

# A Study of the Creeds of the Faith

## 1) Introduction

### a) Three Ecumenical (Universal) Creeds

- i) Apostles' Creed
- ii) Nicene Creed
- iii) Athanasian Creed

### b) What is a creed?

- i) A statement of faith (Latin "credo" = "I believe")
- ii) "I believe" not "we believe" because faith is personal – no one can attest to another's faith

### c) Why have creeds?

- i) Most people were illiterate; creeds were used to pass down the essentials of the faith
- ii) Only those had been through catechism were allowed to partake in Communion; after the Service of the Word those not confirmed were dismissed, the doors were closed, and the Service of the Sacrament was held
- iii) Many heresies developed over time that had to be addressed; the Creeds defined the essentials of the true faith (Gal 1:6-9)

## 2) Earliest Creed

### a) 1 Corinthians 15: 3 - 9

- i) Greek words used for "received" (parelabon) and "delivered" (paredoka) are equivalents of technical rabbinical terms used in the passing on of tradition (not "telephone game" but careful study of oral history)

### b) Paul's background

- i) Student of Gamaliel (see Acts 5:34); well versed in the traditions of the Jewish faith (Gal 1:14)
- ii) Personal revelation of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus approximately 2 years after the Resurrection
- iii) Visited Jerusalem 3 years later (c. 36/37 AD), met only with Peter and James, the brother of Jesus (Gal 1:18-19), where he received (parelabon) the Christian tradition

- iv) Paul's visit to the church at Corinth was c. 51 AD; 1 Corinthians is dated c. 54/55 AD
- c) Core statements of the faith
  - i) Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; He was buried, and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures
    - (1) Ps 16:8-11; Isa 53:6,11
  - ii) He appeared to Peter, then to the Twelve, then to more than 500 people at the same time, most of whom were still alive (and could thus serve as witnesses), and then to Paul himself
    - (1) Acts 1:21-22; Lk 24:34; Lk 24:36-43; Jn 20:19-23; Mt 28:10, 16-20
- 3) Apostles' Creed
  - a) Not created or approved by a particular council (versus Nicene)
  - b) Defines the core essentials of the Christian faith
  - c) Touches on Trinity
  - d) Traditionally recited on Sundays without Communion
  - e) Not written by the Apostles themselves, but is a brief statement of the core beliefs taught by God through the Apostles
  - f) Trinitarian in nature (Christians are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit)
  - g) Referred to as the "rule of faith" or "rule of truth" in the early church
  - h) Irenaeus received from Polycarp, and Polycarp from the Apostle John
    - i) *Contra Haereses, Irenaeus, "The Church throughout the whole world, to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples the faith in one God, the Father Almighty, who has made heaven and earth and the sea and all things that are in them; and in one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who has proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and resurrection from the dead, and the bodily assumption into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father."*
  - i) Complete form of current version is first found in a sermon by Caesarius of Arles in France in 500 AD
  - j) Luther's morning and evening prayers included reciting the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer

k) Referenced by Ignatius as early as 90 – 100 AD, by Justin Martyr as early as 140 AD

l) First Article: Creation

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

ii) What does this mean?

(1) I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.

(2) He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.

(3) He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.

(4) All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey him.

(5) This is most certainly true.

iii) God created all things out of nothing in six days. He created the angels (messengers); people do not become angels! The angels that rebelled are the devils or demons.

iv) Human beings are the most important visible creatures, having been made in His own image, with authority over all the earth (Gen 1:26-28)

v) God still provides for us our daily needs (Ps 145:15-16; 1 Peter 5:7)

m) Second Article: Redemption

i) 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, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

ii) What does this mean?

(1) I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in

His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

(2) This is most certainly true.

iii) Jesus means “the Lord saves”. Jesus is His personal name. (Matt 1:21)

iv) Christ (Greek) or Messiah (Hebrew) means “the Anointed”; Jesus has been anointed with the Holy Spirit without limit to be our Prophet, Priest, and King

v) Jesus is “true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary”

vi) Christ fulfilled the letter of the Law through His perfect life, innocent suffering and death, and Resurrection.

vii) “He descended into hell” has been a point of contention; not all versions of the Apostles’ Creed include this statement

(1) The Scriptures teach that Christ, after He was made alive in His grave, descended into hell, not to suffer punishment, but to proclaim His victory over His enemies in hell (1 Peter 3:18-19; Col 2:15)

n) Third Article: Sanctification

i) I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

ii) What does this mean?

(1) I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

(2) In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

(3) In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and sins of all believers.

(4) On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

(5) This is most certainly true.

iii) The Holy Spirit is God (Matt 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor 3:16)

- iv) All believers in Christ, but only believers, are members of the church (invisible church), one spiritual body of believers; Christ is the one and only head of the church. The visible church includes unbelievers
  - v) God has forgiven the believers their sins through Christ (Ps 130:3-4; 2 Cor 5:19)
  - vi) On the Last Day Christ will raise all the dead, the same bodies that died shall be made alive (Job 19:25-27; John 5:28-29; 1 Thess: Dan 12:2; Matt 10:28; Matt 25:41)
  - vii) God gives eternal life (John 3:16, John 3:36); at the time of death the soul of a believer is immediately with Christ in heaven (Eccl 12:7; Luke 23:43)
  - viii) At the Last Day, in both body and soul, we will begin the full enjoyment of being with Christ forever (1 Cor 15:51-52; Matt 25:34)
  - o) Normally used on nonfestival Sundays and, according to some worship books, during the “green seasons” of the church year – the Sundays after Epiphany and Pentecost
- 4) The Nicene Creed
- a) Called to address the nature of Christ and the Trinity
    - i) Arianism taught that Christ was a created being, and that there was a time when He did not exist (he had a beginning)
    - ii) Donatists – grew out of the persecution under Diocletian; taught that all acts of anyone that denied Christ were null and void, and the denier could never be restored to communion nor to office. Anyone they had baptized must be baptized again. This put the power in the person doing the act, not in God working through the person.
    - iii) Marcion – taught that God the Father, as Creator, was not the same God that Jesus referred to as His Father; the God of the OT was the creator of the evil in the world while Christ, as God, was the Savior of the world. Called for a complete separation from Judaism
  - b) Council of Nicaea called by Constantine in 325 AD to address Arianism, the date of Easter, structure of the Church, and the Donatist and Marcionist views
  - c) Convened on May 20<sup>th</sup>, concluded on July 25<sup>th</sup>
  - d) Attended by over 300 bishops and their staff (over 1,800 total)
- 5) Athanasian Creed
- a) Confessed only occasionally, most often on Trinity Sunday
  - b) Named after Athanasius (AD 296-373), the great defender of trinitarian theology
  - c) Originated in Gaul (France) a century or so after his death

- d) Not created or approved by a particular council (versus Nicene)
- e) Deals with the most fundamental Christian truths: the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and His work of redemption
- f) Martin Luther wrote “The first symbol, that of the apostles, is indeed the best of all, because it contains a concise, correct, and splendid presentation of the articles of faith and is easily learned by children and the common people. The second, the Athanasian Creed, is longer ... and practically amounts to an apology of the first symbol.” “I do not know of any more important document of the New Testament Church since the days of the apostles” [than the Athanasian Creed].