

MEMBER STUDY GUIDE

Weeks 5 & 6: After Nicaea

The Councils of Constantinople and Chalcedon, and the World the Creeds Made · A.D. 325–500

From Pentecost to the Present: An Apostolic History of the Church · Life Church of New Jersey

This unit runs across two live class sessions. Part One (Week 5) covers Nicaea's aftermath through the Council of Constantinople. Part Two (Week 6) recaps that ground, then covers the Apostolic Answer, the Council of Chalcedon, and the road into the medieval church.

Anchor Verse: 1 Timothy 3:16 — "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

PART ONE · Week 5 Session

I. Where We Left Off — Nicaea, A.D. 325

- A.** In A.D. 325, 318 bishops gathered at the Council of Nicaea to answer one question: is Jesus Christ truly God, or God's first and greatest created being?
- B.** The council affirmed that the Son is homoousios — "of one substance" — with the Father, against the teaching of Arius that "there was a time when he was not."
- C.** Scripture had already settled this without a council or a Greek word:
 - Colossians 2:9** — *"in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"*
 - John 1:1, 14** — *"the Word was God... and the Word was made flesh"*
- D.** Left unresolved: Nicaea's creed said almost nothing about the Holy Spirit. It stopped at three words — "And in the Holy Ghost."

II. Words We'll Hear Tonight — Key Terms

A short glossary of terms that repeat throughout this unit, so the vocabulary never gets in the way of the substance.

- A.** Orthodox / Orthodoxy — the teaching officially recognized as correct by a council; here, belief in Christ's full, eternal deity.
- B.** Arianism / Arian — Arius's teaching that the Son was a created being, not eternally God — "there was a time when He was not."
- C.** Heresy / Heretic — a teaching (or teacher) formally judged by church leaders to contradict essential Christian doctrine.
- D.** Creed — a short, formal statement of belief, agreed on by a council, meant to be recited or confessed.
- E.** Homoousios — Greek for "of one substance"; Nicaea's word affirming the Son shares the Father's very being.
- F.** Council / Ecumenical Council — a formal gathering of bishops, claiming to represent the whole church, called to settle disputed doctrine.
- G.** Bishop / See — a chief pastor over a city's churches; his "see" is the city or region under his authority.

- H.** Trinity / Trinitarian — the doctrine that God is three co-eternal, co-equal persons — Father, Son, Spirit — sharing one substance.
- I.** Modalism / Sabellianism — label for teaching that God is strictly one, appearing in different “modes” — condemned alongside Arianism at Constantinople.
- J.** Hypostasis / Ousia — Cappadocian technical terms: hypostasis = “person”; ousia = “substance” or “essence.”
- K.** Canon (this sense) — a binding church ruling issued by a council — not to be confused with “the canon of Scripture.”
- L.** Apostolic Oneness — our own confession: God is absolutely one, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost — not three eternally distinct persons.

III. A Fragile Peace — Arianism Returns, A.D. 325–360

- A.** Constantine died in 337. His empire split among three sons; the one who ruled the East, Constantius II, favored Arian bishops.
- B.** Athanasius of Alexandria, the great defender of Nicaea, was exiled from his own church five separate times over roughly seventeen years — a pattern historians call “Athanasius contra mundum,” Athanasius against the world.
- C.** The Arian party itself split into competing factions once it left the plain apostolic confession behind — a pattern worth remembering: half-truths rarely settle into one stable alternative.

IV. The Pagan Interlude — Julian the Apostate, A.D. 361–363

- A.** The emperor Julian renounced Christianity and tried to revive Roman paganism, tolerating every Christian faction equally in hopes they would destroy one another.
- B.** His short reign (he died in battle in 363) had an unintended result: with paganism as a common enemy, Christian infighting quieted and the Nicene position began quietly regaining ground.

V. The Cappadocian Fathers

- A.** Basil of Caesarea (“the Great,” c. 330–379) organized orthodox resistance to Arianism; died two years before the Council of Constantinople.
- B.** Gregory of Nazianzus (“the Theologian,” c. 329–390) preached from a small chapel in Constantinople named Anastasia (“Resurrection”) during forty years of Arian control of the city; later presided over the Council of Constantinople before resigning.
- C.** Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395), Basil’s younger brother, was present and influential at the council.
- D.** Together they built the vocabulary — three hypostases (persons), one ousia (substance) — that becomes the technical foundation of the historic doctrine of the trinity (see Sections X–XII).

