nourished on the Old Testament Scriptures would know that that is a prerogative of God alone. That only God, only one who is deity, only one who is divine can give the Spirit.

Or, again, Jesus as Lord is a proper recipient of prayer. Acts 7 is probably the most well-known example. Acts 7, verse 59, Stephen, in the context of martyrdom, he cries out to the Lord Jesus.

Jesus is the focus of his prayer. Again, any right-thinking Jew in that context would know only God is to be prayed to. Not any other, only God.

1 Corinthians 12, verse 8, that very well-known passage of the Apostle Paul, as he is seeking relief from, presumably, physical discomfort, what he calls the thorn in the flesh. And he asks the Lord, he says three times, and as the passage goes on, he receives the answer from the Lord Jesus. My grace is sufficient for you.

My strength is made perfect, as it were, in your weakness. And, obviously, the one to whom he is calling upon as Lord is the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, the term Lord, in the New Testament, is a word that when any of the Greek-speaking Christians in those early days would have seen, their Old Testament Bible was what would have come to mind.

Because the word that the old King James called Jehovah, or is more regularly translated today as Yahweh, the word for God that is given to Moses on Sinai, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and the Greek translation of the Old Testament is pretty well the Bible of the early church. Most of the converts, as the Gospel goes outside of Palestine, cannot read Hebrew or Aramaic, the two languages in which the Old Testament was originally given. And what they read is the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

And the word Jehovah, or Yahweh, in the Old Testament is translated by the Greek word Kyrios, Lord. My point is this, that when the early church gives the title of Kyrios, or Lord, to Jesus, it is using a word that is exclusively reserved in the Old Testament for the translation of the word Yahweh. In other words, it's a divine title.

And so, we could spend a lot more time looking at the New Testament, and to see the Biblical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity. It is there, B.B. Warfield, great Presbyterian theologian of the earlier part of this century, could say that the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ is all the way through the New Testament. And he's right.

Even a little passage, and let me just conclude one little passage and then move on into the fourth century. Even a little passage when Jesus predicts the coming of the end. He says, on that day, the Son of Man will send out His angels.

And Warfield says, what does that little possessive pronoun, His angels, tell us about the Son of Man, or Jesus? Who is this One who owns angels? Who bid them do this, and they do it. Is He not a divine person and being? And so the fourth century, as we move into it now, as it begins to defend the deity of the Spirit and the Son, and we want to focus our attention initially on this, is not doing something that is foreign to the New Testament. It is bringing out and summarizing what is at the heart of the New Testament witness.

That this One who is fully man is also fully God. Now down until the beginning of the fourth century, the deity of Christ is largely unquestioned. If you look at the history of the Church between the New Testament period to the beginning of the fourth century, there is very little struggle or debate about the deity of Christ.

His humanity, yes, the Gnostics denied the humanity of Jesus. But His deity is something that is largely assumed. But in the fourth century, there arose the teaching we call Arianism.

A-R-I-A-N-I-S-M. Arianism. And the propagator of it, at least in its early form, is a man named Arius.

A-R-I-U-S. We know very little about his life prior to his appearance on the scene of history. This is typical of most of the early Church figures.

It is reckoned he was born somewhere around 218. He is born in Egypt. He is Egyptian.

Becomes an elder in the Church at Alexandria, presumably after he has studied in Antioch. There are a number of his letters that have been preserved. And in one of them he mentions studying under a man named Lucian of Antioch.

And Antioch would have been in what is now modern Syria. And so there is a period of time in which he is outside of Egypt. But he comes upon the scene of history around the year 318, when he begins to teach publicly in a church in Alexandria that there was a time when the son did not exist.

There was a time when the father was not the father, because he did not have a son. There was a time when the words everlasting and eternal only belonged to the father. And they really do not belong to the son.

The son, he could say, is not everlasting or co-everlasting with the father. The son, he could say, was created by the father as a perfectly immutable creature. In other words, for Arius, the term God properly applies only to the father, not to the son.

He sent some of his teachings to the bishop of Alexandria, a man named Alexander. He is to remember, Alexander of Alexandria. And Alexander of Alexandria's response was blunt and sharp and immediate.

The son is eternal, he emphasized, as eternal as the father. There was never a time that the father was without the son. As such, the son must be fully God.

Arius was summoned by Alexander and a number of other key leaders in Alexandria to a meeting. Basically, a private meeting where they wanted to find out his views in detail. Would he recant? He would not.

Finally, a synod is called of around 200 bishops and elders in Egypt and Libya. Libya being the area, at least in the Roman nomenclature. And these 100 or so elders and bishops drew up a statement which condemned and repudiated Arius' views.

Now, at this point, Arius could have had a number of options. One option was, he could have recanted. He could have recognized that a significant block of church leaders had rejected his teaching and maybe he should rethink and reconsider.

He does another option, though, and that is he takes the controversy outside of Egypt and spreads it across the eastern Mediterranean. He writes a letter to a man named Eusebius of Nicomedia. And Eusebius was a bishop in Nicomedia, which is in northwestern Turkey today.

And Eusebius had the ear of Constantine. He was, as you look at his career, a very worldly, wise churchman. A man who took advantage of the sudden influence the church now had because of Constantine's embrace of Christianity.

And Eusebius championed Arius' views. In fact, Arius disappears very early on in the whole discussion and struggle. And it's Eusebius of Nicomedia who is the main propagator of Arianism for at least another 10, 15 years.

Where and how Arius ends up, we really do not know for sure. One of the great opponents of Arianism, Athanasius, has a tract or a book on the end of Arius. And it's almost very similar to the sort of end of Judas in the book of Acts and the Gospel of Matthew.

But as, while the end of Judas is historically accurate and reliable, this tract by Athanasius, most historians have questions about whether or not Arius actually ended up dying the way that Athanasius reports. But the key thing to note here is that Arius disappears pretty quickly after becoming the focus of controversy. Eusebius of Nicomedia, a man of great influence at the court of Constantine, takes up the cajons, as it were, for Arius.

Now what is especially difficult about the Arian controversy is the fact that Arius could actually use the term, as would his followers, use the term God of Christ. He could say, yes, the Son is God. But then when he was pressed, he's not God in the way the Father is God.

He's God in the sense that he is above all other creatures. He was the first of the Father's creation. He is perfect.

He is immutable. He has never experienced any sort of fall or anything like that. In other words, he's like an angel.

But in the heart of Arius' thinking, the Son is a creature, even though he may be the highest of all creatures. Eventually, as this controversy moves out of Egypt and begins to envelop the church in the eastern Mediterranean, eventually, in the summer of 325, a council is called at Nicaea. Nicaea is spelled, the old way of spelling it was N-I-C-A-E-A.

More recently, the little A-E combination has been dropped out of English, as I'm sure you're aware. Medieval, for instance, had it. And Nicaea is often simply spelled N-I-C-E-A.

A little village, not far from the contemporary Istanbul, what was once Constantinople. And about 220 bishops and elders came to this council. It's a very, very important council.

Their fare, their accommodation, was paid by Constantine himself. Constantine was deeply disturbed by this controversy. And his disturbance was based on the fact that he had embraced Christianity, and he believed it was going to be something that could unify the empire.

And suddenly now, he finds, at least from his vantage point, the church ranked in two. And so he wanted to see a resolution of the problem. And in that council, there was eventually drawn up, in the summer of 325, the document we call the Nicene Creed.

And on the notes that I've given you, and you turn into the second page, there is a page there with two creeds. The Nicene Creed, and then a thing called, it's quite a mouthful, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. And I dare say, if you have ever been raised, if you've been raised as I was, I was raised Roman Catholic, and I remember repeating this creed, which was called the Nicene Creed.

Now the creed that has come down in the Roman Catholic Church, of the Orthodox Churches, the Anglican Church, I studied at Wycliffe College in Toronto, Evangelical Anglican School, and other denominational bodies also recite the creed, and call it the Nicene Creed. The creed that is generally called the Nicene Creed today is actually the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. The real Nicene Creed, and there's very little difference between the two, as we will see, the real Nicene Creed is the first document there.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible. The first article centers on God the Father. And you can see very clearly, if you recall when we went through the struggle against Gnosticism, and the place of Irenaeus, and Irenaeus' use of creedal statements to fight Gnosticism, you can remember that his creed, or his statement of faith, began the same way.

