

## **The Trinity Class 12: The Creeds, Part 4: Answer to the Heretics**

Truro Anglican Church Sunday School November 3, 2024

We are now going to swing all the way to the other end of the heretical spectrum.

Gnosticism and Docetism argued that Jesus could not be human and God because, by their definitions, God cannot be mixed with evil matter. Thus, they argued, Jesus could only “appear” or “seem” to be a human being. In their system, He was merely an apparition of some sort.

At the other end of the spectrum, adoptionism argued that while Jesus was fully human, He could not be fully God. There are several strands of philosophy behind this assertion.

One strand is that since there is only One God, as we have seen in our study, God cannot exist as more than One Person. He is, by philosophical definition, indivisible into more than one piece. This is rooted in Plato’s thought and others who modified it over the years. Thus, Jesus could not be God in the same way God the Father is God because to have two Gods means God is divisible.

It was thought by many that Greek philosophy had set the parameters for all theological speculation. Once again, men tried to force a system of thought onto the Scriptural witness and make Christianity “fit” Greek philosophical systems. This has continued to be a very powerful force within and against Christianity down through the centuries. Many contemporary theologians continue to argue for this line of thought, ignoring or downplaying the Scriptural witness to the Trinity.

The other strand behind adoptionism is Judaic in background. It is best represented by the Pharisees in the New Testament. They were committed to keeping the Law of Moses scrupulously and believed that they could earn their way into heaven by their obedience.

Adoptionism is also a recurring heresy in the history of the Church.

Commonly, adoptionism argues that Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Law while He was growing up and that, as a reward for being a good boy, God “adopted” him and bestowed a measure of divinity on Him at His baptism by John through the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, they deny that He was God by nature prior to the Father “rewarding” Him with divine status. He was just an exceptionally good human being who was able to overcome sin by His own human will and effort. On our Trinity chart, Adoptionists deny the “is” leg that runs from the Son to the central Almighty God circle.

We will discuss several other aspects of adoptionism in class.

Remember; Docetist systems argue that Jesus cannot be human. Adoptionist systems argue that Jesus cannot be God. Both deny the existence of God as a Trinity.

Most heresies fall somewhere between these two end points.

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