VI. Is the Holy Spirit God? — The Unfinished Question

- A.** Once the church described the Son as a distinct divine person, the same logic reached toward the Spirit: is He a third divine person too?
- B.** At least four views circulated:
 - 1.** The Spirit is simply God Himself in spiritual manifestation.

2. The Spirit is God's impersonal power or energy.
 3. Macedonius, bishop of Constantinople, taught the Spirit is a created being — an angel.
 4. Athanasius and the Cappadocians: the Spirit is a third, fully divine, co-equal person.
- C.** The Spirit-deniers were called Pneumatomachi ("Spirit-fighters") or Macedonians — exactly the party the Council of Constantinople was convened to answer.
- D.** The Apostolic answer, then and now, comes from different texts entirely:
- Acts 2:38** — *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ... and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"*
- 2 Corinthians 3:17** — *"Now the Lord is that Spirit"*

VII. Theodosius I and the Edict of Thessalonica, A.D. 379–381

- A.** Theodosius I, raised in the Nicene faith from birth, became emperor in 379 and had no interest in tolerating Arianism.
- B.** In 380, he issued the Edict of Thessalonica ("Cunctos Populos"), making Nicene Christianity the official, legally required religion of the whole Roman Empire — the first time this happened by law.
- C.** Entering Constantinople, he removed the sitting Arian bishop and installed Gregory of Nazianzus, ending forty years of Arian control of the capital's churches.
- D.** To make these actions permanent, Theodosius called a new council to meet at Constantinople in May, 381.

VIII. The Council of Constantinople Convenes, May A.D. 381

- A.** 150 bishops gathered — less than half of Nicaea's number — and every one Greek-speaking. The Latin-speaking Western church sent no representatives at all.
- B.** Thirty-six Pneumatomachian bishops attended, then walked out rather than affirm the Spirit's full deity.
- C.** The council's presidency was remarkably unstable: Meletius of Antioch presided first and died mid-session; Gregory of Nazianzus succeeded him and then resigned under political pressure; Nectarius — not yet even baptized when the council began — was elected and finished presiding.
- D.** Emperor Theodosius attended the opening session in person.
- E.** Canon 3 ranked the bishop of Constantinople ("new Rome") second only to Rome — a political decision that helped fuel the later 1054 split between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.

IX. What the Council Decided

- A.** No new creed was written from scratch. Instead, the Nicene Creed of 325 was expanded with a full confession about the Holy Spirit.
- B.** New wording declared the Spirit to be "the Lord and Giver of life... who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified."
- C.** Seven canons were issued, condemning the Eunomians, the Arians/Eudoxians, the Semi-Arian Pneumatomachi, the Sabellians, the Marcellians, and the Apollinarians.
- D.** Theodosius ratified the council's decisions as Roman law within two months (July 381). Public worship by any condemned group was forbidden.

X. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, A.D. 381

The creed most churches recite today as "the Nicene Creed" is actually this expanded 381 text, not the shorter 325 original. The bolded closing section on the Holy Spirit is Constantinople's addition.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds... very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father... who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man... and the third day He rose again... and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence He shall come again... to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

XI. The Trinity Doctrine Is Finalized

The formal definition: one God eternally existing as three distinct persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — each fully and equally God, sharing one identical divine essence, yet genuinely distinguished from one another and not merely three roles or masks of a single person.

A. This section is the payoff of the whole deep dive: Nicaea (325) alone does not give us "the Trinity." It gives a two-person answer — the Father is God, the Son is God, and they are one substance. The Spirit is left almost entirely undefined.

B. Constantinople (381) is what actually completes the doctrine — adding the Spirit as a fully divine, fully co-equal, fully worshipped third person, using the Cappadocian vocabulary of three hypostases and one ousia.

