

## The Apostles' Creed: Its History & Place in the Church (1)

I believe in **GOD THE FATHER** Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth

I believe in **JESUS CHRIST**, His only begotten Son, our Lord  
Who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell  
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  
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

- The Apostles' Creed is one of the earliest and most used confessions of faith in the Christian Church. Philip Schaff writes, "As the Lord's Prayer is the Prayer of prayers, the Decalogue the Law of laws, so the Apostles' Creed is the Creed of creeds." (*The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. I, p. 14).
- The most outstanding feature of the Apostles' Creed is its Trinitarian structure. It has three main sections organized around each of the members of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
- The earliest record of something like the Apostles' Creed is an early Trinitarian baptismal confession from about 150AD. Based on Matthew 28:19, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of **the Father** and of **the Son** and of **the Holy Spirit***", subsequent to their baptisms, recipients were required to affirm their faith by confessing that they believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- The reason why they were required to affirm their faith by way of a standard Trinitarian confession is because we are urged by God to be, *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, ...* (Eph. 4:3-6). Indeed, the Bible is full of confessional statements, which establishes the fact that Christianity is a confessional faith.
- The people of God in the Old Testament were identified by a unifying confession called the *Shema* (the Hebrew word for "hear") which is found in Deuteronomy 6:4: *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one*. This was a very basic and simple confession (similar to the NT confession "Jesus is Lord" as we will see), it seems that it was to be taught to children and recited daily (cf. 6:7), and as God's deliverance of His people continued to unfold, this confession would form the basis of more elaborate confessions that the people would ultimately make in response to God's salvation. For instance, in Deuteronomy 26:1-11 we find another, more elaborate confession that Israel is to make in the context of a worship service.
- The Psalms are full of statements of confession and response to God's redemptive acts. In example, Psalm 22:22 (quoted in Heb. 2:12), records Jesus says, *I will tell of Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise You*. Psalm 145:4 says, *One generation shall commend Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts*.
- Therefore, even in the OT we see God's people making a public confession of their faith in response to His revelation and salvation. "What God had done in history, His people believed and confessed." (Hyde, p. 12).
- Coming into the NT, we soon find ourselves at Peter's great confession in Matthew 16:13-18.
- A few things we learn from this are: 1) Peter, in the confession, is not quoting Scripture, but rather he is summarizing the truth about Christ that he has come to know and believe. 2) He is blessed for making this good confession. 3) This confession is based upon divine revelation. 4) Christ will build His church on the solid rock of the truth confessed about Him. In a nutshell, we learn from this passage

that: **The blessing of God rests upon those that confess the divinely revealed truth about Jesus Christ.** And we need to remember that this all comes after Jesus had said in 10:32, “...everyone who *confesses Me before men, I also will confess before My Father who is in heaven*”.

- Moving on in the NT, we come to the often repeated early Christian confession, “Jesus is Lord” (Acts 2:36; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:11). Paul says in Romans 10:9, *confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. Why? Because, 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* (Phil. 2:9-11).
- As Paul commends Timothy for doing, when we confess with our mouths, we follow in the footsteps of Christ Himself: *Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in His testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession...* (1 Tim. 6:12-13).
- Indeed Cornelis Venema says,

When a good and true confession is made upon the basis of the Word of God, it is also said to be the fruit of the revelation of the Father and the operation of the Spirit through the Word. Thus, the apostle Paul can identify the confession, “Jesus is Lord,” with a “speaking by the Holy Spirit,” that is, a speaking which is the fruit of the Spirit’s testimony through the Word (1 Cor. 12:3). Or, when Christ posed the decisive question to His disciples, “[B]ut who do you say that I am?,” Peter responded with the confession, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:15-16). What is striking at this point is how Christ identifies the source of this confession, upon which He will build His church, with the Father who has revealed it from heaven. No one who is a Christian can escape this call to confess his faith in response to the Word of God. (*What We Believe*, p. 4)

- This then brings up the very nature of a confession or creed. Many would eschew creeds and confessions saying, “I have no creed but Christ”, “I just believe the Bible” or “Those are just the words of men”. But these common sentiments seem to miss the fact that that is exactly what a creed or confession is supposed to be—namely man’s answer to God’s Word. We hear the voice of our Shepherd and we follow Him (cf. John 10)...we listen the Word of God and we respond in belief and confession articulating what we have heard Him saying to us.
- In this regard Philip Schaff has written, “The value of creeds depends upon the measure of their agreement with the Scriptures.” (*The Creeds of Christendom*, p. 7). He further adds, “For this reason a creed ought to use language different from that of the Bible. A string of Scripture passages would be no creed at all... A creed is, as it were, a doctrinal poem written under the inspiration of divine truth.” (fn #2, p. 7)
- Luke Timothy Johnson has said, “Some truths are so critical that they must be repeated over and over again.” Confirming this sentiment are the various statements that Paul says are trustworthy and worthy of all acceptance: *The saying is trustworthy and deserving of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners* (1 Tim. 1:15) or the confession he repeats in 1 Timothy 3:16, *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, taken up in glory.*
- Thus we see that being a **confessional** church IS being a **biblical** church. Throughout the history of Christianity, up until relatively recent years, the Church has always confessed its faith by way of creeds and confessions.
- Thus we will be studying this most ancient and most universally used Christian creed, which articulates the basic truths of our faith. And as we proceed in our study our aim will be to show how it rises directly as a response to the truth of God’s Word.