And that first article goes all the way back to the Church's struggle against Gnosticism. The assertion of one God, who is the maker of heaven and earth. And it's interesting today, I won't get into this in any detail, it's interesting today that that article again is under attack.

That if there's one article under attack, in the creedal statement here, it will be the first article, and the assertion of God as Father. And that could take us off into quite a discussion, and I'm not going to go there. That's the first article.

The second article is the critical one, and that deals with the Son. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only begotten, that is from the substance of the Father. A better word for substance there is the word being.

And this is an older translation, and the word substance actually was a word that was regularly understood as the word being. Today I'm not sure it conveys that idea, and I think a better translation would be the word being of the Father. God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance, or of one being with the Father.

Through whom all things came into being, things in heaven, things on earth, who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered. Now the last part of that article, just to indicate, again comes from the Church's struggle with Gnosticism. The Church is incorporating, as it were, some of its past struggles and insights, and the affirmation of the true humanity

of Christ, his incarnation, his suffering and dying, his ascension in the flesh to heaven, and so on is incorporated there in the last part.

The critical part though, in the struggle against Arianism, is the affirmation that the Lord Jesus Christ is from the being of the Father, and he is true God from true God. He is begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. And Arian could affirm some of the statements there.

He could affirm, for instance, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He could affirm that Jesus Christ is begotten from the Father. When he affirmed begotten, he would understand it to mean created.

He could affirm that Jesus Christ is the only begotten. He could affirm that Jesus Christ is God. But there are a number of statements here he could not affirm.

And those statements go to the heart of the New Testament witness about the Lord Jesus Christ. Who is Jesus Christ? He is the one who is begotten from the Father. What that statement is meant to convey is that while, as the statement will go on to affirm, that the Son shares all of the divine characteristics of the Father, of God, there is one sense in which he is different.

In other words, there is in the Godhead, and at this point we're thinking only of the two, there are the two persons, the Father and the Son. They are not the same and identical. They share the same being, but they are not the same person.

This is very difficult, but it is central to the affirmation of biblical Christianity. The God whom we worship is one who is three, and yet one God. A God who is three and one.

Three persons sharing one being. And it is something, ultimately, I think, that we, in finite and fallen creaturehood, and our reason cannot fully, fully grasp. It should not surprise us.

Because if God is to be God, he is to be expected to surpass our reason and our understanding. And then a statement goes on to affirm that he is true God from true God. All that the Father is, the Son is.

Except for this one point, the Son is begotten, the Father is not begotten. Now if you ask and press them, what does that mean? And I'm not sure, and I've read a lot in this area, I'm not sure I've ever come up with any of these early church fathers explaining it in a way that, yes, I can fully grasp what's going on here. What I think that this is doing, this statement, begotten, is an affirmation of the person.

The Son and the Father are not the identical person. Remember when we looked at Tertullian, that also is heretical. It's the heresy of modalism.

But the Son is truly God from truly God. He is begotten, he is not made. He is not a creature.

And this is the heart of the document. He shares the same being as the Father. He is a one being or one substance with the Father.

He is God, fully God, the eternal God. And as Alexander of Alexandria said, and he was not present, well he was present, sorry, at this council that drew up this statement, there was never a time the Father was not a Father. He was always with His Son.

And the Son is eternal. He is true God. The New Testament, again, if these men were asked, where does the New Testament affirm that? It affirms that in a number of places.

Romans 9.5, where the Apostle Paul says, talking about the Messiah coming from the nation of Israel, blessed God forever and ever. He affirms it in Titus 2.13. We are awaiting the coming of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is affirmed by the Daudine Thomas.

Poor man, he's had that epithet, doubting, for the last 2,000 years. But he comes to faith when he falls at the feet of the One whom he had known as Jesus of Nazareth and confesses, My Lord and My God. And so the New Testament witness here is, I think, rightly and accurately summarized.

Now notice before we move on, there's that little third article, and we believe in the Holy Spirit. Nothing more said. And you might ask why.

And the answer that one would be given is that the issue of the deity of the Spirit was not being debated. Arius did not believe in the Spirit's deity. Press, he would say, that the Father created the Son, and then the Son created the Spirit, and then the Spirit of the Son created everything else.

But it was not a center of debate, as it would become in the 360s and 370s. In the 320s and 330s and 340s, the center of debate is the deity of the Son. And then the final statement, which is really not part of the Creed, but is a kind of an appendix, rebukes or anathematizes, that's a very strong word, anathematizes, those who say there was when He was not.

In other words, there was a time when the Son did not exist. Before being born, He was not. Or He came into existence out of nothing.

They affirm that these statements applied to the Divine Son are biblically wrong. Now, this should have ended the controversy. Constantine actually affirmed this, and said that this was, as far as he was concerned, the end of the discussion.

It should have ended the discussion. But it did not. And the debate will drag on for another 50 or so years.

And part of the reason for the debate was, again, a man like Eusebius of Nicomedia, who could not confess this, but was a man who had significant influence with Constantine. Within a few years of this Creed being drawn up, within three years, in fact, one of the key men who had drawn this up, Alexander of Alexandria, had died. And he'd been replaced by a man who'd been a deacon, or Alexander's secretary at the Council of Nicaea, Athanasius, one of the great theologians.

And he was a young man at the time. There was great debate as to whether or not this young man should be made the Bishop of Alexandria, a very, very important position of leadership. He was probably a native Egyptian.

He was North African. He was not Greek, as is often the thought. Greek is his mother tongue in many respects.

But there is a clear indication that he is quite proficient in Coptic, which is the Egyptian language. And he probably was North African. And he becomes the brunt of attack of the Arians.

And he is pressed, after this Creed had been drawn up, to receive Arius back into the Church. If Arius could confess this, Arius could not. But Athanasius says on a number of those occasions, he says there was no way he was ever going to receive Arius back into the Church, unless he professed the Nicene Creed.

In fact, he said if he was forced into this, he'd cut off the wheat supply of the rest of the Roman Empire. Egypt was the breadbasket, much like the prairies have been. For Canada, Egypt was the breadbasket of the Roman Empire.

And the opponents of Athanasius, Arians, heard those sort of statements. And they went to Constantine, and they told him, Constantine is actually threatened to cut off the bread supply of the Empire. Well, Constantine demanded Athanasius come and see him.

Alongside that charge, there was one that was a lot more serious. And now I have to back up a little, and you need to follow closely. During the persecution, the Great Persecution, which we looked at last week, which came to an end in 312, but which raged in the eastern part of the Roman Empire for eight or nine years, there was a schism that took place in the Church in Egypt.

The schism was over. What happens? How should the Church deal with those who deny Christ in the midst of persecution? In the year 306-307, two leading elders in the Church in Alexandria were imprisoned and about to be tried for their faith. One of them was Peter of Alexandria, the predecessor of Alexander.

Another of them was a man named Malatius. And they got to suffering in the prison. What will happen when we emerge as a Church victorious from this struggle with the Empire? And that alone tells you something of the confidence and optimism these men had.

And they were going back and forth. And finally Alexander said, well, or Peter rather said, and they were talking about what should we do with those who have denied the faith. And Peter said, well, we will treat them the way our Lord treated Peter.

Those who profess repentance and is genuine, we will receive them back and welcome them back as brothers and sisters. Malatius said, absolutely no way. Absolutely no way.

We've gone through the heat of the fires of persecution. These people have denied Christ. Maybe God will forgive them, but we cannot extend that forgiveness to them in this life.

They can never be fully embraced in the Church again. The discussion in the prison cell got so heated that finally Malatius got up and drew a line in the dirt. And he said, everybody here who's on my side, come over to this side of the line.

And right there in the prison cell there was a schism. Both Peter and Malatius died as martyrs. But the schism persisted.

And the followers of Malatius, the Malatians, did not like Athanasius. Because Athanasius was a successor of Alexander. And Alexander was the bishop who succeeded Peter.

And they didn't like Athanasius. And so the Aryans came to the Malatians and kind of got together. And the Malatians, theologically, were orthodox.

But it's interesting how politics can make strange bedfellows. And these two groups who didn't agree with each other theologically, and yet they had a common enemy in Athanasius. They agreed to fight him.

