

BASICS OF CHRISTIANITY

The bulk of what we believe we hold in common with the Christian church around the world and throughout the ages. Three creeds adopted by the worldwide church centuries ago summarize the most important tenets of our faith: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

To summarize these common beliefs, we'll use the text of the Apostles' Creed. But first an explanation. Despite its title, the Apostles' Creed was not written by the apostles or disciples who walked and talked with Jesus in the first century. Instead it is a compilation of what believers in the first centuries knew from written and oral testimony, which was then distilled into the essentials of the Christian faith. This creed was reworked by successive councils of the early Church. It was adopted in its present form before the end of the fourth century.

A quick look at the structure of the Apostles' Creed reveals one of the bedrock truths of the Christian faith: the Trinity. The creed is divided into three parts: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All Christians believe that the Bible reveals one God in three "persons." In other words, God is a perfect community of love.

God

I believe in God,

The creed begins with a simple affirmation of belief in God. The following three sections describe the three persons of this one God.

God the Father

*the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.*

The first person of the Trinity is the one Jesus revealed to us as "the Father." God is not some remote, unknowable spiritual entity. Rather God is our loving, powerful heavenly Father.

Against all other ideologies about the beginning of the world, we profess that God created heaven and earth and all that is in them. This profession affirms the goodness of creation and endows it with meaning and purpose.

Further, all that is good and beautiful points to a Creator God. Thus all humans can know something about God through what creation reveals.

God the Son

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

We affirm that Jesus of Nazareth, though born of a woman, was more than a human being; he was actually God's Son and thus also God himself.

As the Christ, Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies about a Messiah who would redeem God's people. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are grounded in historical fact.

After his earthly work of redemption was finished, Jesus took his place in heaven as Lord of all things. He will come again to make all things new.

God the Holy Spirit

*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.*

**that is, the true Christian church of all times and all places*

When Jesus ascended bodily to heaven, he promised his disciples a comforter, a source of power; one that would “lead them into all truth.” This gift was the Holy Spirit. Ever since then, the Holy Spirit has dwelled in and empowered God’s people.

The Holy Spirit is the presence and power of God with us here and now, leading the church, uniting God’s people, applying God’s forgiveness to our broken lives, speaking to us, and spurring us individually and communally to godly living.

THE BIBLE

We believe that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. It contains all that people in any age need to know for their salvation. We call the Bible God’s Word, believing that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, God speaks to us through this book.

The Bible has two major sections that at first glance seem quite different from each other.

The Old Testament records God’s work through centuries of Israelite history until about 400 B.C. The New Testament picks up with God’s work through the life of Jesus, the coming of the Holy Spirit in power, and the subsequent spread of the church over the first century A.D. You could also think of the Bible as a library of sixty-six unique books of various kinds by many authors in different contexts over thousands of years. But it is only one book: the whole of it forms one richly textured story of God’s loving purpose in relation to humans and the whole creation.

Four Chapters

Reformed believers summarize this biblical story in four major chapters:

Creation - In the beginning God created a world where everything was in perfect harmony. Relations between God and humans and the creation were good and whole.

Fall - Through pride, humans were enticed by Satan into rebelling against God. Their disobedient act opened the door for the “sin virus” to enter the world. This virus contaminates everything: no person, no creature, no institution, no relationship or individual action is free from the totality of this contamination. The results of sin are evident in such things as greed, violence, and oppression as well as pollution, sickness, death, and weeds. The most devastating effect of sin is alienation from God. Still, sin cannot obliterate the “image of God” in us that longs for God and for wholeness.

Redemption - But God did not allow sin have the last word in this story. Because of his great love for humans and for the whole creation, God set out to redeem the world from its sinful condition. God called Abraham and Sarah and their descendants, the people of Israel, to be his partners in blessing the whole world. Finally, he sent his only Son, Jesus the Messiah, to live a fully human life and then die, thus paying the price for humanity’s sinful actions. But death could not defeat Jesus. God raised him from the dead to show that he had conquered sin and death. Now God’s kingdom is growing and spreading in this world, and Christians are part of that great work.

New Creation - One day, Jesus is coming back again to extend God’s reign on earth completely. He will do away with any traces of sin and its effects. There will be no more sickness, no more suffering, no more alienation from God, no more death. Evil will be eradicated. God himself will dwell with humans and all creation will be fully restored. Praise God!