

Unpacking the Apostles' Creed



THE APOSTLES' CREED

I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY,
CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD.
HE WAS CONCEIVED BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
AND BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY.
HE 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
AND IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER.
HE WILL COME AGAIN 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.

Introduction

The Apostles' Creed is perhaps the most succinct and ancient summary of the Christian faith. The creed outlines the apostles' teaching concerning the Gospel and serves to ground our understanding of the Christian faith in the Scriptures.

Discuss

What do you hope to get out of studying the creed together? What is your experience of the creed?

Why Study the Apostles' Creed?

We study the creed because it:

1. Provides a brief summary of the Christian faith.
2. Helps us avoid inadequate or incomplete versions of Christianity.
3. Shapes our sense of belonging within the community of God's people.
4. Helps us "confess" our allegiance.
5. Directs us back to God's word, the Bible.

Recite the Creed Together

Discuss

What seems to be the focus of the Creed and what seems to be missing?

Creeds in the New Testament

The word Creed comes from the Latin word *Credo*, which means, "I believe." The creed began as a statement of faith; a summary of the main points of the Christian faith. We actually see other mini-creeds scattered throughout the New Testament.

Philippians 2:6-11 reads:

Who, being in very nature God,
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 human being,
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.

“Jesus is Lord”

The simplest creedal confession in the New Testament is simply “Jesus is Lord”

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **Romans 10:9**

Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. **1 Corinthians 12:3**

For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. **2 Corinthians 4:5**

...and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. **Philippians 2:11**

Development of the Apostles’ Creed

The earliest form of the Apostles’ Creed is found in Irenaeus and Tertullian (200AD), called the “rule of faith.” Out of this emerged the Old Roman Creed. The Old Roman Creed is more or less the form of the Apostles’ Creed as we say it today.

The Creed was primarily used as a teaching tool during a baptism service in the early church.

Discuss

What themes or patterns do you see in the Apostles’ Creed?

Form of the Apostles’ Creed

The Apostles’ Creed has a Trinitarian structure. At its core it is the confession of Father, Son, Spirit.

There is also a “narrative” structure to the Creed. It touches upon three major movements in the story of God’s interaction with people:

- 1) **Creation** – God the Father, the creator of heaven and earth.
- 2) **Redemption** – Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection is the great redemptive act. Believers anticipate the same resurrection as they place their faith in Jesus and his work on the cross.
- 3) **Reconciliation** – Seen through the work of the Spirit in restoring humanity to the fullness of life, which includes “the communion of saints,” “the forgiveness of sins,” the resurrection of the body,” and “the life everlasting.”

Discuss

Share your own story. How has God made a broken thing new in your own life?

Pray