And they concocted a story that Athanasius then actually had a Malatian bishop, Arsenius, murdered. Well, that was a capital crime. So, Athanasius is taken off to Constantine.

He's got two main charges against him. He's threatened to cut off the bread supply of the empire. And he's murdered a bishop.

Meanwhile, Athanasius' supporters have been scouring the countryside and they have found Arsenius holed up in a house, actually, in Alexandria. And they bring him into court with a kind of a cloak over his face. So nobody can see him.

So the charges are raised and Athanasius insists, Yes, I threatened to cut off the bread supply of the empire and I stand by that. That if you insist, Constantine, that the Arius has been received back in the church, there's no way I'm going to receive him back in the church. The other charges, well, the other charges are completely false.

Those opponents say, well, give us proof. And lo and behold, they trot out Arsenius, pull off the cloak, and there he was. And that charge was thrown out of court.

But Constantine was so annoyed with Athanasius about the bread supply, he was exiled for three years. He was sent to an internal exile in northern, north-west-eastern France. Or what was then Gaul.

It was the first of five exiles this man underwent for the sake of his defense of the deity of the sun. Constantine died in 337. He was succeeded by a son, Constantius, who was a flaming Arian.

He didn't like Athanasius either. He exiled him at least once. And then a second time, descended upon Alexandria, determined to rid himself of this man who continued to defend the deity of the sun.

Again, remember the problem we looked at last week. What happens when the person who's ruling your country disagrees with you theologically? You're in danger of being persecuted. And Athanasius was being persecuted by a man who claimed to be a Christian, but was an Arian.

It's got a humorous twist to it. Apparently Athanasius was preaching at a worship service in the church in Alexandria, and he was told that the police were searching for him. And he needed to get out right then and there.

And so he stumbles out the back door, gets into a boat, and he's heading down the Nile. Word gets to the police, yes, Athanasius is on the Nile, catch him. The police boat is coming down the Nile pretty fast, and it draws ahead of Athanasius' boat, just a wee bit, and one of the police yell over to Athanasius, Have you seen Athanasius? He obviously didn't know what he looked like.

Athanasius yells back, Yes, he's just ahead of you. And his boat actually was just a wee bit ahead of the police boat, and the police boat put on all speed, obviously with rowers, and Athanasius is able to escape. Hides out in the desert for six years.

Now why did Athanasius, and he went through incredible persecution, persecution from Arians who were in power, why did he maintain his conviction that the Son is fully God? Well, a number of reasons. First of all, he believed that the scriptures assert this. For instance, this is his reason from John 16, verse 15.

The statement where Jesus says, All that belongs to the Father is mine. Think about that. All that belongs to the Father is mine.

If he is not fully God, that is arrogance and blasphemy. All that the Father, that belongs to the Father is mine. Or John 17, verse 10.

This is Jesus praying to the Father. All you have is mine. Well, Athanasius says, He clearly indicates the Son shares all the divine attributes of the Father.

The Father is light, he writes. The Son is radiance and true light. The Father is true God.

The Son is true God. Of all that the Father has, there is nothing which does not belong to the Son. A second argument that Athanasius made, and he's got quite a number of them, and you can read them in his writing, that he makes is that in the baptismal formula, we are baptized into the name of the singular name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

He argues, and I think again rightly, from the singularity of the name, that this is one being into whom we are baptized. Strange it would be, he said, that if we are baptized into the name of God, a creature, if the Son is a creature, and a lesser creature. Very, very odd.

He rightly sees that baptismal formula is more than simply a name that is pronounced over the one baptized. It is a declaration of faith. That whether you are committed to believer's baptism or infant baptism, is ultimately a declaration of faith in that one who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In fact, I think a very strong case can be made that in the New Testament, the name of God is Father, Son, or the Lord Jesus Christ. And then thirdly, Athanasius rightly recognized that if the Son is not fully God, our salvation is in peril. He rightly saw that in Scripture, salvation is of God alone.

All the way through Scripture is this affirmation. It is God who saves. There is no helping man.

No helping creatures. It is God who saves. If the Son is not fully God, he cannot save.

In fact, I would venture to argue that Athanasius' defense of the deity of the Son comes down to those two points. The one about the baptismal formula and the one about the issue of salvation. Some historians, and not in recent years, but some older historians in the century would look back at this debate and say, oh, this is all high-throne theology trying to penetrate the secrets of the being of God.

No, it's not that at all. It's dealing with what does it mean to be saved? How is a person saved? Who is the Savior? If the Son is not fully God, he cannot be Savior. And so the Church, the entire Church, owes this North African, or this Egyptian, an enormous debt.

He would die in 373, and not yet seeing the victory that would come, but he had paved the way for what becomes the Nicene or Constantinople Creed or the full affirmation of the Trinity. Now let me turn to that, and we'll have to deal with this very briefly, unfortunately. His mantle falls upon a man named Basil of Caesarea.

They never met, they corresponded. Caesarea, there were many towns called Caesarea, but the Caesarea of which we're talking is in Turkey, central Turkey. The Turkish highlands today, or the Anatolian highlands, in those days called Cappadocia.

And Basil of Caesarea came from aristocracy. Came from very different roots, one suspects, than Athanasius. Athanasius, probably a lower middle class in his roots.

Basil, definitely upper class aristocracy. His grandparents on both sides had been persecuted. He had lost a couple of his grandparents as martyrs.

In fact, all of his family property had been confiscated during the great persecution of 303 to 312. Basil studied initially in the University of Athens, and he intended to become a teacher of rhetoric, one of the great professions in the ancient world. A profession like law or medicine would be today.

But he came back to his homeland in Cappadocia, intending to set up shop as a great teacher of rhetoric. Rhetoric is the art of public service. And his sister, Macrina, who had been converted, began to share her faith with him, and urged him to think about the faith as if it were his hospitals.

The only hospitals in the Roman world were those attached to the Roman army. They were military, field hospitals. They were not hospitals for the average person.

If you were wealthy, you were employed, you actually had living in your employ a physician. But most of the empire had no recourse at all to any sort of medicine, medical help. And so it's the Christians who first found hospitals, and Basil is the founder of a number of very important hospitals.

It is also Basil who defends the deity of the spirit. He writes a book called *On the Holy Spirit*. That's the book, the title, *On the Holy Spirit*.

It's interesting how there had not been, up to this point in time, a book on the person of the Holy Spirit. There had been many books on Christ. Nothing on the person of the Spirit.

It's also interesting, and I don't know how to explain this, it's interesting that the first book on baptism was written around the year 190 by Petunian. There is no book on the Lord's Supper until the 800s. Explain that, it's curious.

Anyway, Basil is the first to write a book devoted to the Spirit. And he does for the Spirit what Athanasius had done for the Son. He argues and shows that the Spirit deity is there fully in the pages of Scripture.

He shows, for instance, that the Spirit, 1 Corinthians 2, verse 10, is the one who searches the depths of God. Who is this one who knows the deep things of God? The Spirit is the one who enables men and women to confess Christ, 1 Corinthians 12, verse 3. The Spirit is the one, 1 Corinthians 12, verse 11, who gives spiritual gifts as He wills. The giving of gifts is not up to the church or men, but is up to the Spirit.

The Spirit is omnipresent, Psalm 139, verse 7. The Spirit is implicitly called God by Peter, in that very well-known scene in the book of Acts, early on in the book of Acts, where Peter says to Ananias and Sapphira, you have lied to God, when they kept back a portion of the money and claimed to have given it all. You have lied to God, and then again, you have lied to the Holy Spirit. In fact, this is the way how Basil speaks of the Spirit.

He perfects all other beings, but He Himself lacks nothing. He does not grow or increase, but is immediate fullness, omnipresent. From Him comes foreknowledge of the future, understanding of mysteries, distribution of spiritual gifts, everlasting joy.

Such, to mention only a few of the many, are the conceptions about the Spirit, which we have been taught by the scriptures to hold about His greatness, His dignity, and His activities. Basil would die in 379, two years before the Council of Constantinople, which published this statement, which is often described as the Nicene Creed, but technically, it's the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. You might want to read all of it later.

We're only going to read the third article, dealing with the Spirit. You'll see that the first and second articles are very similar to the earlier statement of the Nicene Creed. This statement we're going to read now, the third article, is one of the key landmarks in the history of the Church.

