

The Apostles' Creed: I Believe (3)

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*

- At the end of the previous study we considered why the Creed has the name that it does, particularly in reference to the term “Apostles” (i.e. Because each line can clearly be traced to the Apostles’ writings). In this study we will consider why this ancient statement of faith is called a “Creed”, and why this is so significant to a Christian’s walk of faith. But first, we will note a couple more points concerning its structure.
- As has been mentioned, the Apostles’ Creed has three major parts, organized around each member of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Another way of thinking about these divisions, and therefore God Himself, is to think about God in terms of His work as **Creator**, **Redeemer**, and **Sanctifier**. Therefore, the first section is about the Father and our creation, the second section about the Son and our redemption, and the third section about the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.
- Something that is interesting to note in regard to these divisions—and something we will get more into as we study the final section—is the inclusion of the Church and the communion of the saints in the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of our sanctification. That is to say, contrary to the sentiments of your average American Christian today, the place of the Church in the life of the believer was seen as absolutely vital to the Christian Faith.
- We come now to consider the first word(s) of the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe”. As mentioned in a previous study, the word “creed” comes from the Latin word *credo*, which simply means “I believe”.
- One of the biggest mistakes that is made in thinking about the Apostles’ Creed (or any other Christian creed for that matter) is that when we say “I believe” we are simply checking off a list of correct doctrines or things Christianity teaches. In other words, “I believe there is a God who created the world”, “I believe that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary”, “I believe that there is life after death”, etc.
- Now, it is the case that Christianity teaches—and Christians believe—all of these things, but when we say, “I believe” we are saying more than that we affirm the historical accuracy of the resurrection of Christ or that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. Affirming those things is called having “historic faith”. But, as we learn from James 2:19, even the demons have this kind of “faith”. In other words, they believe that God is one—they could confess the Creed, if that is all that is meant by “I believe”.
- Faith in the Bible, and therefore in the Creed, means more fully, “I trust in” or “I rely upon” or “I have staked my eternal destiny upon”. Therefore, far more than a cerebral checklist of propositions and correct doctrines, the Creed articulates the heart of the Gospel that Christians have come to rely upon for their salvation.

- Thus when we say that we believe in God the Father Almighty, we are saying that we fully rely upon and have staked our lives upon God the Father Almighty, our Creator. When we say that we believe in Jesus Christ who was born of the virgin Mary, we are saying that we rely upon this virgin-born Savior for our redemption. In other words, that it is absolutely essential to our salvation—meaning we couldn't be saved by any other type of savior—that our Savior was born of a virgin, not inheriting the sinful nature of Adam like the rest of mankind.
- Furthermore, the Creed's first person posture seems to have come as a development from very early baptismal vows or questions, such as this one from 220 AD:

Do you believe in God the Father Almighty? Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit from the virgin Mary and was crucified under Pontius Pilate and died and was buried and rose again? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Church, and the resurrection of the dead?

- So from a question to be responded to with the answer "I believe", the Creed became the form by which the candidate for baptism stated proactively, positively, and personally, that they were trusting in, and relying upon, the salvation offered to sinners in the Gospel.
- This then brings up the personal nature of creedal confessions. Although we confess along with others a common faith, our confession is our own and must be our own. That is to say, no one can believe for us and no one can confess in our place. As we noted in an earlier study, we can benefit from another's prayers, from a magistrate's justice, from a kind man's benevolence, but not from another's faith.
- When we say, "I believe", we are saying that we have come to trust in the God of the Bible and His Christ. And therefore, we are acknowledging that we have passed from death to life, that we have been born again, that we have received the gift and grace of faith. Faith is not natural to man...sin is natural to man. We have a sinful nature from our earthly fathers, but we can only have faith from our heavenly Father.
- Thus, to be able to say, "I believe", as the Creed forms our words, we are confessing that we have become partakers in the divine gift of salvation that is found in Jesus Christ alone. Furthermore, and more particularly, we are confessing that we have been found by the grace of God.
- Finally, we also need to note that while the Christian faith involves doctrinal truths, and we believe in certain propositional truths, it is fundamentally a faith or trust upon a Person. We don't just believe things about God, but we believe and rely upon Him personally. Thus when we talk about *credo*—saying "I believe"—we are saying that we have entered into a personal, saving relationship and fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- A comment from J.I. Packer summarizes well what we have been saying in this study,

I can believe in UFOs without ever looking for one, and in democracy without ever voting. In cases like these, belief is a matter of the intellect only. But the Creed's opening words, "I believe in God," render a Greek phrase coined by the writers of the New Testament, meaning literally: "***I am believing into*** God." That is to say, over and above believing certain truths *about* God, I am living in a relation of commitment *to* God in trust and union. When I say "I believe in God," I am professing my conviction that God has invited me to this commitment, and declaring that I have accepted his invitation. (*Growing in Christ*, p. 19)

- So, as we proceed through the Creed together, we need to keep coming back to this idea of what it means to say, "I believe". This understanding should enable us to resist falling into a meaningless and merely rote recitation of the Creed. Rather, each time we take the words of the Apostles' Creed upon our lips, it should flow from, and be the expression of, a believing heart that is joyfully resting upon God and His salvation in Christ as revealed in the Scriptures.

