



Apostles' Creed

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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 into Hades. On the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty, from whence he will 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.

Those are the words of the Apostles' Creed. They have been recited by churches for more than a thousand years. We recited them in our service this morning. For the next five weeks, leading up to Easter morning, we will be reciting them every Sunday morning.

I thought that it would be good for us to take a week and think about these words, so that as we recite them each week, they might have more meaning in our hearts as we say them, and that they might not be mere words.

These words are called "The Apostles' Creed": not because the apostles wrote them down, but because they summarize the fundamental teachings of the apostles, found in the New Testament.

The origin of these words traces back to the second century, in the writings of a man named Irenaeus. Listen to what he wrote in his book *Against Heresies*:

The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord.[\[1\]](#)

This isn't exactly the Apostles' Creed as we know it. But if you know the Apostles' Creed, you can hear some of the verbiage begin to form.

By the fourth century, the Old Roman Symbol was recited in many churches, especially by baptism candidates. Those being baptized would recite this as an affirmation of their faith:

I believe in God the Father almighty; and in Christ Jesus His only Son, our Lord, Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, Who under Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried, on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father, whence He will come to judge the living and the dead; and in the Holy Spirit, the holy Church, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh, the life everlasting.[\[2\]](#)

Again, if you are familiar with the Apostles' Creed, you can hear the seeds of it here. Later church history would expand and solidify these words. The final form that we have today wasn't finalized until the eighth century. Still, that's more than a thousand years that the church has been reciting these words.

Philip Schaff says this about the Apostles' Creed:

It is by far the best popular summary of the Christian faith ever made within so brief a space. It is not a logical statement of abstract doctrines, but a profession of living facts and saving truths. It is a liturgical poem and an act of worship. Like the Lord's Prayer, it loses none of its charm

and effect by frequent use. It is intelligible and edifying to a child, and fresh and rich to the profoundest Christian scholar. It has the fragrance of antiquity and the inestimable weight of universal consent. It is a bond of union between all ages and sections of Christendom. It can never be superseded for popular use in church and school.^[3]

It would be helpful for you to know this creed.

I grew up in a church that recited this creed every first Sunday of the month, which was communion Sunday. We recited it before taking the bread and the cup.

My mother passed away about a year ago. In her last few years of life, she had dementia and couldn't really hold a conversation. She needed care all of the time. My dad, as he prepared her for bed each night, would tuck her in and often sing "The Gospel Song," which she was able to sing along with. He would also recite the Apostles' Creed to her. She was able to say the words of the creed. They had been embedded into her mind.

Oh, I hope that in my dying day, when I can no longer hold a conversation, someone will recite to me the Apostles' Creed, so that I can recite it right along with them:

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 into Hades. On the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty, from whence he will 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.

I want to say those words, because they are "a profession of living facts and saving truths"^[4].

These are the words that unite all professing Christians. If you want to witness to a Roman Catholic, know these words, and you can find a point of common ground from which you can share the gospel. If you want to witness to a Lutheran, know

these words, and you can find common ground. If you want to witness to those in mainline denominational churches, chances are that they may have heard these words a time or two.

I was talking this week to a good friend who is a hospice chaplain. He told me that knowing this creed has helped him in sharing the gospel with people of all sorts of Christian backgrounds. As he begins to quote the creed, often those with a church background will remember some of it. He will tell them, “So much of what I believe is what you believe.” Then he builds a level of trust from which he can expound upon the truths in the creed, which people will receive from him.

So, do you know the words of the Apostles’ Creed? Perhaps this morning’s message will stir you to spend some time memorizing these important words of church history.

Hopefully, in our services we will experience what Charles Cranfield says comes about in churches who recite these words: “It would be health-giving for those churches in which the Creed is seldom if ever used to discover the thrill and inspiration of confessing together our common faith in a formula that binds us to our fellow Christians across denominational and national boundaries and across the centuries.”

That’s what I hope we discover these next five weeks as we recite the creed together.

So, let’s consider these words. The helpful thing about all of them is that they are grounded in the words of the apostles. This morning, I simply want to use the words of the creed to open up for us all these “living facts and saving truths.”

First of all, let’s consider the opening words of the creed: “I believe.” Some versions of the Apostles’ Creed add an “I believe” to the next part as well: “I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.” Then, we see “I believe” again when speaking of the Holy Spirit: “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” These words establish what the Apostles’ Creed is. It is a profession of faith. Or, as I have put it this morning in my first point, it is

1. A Faith Profession

That’s what the Apostles’ Creed is. It is what all followers of Christ believe. This is the meaning of the word “Creed.” In Latin, the word is *credo*, “I believe.” That’s

s what a creed is: a simple profession of faith.