After the affirmation of the Deity of the Father and the Son, there is this affirmation of the Spirit. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver. Notice the title.

If He is called Lord, He is divine. He is the giver of life, created life and spiritual life. He proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and Son is together worshiped and together glorified, who spoke through the prophets, and then goes on to look at areas of the Spirit's work.

We believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic Church. We confess one baptism to the remission of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world.

But dealing with that statement of the Spirit, He is one who is worshiped and glorified. You do not do that to a creature. That is only appropriate to God.

If worship, and I would venture to say that this is one of the key reasons why the Church affirms the doctrine of the Trinity, is because they knew from Scripture that the Son and the Spirit are to be worshiped. If one worships the Son and the Spirit, then they are God. In effect, if you say that the Son and the Spirit are not God and yet worthy of worship, it is hero worship, and worsted is idolatry.

And this statement then is probably the key statement from the early Church in the doctrine of the Trinity. It is a landmark. It is a heritage that has been passed down to us.

And if we had had more time, we could have gone into greater length to show why, I think, biblically based, the Spirit is rightly described as God and a full member of the Trinity. It is something we tamper with at our own peril. Well, let me stop here and ask if there are any questions.

It is twenty-five after and maybe we have time for about five or so minutes of questions. Yeah, Hebrews 1 verses 1 to 3 is very, very important in the way in which the early Church writers and theologians develop a theology of who the Son is. Yes, Athanasius would say the unpardonable sin is the refusal to confess the Son of God.

This could get us into a long debate. I would say in the context in which Jesus names that, it is the refusal, it is the looking at the works of Christ and saying they are from the devil. It is tied very much to Christ.

It is the steadfast refusal to see in Christ the hand and revelation and God himself. I think it is focused on the Son. And again, because of the consistent New Testament emphasis, the Son does not have the Father.

No, that is Eusebius of Caesarea. This is Eusebius of Nicomedia. So, they are two different.

Now, Eusebius of Caesarea, some of his theology was pretty woolly too. Athanasius is kind of a pretty strong comment. He says he should have stuck to writing history and never got himself into theology.

His theology was not the greatest in some respects. He leans that way. He leans that way.

I would want to say no, but he leans that way. As a historian, he is fabulous. As a theologian, he should have done what Athanasius said.

He should have stuck to writing history. Doing church history, I know this in my thought, but doing church history and doing theology are two different exercises. Very, very different.

I think that I should have been repeating the questions for the tape. The question was, does the passage in John 4 that God is a spirit have any reference to this? I do not think it does. I think that is an affirmation about the nature of who God is.

God as the triune being. I do not think it is a reference to the... Athanasius, if I recall correctly, does use that verse, but I do not think he is rightly exegeting it or rightly interpreting it. I think it is a statement about that God is not a corporeal being.

He does not have a body. He is spirit. That is very interesting.

I have never seen that. But I think there probably is some validity. Certainly in the New Testament you have the... One more question and then we will break.

The question was would I like to comment on the term homo ubios, and that is the term of one substance, one being with the Father. The word is not a biblical word. That is obvious.

And some of the Arians, their response was, hey, this is not a biblical word. Not a word we can find in scripture. And yet it is, if one affirms, first of all, the monotheistic faith, that there is one God, maker of heaven and earth, and yet if in the early church's experience, and as it listened to the teaching of Jesus, and as it responded to his teaching and his person and his work with worship, who is this one who they were worshipping? He has to be God.

And so there is this tension of the affirmation of one God, and yet Jesus also is God. To me, one of the greatest proofs of the deity of Christ in the New Testament, that those early believers thought of Christ as God, is they worshipped him. It is all the way through the affirmation that one day the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow.

Or the Revelation 4 and 5, the worship that is given to Christ. These were Jews. They weren't polytheistic Gentiles, just fresh out of a polytheistic environment.

They were Jews who had it beaten into them. And in one sense, that, by some of the problems they had gone through back when they had embraced polytheism, back in the 400, 500, 600 B.C., and they have learned the lesson there is one God in a monotheistic faith. These are the ones who responded to Jesus with worship.

And how then, and I think rightly this term explains, he is a one being with the Father. The term, though, as I say, caused some dispute because the Arian said, well, it's not. The Son shares the divine being to the full.

Colossians 2, verse 8 says the same. In him dwells the Godhead fully. I don't know if that's fully.

Was there something else you were looking for? Well, let's break here. It's 25, so we'll break for 10 minutes or so. Well, we'll get back.

If one were to name the three great bequests of the early church to the contemporary church or the church down through history, certainly the doctrine of the Trinity would be one. Augustine's life and theology would be another. We want to look at those next week.

And then the third thing that one would have to name would be the canon. What we call the New Testament, although the word canon embraces the entirety of the Old and the New Testaments. 66 books, 39 in the Old, 27 in the New.

Now, the term canon, and you need to note its spelling, it's got one N, not two N's. The two N type of canon is the one we fire. The one N comes from the Greek word kanon, K-A-N-O-N, kanon, which actually probably ultimately goes back to an Assyrian word, which described a reed or something that was straight, a ruler.

And then it has, from that basic meaning, the idea of something straight, an actual reed, the plants, it comes to have the idea of something that is upright, something that is straight, something that is the norm or the standard. And it's in this sense that the scriptures are described as the canon. They are the norm, the standard by which the church tests, beliefs, and doctrine, and tests experience, and so on.

The scriptures are the norm by which thinking and practice are determined. Now, in our time together in the second hour, what we want to do is look at three things. We want to look very briefly at the Old Testament as part of the canon, and that very briefly.

We want to look at the New Testament canon in more detail, and there the key word I want to think about and focus on is the word authority. And then we want to affirm that the canon is closed. And we do not, as Christians, affirm an open canon, but a closed canon, and the question we want to answer very briefly again is why.

Now, right from the beginning, Christians were a people of the book, like the Jewish people. And the book they affirmed and listened to, they listened to in the preaching of the word, they used in worship, they consulted for wisdom in daily life, they consulted for wisdom in theological debates, and the book that they consulted was that which we know as the Old Testament scriptures. By the days of the early church, the Old Testament scriptures were a closed book.

There were 39 books of the Old Testament. And there is no debate, and you see nothing, no hint of debate, in the New Testament at all, I'm thinking here of the gospel accounts, among the Jews, of any discussion about whether or not some of those Old Testament books should be in or not in. The issue was basically decided, although it would not be until the councils, and you have it there on the notes there, the councils of Jamnia in 1918 AD, that final codification was laid down that the 39 books that we know as the Old Testament are the Old Testament, they are the Bible for the Jewish people, and nothing more.

There was some debate among the rabbis about four books, the book of Ezekiel occasioned some debate, because Ezekiel's description of the temple was so unlike the Pentateuch's description, and that caused some debate. There is no mention of the name of God explicitly in the book of Esther, although I don't know how anybody could read the book of Esther and not see that book is really a story about God and God's providence. There's no mention of God in the book of Solomon either explicitly, and that caused some debate.

Ecclesiastes also caused some debate. At times it was felt that some of the wisdom fell short of the words and statements of the rest of the scripture. But as with any book in the scriptures, the realization came that the portion or text has to be seen in light of the whole, and any portion of Ecclesiastes has to be seen in light of the whole book.

And you find no hints among Jesus or his Jewish opponents, some of the Pharisees, there's never any debate about should this book be in or should it be out. There's debate about the scriptures, debate about the interpretation of scripture, debate about the use of scripture, but not a debate about the scripture. And so the early church then inherited these 39 books as their scriptures.

They would use all of them in those early, early days, before the church began to branch out. So not surprisingly, they retained that heritage. More importantly, the Lord Jesus, throughout his ministry, has a reverence for the scriptures.

He questions and attacks numerous areas of tradition. One thing you cannot describe our Lord as, as a reactionary or a traditionalist. He is a radical in numerous areas.

One who calls upon us, likewise, to radically give our lives completely over to him. But he never once has any question about the divinity in the sense of the divine inspiration of the Old Testament scriptures. They are the word of God.

For instance, Luke 24, and some of these passages you may want to simply listen to. I'll cite a few, quite a number, but some of you may simply want to just note. Luke 24, after his resurrection, Luke 24, 25-27.

