

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/>

**Study 5 - *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.***

Ascension

1. Read Lk 24: 50-53 and Acts 1: 1 – 11, the account of Jesus' ascension. What do you learn about Jesus' ascension? Where did he go? What was he like? How did the disciples react?
2. What does Jesus' ascension mean for us? (See Jn 14: 2, 16:7; Rom 8:34)
3. Is Jesus absent or present in our world and in our day-to day lives? (See Acts 1:9, Matt 28:20)

Seated at the right hand of the Father

4. What is Jesus doing now? (Ps 110: 1)
5. What does this mean for you personally in how you worship and live your life? (See Col 3:1 – 2 and Heb 6:20, 10: 19-22)
6. Jesus ascended in his resurrected body, as a human. How is Jesus ruling as Lord a fulfilment of God's purpose for humanity? (Ps 8: 5-8; Heb 2: 8-9)

He will come again to judge

7. What do we know and what do we not know about Jesus coming again? (See Acts 1: 11; 1 Thess 4: 16-17; Lk 12: 39-40)
8. Why is Jesus coming again to judge the living and the dead good news for us as Christians? (2 Thess 1: 5-10; Phil 3: 20-21; Col 3:4)
9. How should Jesus' coming again to judge impact our lives today? (Acts 1: 8; Matt 24: 14; 2 Thess 1: 4-5; 1 Thess 4:18)

Pray Together

Take time to praise Jesus and worship him just as the disciples did after he was taken up to heaven. (Lk 24: 52-53)

Going Deeper

Read Michael Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, Chapter 11

Study 6 – I believe in the Holy Spirit

Who is the Holy Spirit?

1. What makes one a 'person'? Is the Holy Spirit a 'person' or a supernatural force? (Look at what the Holy Spirit does Jn 14:16; Act 13:2; 1 Jn 5:6; Rev 2:7; Heb 10:29) What does this mean for you as a Christian?
2. Is the Holy Spirit fully divine, an equal member of the Trinity with God and Jesus? (See Act 5:3-4; 1 Cor 3:16-17 & 6: 19-20; 1 Cor 2: 10-11) What does this mean for you as a Christian?

What does the Holy Spirit do?

3. What is the role of the Holy Spirit? (Gen 1:1-2; 2 Pet 1:21 & Eph 2:22; 2 Tim 3:16 & Jn 14:26; Jn 6:63 & Rom 8:2)
4. What does the Holy Spirit do for the church? (Rom 12: 4-8; 1 Cor 12: 27 – 30; Eph 4: 11 - 13) What gifts do you see given to members of St Johns or your Life Group?
5. What does the Holy Spirit do for each of us as Christians? (Gal 5: 22-23) What does it mean to live by the Spirit in order that the fruit of the Spirit can grow in us? (Gal 5: 16-18, 25)

Above all

6. As we think about the role of the Holy Spirit in the church and in our own lives what is the most important gift the Holy Spirit gives us? (Eph 4:3; Rom 5: 5; 1 Cor 13:1-3)

Application: This week think about who the Holy Spirit is and what that means for your life. If you haven't done so before, ask the Holy Spirit to show you what gifts he has given you to serve and how you can be faithful in using those gifts with love.

Pray Together

Pray that you might know the Holy Spirit more deeply, cooperate with the Holy Spirit as he transforms your character and empowers you to use the gifts he has given. Pray that the Holy Spirit would fill you with the love of God.

Going Deeper

Check out <https://www.logos.com/grow/spiritual-gifts-inventory-assessment/> for more on Spiritual Gifts and how to know yours.

Read:

Michael Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, Chapter 11

J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*.

Study 7 – I believe in the holy catholic church

The church

1. What is the church? (1 Cor 12:27; Col 1: 24; Eph 2: 19 – 21) How do you feel about the church?
2. The Bible uses a variety of images to refer to the people of God. How does the image of ‘flock’ (Act 20:28), ‘kingdom and priests’ (Rev 1:6; I Pet 2:9), ‘family’ (Mk 3: 35), ‘Temple of God’ (Eph 2: 21-22) and ‘body’ (1 Cor 12: 12-13) add to your understanding of the church? How is the church different from a group of friends with a common interest?

Characteristics of the church

The Apostles Creed refers to ‘the holy catholic church’ while the Nicene creed expands that to ‘one holy catholic and apostolic church’.

3. What makes the church ‘one’? (Eph 4: 4-6; 1 Cor 12: 12-13)
4. How should this oneness play out in the church? What does it mean for us? ((Jn 17: 23; 1 Cor 12: 25-26; Jn 15:12)
5. The holiness of the church refers to both our position in Christ and how we are to live out our lives. What makes the church holy? (1 Cor 1:30; Eph 5: 25b-27) [N.B. this does not mean the church is sinless and without problems]
6. As a holy church how are we expected to live our lives? (Eph 1: 4; Heb 12: 14; 1 Pet 1: 15-16)
7. The term ‘catholic’ church refers to the fact that the church is universal, including all believers wherever they are and does not refer to the Roman Catholic denomination. (Eph 2: 11-22) Share how you have been enriched in your faith through interaction with Christians from other countries and other ethnic groups.
8. The apostolic church includes those people who adhere to the same message or gospel. What is that message and what are we expected to do? (Eph 2:20; I Cor 15:1-3; 2 Thess 2: 15; Jude 3)

Application: This week think about the church and what the church of ‘us’ means for your life.