This is different from a “Confession.” A confession is a much larger statement of faith, often describing the particular teachings of denominations. A confession might be dozens of pages long, like the Augsburg Confession (1530), which is influential in Lutheran circles; the Westminster Confession (1646), which is influential in Presbyterian circles; or the London Baptist Confession (1689), which is influential in Reformed Baptist circles.

For the most part, these confessions agree. But in their length, they begin to diverge. They diverge on baptism: some advocate baptizing infants, while the London Baptist Confession advocates baptizing only those old enough to make their own profession of faith. They diverge on church polity: whether the church is ruled by elders, governed strictly by the local congregation, or whether there is some episcopal structure with bishops or presbyteries overseeing multiple congregations. They diverge on views of the Lord’s Supper: whether the communion elements are symbolic and memorial, or whether the elements have the spiritual or even the real presence of Jesus in them.

This is the role of confessions: to define the beliefs of particular denominations. But this is not what we have in the Apostles’ Creed. The Apostles’ Creed is devoid of all sectarian language. It is broad enough to be embraced by all Christians, regardless of any denominational distinctives.

For you to be a Christian, you must profess to believe these things. You must believe in God the Father, who created all things, the land and the sea and all that is in them. You must believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lord of our lives, who came into the world through a virgin, who suffered and bled and died upon the cross, who was raised from the dead, and will come again to judge the living and the dead. You must believe in the Holy Spirit. You must believe in the church; an isolated Christian is no Christian at all. You must believe in the forgiveness of sins, that by faith in Jesus your sins are forgiven. You must believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

These are the core minimum of what every Christian professes.

Every Christian professes to believe what the opening words of the Bible say: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). He is the potter. We are the clay.

Every Christian professes to believe in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul said it this way in 1 Corinthians 15:

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

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.

You can hear these words echoed in the Apostles' Creed, that Christ died and was buried and was raised on the third day.

Every Christian professes to believe in the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity. Every Christian professes to believe in the church and the communion of the saints, the corporate aspect of Christianity. Jesus said to Peter upon his profession that Jesus is the Christ, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Jesus came to save people, who would gather together in community.

Every Christian professes that we have a hope of the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body and everlasting life. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

All of these things are core to the Christian life. You cannot be a Christian and not believe these things. That's why the motif of the creed is faith: "I believe. I believe. I believe."

I remember reading the autobiography of William Barclay, an influential Scottish theologian. He wrote a commentary on the New Testament that is very helpful, especially regarding the historical and cultural background of the New Testament. But William Barclay was very liberal. He didn't believe many of the core truths of Christianity, though he was an influential teacher of the church.

Liberals in Christianity have a way of affirming things they don't really believe, but which they know are core to the Christian faith. In his autobiography, he was

wrestling with the preaching and teaching of things he didn't really believe. He writes:

Does this mean that I cannot preach on anything except the things which I intensely and unconditionally believe? No, it does not mean that. I can expound a doctrine, explain it, show its meaning, even if I myself am not sure of it. I remember reading a thing which gave me great comfort; I think it was in one of F. R. Barry's books. I had always had difficulty in repeating the Apostles' Creed, for there are items in it which I could not hold. But Barry somewhere said that the original introduction to the Apostles' Creed was not, 'I believe,' but 'We believe.' That is to say, when I am reciting the Creed, I am not claiming that all this is without exception my personal belief; but I am stating that it is the Church's belief, and this of course I can do.^[5]

But this, of course, is not what the Apostles' Creed is. The Apostles' Creed is "I believe." Now, as this is true of all of us together, we can certainly say "we believe", but that's not wiggle room that allows you to say it and affirm it when, in fact, you don't believe.

2. Strictly Trinitarian

This is the broadest structure of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord." "I believe in the Holy Spirit."

Now, to be entirely accurate, the Apostles' Creed doesn't fully define the nature of the Trinity, how it is that God is one in substance but three in persons. The actual historic understanding of these things is worded clearly in the Nicene Creed (325 AD) and further clarified in the Chalcedonian Definition (451 AD). Both of these creeds arose out of church councils that wrestled with the teaching of Scripture regarding the nature of the Trinity. The Nicene Creed declares that Jesus Christ is:

The only begotten Son of God, Begotten of the Father from all ages. God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten and not made; being of one substance with the Father.

The Chalcedonian Definition declares that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human, having two natures:

Without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.