Then Jesus said to them, You are such foolish people. You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the scriptures wasn't equally predicted by the prophets. The Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his time of glory.

Then Jesus quoted passages from the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining what all the scriptures have said about himself. Or Luke 24 again, verses 44-48. Then he said, When I was with you before, I told you everything written about me by Moses, and the prophets and the Psalms must all come true.

And then he opened their minds to understand these many scriptures. And he said, Yes, it was written long ago. The Messiah must suffer and die and rise again from the dead on the third day, and so on.

Notice he goes back to the scriptures, and he uses there the traditional threefold division of the Old Testament scriptures. The Old Testament scriptures is the Jews' divinement. There was the law, or Moses, that's the Pentateuch, the first five books.

And then there was the prophets. And the prophets encompassed, that division encompassed Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the minor prophets. And then there was the rest.

It's called here the Psalms encompassed the Psalms, but also encompassed all the other writings. And it's interesting, and you find this reflection of the order of the Old Testament books. Jesus reflects it here.

First the law, then the prophets were the next ones in order, and then the rest of the writings, so that the Old Testament of the Jews in Jesus' day ended with 2 Chronicles. That's why, and you might simply want to note this, that's why in Luke 11:50, Jesus says that it has always been that when prophets have come among the people of Israel that they've been persecuted, and have shed the blood of the prophets from Abel unto Zechariah. And Zechariah, though, was not the last prophet chronologically.

But he is the last prophet canonically. He's the last prophet mentioned in 2 Chronicles. And if, as was the case, the Old Testament in Jesus' day ended with 2 Chronicles, Jesus is encompassing the entire book.

In other words, our arrangement then is somewhat different from the arrangement in Jesus' day. But the point here is this, that Jesus regularly turned to the Old Testament scriptures to indicate and to substantiate and affirm what he was teaching. And therefore, not surprisingly, that the early church would also embrace the Old Testament as canonical, as a norm, and as a standard.

The big question is, though, why did the church feel impelled to add another book? Or rather, another 27 books, which we call the New Testament. Why did the early church add this collection of writings to the Old Testament? Now, there's a lot of ways that we can approach the canon, and I dithered back and forth as to how I was going to do the lecture tonight. And one of the ways that we could do this lecture is look at it in terms of the various lists of the New Testament books that the early church affirmed as canonical.

And there are lists in the 2nd century, the Muratorian Canon, for instance, or the list that Irenaeus gives. Irenaeus has a listing which basically includes all the books except for 2, 2 Peter, if I recall correctly, and Jude. And there are other lists, until finally you come to the year 367, where Athanasius draws up a list that is identical with our list of the New Testament books.

And some writers argue that the continent of the New Testament was not closed until that point. No, it was open until that point. To me, that's a misreading of the history of the early church.

Because the critical issue is not to find a list that has all the exact books, but the critical thing is to find how did the early church view all of those books that they eventually came to say were the canon of the New Testament. And if you go back, you find the early church recognizes the authority of these books. There are debates, and we'll see there are debates about 7, and only 7. And there are reasons for the debates.

But there are different ways, in other words, there are different ways of approaching this issue of the canon of the New Testament. Let me stress two things. One is, or let me stress one thing, and it's very, very important.

Evangelicals have generally neglected this whole issue. The focus has been inspiration, and not the issue of the canon. But the canon, I think, is you often encounter people, well, why do you believe those 20 symbols? I've heard that there's another book, like the Gospel of Thomas.

Well, why is Matt in there? And these are questions we should be able to answer. But the way I've chosen to approach this issue is around the word authority. And as I said, I want to stress that there are a number of ways of approaching this, and we could do a whole course of lectures on the canon.

And I have one kick at the can, so to speak. And so I thought that I'd approach it from this issue of authority. Why was it the early church felt compelled to add 27 more books? It's because of the authority that they saw in, first of all, the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

These are things that are not going to be new to most of you, but Matthew 7, 28 to 29, one of the things that surprised the hearers of our Lord the first time in those early days, they were amazed at his teaching. Matthew 7, 28, after he finished his speaking of the Sermon on the Mount, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, for he taught as one who had real authority, quite unlike the teachers of religious law. There was a distinction that they sensed between the Pharisees and the scribes in the way they taught and the way our Lord taught.

He, Christ, had authority. Well, how did that come out? Well, consider these sort of statements. The cluster of these are all in Matthew.

Matthew 24, 35. Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will remain forever. Heaven and earth will flee.

That which is most solid in our experience, although the recent experience of some nations of earthquakes may belie that statement, but that which is most solid, heaven and earth, flowers come and go with the seasons, and they're transitory, and fashions come and go. Men and women die eventually. Buildings eventually, after a few centuries, crumble.

But heaven and earth, that which is most, most solid in the universe that human beings know, all of it may go. But Jesus affirms, my words will remain. My words are not merely produced, as it were, by the vocal cords of his larynx and so on, but, and therefore our breath being spoken in, they are words that will remain.

Or, think about this statement in Matthew 7, just before the one that we read earlier there about the authority of Christ. Matthew 7, 24 to 26. Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is wise like a person who builds a house on solid rock.

And though the rain comes in torrents, and the floodwaters rise, and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it's built on rock. But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will fall with a mighty crash.

In other words, your eternal destiny is measured against what you do with the words of Jesus. And it's a plain, flat affirmation. And no wonder the crowd sense there's an authority here.

None of the Pharisees or the Rabbis or the Scribes ever spoke in this way, that the eternal destiny of their hearers was dependent on how they responded, as it were, to their words. They always drew their and referred their hearers back to the Old Testament Scriptures. But Jesus is freshly affirming.

He goes back to the Scriptures to base off in his affirmations and assertions, but just as much of his teaching is fresh and new, and is centered on his words. Thus, in the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, a number of times he will say, in the past you have heard it said, but I say to you. You never find any Rabbi ever doing that in Jesus' day.

A little phrase, I say to you. To his hearers it was an unmistakable assertion of divine authority. Or look at the last words recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew 28, 18-20, where Jesus gives the Great Commission.

We've already alluded to it in the baptismal formula. I've been given complete authority on heaven and earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given them. In other words, again, the authority of Christ's teaching. The authority of his words.

Not surprisingly then, in the early church, if you look into the Apostle teaching, as you get, for instance, in 1 Timothy 5, where the Apostle Paul refers his readers, then and now, 1 Timothy and the churches in Ephesus, to these scriptures. Notice what he says in 1 Timothy 5, verse 18. He's dealing with the issue of elders receiving remuneration for their labors.

And he says this, The scripture says, That's Deuteronomy 25. And in another place, That's not an Old Testament text. The words are identical to a passage in the Gospel of Luke.

In other words, here, Paul says, Scripture says, Old Testament text cited, and the words of Jesus. And so my point is this, is that it's not surprising that the authority that attended Christ's words was recognized by his followers. It's not surprising then that there were, as the records of his life and teaching and ministry were drawn up, the Gospel accounts, that these were reckoned or seen to be invested with the authority that had attended Christ's.

In other words, the Gospels, because they record the teaching and ministry of Christ, have that same imprint, as it were, of authority. But what is also significant to note is that Jesus passes on that authority to a select circle of men, the apostles. Again, a number of passages.

This time from the Gospel of John, in what is known as the Farewell Discourse, John 14 through 16. And Jesus is talking about the coming of the Spirit. In John 14, 26, he says, When the Father sends the Counselors, my representative, and by the Counselor I mean the Holy Spirit, He will teach you everything and remind you of everything I myself have told you.

Or John 16, verse 13. When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. And I've already mentioned, and I would argue, or defend the view at some length, that what those verses are primarily referring to is the inscripturation or the writing down of the New Testament Scriptures.

That the apostles did experience the Spirit reminding them as they wrote down the Scriptures. They did experience the Spirit guiding them into all truth as they wrote down the Scriptures. In other words, Jesus gives to a select group of individuals authority.

Again, John 15, 26 to 27. I will send you the Counselor, the Spirit of Truth. He will come to you from the Father and will tell you all about me.

And you must also tell others about me because you have been with me from the beginning. Or then as you move into the letters of the Apostle Paul, Ephesians chapter 2, verse 20. Ephesians 2, 20, as Paul is comparing the Church, the history of the Church, or the building of the Church, to a temple.

