

The Trinity Class 11: The Creeds, Part 3: Answer to the Heretics

Truro Anglican Church Sunday School October 27, 2024

Last week, we began looking at the challenge of Gnosticism to the early church. This week we will look at one particular form of Gnosticism called “DOCETISM.” This was the argument that since, under the gnostic system, all matter is evil and God, by definition is holy and pure spirit, then God cannot enter into the material world because that would make the pure and good God subject to the evil in the material world.

Against Christianity, the argument of the Docetists was this meant that Jesus could not be the incarnation of the Son of God, since, again, if He were truly God, then He couldn’t mix with evil matter.

Thus, they argued that Jesus merely APPEARED to be human. He was like a hologram. He was faking it. Docetism means to appear, but not be the real thing.

We spent several weeks establishing the fact that Jesus is God, a member of the Trinity. This is the consistent teaching of the Scriptures. Thus, He is pure and good and free from evil.

He was also fully human. We see this in such places as:

1 John 1:1–3 (ESV)

¹That which was from the beginning, which **we have heard**, which **we have seen** with our eyes, which **we looked upon** and **have touched with our hands**, concerning the word of life— ²the life was made manifest, and **we have seen it**, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— ³that which **we have seen and heard** we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

John testifies that he saw, heard, and TOUCHED the Savior and that He was sent from God the Father, i.e., from the realm of pure, good spirit, into the human world, thus proving the Docetists wrong.

This is summarized for us in the Nicene Creed:

“For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man.”

Thus, Jesus was fully God and fully Man at the same time. He unites in His person all that God is and all that a Man is.

One other element to remember is that the Docetists argued that all of matter, everything created was tainted by evil simply by virtue of being created.

Christianity argues that creation was good. That what God created, all of it, was good, free from evil. Evil entered into Creation from outside when sin entered our relationship with God. As a result, evil affects all of this world, but not because the world was created evil.

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The following is an attempt to illustrate the Athanasian Creed graphically. Thanks to Jim Murphy for adapting this:

