



TRADITIONS
HOME GROUP STUDY SERIES
February to May 2015

FGA MELBOURNE
MEMBERS

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Note on the cover symbol: The symbol is known in Latin as "triquetra", meaning three-cornered. The symbol demonstrates the simultaneous distinction and unity of God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit; three persons in one God.

TRADITIONS – Members

Session 1: History and Scripture

Why is it important to get our traditions right?

Key passage: *“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”* (1 Corinthians 15:1-8, ESV)

A. Scripture Reading (Hebrews 2:1-4)

B. Main point

Creedal statements shape our thoughts, life and actions

Can you recite the Apostles' Creed? Give it a go. Then have someone to read the whole creed aloud.

Whether we realise it or not, we all live by creeds. Creed is just another name for belief (the root word *credo* is Latin for "I believe"). What we believe or agree with in our thoughts, guides the way we live our life, shaping our thoughts and actions. This is true of all people, irrespective of culture or what the actual beliefs are. For example, just as helping out someone in need stems from the belief that humans should be compassionate to one another, likewise the justification for violent terrorism stems from a belief system that condones killing is another human for a cause. What kinds of beliefs do you live your life by?

From a Christian perspective, the Apostles' Creed is a collection of connected statements that centralises the core beliefs of Christians across all times. The Hebrew creed spoken by the whole congregation of Israel (the *Shema*) is stated in Deut 6:4 "Hear O Israel: The Lord (*Yahweh*) our God the Lord (*Elohim*) is one." The first known Christian creed was "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3, Rom 10:9, Phil 2:11). This statement defied the ruling Roman creedal statement, that the Emperor, Cesar is Lord. Gradually the creeds or beliefs developed and the Apostles' Creed was developed in the early church around the 2nd century AD from the Church in Rome. This was a time the church leaders wanted to recognise the most important things that were contained in the Apostles writings. These were not Scripture itself, but the to ensure the Creed was faithful to the Bible in every respect each word and statement was carefully crafted. Given such great importance, the creed has since been learnt and passed from generation to generation, across both the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. These are the faithful crowd of witnesses that now look to us, the present generation to see how we as Christians will live in this generation. As a Christian today, we are all on the same

journey. The Apostles' Creed provides us with markers of that journey so we do not drift away.

C. Discussion Questions

1. What are the things that drive us? If you had to make a creedal statement, what would it be?

E.g. "I believe you must never pay full price for a product" or "happy wife, happy life"

2. Take a look at the Apostles' Creed. If someone were go through it, as if it were one of the statements above (or one of your own creeds), what things would be different in their life?

3. What family traditions did you have growing up and what did they achieve?

D. Application and Prayer

What words do you live by? At the beginning of this series, it would be a good idea to write down some of your core beliefs. These beliefs affect the way you live and what you value, and sometimes they can be hidden from your own view. Spending time to figure out what they are for yourself allows you to match your beliefs against God's word.

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what you really do believe. Surrender your beliefs to God and ask him to shape and lead you in thinking and understanding, so that you may increase in the knowledge of our loving and holy God.

Try to memorise the Apostles Creed before the next session.

E. Looking Forward

Next session we will look at the God of the creed in whom we believe.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

Each one of the creedal statements is designed to bring out the best of Christianity. It would be interesting to reflect on what's different between the Christian Creeds and your own personal beliefs. If you have an opportunity, perhaps talk to your home group leader or a pastor about some of these differences.

TRADITIONS – Members

Session 2: "I Believe in God"

Early Christians believed in a higher power

Key passage: "For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame... for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:11-13 (ESV)

A. Scripture Reading (Rom 10:8-13)

B. Main point

How do you think the whole world works?

In our secular western world God is often absent. Discussions about God are often met with scepticism, scorn or even ridicule. Sometimes in our defence of the gospel we fail to realise that each belief system begins with a statement of faith. Adherents to the big bang theory (not the TV show), for example, hold to a creedal statement "time began at the Big Bang". This popular theory says that world has not existed forever but rather arose from an "initial singularity", which had infinite density to have contained all the matter in the universe. Around 15 billion years ago, the universe was born from the big bang that released the matter, and it has been expanding ever since (www.hawking.org.uk/the-beginning-of-time). While this is not a lesson on apologetics (note, the Big Bang theory does not negate the existence of God, but that is a discussion for another time), it does not take much to realise that this cannot be proven and it is just the best theory that explains the beginning of the universe and time based on observation of natural phenomena in our cosmos.

For theists (people who believe there is a supernatural higher power) including Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and animists), their belief in God shapes their understanding of the origins of the universe. For Christians it is very specific, I believe in God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth. Then, each of the Christian creedal statements break it down further so that it quickly becomes unique among the world's major belief systems. In particular, the claims made about Jesus are extraordinary, his life from conception to death, and included within them are documented historical events that can be verified today. This is a specific God, who came at a specific time in a way that in a way that.

We do well to remember that many religions place the emphasis on the laws that govern the practice of their religion (called orthopraxy). These religions say that you must do certain rites before you get forgiven, or do works to earn salvation. For Christianity the emphasis is on orthodoxy, which is right opinion or belief, hence the Apostles' Creed begins with "I believe in God..."

C. Discussion Questions

1. Why do some people not believe in God?

2. How does believing in God (any God) shape the way you live?

3. What differentiates Christians in their beliefs from others? (clue: take a look at the last two lines of today's section of the Apostles' Creed)

D. Application and Prayer

Try an exercise to help prepare you for evangelism. Break into pairs and take turns to share why you believe in God, and what that means to you. Allow 3 minutes per person. Make sure you time it!

Pray for someone you know or have heard of who do not yet believe in God or know Christ. You can pray for unreached peoples who have never heard of God or pray for families of friends. There is power in praying together.

E. Looking Forward

Next session we look at the first of the two major sacraments that Jesus instituted, that of Baptism.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

Genesis, the first book of the Bible is not an attempt at a scientific account of how the world began. Rather, it answers the questions why it came into being and gives us the reason and purpose for why we exist. The beginning of the world is a good way to start thinking about beliefs. Feel free to talk to your home group leader or pastor about your questions regarding this.

TRADITIONS – Members

Session 3: Baptised and Raised

First Sacrament, Baptism

Dying to ourselves and being raised with Christ

Key passage: *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20, ESV)

A. Scripture Reading (Galatians 3:27-29)

B. Main point

You die, Christ lives.

God was the one to initiate physical signs for spiritual truths. Starting from the Garden of Eden, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were both markers of spiritual boundaries. Sacraments, themselves, are not unique to the New Testament. We see that through Moses, God instructed the people of Israel to embrace annual feasts, celebrations and ceremonies. Each of which usually involved sacrifice on behalf of the people, but to which God attached a specific meaning promise. Physical things and special events provide vital landmarks in our spiritual journey that help us engage with God. Living every day life, we have a tendency often to forget, neglect or trivialise or things that God sees are important. But by recognising these we understand what things are important to him and make them our priority too.

Baptism is a one-off ceremony or ritual that unites us with Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus himself was baptised. This act was one of identification with human sin and suffering, and was the first step in our liberation, by fulfilling all righteousness (Matt 3:15). It was only after Jesus' baptism that the Holy Spirit descended on him (Mark 1:9-13, John 1:33-34) and he was anointed with power and commissioned for ministry, and his sonship was publically sealed.

As it was with Christ so it should be with us. As we go through baptism we become united with Christ in his death, and rise to his resurrection to be clothed with Christ (Gal 3:27-29).

It is not just the dying of self, but it is being raised to live for Christ (Gal 2:20). Much like a wedding marks the end of your single life, and the beginning of a new life with your spouse, Baptism marks a new life with Christ. Through enacting this symbol we join with all the Christians that have gone before, who have declared that Jesus Christ is Lord.

If you have already been baptised then this session is a daily reminder of what this symbolises. If not, you are invited to thoughtfully consider it.

C. Discussion Questions

1. Is ritual important? Why?

2. What does Baptism mean to you? Why is it important?

3. Why do you need to die to self? What's wrong with you?

4. What does it mean to be raised with Christ?

D. Application and Prayer

We will be having baptism on Easter Sunday. For those who have not been baptised, consider taking this step of obedience in faith. Talk to your home group leader or one of our pastors if you would like to.

E. Looking Forward

In the next session we look at three sanctifying agents that help us to become more like Christ, Holy Communion, the work of the Holy Spirit and the community of believers.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

"The blessing of sacramental worship is the thrill and comfort of knowing that God meets us where we are, washing us, feeding us, quenching our thirsts for grace. We not only believe it, we sense it, see it, taste it, feel it, smell it and swallow it. What my mind doubts my mouth tastes as the Lord's goodness. When my faith falters, my fingers can touch the truth." Leonard I. Vander Zee.

Christians engage in rituals not because the rituals themselves have some magical power. Rather, they are very important real life connectors for us, for the things we believe and love on the inside.

TRADITIONS – Members

Session 4: Sanctified

Second Sacrament: Holy Communion, The Holy Spirit, Church and Community

Key passage: *"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:23-25, ESV)*

A. Scripture Reading (1 Cor 11:17-34)

B. Main point

We have been sanctified to be like Christ

The sacrament of Holy Communion serves the purpose to connect us with God as our creator and redeemer. Although we partake together, this experience moves from a corporate act to a very personal level. Christ becomes your creator and your redeemer. We are reminded that our personal sin was laid on him, he took our place, took our condemnation and our shame. In place we take his forgiveness and healing and all the "sózó" of the cross. Sózó is the Greek word translated as salvation. It does not just refer to eternal life, but encompasses provisions for welfare, prosperity, deliverance, preservation, salvation, and safety. This is the good news of the gospel.

As baptized believers we are now part of Christ's body (1 Cor 10:17), and he is the head. The same body and blood that sanctifies you also sanctifies the Christians around you, including your pastors or other men and women of God (1 Cor 12:12-13). Remembering Christ together unites us together in humility and unity.

Communion is not the only sanctifying agent. God also speaks to us through the Holy Spirit. As we yield to the inner promptings and obedience to the Word of God, we find ourselves becoming more like Christ. Likewise, attending Church and living in community, or mixing with other believers are other sanctifying agents that God uses to mould Christ in us. So we have three in addition to the sacrament of Holy Communion, the relational aspect of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives, receiving teaching through the Church and journeying with other believers. People who are usually quite different to ourselves, but have equal needs for forgiveness and grace. Embracing these three binds us together as the body of Christ (Eph 4:4).

C. Discussion Questions

- 1. Why do you think Jesus chose ordinary elements like bread and wine to remember such a significant sacrifice?**
- 2. How does each of these three sanctifying agents make us more like Christ?**
- 3. What goes on with you every time you take communion at church?**

D. Application and Prayer

Share Holy Communion as a home group. This is something that should be only for people who desire to be committed to Christ, and to embrace him anew. If there are non-believers or people who are not comfortable then by all means opt out. There is absolutely no shame if you do not participate.

E. Looking Forward

Next Session we look at the Confession of sin, why it is so important to maintaining a vibrant walk with God.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

Holy Communion is something followers of Christ do in all traditions, whether they be Roman Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal, Uniting etc. The Bible teaches that this is one of two rituals that are done to experience Christ and more of God's grace in life. If you prefer not to partake you may still wish to receive a blessing prayer from your group leader.

TRADITIONS – Members

Session 5: Confession The Forgiveness of Sins

Key passage: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* (1 John 1:9-10, ESV)

A. Scripture Reading (James 5:13-16)

B. Main point

How are you dealing with sin?

Have you ever confessed your sin to another person? Most people privately deal with sin, deny that they sin or are too afraid/ashamed to deal with it at all. Some Christians have never confessed their deepest darkest sins to anyone else and wonder if they God can forgive them. Without confession to God or another person we trust, as we continue walking through life there is often a nagging voice in our heads reminding us of our sin, or worse bringing thoughts of condemnation that you have not been, or cannot be, forgiven. Guilt sticks until sin is confessed, and this becomes the Devil's playground.

Forgiveness of sins cannot be just a concept - it must be experienced by every Christian. We need to be reminded that the reality of our human nature is that we are not alone in our sin. And it is when we are able to confess our sin that powerful transformation can occur. This is a key factor helping us to live an authentic Christian walk.