And he says this, Ephesians 2, verse 20. So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people.

You are members of God's family. We are his house. Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. One would expect that Christ alone is the foundation. But here Paul adds the apostles and prophets.

That their ministry is foundational. Why? Because the authority that Christ possessed, he gave to the apostles. And there is a good, very strong argument that the Greek term apostle actually is a translation of a Hebrew term.

Shaliak. The idea of one who goes as your representative. And that that person so fully represents you that what they say, you say.

And so the apostles are sent as the representatives of Christ. The select group of witnesses who carry with them the authority of Christ. Both in their oral words and in their written words.

So much so that the apostle Paul, as he thinks of the church, it is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. And from that point on, after the foundation has been laid, what you're building is superstructure, as it were. Or look at Paul himself, as you look through his ministry.

As he writes his letters, what do you see? For instance, and I'm going to choose about four or five little passages. 1 Corinthians chapter 14. This comes at the end of that long passage, the long discussion in chapters 12, 13 and 14 about the gifts of the Spirit.

And Paul's attempt to regulate what he saw as some disorder in the church of Corinth and to speak plainly to some in Corinth who said that there was one spiritual gift which was above all the other spiritual gifts and that was speaking in tongues. And Paul speaks to that issue very plainly. And then at the end of the chapter, and one suspects he might be thinking that somebody could respond to Paul and say, that's simply your words, Paul, but in the Spirit, the Spirit has given me different words.

Paul says this, 1 Corinthians 14, 37 and 38. If you claim to be a prophet or think you're very spiritual, you should recognize that what I'm saying is a command from the Lord Himself. If you do not recognize this, you will not be recognized.

In other words, if you do not recognize what Paul is speaking here and giving here as teaching from God, God will not recognize you. Very strong. There is an awareness on the part of the Apostle Paul of authority that God has given him.

If you reject Paul's teaching, you risk the displeasure of God. Or 1 Corinthians 7, verse 12. 1 Corinthians 7, 12.

1 Corinthians 7 is a long discourse on issues relating to marriage. And Paul has a number of statements in the early part of that chapter that deal with issues of divorce and remarriage. Statements which he can base on the teachings of Christ Himself.

Because Christ spoke to a couple of issues. But then in verse 12, he comes to the issue of a believer married to an unbeliever. And he doesn't have a word from the Lord.

And he says this, 1 Corinthians 7, 12. Now I will speak to the rest of you, though I do not have a direct command from the Lord. And you might be thinking, well, OK, Paul doesn't have a word from the Lord on this, the Lord Jesus.

He's going to give us his opinion. But then you jump down to verse 25. Now Paul raises the issue of unmarried women.

In the patriarchal culture of the ancient Roman Empire, men often were responsible for the marriage of their daughters and so on. And Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 7, 25. Now about the young women who are not yet married.

I do not have a command from the Lord for them. Thus, the Lord in his kindness has given me wisdom that can be trusted, and I'll share it with you. That's the New Living Translation.

Other translations, I think, probably capture it much more strongly. But Paul is in essence saying, well, what he's not saying is this. He's not saying, well, I don't have a word from the Lord on this one, but here's my opinion for what it's worth.

Take it and leave it. That's not what Paul's saying. What Paul is saying is, here is my opinion, and you must recall that I am one whom the Lord considers trustworthy.

That's very strong. I am so trustworthy that if the Lord Jesus were to speak to this issue, here are the words he would say. Where does Paul get authority from that? He gets it because he is among the select group of men who we call apostles.

He is an emissary of Christ. One who has been given the authority to speak the words as it were that Christ would speak into that situation. Or 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. And these sort of things are tucked away and they're easily glossed over, but they indicate, I think, the sense of authority the Apostle Paul had.

1 Thessalonians 4, 1 and 2. Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God as we have taught you. You are doing this already and we encourage you to do so more and more. For you remember what we taught you in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And especially that little phrase there in verse 2, what we taught you in the name of the Lord Jesus. What we gave you as a command from the Lord Jesus. He then goes on to rebuke the problem which presumably was happening of some believers being dragged back into the sexual mores of the Greco-Roman culture, which was immorality.

And he closes the passage in verse 8 with saying, anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human rules, but is rejecting God. And yet, as you read it, you rightly recognize, it's a man who's speaking to us. What Paul is saying is, these statements that you should not live in immorality, that you need to be careful to sanctify yourselves and how you treat your body.

Paul is saying, these aren't the words of a first century rabbi, converted rabbi. These are the words of God. Very, very strong language.

So it's not surprising, again, just as the Lord Jesus' words are regarded as scripture, 1 Timothy 5.18, that you find Paul's words being referred to as scripture. 2 Peter 3.15-16. Peter says, these are scriptures. And so that's a basic reason, as you launch into looking at the whole issue of the New Testament canon.

What impelled the early church to collect these books? It was because they, first of all, were invested with the authority of God. The Lord Jesus' words and deeds had an authority that was equal to the Old Testament. And the Gospels, as they were written, and they reflect that authority, and convey that authority, therefore, were on the same level as the Old Testament, and were scripture.

The apostles, who were these men? They were a select group. And scholars debate as to how many there might have been. Was there only twelve? My own meaning is probably fifteen or sixteen.

There are the twelve that are there in the day of Pentecost, and then Paul is added, and then Barnabas, and James, our Lord's brother, is also called an apostle. And there may be a couple more. But the important point is to note, it is a small, select group, whom Christ appoints, gives authority to speak and act on His behalf.

And their writings, then, are invested with the authority of Christ. It's not the authority of Paul, the man, but it's the authority of Paul, the apostle. No wonder he begins all of his letters, for instance, with that phrase.

And so, as you move out into the post-apostolic period, you can get bogged down into looking, where are the lists of the New Testament canon? And yes, certain books were debated. But the critical thing to note is, right from the beginning, these books had authority. And so, it is a small, select group, whom Christ appoints, gives authority to speak and act on His behalf.

And their writings, then, are invested with the authority of Christ. It's not the authority of Paul, the man, but it's the authority of Paul, the apostle. No wonder he begins all of his letters, for instance, with that phrase.

And so, as you move out into the post-apostolic period, you can get bogged down into looking, where are the lists of the New Testament canon? And yes, certain books were debated. But the critical thing to note is, right from the beginning, these books had authority. And what the early church does, the early church does not create the canon, it recognizes the canon.

There's a great difference. It's not a difference in terminology. If the early church created the canon, then, in a sense, the early church would be in an authority over the canon.

But you never get that sense in the writings of the early church. In fact, you get the opposite. For instance, let me give you one example.

Ignatius of Antioch, writing around the year 110, he's on his way to prison, he's on his way to martyrdom in Rome. And he writes to a number of churches, and on a couple of occasions he says, this is the way the apostle Paul wrote to you, that was scripture. He was an apostle.

This is the way I write to you, as a prisoner of the Lord. And he draws a very clear distinction. This is a man writing around the year 110, whose early life must have been lived in the apostolic period, but he knows there is a sense in which he is not an apostle.

And therefore, his writings do not have an apostolic authority to them. They do not have the same authority as scripture. Now, there were some books that were debated, and we should get into this.

There were seven books that were debated. Hebrews, James, these are called the anti-legomena, that means disputed books. Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.

Seven books that were debated. Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. And not every church debated them.

For instance, in the West, Revelation was never questioned as scripture. In the East, among the Greek-speaking Christians, Revelation was questioned. Hebrews was questioned in the West, it was never questioned in the East.

And so not every church or every area questioned these seven books. Nor did the questioning of these books start immediately after they were written. In fact, you find a period of time elapsing, usually about 75 to 100 years, not until the late 2nd century you start to find questions about these books.

And the peculiar questions are related to the Gnostic controversy. Some of those questions, we need to realize this as well, we tend to forget these sorts of things. We tend to think that the early church had a book that looked like this, which was a Bible.

And they were all nicely balanced and so on. But they were not. As those books are written, there would be some churches that had a few, they didn't have all.

In fact, it's probably not until the late, into the 3rd century, that we know as the complete Bible would be even available. Some churches would have portions. Again, geographical distance.

