

Five Questions About the Apostle's Creed

Introduction Material

The Apostle's Creed

Sunday Morning Fellowship 2018

Introduction

- Welcome everyone here & elaborate on how exciting it is to begin a ***new series on the Apostle's Creed!*** This series will be an in-depth look at a very "*familiar*" creed that we recite multiple times a month – don't worry, it won't take us as long as it did to get through Mark! Instead of 50 Sunday's, it will only be 20 – 22 max, unless we want to talk more in-depth about something & need more time.
- As we go through this series, hopefully there will be a **renewed appreciation** that you develop for the Apostle's Creed and anytime we start a new series, it's always good for us to cover the background information – the context of our new subject – you might be thrown off if we were simply to dive into the creed, line by line, without explaining how we got there. In order to do that, there are **5 questions we need to ask ourselves this morning as we lay the foundation for this series:**

First Question = What is a creed?

- **Opening example:** One of the things I wish you could see that I get to see on Sunday morning's is when we say the Apostle's Creed. There are all sorts of emotions, reactions, especially for visitors who have never heard or recited it – they are puzzled, looking around the room thinking they are in some sort of cult meeting, *unsure how they got there*. **Ask:** If someone were to come up to you after our morning worship service & ask, "*What is the Apostle's Creed? Why did we do that? What does that word "creed" mean?*" What would you say?
- Besides Creed being an awful rock band in the late 90's, a **creed** is *a simple, yet profound summary of what we, as Christians, believe the Bible teaches*. **We have two types of creeds:**
 - **An individual creed**, which the term "creed" comes from the Latin root "*credo*", meaning "*belief*." It is a summary of what the individual Christian believes or is convinced of from the Scriptures. Thus, why I ask you mostly every Sunday, "*Christians what do you believe?*" *And you start off by saying, "I believe..."*
 - **A corporate creed**, which we call a "*confession*." The term "confession" means "*to say with*" and means to give expression to what Christians believe,

or, in common with one another. Examples of this are the **WCF** with LC & SC, or the **Heidelberg Catechism**.

Second Question = Why have a creed?

- **EX:** If we were to do a **survey** of everyone in this room, or perhaps during morning worship next door, and **have one question on it that read:** *Do you think the Apostle's Creed is important? Circle YES or NO* – **Ask:** What do you think the results would be? 90% in favor, 10% opposed? 50-50? 20% in favor, 80% opposed? There are hundreds of churches opposed to reciting any type of creed at all today. I would argue with you that this is an ignorant & foolish mentality to have.
- **EX:** Some churches **are adamant about saying**, “No creed but Christ” or “The Bible alone” – and those are NOT false statements – even with statements like that however, we see that “an anticreedal” approach is still a **CREED**. **EX:** I’m always amazed at churches that claim to be “non-denominational” because even when they say something like that, they are sticking to a “system” of beliefs to say they don’t “belong to any”, thus making them “creedal”, “doctrinal”, or “denominational.”
- **We need creeds** because you and I both know that we are **very forgetful creatures** – we take what we know for granted & if we fail to make a continued practice in ARTICULATING what we believe, before we know it, heresies & false teaching creep into the church, causing major heart-ache & division. **Listen to this:**
 - “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved”
Romans 10:9-10.
- In our Christian faith, **we are NEVER saying** that a creed is a holy, infallible document that was inspired by God – **creeds are man-made, Scripture is God-made**. We accept creeds, especially the Apostle’s Creed because it is firmly based on Scripture, it is an echo of what is found within the Bible & nothing else! As believers, we are called to be witnesses to God’s kingdom – we’re called to be full of joy, confidence, and **CONFESS** what Jesus has done for you. However, sometimes this can be hard, especially when someone **asks you**, “*What do you believe about the God of the Bible?*” **EX:** If you look at how thick your Bibles are, if you were to try to start in Genesis and end in Revelation, this would take a while & people would most likely never ask you a question about the Bible ever again!
- **We have creeds because** it’s meaningless to speak of “Jesus Christ” unless you are prepared to identify who He is, why He is your Savior and Lord.” As believers,

we offer our responses, confessing the TRUTH we have heard and been taught from God's Word. The **Apostle's Creed helps us do** that because it is a bullet-point summary of what Christians believe about God, Jesus, the church, and the life to come. **EX:** Think of the Apostle's Creed & the other ecumenical creeds as kind of an *"Idiot's Guide to Christianity."* We use them **not as a substitute, but a supplement** for growing in our faith. **Listen to Luke 1:4 here** = *"that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."* The Apostle's Creed is a constant reminder that there is a **SUBSTANCE to the Christian faith**. **Martin Luther** commented here, *"Christian truth could not possibly be put into a shorter and clearer statement."*

Third Question = Where did the Apostles Creed come from?

