

Introduction

- It is the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea.
- It is one of the most significant moments in Christian history.
- The 1st of 7 ecumenical councils, which even the Protestant reformers recognize.
- Church leaders from the entire globe gathered to settle theological issues.

Cause

- The primary issue facing the church was the rise of Arianism, which was the belief that Christ was a created god and not coeternal with God.
- The universal church was becoming divided and Arianism had broad support.
- Constantine was a new convert who wanted Christianity to unite.

Church and State

- This was one of the first moments where church and state overlapped.
- Christianity moved from persecution towards state religion.
- The alliance between state and church would be the norm for over a thousand years.
- Constantine opened the proceedings of the council but did not make decisions.

The Nicene Creed

- It builds upon and clarifies the Apostle's creed.
- The desire is to clarify Biblical language around Christ.
- The most significant addition is "the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made."
- It condemns specific Arian language and beliefs.

Creeds and the Bible

- Sola scriptura does not mean nuda scriptura.
- "No creed but the Bible" is a creed that requires modern assumptions.
- The creed is not authoritative but an accurate description of Biblical belief.
- The Arians, and other heretics, all used the Bible to defend heresy (John 3:16).
- The creed builds a fence around what interpretations are valid and foundational.
- All Christians must believe the words of the creed.
- The creed helped but did not solve the problem.

Date of Easter

- Easter seems to have been always observed in the early church, yearly around the death and resurrection of Jesus, usually near Passover.
- The Quartodecimans argued Easter should be observed on the day of Passover.

- Everyone celebrated Easter, the question was what calendar to follow, the Jewish or Roman, and what day to observe it on.
- There was a desire to celebrate it on the day of the sheep being killed, as Christ was the true Passover lamb.
- The primary issue was separating it from Passover so there would be no confusion with the Jewish faith.
- The desire was for the church to be united on the same calendar, but this took centuries to work itself out.
- Easter is not a Christian adoption of a pagan festival but an ancient practice with ties to the New Testament church.

Other Decisions

- They banned self-castration for clergy, spiritual marriages, wandering clergy, self-ordination, made ordinations more formal, and more.
- Opponents of Christianity will make broad claims about this council in order to disprove Christianity.
- One of their claims is that the Bible was invented at this council, it was not.
- Another claim is that the Trinity was invented here, it was not.
- They will claim competing options were unfairly stamped out by those in power.
- These decisions were not binding and took decades to be fully accepted.

Application

- The Nicene Creed is a helpful tool to explain and think about the Trinity.
- Easter is not a modern invention, but an ancient practice of the early church.
- We stand on the shoulders of Nicaea, whether we see it or not.