

The Apostles Creed

Introduction

A creed (from the Latin *credo* meaning 'I believe') is a statement of belief. There are a number of creeds in the Bible (e.g. Deut 6: 4-5; 1 Thess 4:14; 1 Tim 3:16; Phil 2: 5-11). Christians down through the generations have found them helpful in their faith journey.

The Apostles Creed was written in the 2nd century and settled in the form we know by the 4th. So, it was not written by Jesus' apostles but was based on the teaching of the apostles handed down to the churches (2 Thess 2:15; Rev 3:3). The Creed is a concise statement of what Christians believe.

In the early church the Apostles Creed was most likely used when a new Christian was baptized. They were asked to affirm that they believed in the statements found in the Apostles Creed before they were baptized.

Other creeds were written to counter heresies that arose. For example, the Nicene Creed, that we use in our services, was written to counter the idea that Jesus was a created being and not the same as or equal with God.

The Apostles Creed covers all that Christians should know and believe in concise, simple language. But the creed is more than head knowledge. Each of the truths it expresses, when we truly believe them, has profound implications for how we live our lives.

Doubt and unbelief are real and the Bible recognizes this (Mk 9: 24; John 20: 27; Jude 22). Wrestling with our doubts can be a means to spiritual growth and a stronger faith. As you study the statements in the Apostles Creed you will have opportunity to think more deeply about the essential truths of the Christian faith and what they mean for your life and what you believe.

Going Deeper

Here are some resources you might find helpful:

Michael Bird, 2016, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, (Zonderman Academic) [Also available as an audio book.]

Alister McGrath, 2016, *Apostles' Creed*, (Lifeguide Bible Study Series)

Tim Chester, 2007, *I believe: The Apostles' Creed*, (Good Book Guide Series)

Sermon series:

John Stott,

https://www.allsouls.org/Groups/318206/Sermons/Sundays/ZB001_The_Apostles/ZB001_The_Apostles.aspx

Stbart's Toowoomba

<https://www.stbarts.com.au/sermon-series/the-apostles-creed>

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,
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.*

*He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.*

*He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again 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

Study 1 – I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth

I Believe

1. Read over the Apostles Creed together. What does the Creed mean to you?
2. Why should we try to understand the Apostles Creed? What does it matter to us? Check Michael Bird's answer (Ridley College lecturer) on 'What is the Apostles' Creed and Why Should you Study it?' (5min)

https://www.google.com/search?q=michael+bird+apostles+creed&rlz=1C1WNOO_enAU953AU953&oq=Michael+Bird+apostles+creed&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqCggAEAAAY4wIYgAQyCggAEAAAY4wIYgAQyBwgBEC4YgAQyDQgCEAAAYhgMYgAQYigUyDQgDEAAAYhgMYgAQYigXSAQkxNjQzN2owajSoAgCwAgE&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&ip=1&vld=cid:3376ef20,vid:QSxCjrrNPms,st:0

3. The first words of the Creed are 'I believe'. How is this statement more than just agreeing with facts or head knowledge (See Rom 10: 9)?

I believe in God

4. Christians believe in one God who exists as three distinct and yet equal persons (Trinity) (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14). Discuss what this means and what it does not mean.

The Father Almighty

5. What kind of a Father is God? (Ps 8: 3-4; I John 3:1)
6. Who can call God 'Father' and how do you know if he is your Father? (See Rom 8: 14 – 16)
7. What does it mean to say God is 'almighty'? (Job 42: 2; Lk 1: 37; Rom 13: 1)

Creator of Heaven and Earth

8. How does knowing God as Father and Almighty inform your understanding of God as creator?
9. How does believing in God as creator and you as part of creation change how you live? (Ps 8)

Application: This week try taking time each day to repeat 'I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth'. Do you believe this? Let it sink in while you think about what this means to your life.

Pray Together

Take time to praise God who is almighty and creator and thank him that, through his grace, you can call him Father. Ask him to help you in your unbelief and misunderstandings of God, Father Almighty and creator.