The cost of copying scriptures. If you had wanted to get a copy of the New Testament, your own personal copy, you would have to pay the equivalent of what is an average person's wage today. An average person's yearly wage today.

And you figure what an average person earns today, maybe my figures would be too high, thirty, thirty-five thousand? That's what you would have to pay in the period we're looking at. To own your own copy of the New Testament. And so, generally, a church alone would have a complete copy of the scriptures.

And even then, in those early years, it didn't have it because of geographical distance, cost, a variety of other things. And so it's not surprising that as controversy comes in, the church, the Gnostic controversy, arguing, no, no, we don't need the Old Testament, and some of the New Testament we don't need either. Or the Gnostics arguing, we should be adding these prophecies to scripture.

Or persecution arises. If the Roman authorities, as they did, knocked at your door and said, hand over the scriptures, which ones are you going to hand over? And so on. I mean, those are reasons why the issue of the canon becomes a great debate in the end of the second century, well into the third, and then into the fourth century.

Just let me take one of those books, the Book of Revelation. The Book of Revelation is considered scripture, both in the East and the West, up until around the year 250. In the 240s, there is a writer named Origen of Alexandria.

Origen is what we would describe as a spiritualizer of scripture. He's got deep problems with a pre-millennial eschatology. The idea that when Christ returns, he'll set up a millennium, an earthly millennium.

Deep problems with that. He's critical of it. He's not critical of the Book of Revelation, but he's critical of that idea.

That idea, by the way, I think, is primarily found, or support for it, is primarily found in Revelation 20. 20 verses 1 through 6. The idea of a literal thousand year reign. Origen doesn't believe it.

He's spiritualized it. One of his disciples is a man named Dionysius of Alexandria. Dionysius also doesn't believe it, that there will be a literal thousand year reign.

Whereas Origen believed that Revelation was part of scripture, written by John, the Apostle, Dionysius believes it's part of scripture, but it wasn't written by the Apostle John. So you notice, he's taking Origen's teaching one little bit step further. He denies the apostolic authorship of Revelation.

It's not surprising that after him, Tom named Eusebius of Caesarea, who was a deep disciple of both Dionysius and Origen. And for Eusebius, Revelation is not written by John. It's certainly, there is going to be no literal thousand year reign.

Moreover, it is not scripture. And you can see how successive generations have pushed Revelation out. It finally remains to Athanasius to affirm, no, no, Revelation is scripture.

And because of the, Revelation 20 verses 1-6 can be interpreted other ways than simply the idea of a literal thousand year reign. And yet for about 100-150 years, the book of Revelation was debated. It was debated because of a problem that some theologians had with the idea of a literal thousand year reign.

Now that's one book. I mean, the others can be shown the same. My point in developing that argument there is this.

That when the scriptures were first written, there was a recognition of authority about them. And it is later generations that begin to debate them. And the issue of the canon becomes an issue that arises not so much in the earliest years, but in the late 2nd century, 3rd century, and 4th century.

The final point that we want to make, and we have treated this very briefly and personally, the final point that we want to make is that the canon of the New Testament is closed. It is not possible for the Church, now or even a few centuries ago or a thousand years ago, to add books to the New Testament canon. The canon is closed.

Why? Well, the canon is closed because the canon is written by apostolic witnesses. That's the critical thing. These were men who were given the authority to bear witness to what they saw and experienced and heard and saw.

The idea that the New Testament could be open fails to see what the New Testament is about. The New Testament is not a collection of inspirational books. The New Testament is a collection of books that are bearing witness to what God did in Jesus of Nazareth.

And if they are to bear witness to what God did in Jesus of Nazareth, they have to be contemporaneous with that, those events. History, that period of history is past. We cannot go back, it cannot be remade.

And so, at the same sense, you cannot have an open canon. The Apostles, they are once and for all given. The Apostle Paul, very clearly, Ephesians 2.20. The Apostles are part of the foundation.

The image is one in which anybody who has any modicum of sense knows that when you're building a building or a house, you lay the foundation and then you build the superstructure. Halfway up you don't build another foundation, and then at the top another foundation. In other words, you don't have Apostles, again, appearing on the scene halfway up or at the end of history.

There are some I know today who have argued, in certain circles, that just as there were first century Apostles, there have to be end-time Apostles as well. Well, if that fails to understand what the gift of Apostle is, the gift of Apostle is given once and for all to bear witness to those authoritative works and deeds and words that transpired around and through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. That period of history is past.

Their witness, therefore, is closed. And the Church cannot add them to the canon. That's very, very, very, very, very important.

And the Apostolic gift, in one sense, though, is still with us. It is with us in the New Testament. And that's what the early Church meant by claiming that it was an Apostolic Church.

It didn't mean, and they knew it didn't mean, that the Apostles still continued in their myths. But they were rooted and based on the Apostles' witness. Well, let me stop here and ask if there might be some

questions.

As I say, the issue of the canon is one, and one that I sense as I was working through this material today, in preparation for tonight, that really is something I myself need to go back and probably develop as a course, because it is a very, very important issue. Historically, Matthew is identified with Levi, historically. Mark is the, and definitely Mark, and a very, very solid tradition, and I've no reason to doubt it, that Mark is the John Mark.

And he is identified with Peter. Peter mentions him. Identified not in the sense of person, he's a co-worker with Peter.

And so the Apostolic witness of Peter is basically there in the Gospel of Mark. Luke, obviously, is a co-traveller, companion of the Apostle Paul. There is a significant number of sections in the Book of Acts called the We Sections, where Luke says, we did this, and then we did that, we concluded this.

Okay, in terms of how did Mark and Matthew and Luke go about the actual writing of their Gospels? Luke tells us quite clearly, plainly in Luke 1, 1-4, that he consulted others. There were others who had written before him. And he's read them, he's obviously aware of them.

Neither Mark nor Matthew give us any indication of that. It's clear that Matthew and Luke have used Mark, and are aware of Mark. I mean, as I say, Luke tells us.

He knows of at least more than two. He knows of at least two, he says, others have written. Which presumably is probably Matthew or Mark.

Scholars, some scholars have postulated this source called Q. Which is, we don't have it today, which is a collection of the sayings of Jesus. My problem with that, and I don't deny the possibility that as Jesus was ministering, that there was a writing down of some of his sayings and so on. I don't deny that, the possibility of that.

My problem with that is we don't have Q. What we've got is Matthew, Mark and Luke. And that's, those are the gospels and material that we have to deal with. And I'm not so sure how helpful it is to be probing behind the text that we have to try to find some other source, which we don't have.

And it opens the door for speculation. And one of the problems that has afflicted New Testament scholarship in this century is speculation about all kinds of stuff. Motives, communities, but we don't have it.

What we have is the text. And we have to deal with the text. The way I approached the discussion was a bit different.

I didn't approach it from the context of Matthew, Mark and Luke being apostles. But I approached it from the context of authority. But the critical thing about Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is they enshrine the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ.

His words and His deeds. And for that reason, because they are the earliest witnesses to that. They are contemporaneous witnesses.

They have the authority of Christ in them. Yeah, I think that's fascinating. Irenaeus has a similar sort of thing.

There are four corners of the earth, therefore four gospels. No. Because of the early church.

And the early church, some of them had some fanciful stuff. We want to look at Augustine next week. And Augustine has an illustration about Christ.

The passage in Ephesians 3 where Paul talks about the love of Christ which surpasses height, depth, breadth and length. And Augustine gets into a long discussion about how that's over. Talking about the cross.

And John Calvin rightly comes along 1400 years later and says all of this is very pretty and nice but what on earth does it have to do with Ephesians 3? And he's reading his own ideas into it. And somehow, because I have great admiration and I think a number of what these early church fathers wrote is very, very important. It doesn't mean that we should be blind to their problems.

And that's why I do have problems with evangelicals who are becoming Roman Catholic or Orthodox who claim that evangelicals no longer, because we affirm Scripture as the norm and refuse to affirm Scripture plus tradition that we are blind to the greatness of these men. These men did write marvellous things. On the other hand, there are some foolish things too.

The example of there are four Gospels because there are four winds. So what? And that again is a very, very old, I'm not familiar with that author but I am familiar with that representation. The taking of the four faces in Ezekiel and Revelation and the four Gospels.

