

The Importance and Biblical Foundation for Creeds

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Morning Worship Service

I want to give a teaching to help us get prepared for a series of messages which Pastor Jeff primarily will be delivering to us over the next several weeks, although I may preach one or two at his invitation or order, whichever one it may be.

I want to speak to you about the importance and Biblical foundation for creeds. The reason I want to do this is because we intend over the next twelve weeks - this is the first week of the twelve - to preach through the various phrases of the Nicene Creed.

And you say, I thought we need to preach through the Bible. Well, that's exactly what we're going to do, because the Nicene Creed is the most ecumenical, that is, the most universal of the Christian creeds. Now a creed is a formal statement of corporate faith that has been used or is used in a group or congregation of Christians and has been used long term.

At the beginning it was slowly developing. You're familiar perhaps with the Apostles' Creed, or have heard of the Apostles Creed which we say frequently in the church and the Nicene Creed which we say infrequently in the church.

We have creedal statements in our worship guides - we say or sing a confession of faith.

These creeds are acts of worship and instruments of teaching. We will use these universal statements to see what Scripture teaches regarding who God is and how salvation came about and how it is to be played out in the Christian life.

Today we have a Responsive Reading of the Nicene Creed which is directly rooted in the Word of God - therefore we have a shortened version of the core of Christian faith - what God has done to cause us to worship him.

The Apostles Creed grew out of the Rule of Faith which is found in the Apostolic Writings; that is, from those who knew the apostles, such as Polycarp who knew John. This Rule of Faith is found in the writings of the Early Church Fathers and is the basis for the Apostles Creed.

It was used as:

- 1) A declaration of faith for new believers in relation to their baptism, and
- 2) A standard of teaching which teachers in the Early Church had to conform to.

The Apostolic Writings were before the Canon. The word “Canon” is the word we use to signify the officially recognized authoritative books of the NT. The NT books were circulated and recognized by all the churches for many years and later declared to be the official Canon of scripture in a Church Council that we receive as the apostolic witness to the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, these statements regarding God and his salvation were used in the Creeds before the Canon of Scripture was officially set.

We are part of the Church Universal – which goes back to the time of Jesus – even before in the forming of the First Testament, that is the Old Testament.

God’s people have been here since the Garden of Eden. There was the promise of the Seed of the woman – Jesus was the promised One.

The church was first formed as the 12 apostles, along with other disciples. Then on Pentecost there were 120 gathered and many more – this is seen as the birthday of the Church. We might describe this, and I am making this up, that the Hebrew nation was the first trimester and Jesus’ ministry would be likened to the end of the third trimester – and then the church came in full bloom at Pentecost.

The theme at hand here is the importance and Biblical foundation of creeds.

Creeds are a formal standard of teaching and are an instrument of liturgy, that is, an instrument for the worship of God.

Let’s look at one of our scripture readings for today, **Deut. 26:1-11:**

“When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it, ² you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name to dwell there.³ And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, ‘I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.’ ⁴ Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God.

⁵ “And you shall make response before the LORD your God, ‘A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. ⁶ And the Egyptians treated us harshly and

humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. ⁷ Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸ And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. ⁹ And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me.’ And you shall set it down before the LORD your God and worship before the LORD your God. ¹¹ And you shall rejoice in all the good that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.”

Here we see prescribed words are used – there were the three yearly Feasts in Israel. What we have here are instructions for worship...First, in the tabernacle, and then in the temple. In verse 3 we see the exact words the worshipper was to say:

‘I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.’

They were to make a response, a confession of faith, a creed. This goes all the way through v. 10a

The LORD here is the personal, covenant name of God.

Verse 10b says, “And you shall set it down before the Lord your God and worship before the Lord your God.” This is a formal act of worship. These are instructions, worship guides.

We see a call and response, and a creedal statement. We are to celebrate God’s acts of salvation – the deliverance from Egypt.

We have the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 15 and the Sign of the covenant in Gen. 17.

God sent Moses who did great deeds against the gods of Egypt. Therefore, this creed is a rehearsal of what God did.

Now to the NT – we see creedal statements embedded in the Bible, which are the foundation of the Apostles and Nicene Creeds.

Look at 1 Tim. 3:16:

¹⁶Great 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.

Notice it says here, “we confess...”

What is the meaning of “godliness”? it is what God has done for us and it has been manifested to us.

We see here the Incarnation – the Word joined to the human seed.

The word “vindicated” here is in Romans 1:3-4:

³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

He was “seen by angels:” – his birth, this temptation, and his ascension.

He was “proclaimed among the nations” by the apostles.

He was “believed on” which is the actions of humans.

He was “taken up in glory” which is the Ascension.

We have here three parallel expressions.

The importance of creeds:

They were very important in the Hebrew nation and in the Church from Day 1.

Even in the ministry of Jesus, he asked, “Who do men say I am?” This is the Central Question – “Who is Jesus Christ?”

Creeds help us to define our beliefs as the community of faith. Therefore, we share core beliefs – I must believe those things to be a part of it.

At the same time, we believe and look to God in faith – this is conversion.

In the Hebrew nation they had a way in which the redeemed people could confess their faith and also act it out in worship.

They had, for example, the Passover family liturgy in which the children ask, “What is the meaning of this meal?”

In the baptismal creed we see, “What do you believe about Jesus?”

Creeds...:

- 1) Help us define who God is. The first article of faith (in the Apostles and Nicen Creeds) is “God the Father.”
- 2) They tell us who we are and what we believe and what God has done for us.

Therefore, the second section of the Creed is about Christ and what he’s done.

He was born of a virgin; he has two natures and one being.

He undertook my redemption, took my sin and was crucified and buried for my sins, and raised Victor over sin and death, and he reigns in heaven with the Father.

How does belief in Christ manifest itself?

Salvation is not an individual type program.

But it is a community being created – a congregation that belongs. The old Scottish word “kirk,” which is “church,” means those who belong to the Lord.

The last part of the Creed speaks of the Holy Spirit who unites us with all others who belong to the Church.

“Holy, universal, catholic” refers to God’s people from all time, across all cultures, holding to a common faith. They are holy because they are united to Christ and the Holy Spirit is within them.

Therefore, the response of faith is union with Christ and is life in the Church.

The creeds protect us against error by establishing boundaries. The Nicene Creed dealt with false teaching – even some Christians today hold false ideas about God and Christ. If we get off the road, we can get back on the road.

If there are no boundaries or rails on the bottom of a ramp, then my power chair can go off it.

Sin is not just with the body; it also has to do with the mind, with words, with attitudes. We can sin with false doctrine when it touches on the central core of the faith.

See Exodus 20:1ff...negatives can sometimes clarify the positive.

The Ten Commandments are rooted in the creed that is embedded at the beginning of the Commandments,

Verse 2 is commandment #1 for Jews:

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

This is a creedal statement: who God is and our relationship to him and how we should respond to him.

Ethics or behavior must flow out of our doctrine. This is illustrated in the Ten Commandments. It begins with a declaration of God who is and then how we live in accordance.

Verses 1-3 is response to the command; verses 5-9 are how to relate to humans and boundaries. And the 10th is about heart attitude.

Creeds in worship help us unite with God’s people in every generation who have received Christ’s salvation.