

THE APOSTLES' CREED

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Essentials of Christian Theology, ed. Wm. Placher: pg. 28, 76, 91, 190, 232, 239, 247, 343, 370

The Christian Theology Reader, ed. Alister McGrath: pg. 12-14

In one of my more foolish moments at a MinMan meeting in the spring I asked what was our church's position on the Apostles' Creed. When I used it during Communion some people seemed unfamiliar with it. But I was assured it was solidly a part of the theological/spiritual understanding of the church though it did not get much attention. Here's the really foolish part: I proposed to teach it in a sermon/sermons. So today's message is some of the early church history, but it's important to know how we got to believe what we believe and how we know it's true. You may think it's unnecessary because all we need to know is the Bible. I agree: the Bible is indeed our authoritative word for what's what in terms of what we are to believe and do. But the Creeds were written, not by 1 person but the result of leading theologians coming together to make a statement of common belief that everyone could agree upon. There was enormous pressure on the early church as an endless parade of competing beliefs, surfaced.

I won't go through them all because that would wear you out. But if you want to know more they're documented in good detail and explanation in writings on the early church. Because of the painstaking work of our early forefathers, we don't face the same challenges today and we have clarity about the tenets of our faith. We have our own challenges today with various groups proposing beliefs that just don't square up with Scripture—for ex., Mormonism, Jehovah Witness, Scientology, New Agism, just to mention a few. But even with these, we can go back to the creeds and see how faithful each is with respect to what we believe and know to be true.

Our faith didn't just come out of a vacuum. There's a continuity through it right from the beginning of the Bible—as our series on *The Story* by Randy Frazee & Max Lucado made so clear. Our Bible didn't just appear at the time of Jesus' death. Some of Paul's letters appeared first. Mark's Gospel is generally believed to be the first one written and John's the last, with considerable overlap in the first three Gospels. Matthew and Luke probably used Mark as a source and maybe another source known as "Q" which has not been found. That doesn't change the validity of Scripture.

But the Bible in its present form maybe wasn't formally in place until The Council of Nicea in 325. And in the interval between Jesus' resurrection and 325, various books were debated for inclusion or exclusion from what's called the Canon. Books like James and Revelation and Esther were considered to be excluded, but with repeated study and constant criteria they were included.

Other books are included in what's known as the Apocrypha but are not included in our Bible. The Apocrypha is included in the RC Bible and Eastern Orthodox Bible. Lots was going on in the early days and there needed to be a "standardizing" of our beliefs, of what we stand for.

The Nicene Creed is widely regarded as the basis of orthodox Christianity in both the eastern and western churches. The word "creed" comes from Latin *credo* (I believe). Its primary focus is Christ, but it also importantly functions as a rule of faith for churches. It spoke against Arianism. This is where we have to take a side trip on the wrong understandings among some early Christians. Many followed Arianism, a heresy that treated Jesus as the supreme creation of God and denied His divinity. So the Nicene Creed was written. The creed includes four explicit condemnations of Arian views as well as three statements of faith. Thanks to Russ' pamphlets, you have a copy of the Nicene Creed:

**"We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, the maker of all things seen and unseen. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God; begotten from the Father; only-begotten—that is, from the substance of the Father; God from God; light from light; true God from true God; be-gotten not made; being of one substance with the Father; through whom all things in heaven and on earth came into being; who on account of us human beings and our salvation came down and took flesh becoming a human being; He suffered & rose again on the third day, ascended into the heavens; and will come again to judge the living and the dead.
And in the Holy Spirit.**

As for those who say that "there was when He was not," & therefore being born He was not," and "He came into existence out of nothing," or who declare that the Son of God is of a different substance or nature, or is subject to alteration or change—the catholic and apostolic church condemns these."

I won't say more about that or we'll be getting into way too much theology. But there you have the Nicene Creed & some background. Now let's go to the Apostles' Creed which was our intention in the first place.

The creeds of the early Church preserve the faith of the apostles who first preached the Gospel of Christ. We receive them as a legacy in which the true interpretation of the Scriptures is protected. We use the **Apostles' Creed** as a checkpoint for our faith. When you want to assess the truth of faith that's a very good place to test it. It's also a reminder to us that we, the Church over all history, share these common understandings. The Apostles' Creed is widely used in the western church as a succinct summary of the leading themes of the Christian faith. Historically, it evolved in a complex way. Its origins come from declarations of faith that were required for those who wanted to be baptized. There are twelve individual statements in the

creed. Traditionally, they are ascribed to individual apostles, but there's no historical justification to support that.