- **True or False:** The Apostle's Creed was written by the original 12 Apostles. **FALSE.** The first historian to mention the Apostle's Creed as having apostolic authorship was in 404 AD by a man known as Rufinus. He stated that each Apostle contributed a line/part to the Creed, thus why there are 3 distinct parts with 12 affirmations that everything is built on. He states that as the Apostles were about to go out into the world to minister, as we see in Acts, they all came together to compose a basic formula for what they would be teaching to non-believers. There can be some "validity" to this idea, **EX: Evangelism explosion** in high school.
- However, Rufinus is only one of a few to think this way. **Ask:** So why do we say it came from the Apostle's then? *The easy answer is because it was "always around."* Some think that Paul the Apostle helped contribute to it because there is an early form of a creed found in **1 Timothy 3:16**, **listen to this** = *"Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, and taken up in glory."* That verse covers the entire spectrum of what Christ was called to do in his earthly ministry. Paul later challenges Timothy in **1 Timothy 6** = *"fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."*
- The **earliest records of the Apostle's Creed are seen in 215 AD** where it was already being used in the early Roman Church as an Affirmation of Faith that newly baptized believers were required to say once they were finished being baptized. Its **Apostolic authorship** wasn't questioned until the **Council of Florence in 1438-1445**. Many Reformed pastors, including **John Calvin**, from whom we get the "5 points of Calvinism – TULIP" stated that the Creed wasn't written by the Twelve.

- **Ask:** Is the Apostle's Creed the only Christian creed out there? **No**, in fact there are three other ones that have been around since the early 400's AD. All these creeds **were written for a good purpose:** *to combat against FALSE TEACHING & HERESY:*
 - **Nicene Creed, 325-381 AD.** Combating against the false teaching of **Arius**, who taught that Jesus was a created being like God the Father but not the SAME as God the Father. This creed is usually recited by all Christian churches.
 - **Chalcedonian Definition, 451 AD.** Articulated the statement of Jesus' two natures (human and divine) being "*distinct, yet united without confusion, change, separation, or division*".
 - **Athanasian Creed, 500 AD.** Affirms the central Trinitarian and Christological beliefs after the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

Fourth question = What does the Apostle's Creed teach us?

- **EX:** After reciting the Apostle's Creed, someone still asks, "*Well yea, but what does it teach us OVER ALL?*" **The answer is:** It teaches us about who God is & what He has done/does for us daily in his existence as a Trinity. The instinct for many people today is to *read the Bible as if it were "all about me."* However, as the creed summarizes the Bible, it's clear that Scripture is "*all about God.*"
- **The Apostle's Creed gives us** a basic summary of Jesus' career from Incarnation to his Exaltation and does so in a beautiful way. It is a wonderful formula for what you and I believe, therefore, *if we believe, we confess the TRUTH about our beliefs.* "*So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter*" **2 Thessalonians 2:15.** Every time we recite the Apostle's Creed, we are led back with a **renewed confidence** in the infallibility of the Bible!

Fifth question = Why should we use the Apostle's Creed?

- Now that we've answered the first 4 questions, we come to the last, and perhaps one of the most important ones: "*Why use it? How can we use it? Who cares?*" Brace yourself, here are **5 reasons WHY we should use the Apostle's Creed:**
 - **First, it is declarative.** Every time we say it, *we declare openly and without shame, doubt, or skepticism* WHAT WE BELIEVE strictly on the basis & foundation of God's Word. We need to be reminded of what we believe as often as we can, because as the Bible warns us, ***false teaching is very sly.***

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” Matthew 7:15.

- **Second, it is defensive.** The Apostle’s Creed serves as both a fence of protection, but also a foundation for what we believe through the life we’ve been given because of Christ. We go out into the world eager to share the gospel, but also prepared to give a defense when someone questions the Bible: *“In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” 1 Peter 3:15.*
 - **Third, it is educational.** A believer of any age can memorize this creed, learning the basics of the Christian faith. No matter how long we’ve been in the faith, whether it’s our first day or 10 years, there is always something we can learn about the vastness of God! *“Can you fathom the depths of God or discover the limits of the Almighty?” Job 11:7.*
 - **Fourth, it is unitive.** When congregates confess a creed together, it shows conformity & unity. Saying it out loud isn’t another *“part of the service”* to get through. The Apostle’s Creed brings us back to God Himself every time through the foundation of Jesus: *“but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” Ephesians 2:19-21.*
 - **Fifth, it is doxological.** The Apostle’s Creed is a wonderful aspect of worship and gives teachers of the Word a framework for **WHO** the focus of worship should be: The Trinity. By worshiping reverently & humbly, our need for personal and corporate faith grows stronger & stronger. *“He sets my feet upon a rock” Psalm 40:2.*
- **Ask:** Any closing comments or questions?
Next Sunday we will look at the first phrase: *“I Believe in God the Father the Almighty.”*

Close in prayer...