

The Apostles' Creed

Libanus Church

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Christian, what do you believe?

I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ, his Son, our Lord;

Who was conceived by the Virgin Mary;

Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried;

On the third day he was raised from the dead;

He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;

From where he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit;

In the holy catholic church; (the communion of saints)

The forgiveness of sins;

The resurrection of the flesh;

And eternal life.

HOW OLD IS THE APOSTLES' CREED?

The Apostles Creed dates from about the fifth century AD and is the oldest creed in common use by the Christian church.

DID THE APOSTLES ACTUALLY WRITE THE CREED?

No. The creed developed over time in the life of the church, rather than a statement that was once recorded for posterity. It is called the Apostles' Creed because it faithfully sets forth the central teachings of the apostles of Jesus Christ; and is written in twelve statements.

WHAT IS A CREED?

The English word creed comes from the Latin *credo* meaning "I believe." And in the language of the Christian church is a statement of its belief. What is recorded of Peter in response to Jesus' question in Matthew 16:16 is a creed, a statement of his belief in who Jesus was. It is one thing to say that we have faith, but true faith should have a logical expression. E.g. What do we actually believe? What is the skeletal framework of our belief? It is this question that a creed attempts to answer.

ARE WE TO THINK OF A CREED AS INSPIRED AS SCRIPTURE IS?

No it is not. Any creed is to be understood as the collective affirmation of the church in response to the inspired message that God the Holy Spirit has given in scripture. The worth of any creed is the extent to which it draws its statements from what the bible teaches. Creeds are always to be understood as subordinate to scripture.

IS A CREDAL FORMULA SCRIPTURAL?

The early church recognised that within the pages of the New Testament there are to be found credal statements. These brief credal statements are confessions of truth concerning the God who had revealed himself to us. We find confessions of faith in:

- i. Jesus Christ as Lord (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9; 1 Cor 15:3,4; 1 Tim 3:16).
- ii. God as our Father (1 Corinthians 8:6)
- iii. God as a Triune being (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14)

The value of such succinct statements of truth was not lost on the church. They were as it were, "*sound-bites*" of doctrine, or "*bite-size theology*."

WHY WAS THE CREDAL FORMULA DEVELOPED?

The phenomenal growth of the early church and its call to baptise and teach (Matthew 28.19,20) disciples called for an effective methods of instruction for new converts. What did it mean to believe in Jesus? The practice gradually developed in the church of questioning candidates for baptism. Did they understand why they were being baptised? Did they understand what it meant to confess Jesus as Lord? These questions gradually developed into statements or declaration of faith that the candidate was to make to show that they fully understood what they were doing when they were being baptised. It was in this way that the Apostles' Creed took shape.

WHY DID THE CHURCH USE THE CREED?

The statements made at baptism were a short summary of the instructions in the Christian faith that the candidates had received. These summaries of faith were gradually enlarged and given more detail in response to two causes:

1. The bringing together of the completed canon of scripture. This meant that the church was now able to hold a fuller understanding of what God had made known.

2. The rise of heresy, false teaching, within the church; and attacks upon Christianity from outside the church. With the passing of the apostles there was a vacuum of authority within the church and many erroneous ideas were put forth. The question was, how could the church maintain the apostolic authority on which it was established? The answer lay in the development of the Rule of Faith which allowed Apostolic teaching to continue through the use of:

i. The completed canon of scripture – Here the rule of faith, which contained the authoritative apostolic writings could be consulted and trusted.

ii. The ministry of bishops (who were the chief elders of the large city churches) – who were called to guide the church in living out the rule of faith.

iii. The use of creeds – which represented the summary of apostolic teaching to be believed and followed.

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF A CREED?

The value of a creed as a summary of the Christians faith reminds mature believers of the faith they stand on, and helps to teach both young converts and children the essentials of the Christian faith. A creed also help to establish union between churches by setting the standard of belief that the catholic Christian community confesses; thus guarding it against false teaching,

ARE THERE ANY SHORT COMINGS IN USING A CREED?

No. As long as we do not abuse a creed by putting on a par with scripture. A creed is distilled from the vat of Holy Spirit inspired scripture. And are a summary of Christian truth, not the sum total of biblical revelation.

WHY DOES THE APOSTLES' CREED MAJOR UPON CHRIST?

It is because the New Testament focuses on the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ as the only Mediator between God and men. It is Christ who is the exact representation of God to us. If we are not clear on what we believe about Jesus as the eternal Son of God, who became man, our faith is not the historic revealed faith of holy scripture, nor of the apostles.

WHY SHOULD CHURCHES USE THE CREED TODAY?

Wise churches want to keep healthy by celebrating what they believe. Our church is built upon our confession of faith. A creed is a confession, just like the Westminster Confession; The Savoy Declaration; The 1689 Baptist Confession. With much greater details these confessions expresses our understanding of the Rule of Faith taught in scripture. It is as the forerunner of all the great creeds and confessions of the catholic church of Jesus Christ that we value the use of the Apostles' Creed. And its use in our worship is a corporate act in which a congregation of believers unites to profess their faith in their Triune God.

The Rule of Faith

(A term used by early Christians to describe the standard of orthodoxy in faith and practice taught by the apostles of Jesus and incorporated into scripture)