Going Deeper:

Read Michael Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, Chapters 3 & 4

Study 2 – *I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary*

I believe in Jesus Christ

1. As a historical figure Jesus is rarely disputed. How do we know Jesus was the Christ (Messiah) Israel had been waiting for? (See Gal 4: 4-5; Acts 13: 32 – 33; Jn 3: 16)

Fully God

2. Jesus never said he was God. On what basis do we make the claim that Jesus was fully God? (See Jn 1:1; Jn 17: 21 – 22; Heb 1: 3; Col 1: 15)
3. There are two types of things in this world, the creator God and things he created. Which is Jesus? (See Jn 1: 3; Col 1: 15 – 17)
4. Why is Jesus being fully God important to our faith? (See Col 1: 15; Jn 14: 9; Heb 2: 14 – 17; Titus 2: 13; Matt 1: 23)

Fully Human

5. On what basis do we make the claim that Jesus was fully human? (See Lk 2: 4 – 7; 52; 1 Jn 1:1)
6. Can Jesus be fully human and perfect at the same time? (See Heb 4: 15)
7. Why is Jesus being fully human important to our faith? (See Heb 4: 14 – 16; Eph 5: 1)

Jesus, both fully God and fully human

8. How is it possible to have both human and God united in one person? [Hint: think about what having two natures is NOT,] (See also Matt 1: 18 – 25)
9. What should our response be to Jesus, fully God come among us as fully human?

Application: This week try taking time each day to repeat 'I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary'. Do you believe this? Let it sink in while you think about what this means to your faith.

Pray Together

Take time to give thanks for the grace of God in coming among us fully God and fully human.

Going Deeper:

Read Michael Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, Chapter 5

Study 3 – He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.

Because the only exposure we have of the cross is in art and jewelry we are desensitized to the horror of the cross and the degradation, death, shame and cruelty it represented. Read Mark 15: 22 – 47 slowly and think about the suffering Jesus experienced.

The Shame of the Cross

1. Why was the cross a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (1 Cor 1:18 – 25)? In our post-modern world today, what do people think of the cross?
2. What did the writers of the New Testament think of the cross? (See Mk 10: 45; Lk 22: 37; Jn 3: 16; Jn 13: 31 – 32; Rev 5: 12)
3. Why do you think the Apostles Creed includes the name of Pontius Pilate when it doesn't mention many other important people found in the Bible?

The Victory of the Cross

4. What does it mean when we say Jesus died 'for us' or 'for our sins'? Check out all that Jesus' death achieved for us? (Matt 20:28; Mk 14: 22 – 25; Col 1: 21 - 22; Rom 3: 23 - 25,; Rom 5: 9; Eph 1: 7; 1 Jn 1: 9; Is 53: 4 - 5; 1 Cor 6: 11; Heb 12: 1 – 3)
[You might want to stop and take some time to give thanks to Jesus for what he has done for you.]
5. When he died Jesus went to the place of the dead (Hades). Note this is not hell (Gehenna). What does this mean for us? (See Ps 16: 9 – 10; Rev 1: 17 – 18)
6. How should we Christians live our lives in light of Jesus' death on the cross (See Gal 2: 20; Luke 9: 23; Gal 6: 14)?

Application: This week try taking time each day to remind yourself of what Jesus' death achieved for you and what it means as you go about your daily life.

Pray Together

Pray for each other as you seek to live your lives in the light the cross. Bring your concerns to Jesus who has suffered and achieved so much for you.

Going Deeper:

Read Michael Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, Chapters 8, 9 & 10

Study 4 - On the third day he rose again

Fact of the Resurrection

1. No-one disputes Jesus' death. But how can we be confident he rose again? (See Matt 28: 5 - 6; Lk 24:30 – 31, 35; Jn 21: 2, 6 - 7; AND Acts 1: 3; 1 Cor 15:3 – 8)

Meaning of the Resurrection

Tolkien coined the term 'eucatastrophe' when referring to the resurrection – the opposite of catastrophe, when despair and defeat were turned into great joy.

2. What does the resurrection tell us about Jesus' identity as God/man? (See Rom 1:3 - 4; Acts 2:36/Lk 24: 37 - 43)
3. What does the resurrection mean for us? (See 1 Pet 1:3-4; Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 15: 17)
4. In what sense can we say the resurrection brought in a new age and was a pivotal point in history? (See 1 Cor 15:20 – 23; Col 1: 15, 18; Rev 1: 5)

Implication of the Resurrection

5. What does this mean for the position of Christians and our perspective on life? (See Col 1: 1-4; 1 Pet 1:4 - 5)
6. What does this mean for our service as Christians? (1 Cor 15: 58)
7. What encouragement does the resurrection give us through the difficulties of life? (1 Pet 1:6-7; Matt 28: 20)

Application: This week as you think about the statement 'on the third day he rose again' think also about what it means as the basis of your belief, your salvation, your life and your future inheritance.

Pray Together

Though you have not seen him, you love him: and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls' (1 Pet 1: 8-9). Give thanks to Jesus for your salvation achieved through his resurrection.

Going Deeper

Read Michael Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, pp. 153 – 159

Listen to a Bible Project podcast, 'A Living Hope',

<https://bibleproject.com/podcast/resurrection-way-life-part-2-living-hope/>