Though it had its beginnings as early as the second century, it wasn't in its present form until the eighth century, so you can see there were lots of controversial/heretical teachings that needed to be cleaned up in those intervening years. During the twentieth century the creed has become widely accepted by most churches, eastern and western, as a binding statement of Christian faith. The "descent into hell" and the "communion of saints" aren't found in the eastern churches.

1. I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator (maker) of the heavens and earth.
2. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord;
3. who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary;
4. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell
5. on the third day He was raised (rose) from the dead;
6. He ascended into the heavens (heaven), and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
7. from where (whence) He will come to judge the living (quick) and the dead.
8. I believe in the Holy Spirit (Ghost);
9. in the holy catholic church; the communion of saints;
10. the forgiveness of sins;
11. the resurrection of the flesh (body)
12. and eternal life (the life everlasting).

So what are we dealing with here? The nearly universal acceptance of these creeds suggests that they ought to be given special ongoing significance. They act as markers indicating the boundaries of what the church considers to be central (orthodox).

When we confess the one faith of the church we become a contemporary embodiment of the legacy of the faith that spans the ages. What we say we believe here is what believers have said they believe right back to the time when Jesus walked throughout Palestine. And our successors will do likewise in the future. It makes us all members of one community of faith (p.28).

That was the easier part. Now to go on to an explanation of each of the twelve statements could take us well into eternity! What does it mean that we believe in God the Father Almighty, maker (creator) of heaven & earth? It may be helpful to remind us of how we speak of each person of the Trinity—God the Father as Creator, Jesus as Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as Sustainer. To get to this understanding, remember that Jesus was a Jew and the movement that sprang up around Him 2000 years ago was initially a Jewish phenomenon. So, the assumptions about God that were most basic to followers of Jesus were the same as those established among

the Israelites for more than 1000 years. Eventually, Christianity came to adopt many of the fundamental features of the Jewish understanding of God, particularly first, that there was only one God (Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One—Deuteronomy 6:4). Second, **God has created all that is**. In the beginning God created the heavens & the earth (Gen. 1:1). **The whole universe testifies to the majesty & power of its maker—Psalm 19**: “The heavens declare the glory of God...” **Psalm 8** opens and closes with, “Lord, O Lord, how majestic is Your Name... God created the world and all its inhabitants and created humankind in His image (Genesis 1:26, 27). God the Father is then, the Creator. But, confusingly, remember the Trinity and the singularity of their actions. **God is the Father to whom we come, the Son through whom we come, the Spirit by whom we come.**

So, while we attribute one of the Trinity with a certain role, they are together one. In the history before Jesus walked the earth, God had called Sarah & Abraham into a covenant and elected Israel as a chosen people to bring the whole creation back to a right relationship with God. God told Abraham “all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:3). God showed extraordinary faithfulness to the Jews/Israelites even when they repeatedly tried to abandon this relationship. God relentlessly pursued them lovingly. Without Him nothing was made that has been made. (Psalms 113:5-9, 139:13-18; Matthew 22:35-40; Acts 17:24-28)

The living God is Lord, Creator of all, Sustainer & Ruler of the universe. In the seasons and the harvests, in the rise and fall of nations, God’s goodness and judgment are present. All events in this world are under the sovereign care of the eternal God.

After the great flood God said, “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. Never again will I destroy all living creatures... **As long as the earth endures**, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day & night will never cease.” In **Isaiah 46:8-10**, God says, “Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels... I’m God and there is no other; I’m God and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand and I’ll do all that I please.” In **Matthew 10:29-31**, Jesus says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. Even the hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

God is the Creator of all, the one who keeps everything going; He rules the universe. He created and keeps the seasons turning by His physical mobilizing of the solar system. Those seasons in turn enable the harvests to come in. He rules over the rise and fall of nations. **Romans 13:1** says, “Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.” **All events in the world are under the sovereign care of God.**

God repeatedly brought kings to power and/or deposed them at His will, including Solomon and David. He even used **Cyrus**, a Persian king and enemy of Israel, as a saviour for His chosen people. God the Father saved baby Jesus from the tyranny of **Herod**. Regular earthly events happened according to prophesies: Caesar **Augustus** ordered a census that sent Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem where prophets said Christ was to be born.

Father God, thank You that you established all life and keep everything going according to your goodness and care for us.