C. Nicaea, A.D. 325, compared side by side with Constantinople, A.D. 381:

1. Nicaea answered one relationship (is the Son one substance with the Father?); Constantinople answered the remaining one (is the Spirit also fully, personally God?).
2. Nicaea's own creed condemned language of more than one hypostasis in God; Constantinople's Cappadocian framework requires exactly that language to describe three persons.
3. Nicaea left the Spirit at three bare words; Constantinople gave the Spirit a full confession, worshipped and glorified equally with the Father and the Son.
4. Result: Nicaea gives "the Son is fully God." Constantinople gives, for the first time in official church history, the complete three-person doctrine of the Trinity.

D. An honest note: officially, this is described as "one being in three persons," not three gods. But the distinctions drawn between the persons are sharp enough in practice — each separately addressed in prayer, each treated as a full "who" rather than a shared "what" — that critics, including our own Apostolic Oneness tradition, have long observed this functions much like three distinct divine beings sharing a common nature and name, rather than the strict, indivisible oneness Scripture actually describes.

Deuteronomy 6:4 — *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD"*

Isaiah 45:5 — *"I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me"*

XII. Three Persons, One Being — The Cappadocian Settlement

A. The Cappadocians split two Greek words that had been near-synonyms: ousia (the one shared divine nature) and hypostasis (an individual person within that nature).

B. Their illustration, borrowed from Plato: just as Peter, James, and John are three persons sharing one common humanity, so Father, Son, and Spirit are three hypostases sharing one ousia.

C. Even Athanasius accepted this formula only reluctantly — the original 325 Nicene Creed had specifically condemned speaking of more than one hypostasis in God.

D. Doctrinal historian Reinhold Seeberg's assessment: the formula leaves the church with "three personalities and an abstract, impersonal essence."

E. Even the Cappadocians admitted "begotten" (the Son) and "proceeding" (the Spirit) cannot actually be defined — the very words meant to distinguish the persons are, by their own admission, beyond human language.

XIII. Weighing the Evidence — What Constantinople Got Right and Wrong

A. What it got right:

1. Affirmed the Holy Spirit is fully God, not a creature.

Acts 5:3–4 — *"why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost... thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God"*

2. Reaffirmed Christ's full deity against every remaining form of Arianism.

3. Condemned Apollinarianism, defending Christ's full and complete humanity.

Hebrews 2:17 — *"in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren"*

B. What it got wrong or over-complicated:

1. Required a philosophical vocabulary — hypostasis, ousia — found nowhere in Scripture, to settle a question the apostles answered without it.

2. Condemned Sabellius and the Marcellians (modalists) as heretics in the same breath as the Arians — treating the strict oneness of God as equally dangerous as denying Christ's deity.

Deuteronomy 6:4 — *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD"*

Isaiah 45:5 — *"I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me"*

3. Elevated Constantinople's political rank (Canon 3) for imperial reasons, not theological ones.

4. The creed itself never claims "thus saith the Lord" or cites Scripture for its precise wording — it argues from philosophy and church consensus.

PART TWO · Week 6 Session

Last session ended with Section XIII above. Start here by briefly refreshing the room, then move into the apostolic answer and the second great council of this era.

XIV. Recap: Where We've Been

A. Nicaea (325) settled Christ's deity; Arianism returned under Constantius II; Athanasius was exiled five times; Julian's pagan interlude ironically helped orthodoxy recover; the Cappadocian Fathers rose to defend the faith; the Holy Spirit's deity became the new unresolved question.

B. Theodosius I made Nicene Christianity imperial law and convened the Council of Constantinople (381); 150 bishops expanded the creed and issued seven canons; we read the completed Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed; this is where the doctrine of the Trinity was formally finalized; we weighed the

evidence honestly — right that the Spirit is God, wrong to require Greek philosophical categories Scripture never uses.

