

HEROES AND HERETICS:
An 8-Week Course on Early Church History

WEEK 7 **February 28, 2016**
Teacher: **Pastor Pickens**

Basil – Theology in Action

Life:

- Born into a Christian home in 329-330 at Caesarea in Cappadocia. His grandparents were persecuted and some martyred during the Great Persecution.
- Five brothers and five sisters: brothers Gregory and Peter would later become bishops (Nyssa and Sebasteia respectively).
- Basil received a thorough education:
 - Begun in Annesi. After his father's death his education continued in Caesarea where he met Gregory of Nazianzus, who would later become a dear friend (340)
 - Basil in a later letter to Gregory: "I am like travellers at sea, who have never gone a voyage before, and are distressed and seasick, who quarrel with the ship because it is so big and makes such a tossing, and, when they get out of it into the pinnace or dingey, are everywhere and always seasick and distressed... I carry my own troubles with me, and so everywhere I am in the midst of similar discomforts."¹
 - Basil's education was completed in Athens where Gregory also studied (351 AD).
- Basil returned home and began to teach rhetoric.
- At this point Basil grasped the truth of the gospel and adopted a monastic lifestyle.
- For 2 years he traveled to different monasteries and then established his own in 359 AD.
- At first Basil entered the Arian controversy by writing letters to friends and colleagues.
- In 364 AD Basil was called as a presbyter, somewhat against his will.
- Basil was deeply involved in caring for the poor and ministries of mercy.
- In 370 AD Basil was appointed as Bishop of Caesarea: preaching regularly and continuing to write. Basil continued in his opposition against Arianism under threat and resistance from Emperor Valens.
- Basil called upon the two Gregorys to join him as bishops. Gregory of Nazianzus would later preside over the Council of Constantinople. Gregory of Nazianzus was recognized as the orator of the three and Gregory of Nyssa was recognized as the theologian.
- Basil struggled with poor health throughout his life and in 379 he passed away.

Thought:

- Chrystology:
 - Supported the theology of the Nicene Creed. The Cappadocian Fathers finished the fight against Arianism which Athanasius began.
- Humility:
 - Christianity is intrinsically humble. Justified by grace and requires casting oneself upon God's grace in Jesus Christ as our Savior.
- Pneumatology:
 - Wrote a book entitled, *On The Holy Spirit*. "True Christianity is both orthodoxy and "orthopraxy," and both of these, for Basil, are rooted in the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit. As such, it is not surprising that Basil also played a key role in the articulation of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity."²

¹ Philip Shaff. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Series II, Volume 8* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1895), 110.

² Haykin, Michael A. G. *Rediscovering the Church Fathers* (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 2011), 117.

- “In worship the Holy Spirit is inseparable from the Father and the Son. For dissociated from him you will not worship at all; but being in him you cannot by any means separate him from God, and more than you can sever the light from things seen, for it is impossible to see the image of God, except by the illumination of the Spirit. And he who gazes upon the image cannot sever the light from the image, for the cause of vision is of necessity seen together with the things we see. So then...through the illumination of the Spirit we behold the effulgence of the glory of God; and through the impress we are led up to him of whom he is the impress and exact representation.”³

Take Away:

- The length to which Basil went to defend the doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit teach us about the significance of these doctrines.
- We should adopt a long view to some struggles.

Resources:

Bainton, Roland H. *Early Christianity*. Malabar: Krieger Publishing Company, 1984.

Dowley, Tim. *The History of Christianity*. Minneapolis: Lion Publishing, 1990.

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McGrath, Alister E. *Historical Theology*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1998.

Nichols, Stephen J. *For Us and for Our Salvation*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007.

Placher, William C. *Readings in the History of Christian Theology, Vol. 1*.

Shaff, Philip. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Series II, Volume 8*.

³ Haykin, Michael A. G. *Rediscovering the Church Fathers* (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 2011), 124.