The fantastic fact about forgiveness is that confession of sin restores the standard. It becomes as though the wrong had never happened. This is what makes it possible for you to live to God's standard. Forgiveness is a reboot or reset that God gives us by grace. Just as we don't deserve forgiveness or earn it, but we can freely receive it by grace. The catch is, just as we receive God's forgiveness we are also called to forgive others. Both of these things conspire to help us to live the life we want to live and are good for us to live.

If you are struggling with habitual sin, it can be a spiritual stronghold. Truth and light expels darkness and breaks the hold that principalities and powers can have over you. Find someone who you can confess your sin to and have them pray for you.

C. Discussion Questions

1. In today's era of no confession of sin at all, has it been better for us?

2. How are you dealing with your sin?

3. What are the barriers to confessing sins or being forgiven? How can they be overcome?

D. Application and Prayer

Have a time of personal reflection to God. Perhaps people want to write down their thoughts and prayers. Bring it before the cross. Depending on the dynamics of the group you may want to pair up with someone you trust, and share about sins that you are struggling with.

Pray for one another by quoting the scripture of absolution "because you have confessed your sins, God is faithful and just to forgive you and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9)

Finish with the song, "What Can Wash Away My Sin" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=oU4GFdjAmqo).

E. Looking Forward

In our final session we will see we are believers, what is the true hope for us in life everlasting.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

"To believe in the forgiveness of sins means that we have to confront those roadblocks with the unstoppable grace of God. Identify that place of stuckness and present this to God, standing on the finished work of Christ." J. D. Walt

Confess your sins, receive God's forgiveness and forgive yourself. You will become a new person.

TRADITIONS – Members

Session 6: Hope for the Ages Resurrection

Key passage: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."* (1 Peter 1:3-9, ESV)

A. Scripture Reading (Revelation 21:2-5)

B. Main point

How are you living for the eternal?

As J.D. Walt states "The resurrection of the dead has tremendous implications for the living". It can't help but be so. If this life is all we have then we live very differently (Luke 12:13-21, 1 Cor 15:22). We would live to serve ourselves. God has a higher purpose for each of us. Just as no one has the same destiny, we cannot fulfil anyone else's plan only ours.

God uses each person's journey, with the trials we face now, to produce in us a genuine faith that doesn't fade away. Suffering comes with a greater reward in Scripture (Matt 5:11-12).

Unfortunately, it is so easy just to focus on the needs of today. Some can be very pressing and never seem to let up. However God encourages us to lift our eyes to him, to seek help from him in time of need. Christ has gone before us and he is there for us (Heb 4:15-16). This knowledge should spur us on to keep doing good (Gal 6:9-10).

If the hope of eternal life with God doesn't impact our life now then what do we truly believe?

C. Discussion Questions

1. What do you believe about life after death? What questions do you have about the afterlife?

3. Will there be rewards in heaven?

3. Questions for the end of the series. What will you do different now? What traditions will you put into your life?

D. Application and Prayer

If you feel that the promise of eternal life does not impact your life the way you would like it to, then think about something you are going to do differently to change that. Break into pairs and share this with another person in your group. Pray for one another. Write it down. Just do it.

Particularly pray for those who are going through trials. Pray that their faith will be strengthened and encourage them with the promise that this test will have eternal consequences, proving that their faith is genuine before God and his holy angels, and there is a great cloud of witnesses cheering them on (Heb 10:1).

E. Read the Apostles' Creed together

THE APOSTLES' CREED

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

I believe 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, died and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

The third day he arose from the dead.

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

From there he shall come to judge the living 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.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

Attaining everlasting life begins with "I believe in God...". This is not just a mental assertion or declaration without meaning. Nor does it mean to cast off rational thought and abandon scientific inquiry. However, this type of belief cannot be found there. Belief is empowered by the Holy Spirit when it mixes with your faith. This is a gift from God and is given to those who seek it. J. D. Walt (paraphrased).

TRADITIONS – Members

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Note: Each word of the creed was carefully chosen and the creed was crafted over long discussions by the Church Fathers so that there are no words or sections. There are no words that are superfluous but each has been carefully chosen with meaning and purpose. Everything written is what the church Fathers were things that they wanted us to remember.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

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

I believe 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, died and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

The third day he arose from the dead.

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

From there he shall come to judge the living 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.