

THE APOSTLE'S CREED II

2024-11-17

Two weeks ago we took a look at the need for the church to develop creeds that everyone could understand, live by and test challenges to the faith to determine if they were legitimate or heretical. It's important to know how we got to believe what we do and how we know it's true. The Creeds were written by theologians coming together to make a statement of common belief that everyone could agree upon. There was enormous pressure on the early church with heretical beliefs. Not unlike today, there were skeptics and spin artists, including those who you would have expected to be helping to clarify, not muddy the waters.

Very early on, Gnosticism became a major challenge to orthodox Christianity. Gnostics claimed that they alone had true, secret knowledge about salvation passed down from the Apostles. Among their erroneous contentions was that Jesus couldn't be God if He was incarnated.

Marcion, 150 A.D., was influenced by the Gnostics. He saw the Old Testament. God as different from the New Testament. God (some still speak like that today) and wanted to eliminate the Old Testament. He claimed Jesus wasn't present in the Old Testament. and that the Messiah was not born of a woman and had no physical body.

Docetism said that Christ was not truly human and that the Spirit and Word of Christ indwelt Christ at His baptism and left Him at His crucifixion or that Jesus wasn't crucified at all.

Montanism centered around the gift of prophesy. Montanus referred to himself as the Paraclete—the Holy Spirit. He emphasized end times, no marriage, extreme fasting, celibacy.

On top of this was the fundamental disagreement between orthodox Judaism and Christianity. Many Jews couldn't understand how Messiah could also be God—the Torah centres around "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is One." So they never expected Messiah to be divine in the full sense of the word. And, they fully expected Messiah to free Israel from Rome.

Because of the painstaking work of our early fore-fathers, we don't face the same challenges today and we have clarity about the tenets of our faith. We have our own challenges with various groups proposing beliefs that don't square up with Scripture—ex. Mormonism, Jehovah's Witness, Scientology, New Agism, to mention a few. But we can go back to the creeds and see how faithful each is with respect to what we believe and know to be true.

The Nicene Creed is widely regarded as the basis of orthodox Christianity in both the eastern and western churches. Its primary focus is Christ, but it's also important as a rule of faith for churches. It specifically spoke against Arianism—a heresy that treated Jesus as the supreme creation of God and denied His divinity. So, the Nicene Creed was written:

“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; begotten 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 and 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,” and 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.”

What jumps out at you is one line about God the Father and 1 about the Holy Spirit. The rest is a clarification of who Jesus is/was and how He “fit into” the Godhead.

The creeds of the early Church preserve the faith of the apostles who first preached the Gospel. They serve as a legacy in which the true interpretation of the Scriptures is protected.

The **Apostles’ Creed** is a checkpoint for our faith and a reminder that we, the Church over all history, share these common understandings. It developed between the second and eighth centuries, since many controversial/heretical teachings needed to be cleaned up in those intervening years. It’s become widely accepted by most churches 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 & earth.
2. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord;
3. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit & 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).

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 (Acts 1:28).

So, to the first statement. What does it mean that we believe in God the Father Almighty, maker (creator) of heaven and 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 Christianity 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. Christianity adopted many fundamental features of the Jewish understanding of God, particularly. First there was only one God. Second, ***God has created all that is***. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”(Genesis 1:1). ***The whole universe testifies to the majesty & power of its maker***: “The heavens declare the glory of God...” (Psalm 19:1) **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 each of the Trinity with a certain role, they are together One. In the history before Jesus walked the earth, God called Sarah and 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 even when they repeatedly abandoned this relationship. God relentlessly pursued them lovingly. Without Him nothing was made that has been made. Psalm 113:5-9; Psalm 139:13-18; Matthew 22:35-40; Acts 17:24-28.

The living God is Lord, Creator of all, Sustainer and 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 and night will never cease.” (Genesis 8:21)

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.”

Matthew 10:29-31, Jesus says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not 1 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: “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 or deposed them at His will,** including Solomon and David, even Cyrus, a Persian king and enemy of Israel, as a saviour for His chosen people. The Father saved Jesus from the tyranny of Herod. Earthly events happened according to prophecies: Caesar Augustus ordered a census sending Jo and Mary to Bethlehem where prophets said Christ was to be born.

The whole creation is the theatre of God’s glory and action. God rules the lives of individuals and nations yet leaves our freedom and responsibility intact. God is always at work in the world and in our lives and directs all things towards fulfilment in Christ.

At the end of Genesis, **Joseph** tells his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

In **Deuteronomy 30:19, 20** God says, “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you (who else could do that!) that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live, and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to His voice & hold fast to Him. For the Lord is your life...”

In **Acts 2**, Peter addresses the crowd in Jerusalem, telling them that Jesus was handed over to them “**by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge**” but they “put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross.” But God raised Him from the dead... because it was impossible for death to keep a hold on Him.”

Indeed, “All things work together for those who love God, who have been called according to His purpose,” (**Romans 8:28**)

God's is righteous and demonstrates His loving purpose even in a world where evil abounds. This purpose is uniquely disclosed in Jesus Christ. In Him we see the greatest paradox of life: mighty God chose to come into this world in weakness. In Christ God entered most deeply our suffering.

Matthew 12:15-21: When the Pharisees were plotting how to kill Jesus, the Father spoke: "Here is My servant whom I have chosen, the 1 I love, in whom I delight; I will put My Spirit on Him and He will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out, till He leads justice to victory. In His name the nations will put their hope."

We can't fully comprehend nor is it our task to justify God's rule of the world. Though we experience evil in life, evil can't ultimately prevail, for it's against God's will. The resurrection of Christ and the new life He gives us are assurance of His ultimate triumph.

There are lots of things we don't understand about individuals, the choices they make or the often miserable circumstances they face. The same thing goes with **world order** or the lack of it. **How** do things just keep getting uglier and the world more terrifying to live in? **Why's** life so hard sometimes? **If God's so loving** then why does He allow...any of a million things?

But there's comfort to know that we can't even come close to comprehending, let alone justifying, God's rule of the world. **That is not our task. God is completely able to answer for Himself.** Still, evil is prevalent. Every newscast provides a litany of how low humanity can sink. We have this huge sin problem. **But evil won't prevail.** Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the new life He gives, God's goodness will triumph.

Isaiah 55: 8-9 reminds us that God's "thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways [His] ways...As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are [His] ways higher than your ways and [His] thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is My word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." **God is on a completely different radar screen than us.**

The mystery of human existence is that we belong to God and have been made in the divine image. We know ourselves only when we know God. Our lives must reflect the Creator's love and purpose for all creation. God is Creator and Lord.

It blows my **mind that we're created in God's image and that we belong to Him!**
Romans 8 says we've been adopted by Him. **Psalm 8** "Who are we that you are mindful of us or that you care for us?" Yet **Acts 17:23** In Him we live and move and have our being." Once we are His children, we must live lives that reflect God's love and purpose for all His creation. Live like that this week.