

The Apostle's Creed: An Introduction (Week 1)

Creeds are summaries of belief. In many modern churches, particularly Protestant Evangelical ones like the ones I have attended, they are often ignored. Our zeal to uphold the paramount authority of the Bible often leads us to consider creeds irrelevant or even sacrilegious. Why should we learn such things when we have God's Word on the bookshelf next to us or on the phone in our pocket?

Of course, the Bible is above any words we could use, even words that we use to communicate what it is saying, but that doesn't mean we stop listening to preaching on Sunday or quit reading our devotionals every other day of the week. Ezra and his fellow scribes explained the Scriptures to their listeners as they read them.¹ Peter and Paul, in the book of Acts, did not merely unroll their scrolls and begin reading Genesis 1. They took the message of God, summarized it, and applied it to the situations and people they encountered.

Creeds perform a similar function. They take a lot of important ideas and summarize them so that simple people like me can wrap their minds around them. Many think that the early Church was already making creeds before and during the writing of the New Testament. In fact, some of these early summary statements found their way into the Scriptures themselves; take a look at Philippians 2:6-11, Colossians 1:15-20, 1 Timothy 3:16, and 2 Timothy 2:11-13 as possible examples. In a time and place where literacy and the written word were rarer, forming, memorizing and passing on succinct statements or songs was a very useful way of communicating the convictions of Christianity.

The blessing and joy of history is that we can today pull back the curtain of time and take a peek at what our brothers and sisters in the Lord were saying centuries ago. We can have fellowship with them, as we consider their words and find common ground in the most precious truths of our faith. For the next several weeks we are going to explore one of the oldest and most widely accepted creeds of the Church: the Apostle's Creed.

While we can't say for certain that the creed was actually penned by the Apostles or even by those who knew them personally, like we can say about the New Testament, we do know that it was meant to summarize their teaching and pass it on to future generations like our own. It seems that its early form originated in the 200s AD, though it changed a little over the centuries. The creed was originally used with catechumens, which is a fancy word for new believers who are being trained in Christian doctrine before getting baptized.²

When you're finished reading or listening to this, take a moment to reflect on how you have been trained in the Christian faith? Was it done biblically, thoroughly, consciously? Are there any areas you find are lacking? Any doctrines you do not understand or haven't given much thought to? Like the catechumens of the Third Century and their teachers we ought to think deeply and clearly about what we have received from God Himself. In closing, read the actual Creed below and ask yourself if there is anything in it that you struggle to understand. Then, stay tuned because we're going to go through it all, line by line.

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended to the dead; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick 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."

¹ Nehemiah 8:7+8

² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Apostles-Creed>