There is some very, I mean I have a drawing at home which has the four animals as it were representing the four Gospels. Actually he quotes the prophecy of Enoch and he also quotes the assumption of Moses because the assumption of Moses is the one that carries the statement about the devil fighting with the archangel Michael about the body of Moses. Simply because an author quotes another text as authoritative does not mean that that entire text is authoritative.

Simply because an author will quote a portion of it as authoritative doesn't mean necessarily that that entire text is authoritative. And so with the prophecy of Enoch, one can recognize that this is a genuine prophecy that was handed down, then eventually written down and affirmed that without saying therefore Enoch shall be in the Old Testament canon. Just as the Apostle Paul cites a couple of pagan poets.

He so cites Epimenides and Erastus in his discussion on Mars Hill and he says just as one of your poets has said, in him we live and move and have our being. That's true. It's true, it's true, it's true.

But it doesn't mean that all of that other person's writings are inspired authors. You have a very number of apocryphal books. Those are those books that relate history and some of the theological thought of the Jewish people between the Testaments, between Malachi and the appearance of John the Baptist.

None of them are recognized as canonical even by the Jewish communities in the 1st century. 1st, 2nd Maccabees, 3rd, 4th Maccabees, which I think they're not even part of the Apocrypha. Tobit, Balaam's Dragon and so on, Judas.

None of them are recognized as canonical by any of the Jewish groups in Jesus' day. None of them. None of those books are recognized as canonical until the 1540s when the Council of Trent declares them to be canonical and part of the Old Testament.

That is, the Roman Catholic Council denied it. But you do find Athanasius in the letter that I referred to earlier in 367. He denies that those books, the Apocrypha, are canonical.

Denies it quite explicitly. He says, we have received these 39 and he lists them. He lists the Old Testament as we know it.

Then he says, there are these others. They are good books to read, but they are not canonical. And I'm paraphrasing a little phrase, canonical, I'm not sure he uses that.

So he's already denied that in 367 and yet 1,200 years later you have the affirmation of their canonicity. One of the great debates between Augustine and Jerome centers a little bit on this issue. The discussion back and forth is what kind of status do these books have? And Jerome clearly affirming, no, these books are not canon.

There are two ways of answering that. One is that the scriptures themselves bear their own mark of authority and authenticity. And the second would be that we have to trust the Spirit of God guided the Church in those early centuries to recognize, not create, but to recognize.

And in a matter, again, in a matter so important that for the history of the Church the need of the written witness to what God has done in Christ, in a matter so important, if we affirm the reality of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in converting and so on, and the work of the Holy Spirit in inspiring scripture, if we affirm that God the Holy Spirit inspired these books, surely it's not a big step at all to affirm if he inspired them he would preserve and lead the Church to recognize them. He's talking about the Apocrypha now. Okay, there's a difference between, technically there's a difference between the Apocrypha which deal with Frisiteh and Maccabees, Tobit, Judah, Bel and the Dragon, and then there are a number of books, Deuteronomic canonical books, things like Enoch, Sepp's Assumption of Moses, Book of Jubilees, and a variety of other Jewish writings.

If I recall correctly, anyway, if you read through the early Church writers, I don't know one of them that affirms any of the Apocrypha, or uses the Apocrypha as an authoritative book to clinch an argument. They may refer to them and cite them, which they do, but not as authority on the same level. Now there are three other books that sometimes get raised in the debate about the New Testament.

Epistle of Barnabas, The Shepherd of Hermas, and The Didache. And these get batted back and forth. The critical thing, and if some of you are interested, I have a cross-reference and table of all the New Testament books with various witnesses citing them and listing them.

And what you see with the books that eventually form our New Testament is a solid affirmation with maybe one or two saying no. And then when you get into some of these other books, very, very few. You can't see that, I know, from where you're sitting.

But it's generally, for instance, one author will say, maybe the Epistle of Barnabas should be in. But like 90 other witnesses, no, no, it's not in. It's not canonical.

And so when Athanasius does come to draw up that list, he's not drawing up something that was freshly done in his day, but he is reflecting a consensus of about 200 or so years, 250 years. There's one other question back here. We'll take two more questions and then after this one.

Were they part of the Greek Bible? They were written in Greek, but they were not considered canonical. Even by the... The early church used the Septuagint. The early church used the Septuagint.

But none of the Jewish communities, either in Palestine or those that used the Septuagint outside of Palestine, recognised the Apocrypha as canonical. It would be included at times with Septuagint or books, yes. But it wasn't recognised as authoritative.

By the first century AD, the discussion of the canon of the Old Testament is a closed issue. And the critical for that is you see no discussion of it in the New Testament at all. There's no discussion of what constitutes the Old Testament Scriptures.

Jerome and Augustine, their argument has to do... Yeah, their argument has to do with the inspiration of the Septuagint. And Augustine argues... Part of the reason he argues for the inspiration of the Septuagint is because he can't read Hebrew and Aramaic. And Jerome has learned it.

And the centre of their argument is over the inspiration of the Septuagint. But in the contrary to that, the issue of the Apocrypha is raised. There's at least three... There's at least three, maybe four.

Beyond what Paul tells us. I think he mentions in 1 Corinthians 5 that he had written them. Because I had already written you, he says, not to keep company with somebody who claims to be a brother and is living ungodly.

And we don't have that letter. And then I think there is reference to another letter between what we call 1st and what we call 2nd Corinthians. But again, that's really... And I'm quite prepared to admit that the Apostles wrote a variety of letters we don't have.

But again, in the providence of God, those that we have being preserved, they are the ones that God intended to be canon. Again, to me, if I'm prepared to argue, as I am, that God the Holy Spirit inspired Scripture, by which I mean that God works through the minds and the experience of men to write the Word of God. Not that they suddenly kind of sit back and let their minds go blank and stuff is dropped in like you're downloading a file in a computer program.

But they're actually in the process of writing and researching. I mean, Luke researched the book of Acts. It's quite clear, though, that he did.

In that process, the Spirit of God was at work, harmoniously working along through that person's language, his vocab, and so on. If I'm prepared to affirm that, it is not a big step to affirm that God has preserved what He wanted for us to have as the Old Testament Scriptures and the New. One final question back there.

There are different sequences of the New Testament books in the early church. Recently, I've been reading a book by a man named Philip Comfort, and he argues that there are two types of manuscripts of the Scriptures. There are what are known as the papyri, and the papyri were written on papyrus scrolls, or papyrus codices, like a book.

And then there are what are called the unseals, and the unseals generally start to come in in the 4th century, and they're written on parchment. Most of the ones that have survived, obviously, are the parchment, not the papyrus. Comfort's argument is that the papyrus actually retain an order of the books that is very similar to the order we have today.

In other words, the earliest order is very similar to the order we have today. That order is changed in various communities in the 4th century. The order of the books is not inspired.

And that's vital to know. The order that we have them in is not inspired. The verses and chapters are not inspired.

There are no verse divisions until the 1550s, and there are no chapter divisions until probably the 800s, 900s. That's why the apostle, the writer of the Hebrews says, in a certain place it says this, and he doesn't have chapter and verse. You never find chapter and verse, you just find quoting of books.

And likewise, the order of the books is not inspired. Well, there's a lot more, and I don't hesitate to admit that we've only scratched the surface here. And as evangelicals, we do need to be more aware of the importance of the issue of the canon.

And while the issue of inspiration is important, the canon also, and why, the question why we have 27, and not 28, not 26, why 27, and why these 27, is a very important issue. Next week, Lord willing, we want to look at Augustine, and we want to spend our two hours thinking about him. And the first hour, we'll look at his life.

His life is, we know more about Augustine than any other ancient figure. And then we want to look at his theology of history. We could look at a variety of areas of theology, his theology of grace, for instance, his theology of the Church.

But what are your thoughts for me on his theology of history? Let us close. Almighty God, we worship you as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and confess with these early believers who will be looking at us, Athanasius and Basil, that you are three in one, Father, Son, and Spirit, worthy of our worship and adoration. We thank you for the gift of your word, and recognize that there is so much here we do not understand, but we pray that you would give us grace and strength to put into practice what we do know, that in our lives we might build upon the solid rock of your Son's words.

And we ask all this for Jesus' sake. May your grace and peace and mercy be our portion this night, and be the portion of your people throughout this world.

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