

The Apostles' Creed: ...suffered..., was crucified, dead and buried (8)

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

- One of the striking things about the Apostles' Creed is that it moves immediately from the Virgin Birth of Christ, to His suffering and death—"womb to tomb"¹. In other words, the Apostle's Creed skips Jesus' bar mitzvah (cf. Lk. 2:41-52), baptism/ordination (cf. Lk. 3:21-23), miracles, and teaching.
- A helpful way to think about this is as follows:

The Creed does not make this leap to denigrate Jesus' teaching and miracles but because those who wrote the Creed, ...not to mention Peter, John, and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles, understood that the main thing about Jesus' life was His death...the ending of His life is the story. (DeYoung, p. 81)

- Even so, the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism rightly recognize that the reference here that Jesus *suffered* speaks to the fact that His whole incarnate life was one of suffering. As they write in Q. 37: What do you understand by the word "suffered"?

That during His whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained in body and soul the anger of God against the sin of the whole human race. This He did in order that, by His suffering as the only atoning sacrifice, He might set us free, body and soul, from eternal condemnation, and gain for us God's grace, righteousness, and eternal life.

- Indeed, we need to understand Christ's death on the cross as the culmination of, and the greatest act of, His obedience to the Father as Mediator of the Covenant. In other words, as the Second Adam, Jesus was tasked with a Law to fulfill that would bring glory and reward to Himself and His people. Like the First Adam's Mediatorial Law, this one would involve a "tree" (cf. Gen. 2:16-17 w/ 1 Pet. 2:24).² Jesus would obey and save His people:

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 (Phil. 2:8-9)

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Rom. 5:17-19)

- Another curious thing about the Creed is that it names a pagan, civil magistrate. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each named in the Creed, and besides them, only Mary and Pilate—the one (humanly speaking) who gave Jesus life, and the one (humanly speaking) that gave Jesus death. And, the contrast between these two individuals could not be more striking:

<u>MARY</u>	<u>PILATE</u>
Female	Male
Young	Aged
Disadvantaged	Advantaged
A Servant	A Ruler
Powerless	Powerful

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *The Good News We Almost Forgot: Rediscovering the Gospels in a 16th Century Catechism*, p. 81)

² Both Adam and Jesus, as men, were already naturally under the "moral" law; but also, both being the federal representatives of their people, they were also tasked with a "mediatorial" law. It is this "mediatorial" law, in both cases, that was the crux of the covenant. As Adam broke his special law—not eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—his people died. As Jesus (the Second Adam) kept His special law—bearing our sins in His body on the tree—His people are now granted life and righteousness in Him (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45).

Poor
Risked All
Feared God
Graced
Godly
Faithful
Gave Birth to the Son of God
Remembered as the Blessed Virgin

Rich
Risked Nothing
Feared Man
Reprobated
Godless
Faithless
Killed the Son of God
Remembered as Cursed Coward

- It is interesting to note that all that Mary prophesied about herself and others has come to pass—“*For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.*” (Lk. 1:48), and, “*He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.*” (Lk. 1:53)—and on the other hand, Pilate’s attempt to excuse himself and clear his own name in connection to the death of Jesus—*...he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see it for yourselves.”* (Matt. 27:24)—has failed miserably as seen in the prayers of the early Church (cf. Acts 4:27) and the fact that for 2000 years the Church universal has been identified by the whole world as the people who worship and believe upon a God and Savior named Jesus Christ who we distinctly confess, *suffered under Pontius Pilate.*³
- The naming of Pilate is suggestive of at least four things: **First**, it grounds the central act of God’s redemption in real and verifiable history. Christianity is not a story that begins, “Once upon a time in a land far, far away...”, but a faith that lays hold of a crucified and risen Savior who lived and died in this world, in the land of Palestine, during the term of Pontius Pilate (Prefect of Judea A.D. 26-36).
- **Secondly**, it vindicates the prophets and the prophecies of the OT that said that the Messiah would be judged by a Gentile court (cf. Lk. 18:31-33 w/ Acts 4:27-28).
- **Thirdly**, it establishes the fact that Jesus would undergo legal judgment, and be both justified and condemned by the same civil magistrate. This should be faith strengthening to us in that it tells us that Jesus was righteous and innocent before the Law, and thus had no sin, therefore, His death was not for His own sins, but for the sins of others. In other words, His innocence and condemnation from the same judge alerts us to the fact that His atonement is not for Himself, but for others...namely, for us (cf. Ps. 69:4)⁴
- **Fourthly**, it tells us that there is in fact a relationship between the Church and the State. It was God’s will that the civil magistrate would participate in the plan of redemption (both clearing and condemning Christ). Indeed, there is nothing in the whole of creation that God has ordained and purposed apart from the aim of glorifying Himself in the salvation of a Bride for His Son (cf. Eph. 1:22). Therefore, even the civil magistrate is ordained and has a purpose to that ultimate end, thus making it accountable to God’s judgment since it is His servant. Thus Pilate stands in the Creed as a confirmation to the call and warning that goes out to all civil governments to *Kiss the Son*, lest He be angry with them and they perish in the way (Ps. 2:12).
- Why is the cross so central? Because God is holy and His Law—which reflects His holiness—was violated. This affront to His holiness was infinitely heinous, thus it required an infinitely sufficient atonement. And beyond mere remedy for the negative aspect of sin, there was the positive desire to display and communicate His glory to His people in the saving of a Bride for His Son. Therefore, there had to be an infinitely meritorious atonement and righteousness to both satisfy the infinite wrath of God in the place of infinitely guilty sinners...and that is the reason for the necessity and centrality of the cross: Our infinitely perfect Savior, satisfied the infinitely horrific wrath of God, accomplishing infinite redemption and purchasing infinite glory and reward because of the merit of His infinitely worthy obedience unto death for infinitely unworthy sinners.⁵
- In other words, God’s Law had to be honored (propitiated and obeyed) for our reconciliation to be effected...and therefore the necessity and the centrality of the cross.
- The focus of the Creed on the death of Christ follows Christ’s own institution of the Lord’s Supper, which He said to do in His remembrance, which proclaims *the Lord’s death until He comes* (1 Cor. 11:26). This focus also comports with all the examples of Apostolic preaching that we have, and the self-defined focus of the Apostolic ministry: *But we preach Christ crucified* (1 Cor. 1:23); *Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Gal. 6:14); *I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified* (1 Cor. 2:2).

³ The connection between Pilate’s hand-washing and the Church’s perpetual confession of his name was first pointed out to me by Taylor Finnicum. Great insight...thank you!

⁴ See Caspar Olevianus, *An Exposition of the Apostles’s Creed*, p. 76

⁵ See Craig Biehl’s *The Infinite Merit of Christ*.