

Affirming the Essentials of Our Faith

A Study of the Apostles Creed

All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

Introduction

When people ask about Christianity, believers will naturally point to the Bible, try to get them studying the Bible and to lead them into personal trust in Jesus Christ as soon as they can. **Imagine** you have no Bible, though, and you live in a time where there are different beliefs about this man named Jesus.

History – Marcion rejected “the God of the OT” – OT was judgmental, NT was giving/forgiving. He rejected or reinterpreted what the church has come to believe about the creation, incarnation and resurrection of Jesus. He founded his own church with his own scriptures. His list of “scripture” was the first attempt to put together a NT.

Q – What is a creed?

“Creed” means “belief”; many Christians of former days used to call this Creed “the Belief,” and in the second century, when it first appeared, almost as we have it now, it was called the “**Rule of Faith**” or “**Symbol of Faith**”.

For almost two thousand years, the creeds of the Church were statements defining the core elements of Christianity. They were the basis for determining what it means to be a Christian. If you deviated from these beliefs, you were rightly labeled a **heretic**.

Q – What is the difference between a **creed** and a **confession**? (Baptists have traditionally NOT been creedal people – No creed but the Bible!)

During the Protestant Reformation, various denominations issued lengthier statements of faith, called canons or confessions, which further defined what the Reformed churches believed about salvation, church polity and other issues. These were meant to “describe” what a group of people believes, not say what it meant to be a Christian.

“This ancient document is the most excellent epitome of the things most surely believed among us. It is not issued as an authoritative rule or code of faith, whereby you may be fettered, but as a means of edification in righteousness. It is an excellent, though not inspired, expression of the teaching of those Holy Scriptures by which all confessions are to be measured. We hold to the humbling truths of God's sovereign grace in the salvation of lost sinners. Salvation is through Christ alone and by faith alone.” – **C. H. Spurgeon on the Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)**

Q – Why is it important to have a creed?

The hundred-word Apostles’ Creed (so called, not because apostles wrote it, but because it teaches apostolic doctrine) is a “simplified road map”, enabling you to see at a glance the **main points** of Christian belief. Written approx. middle of 2nd century. It would have been used to identify “true” Christians from the heretics.

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The Apostle's Creed is **Trinitarian** –It can be separated by statements about God the Father, the Son (larger), and the Holy Spirit. It may have also been used during **baptisms**, as a form of **examination**. Believers are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It helps to take them through the Creed, as both a **preliminary orientation** to the Bible and a preliminary analysis of the convictions on which faith in Christ must rest.

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 Holy Spirit,
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 Almighty,
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 life everlasting.

Q – Which part of the creed is given the most attention?

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I Believe in God

The Creed is personal! – “I”

In worship, the Creed would normally be recited in unison, but the opening words are “I believe”—not “we”: each worshiper speaks for himself/herself. Thus the believer proclaims his/her own beliefs.

Q – What is belief?

I can believe in UFOs without ever looking at one, or in democracy without ever voting. Belief like this is a matter of one’s intellect only.

- Basically you are saying, “I think it is true!”

“The Creed’s opening words, ‘I believe in God,’ render a Greek phrase coined by the writers of the New Testament, meaning literally: ‘*I am believing into God.*’ Above believing certain truths *about* God, I am living in a relation of commitment *to* God in trust and union. When I say, ‘I believe in God,’ I am professing my conviction that God has invited me to a commitment, and declaring that I have accepted his invitation.” – J.I. Packer

“Faith” may express the level of commitment meant by “I believe.”

The word “faith” has the idea of **trustful commitment** and **reliance**. Whereas “belief” suggests an **opinion**, “faith,” whether in a car, a medicine, a doctor, a spouse, is a matter of treating the person or thing as **trustworthy** and committing yourself accordingly. The same is true of faith in God, in a more far-reaching way. To have faith in God is to trust Him!

Faith is being sure of things we cannot see!

Hebrews 11:1, 3 ¹ Now faith is the **assurance** of things hoped for, the **conviction** of things not seen...³ By faith we **understand** that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Faith is needed to know God!

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is **impossible** to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must **believe** that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

True faith is founded in Jesus!

- The writer of the letter to the Hebrews provides a list of persons of faith throughout history, and then states the foundation of our faith.

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Hebrews 12:1–2 ¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a **cloud of witnesses**, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the **founder and perfecter** of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

“**Perfecter**” – one who completes something, or one who reaches a goal.

Q – What does God require of us?

John 6:28–29 ²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” ²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the **work of God**, that you **believe (trust) in him** whom he has sent.”

1 John 3:23 And this is his commandment, that we **believe (trust) in the name of his Son Jesus Christ** and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

Christian faith means **trusting** in God’s Son, Jesus Christ!

Q – What about doubt? Is there any room for doubt (double-minded) in the Christian’s mind?

Q – How can a faithful Christian help doubters?

- *Explaining* the problem area (for doubts often arise from misunderstanding)
- *Exhibiting* the reasonableness of Christian belief at that point, and the grounds for embracing it (for Christian beliefs, though above reason, are not against it)
- *Exploring* what prompts the doubts (for doubts are never rationally compelling, and hesitations about Christianity usually have more to do with likes and dislikes, hurt feelings, and social, intellectual, and cultural snobbery than the doubters are aware).