Further, the Nicene Creed expands upon the deity of the Holy Spirit:

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

Those creeds define exactly what the church universal has believed about the nature of God and the Trinity. These definitions are not expanded upon in the Apostles' Creed, but in structuring the Creed around the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the historic understanding of the Apostles' Creed is Trinitarian: one God in three persons.

One of the blessings we have at Rock Valley Bible Church is that we are an independent, non-denominational church, meaning that we answer to nobody but the Lord. We have no governing body, no denominational ties. Nobody will come into our church telling us what to do. But one of the greatest dangers we have is that same independence: with nobody to answer to but the Lord, it is all the more important that we ground ourselves in the historical church, in the fundamentals of what the church of Jesus Christ has always taught.

Believing in the Trinity places us in the long line of believers down through the centuries. And it protects us from the heresy of any johnny-come-lately organization, like the cults. A Jehovah's Witness cannot in all good conscience affirm the Apostles' Creed. A Mormon cannot in all good conscience affirm the Apostles' Creed. Nor will any other cult that comes around be able to affirm these things.

If you memorize the Apostles' Creed, it might just be a good place to begin in reaching out to a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon or any other cult member who comes seeking to persuade you. You can begin by asking, "Do you believe the Apostles' Creed?" You can quote it for them and tell them that this is what the historic Christian church has believed for more than a thousand years, and that its teaching goes back to the New Testament.

Also, parents: if you want to help protect your children as they grow up and enter college or the workplace, and they meet that Jehovah's Witness or Mormon or cult member who seems to know the Bible better than they do; one antidote to this is the Apostles' Creed. If an organization will not affirm the Apostles' Creed, it is to

be avoided at all costs. There are churches in the Rockford area that can look good on the outside, even having “Bible” in their name, who can talk about Jesus, but cannot affirm the Apostles’ Creed. Avoid such a church.

3. Distinctly Christian

By this I simply mean that the Creed focuses upon Jesus. Note the percentage of the Creed devoted to him. God the Father has two lines: he is “the Father almighty” and the “maker of heaven and earth.” The Holy Spirit gets one line: “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” Jesus has ten lines in the Creed. This says something. It says that Jesus is central to the Christian faith.

Note what the Creed points out about Jesus. The first three lines speak about his being. He is God’s Son. He is our Lord. He was miraculously conceived. He was born of a virgin.

Jesus is the Son of God. Remember when Jesus was baptized? The voice of the Father came from heaven: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

Jesus is the Lord. Believing this is crucial to your salvation: “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” (Romans 10:9). Jesus is our master. We are called to seek his will.

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. That is, Jesus wasn’t merely a man who was uniquely empowered by God at his baptism. Many cults say that when the Spirit came upon him like a dove, that was a transformational moment, the point at which he was empowered to do the work of the Messiah. But this isn’t true. From conception, Jesus was different. The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would be “Immanuel, God with us.” He could not have been born as a mere human. To save us, he needed to be divine. That’s why the virgin birth is so important. Apart from the virgin birth, Jesus is just like any of us, flawed and sinful human beings in need of salvation. But Jesus was born of a virgin.

Matthew 1:22-23

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

Christmas is fundamental to Christianity. Deny the virgin birth and you deny the core of who Jesus was, truly God and truly man in one being.

Then the Apostles' Creed passes over the life of Jesus and goes from his birth directly to his suffering. Now, it's not that the life of Jesus wasn't important. The gospels tell us all about Jesus and how wonderful he was, how "he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38), how he taught wonderful things, how he was gentle and lowly, calling all to come and follow him. But the Apostles' Creed makes no mention of this, because for the sake of summary, the most important thing about the life of Jesus was his suffering and death.

It is curious that Pontius Pilate is mentioned in the Creed, how Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate." There is no mention in the Creed of Mary or Peter or any of the disciples. There is no mention of any of the religious leaders of Jesus' day. The only other human being mentioned is Pontius Pilate. But in the annals of history, Pontius Pilate was a nobody, essentially a small-town mayor. The only reason we know his name is because he presided over the trial of Jesus and eventually sentenced him to death on the cross. So why is he mentioned? I think it's to bring into reality the suffering of Jesus. It was real. Jesus was no mere phantom or thought. Following Jesus isn't following some ideology. Following Jesus is following a real person who really suffered, who really died. As the Creed says, he "was crucified, dead, and buried."

This is the most important thing about the life of Jesus: his death. Isn't this where the gospel writers place most of their focus? In all four gospel accounts, there is a disproportionate amount of space given to the last week, and to the last day of Jesus before he died. It's because the crucifixion of Jesus is the most important event in his life. Upon the cross he died for our sins.

