

CHRISTIAN HISTORY 101

SESSION TWO: Patristics and Professions

- The Establishment of the New Testament Canon
- The “Patristics,” or Church Fathers
- The Early Creeds
- Covering a time period from circa 100 AD to 500 AD

I. THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

Canon: The word means “measuring reed,” a ruler, or standard.

The accepted or fixed Canon of the New Testament by category:

<u>Gospels</u>	<u>History</u>	<u>Pauline Letters</u>	<u>General Letters</u>	<u>Apocalypse</u>
Matthew	Acts	Romans	Hebrews	Revelation
Mark		1 Corinthians	James	
Luke		2 Corinthians	1 Peter	
John		Galatians	2 Peter	
		Ephesians	1 John	
		Philippians	2 John	
		Colossians	3 John	
		1 Thessalonians	Jude	
		2 Thessalonians		
		1 Timothy		
		2 Timothy		
		Titus		
		Philemon		

A number of “Competing Books” were hotly debated for admission into the Canon. Books that were accepted: Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. Books excluded: The Revelation according to Peter; the Letter of Barnabas; Shepherd of Hermas; the Gospel of Thomas; the Didache; the Letter of Clement.

The major criteria employed by the early church to establish the Canon:

- 1) The text was written by an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus or close associate of an eyewitness.
- 2) The text is consistent with the overall voice of previously accepted Scripture.
- 3) The church, as a whole, found the text recognized and useful.

By circa 400 AD, the current 27-book collection was generally accepted as the New Testament.

II. THE PATRISTICS, OR CHURCH FATHERS

Generally, this covers the time period from 100 AD to 450 AD. It was a dynamic period where theology was not yet united with Empire, there was not yet a “Catholic” church, and the New Testament was in its infancy.

<u>Early Church Fathers</u>	<u>“Greek” Fathers</u>	<u>“Latin” Fathers</u>	<u>Desert Fathers</u>
Clement	Justin Martyr	Tertullian	Anthony the Great
Ignatius	Irenaeus	Ambrose	Abba Poemen
Polycarp	Origen	Jerome	Amma Syncletica
	Athanasius	Augustine	
	John Chrysostom		

The Roman Catholic Church demanded four major characteristics to be designated a “Father of the Church.” 1) Lived before 750 AD. 2) Doctrinal orthodoxy. 3) Personal holiness. 4) Highly regarded by the Church.

Major contributions of this period: 1) Establishment of Christian “identity.” 2) Formation of the New Testament. 3) Development of “apologetics,” particularly in relationship to Greek and Jewish philosophy. 4) Achieving a consistent, doctrinal, consensus. 5) Drafting of the early Christian creeds.

III. THE EARLY CREEDS

The first Seven Councils of the church are known as the “Ecumenical Councils.” In order, they are: 1) The First Council of Nicaea, (325); 2) The First Council of Constantinople, (381); 3) The Council of Ephesus, (431); 4) The Council of Chalcedon, (451); 5) The Second Council of Constantinople, (553); 6) The Third Council of Constantinople, (680–681) and 7) The Second Council of Nicaea, (787).

1) The New Testament Creed

Who, being in very nature God, he did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:6-11)

2) The Apostles’ Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

3) The Nicene Creed

We believe in **one God**, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, **eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God**, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.

Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. **With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified**. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

4) The Chalcedonian Creed

This creed expands upon the Trinity and the “dual nature” of Jesus, adding the following verbiage: “Our Lord Jesus Christ [is] at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man...of one substance with the Father...and at the same time of one substance with us...Recognized in two natures, without confusion, without division, without separation...each nature...coming together to form one person...”

5) The Athanasian Creed

Expanding further upon the Chalcedonian text, this creed reinforces the Trinity while defended God’s “Oneness;” the dual nature of Jesus; and expands upon Jesus’s humanity: “We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence...Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost...And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord...”