XV. The Apostolic Answer — No Council Required

Everything the fourth-century church fought fifty years and two councils to settle, the apostles had already answered in plain language, three centuries earlier:

1 Timothy 3:16 — *"God was manifest in the flesh"*

Colossians 2:9 — *"In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"*

John 14:16–18 — *"another Comforter... I will come to you"*

Acts 2:38 — *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ... and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"*

A. Our verdict: right that the Spirit is God; wrong to require a third divine "person" alongside two others where the apostles preached one God, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

XVI. More Scriptures on Oneness

God declares His oneness:

Isaiah 43:10–11 — *"before me there was no God formed... I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour"*

Isaiah 44:6 — *"I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God"*

Isaiah 9:6 — *"his name shall be called... The mighty God, The everlasting Father"*

Zechariah 12:10 — *"they shall look upon me whom they have pierced"*

Deuteronomy 32:39 — *"I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me"*

Jesus claims that name:

John 8:58 — *"before Abraham was, I am"*

John 10:30 — *"I and my Father are one"*

John 14:9 — *"he that hath seen me hath seen the Father"*

Colossians 1:15 — *"the image of the invisible God"*

Revelation 1:8, 17–18 — *"I am Alpha and Omega... I am the first and the last... I am he that liveth, and was dead"*

A. Same voice, same name, same God: the LORD of Isaiah who declares "beside me there is no saviour" is the Jesus who says "before Abraham was, I am."

XVII. Two Extremes and a “Robber Synod” — Nestorius and Eutyches

A. Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople (428–431), objected to calling Mary Theotokos (“God-bearer”), preferring Christotokos (“Christ-bearer”) — critics heard him dividing Christ into two separate persons loosely joined. Condemned at the Council of Ephesus, A.D. 431.

B. Eutyches, an influential monastery leader in Constantinople, reacted the opposite way — teaching that Christ's human nature was absorbed into His divine nature, leaving one merged nature (Monophysitism).

C. In 449, the Second Council of Ephesus — later branded the “Robber Synod” (Latrocinium) — upheld Eutyches by force; Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople was beaten by monks during the proceedings and died of his injuries days later.

XVIII. The Council of Chalcedon Convenes, A.D. 451

A. New emperor Marcian and his empress Pulcheria overturn the Robber Synod and call a fresh, genuinely ecumenical council at Chalcedon.

B. Roughly 520 bishops attend — the largest gathering of any ancient council — and unlike Constantinople (381), the Western church sends real representation: legates of Pope Leo I.

C. Leo's “Tome to Flavian” (449), a doctrinal letter on the two natures, is read aloud; bishops reportedly cried out, “Peter has spoken through Leo!”

D. Eutyches is condemned, Flavian is posthumously vindicated, and the Robber Synod of 449 is formally annulled. This is the Fourth Ecumenical Council, after Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus.

XIX. The Chalcedonian Definition, A.D. 451

The actual conciliar wording, meant to settle exactly how Christ's two natures relate:

We... confess one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence (hypostasis)...

not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from the beginning declared concerning Him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and as the Creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.

XX. Weighing the Evidence — What Chalcedon Got Right and Wrong

A. What it got right:

1. Rejected Eutyches: Christ's humanity is real and complete, not absorbed by His deity.

Hebrews 2:17 — *"in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren"*

2. Rejected Nestorius: Christ is one undivided person, not two separate subjects loosely joined.

3. Preserved both truths in the single verse that has anchored this whole series:

1 Timothy 3:16 — *"God was manifest in the flesh"*

B. What it got wrong or over-complicated:

1. Added still more Greek technical vocabulary — physis (nature), hypostasis (person), prosopon (person/face) — none of it found in Scripture.

2. Could only define the union negatively (four “withouts”) rather than positively — a sign of how far the debate had drifted from plain apostolic language.

3. Failed to produce the unity it aimed for — a large share of the ancient church rejected the formula immediately and permanently (see Section XXI).

4. Like Constantinople, never claims “thus saith the Lord” for its precise wording.

XXI. A Church Divided — The Oriental Orthodox Split

- A.** The Coptic Church of Egypt, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church, and the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches all rejected Chalcedon's formula — together known as the Oriental Orthodox communion.
- B.** Their objection: “two natures” language sounded too close to Nestorius's error; they preferred “one united nature, out of two” (Miaphysitism — distinct from Eutyches's Monophysitism, though long confused with it).
- C.** This split has never been formally healed. Modern ecumenical dialogue (from the 1960s onward) suggests the two sides may have been arguing past each other linguistically more than theologically.
- D.** Three separate divisions to keep straight: Oriental Orthodox (split at Chalcedon, 451); Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic (split from each other in the Great Schism, 1054); Roman Catholicism (fractures further at the Reformation, centuries later).