1 Peter 2:24

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

His death was a sacrificial death, his life for ours. He was the sinless one who died for us sinners: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Now, the phrase right after this one is the most controversial in the entire Creed: "He descended into Hades." This has been translated various ways. Some say, "He

descended into Hell.” Others say, “He descended into the dead.” I think this is the best way to understand it: Jesus died, was buried, and remained dead for three days.

The Creed continues: “On the third day he rose again from the dead!” This is where we are headed during this season of Lent, to Easter morning, when we celebrate Jesus risen from the dead. Because this is where our hope really is. Not only in the death of Jesus, but in his resurrection, for he proved that there is life beyond the grave. My hope this Easter season is that we might catch the hope that the angel gave to the women who came to the tomb:

Matthew 28:5-7

But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.”

What excitement they had when they saw him alive! When Thomas was able to touch Jesus, he said, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

And the resurrection dominated the preaching of the apostles. They constantly talked about what they had seen and heard: Jesus risen from the dead! You could not shut them up! When the religious authorities tried, Peter said this:

Acts 5:29-32

“We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

But Jesus didn't rise from the dead only to die again. No. He ascended into heaven to sit at God's right hand.

Philippians 2:8-11

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and

on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is reality: God has raised Jesus, who sits at his right hand, and he has appointed him as judge. Paul told those in Athens:

Acts 17:30-31

“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

4. A Hopeful Expression

That’s where these last five phrases point us to hope.

The holy catholic Church. “Catholic” means “universal.” I believe in the catholic Church, the large church, the universal church. Everybody across all ages and all times who believes and trusts in Christ is part of the church.

The communion of saints. This brings the universal church locally. But it also speaks about how we share something with all those who have ever believed in Jesus. To be a Christian is to be part of this communion. The Apostles’ Creed isn’t just about us and God. It speaks about the church that Jesus is building, the kingdom he is building. Do you cherish the church? Do you believe in the church? Do you have a conviction that you should be here, or be around other believers? It looks different in different places. In Africa, it may mean gathering in the bush. In China, it means gathering in small group Bible studies because the government won’t allow large congregations. But it’s gathering with other Christians. Do you feel a communion of saints? When you hear about persecuted Christians, those in Iran who cannot express their faith without risk of death, those in the Muslim world, do you have this connection? Do you meet somebody on the train or at the airport who is a Christian, and you kind of instantly connect? That’s the idea here.

The forgiveness of sins. The fourth point in my sermon is that the Apostles’ Creed is a hopeful expression. The greatest hope we could have is forgiveness of sins. When you truly understand the weight of sin and the judgment it brings, it can weigh you down. As a church, we’ve been reading through the Scriptures. Particularly, we have been reading through Kings and Chronicles, much of which is king after king failing and not walking rightly before God. Eventually, we see

Judah going into exile because of their sin. You just see over and over how it's their sin that leads to their destruction. This is a common theme in the Old Testament, which covers some three-fourths the entire Bible. The Old Testament is a long story filling us with the idea of our need for redemption.

I remember hearing the story about John Wesley and how he would preach. He said, "First I preach the law, strong and hard, until I get people really feeling the condemnation of God upon their souls. Then I give them a little grace, so it's not so bad. But then I go back to the law and preach it long and hard, so they feel just crushed under it. And then I preach the grace of Jesus, free and full." He said, "Read through the whole Scriptures and you'll find that's basically what happens there: we're under the law, under the law, and then we see the grace and the gospel of Jesus Christ."^[6] Reading through the Old Testament helps get us to the fullness of the gospel.

The resurrection of the body. This goes beyond even the resurrection of Jesus. What's being talked about here is the resurrection of our bodies. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that when the trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised imperishable and we must be changed. This perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. We will have a spiritual body someday, the kind of body that Jesus had in his resurrected, sinless state, which we will have forever.

And the life everlasting. This is what Jesus promised in the gospel of John: "This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Eternal life is, yes, duration, but it's also quality, and it's knowing Jesus in a time when time is no more. It'll be everlasting. Time doesn't progress. We'll be there forever. When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we have no more days to sing his praise than when we first begun.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 22, 2026 by
Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.10.1.

[2] Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 21. The Old Roman Symbol is preserved in a letter of Marcellus of Ancyra to Pope Julius I (c. 340 AD).

[3] Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 15.

[4] Ibid.

[5] William Barclay, *A Spiritual Autobiography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 98.

[6] The precise source of this anecdote has not been verified. Wesley's general approach to preaching law before grace is well documented (cf. his December 20, 1751 letter to Ebenezer Blackwell, in *The Works of John Wesley*), but this specific formulation may be a paraphrase of his method rather than a direct quotation.