Pray Together

Pray for the church (People of St Johns and the church worldwide), for unity, faithfulness to the teaching of the Scriptures, that we might live holy lives worthy of being called as Christians.

Going Deeper

Read: Michael Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, Chapter 13

Study 8 – I believe in the communion of saints

1. The English language uses the word 'saint' in a variety of ways and most of them are unhelpful. What does the Bible and the Apostles Creed mean by 'saints'? Look at different versions of the Bible and the different ways 'saint' can be translated to get the meaning. (See Ps 85: 8; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1: 2; Eph 1:1, 15)
2. What does it mean to have communion with the saints? Check out the dictionary meanings of 'communion'.
3. The Bible uses the term fellowship for communion. What is the basis of our fellowship or communion with each other? (See 1 Cor 1:9; 1 Jn 1:3-4)
4. What makes fellowship more than a friendship? (Jn 13: 34; 15:17; Eph 1:15)
5. The Bible likens the Christian life to a race, a marathon (Heb 12: 1-3; 1 Cor 9: 24-27). Brainstorm what you know about running a marathon and how that analogy might be applied to the Christian life following Jesus and fellowship together.
6. How can we have fellowship with each other, both individually and as we meet in groups? Is it possible to have fellowship if we 'meet' only using digital means? What does fellowship with other Christians look like for you? (Heb 10:25)
7. How can we have fellowship with Christians who have died? How do they encourage us to persevere in the race? (Heb 12: 1)
8. Ultimately, our joy comes from following Jesus but as we fellowship with other Christians, we will experience joy. Who are some of the saints, the people of God, who have inspired and encouraged you in the faith and given you joy?

Application: This week make time to meet up with another Christian to encourage them in their faith.

Pray Together

One way we can 'commune' with each other is to share in prayer. Take time to pray for each other and your faith journey.

Study 9 – I believe in the forgiveness of sins

1. What are the questions you have around forgiveness? Make a list.

Salvation

The Apostles' Creed regards "forgiveness of sins" as a convenient head term to encompass the whole package of salvation. (M. Bird)

2. When are we saved? Explore salvation in our past (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:18-20), present (Phil 2:12-13) and future (1 Pet 1:4-5)
3. What are we saved from? (See Ps 51: 1-5; Rom 5:9)
4. What are we save to? (See 2 Cor 5: 17-21; Rom 5: 1-2)
5. Who are we saved by? (See 2 Cor 5: 18; Rom 5: 10)

Forgiveness

6. What does it mean to be forgiven by God? (See 2 Cor 5: 19, 21)
7. The Bible encourages us to forgive others (Matt 6:12; 18:23-35). But what does it mean to forgive? Is reconciliation necessary in all cases?
8. Many people today think that forgiveness is like giving a gift to the person who has wronged you, encouraging them to do more wrong as they are released from unwanted consequences. Can we forgive and also seek justice?
9. Go back to that list of questions you made earlier and discuss any that have not already been answered as you worked through this study.

Pray Together

Give thanks to God for his love and grace that extends his forgiveness and salvation to us.

Going Deeper

Read: Michael Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, Chapter 14

Johann Arnold, *Why Forgive?*

Leila and Danny Abdullah's story of forgiveness - <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/christian-living/leila-and-danny-abdallah-reveal-forgiven-driver-has-come-to-christ/>

Study 10 – I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting

1. 'I feel hopeful for the future'. Are you with the 61% of Australians who agree with this statement or the 39% who disagree or are unsure?
2. What is the hope of Christians for the future? (See Titus 1:2, 3:7; Phil 1:23; Jn 14:2-3) what is the basis of our hope? (1 Cor 6:14)
3. What do you think heaven will be like? Now, explore what the Bible tells us about heaven. (See Gen 1:1; Matt 6:9; 1 Thess 1:10; Phil 3:20; 1Pet 1:3-4)
4. Where do believers go when they die (life after death)? (See 2 Cor 5:1-4; Phil 1:23) What will we do there? (See Rev 6:10-11; 7:15-17)
5. When will our bodies be resurrected? (See 1 Thess 4:16-17)
6. On what basis can we be sure Christians will be resurrected? (1 Cor 6:14, 15:20-23)
7. What will the nature of our resurrection body be? (See 1 Cor 15:42-43; Rom 8:23)
8. As our bodies are resurrected and made new what will happen to heaven and earth? (See 2 Pet 3:13; Is 65:17)
9. What does the hope of resurrection and life everlasting mean for you now in this life?

Application: As this is the end of the series you might like to say the Apostles Creed together as an affirmation of your faith.

Pray Together

Give thanks to God for the life and hope we have in him. As you pray for your concerns ask God to also help you see the challenges of this life in the perspective of everlasting life.

Going Deeper

Read: Michael Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, pp 212-220