XXII. The Apostolic Reading of Chalcedon

Fully God, fully man — no four qualifiers required:

- John 1:14** — *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us... full of grace and truth"*
- 1 Timothy 3:16** — *"God was manifest in the flesh"*
- Colossians 2:9** — *"In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"*
- Hebrews 2:14, 17** — *"took part of the same... flesh and blood... made like unto his brethren"*

- A.** Our verdict: Christ is genuinely, fully God and genuinely, fully man, united in one person — exactly what Chalcedon was trying to protect, stated plainly by the apostles centuries before Nestorius or Eutyches were born.

XXIII. The Divide Begins — East and West

- A.** Canon 3 of Constantinople (381) ranked the bishop of Constantinople (“New Rome”) second only to Rome, ahead of Alexandria and Antioch, for political reasons alone.
- B.** No Western bishop attended the Council of Constantinople; the language gap between Greek East and Latin West widened over the following century.
- C.** The West later added “and the Son” (filioque) to the Spirit's procession, unilaterally, at the Synod of Toledo (589) — altering the very creed finalized at Constantinople without Eastern consultation.
- D.** Rome falls in the West (476); the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire continues for nearly another thousand years, developing separately in law, language, and church governance.
- E.** These seeds — political rivalry, a widening language gap, a unilaterally altered creed — take nearly 700 years to fully ripen into the formal Great Schism of 1054, when Rome and Constantinople mutually excommunicate each other.

XXIV. Looking Ahead — The World After Chalcedon

- A.** The empire crumbles: the Goths defeat Rome at Adrianople (378); Alaric sacks Rome (410); the Vandals conquer North Africa (429–439); the last Western emperor is deposed (476).
 - 1.** Ironical twist: most invading peoples were already Christian — but Arian Christian, converted by the missionary Ulphilas before Constantinople settled the question. Arianism survived among barbarian kingdoms in Spain until 587 and among the Lombards almost to 600.

B. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) writes *The City of God and Confessions*, and shapes Western trinitarian thought for a thousand years — even while some of his own trinity illustrations lean toward describing one Person's faculties rather than three distinct persons.

C. Monasticism rises: from Antony's desert withdrawal (c. 270) to Benedict of Nursia's balanced Rule (c. 530), the church develops a new form of costly devotion — but also risks a two-tier Christianity where "serious" holiness belongs to monks and priests rather than every believer.

D. By A.D. 500, the pieces are in place for what our curriculum calls the long eclipse — though God never stopped saving souls in any century.

XXV. Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Read 1 Timothy 3:16 aloud together. What does this verse settle that took the fourth-century church over fifty years and two major councils to work through?
2. The Cappadocians said even they could not define what "begotten" and "proceeding" actually mean. What does that admission tell us about building doctrine on philosophy rather than plain Scripture?
3. Constantinople condemned strict oneness teaching (Sabellianism) as a heresy equal to Arianism. How would you gently and biblically explain to a trinitarian friend why Apostolic Oneness is not what the councils meant by "Sabellianism"?
4. Most believers in the barbarian kingdoms after Rome's fall were Arian Christians for generations. What does that teach us about how quickly clear doctrine can be lost within a single generation — and what should we do to guard it in our own homes?
5. Section XI notes that Nicaea alone does not give us "the Trinity" — it takes Constantinople to complete it. Why does that surprise most people, and why does it matter to know which council actually finished the doctrine?
6. Chalcedon could define Christ's two natures only negatively — four things it is NOT. How does that compare to the plain, positive confidence of "the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14)?
7. The Oriental Orthodox split (451) and the East-West Schism (1054) happened three centuries apart, for different reasons. What do both divisions teach us about the danger of letting institutional politics and philosophy — rather than plain Scripture — drive the church's biggest decisions?

"God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." — 1 Timothy 3:16

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