



The Apostles' Creed: 'I believe in...'

by Bernard Gabbott

Memory verse:

Therefore, brothers, since we have boldness to enter the
sanctuary through the blood of Jesus ...
let us hold onto the confession of our hope without wavering,
for he who promised is faithful'

Hebrews 10:19, 22

Introduction

As an Anglican church, defined as a denomination by the Thirty-nine Articles, we are publicly a church of three creeds: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

Each creed is a summary of Biblical truth, developed in response to a debate about theological substance. The Nicene Creed emerged out of the 'Arian Controversy' about the nature of the relationship between God and Jesus—resolved at the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451). The Athanasian Creed emerged out of the debates about the nature of the Trinity, in which the orthodox view of the Bible was championed by Athanasius. Of these three, the Apostles' Creed is the simplest, the shortest, and the most universally accepted across every form of Christian denomination.

The word 'creed' comes from the Latin word 'credo' - 'I believe'. It is a statement of belief, a summary of key truths that are believed, that someone has 'faith in'. In many ways, such creeds are a statement not just of what someone (or, some community) believes in but also how they view the world (their worldview).

In this sense, creeds—as summary statements—are not unusual in God's word—from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, through to Matthew 28:19, Philippians 2:5-11, Romans 10:8-9, 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 and Colossians 2:6.

The specific origins of the Apostles' Creed are unclear, but by the eight century, its current form was established. Most likely, it emerged from what was called 'the Roman Creed', an early summary of the Biblical truth used at baptism. Traditionally, baptisms were conducted on Easter Sunday. They involved a public declaration of faith, after a long period of discipleship training (sometimes of up to three years). This public declaration of faith was extremely significant, especially as official opposition to Christianity developed. To make such a public declaration of allegiance to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was to publicly declare allegiance to another ruler and empire!

In this context, it seems that the Apostles' Creed was developed to summarise the key truths of 'apostolic faith' - the truth of the faith that was passed on by the apostles as they carried out the work begun by Jesus, and for which they were commissioned by Jesus, equipped by Jesus, and sent out by Jesus (Matthew 28:16-20).

The structure of the Apostles' Creed is Trinitarian—and all good creeds are! It describes faith in 'God the Father', 'God the Son', and 'God the Holy Spirit', and what this creates and entails. And, like all good creeds, it speaks to the currents of the world we live in, confronting falsehood in Christian 'teaching', and the thoughts and desires of the world around us.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.

He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven.

He is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and 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 life everlasting.

Amen.

Resources:

- Affirming the Apostles' Creed, J.I. Packer, Crossway: 2008
- 'I believe': Exploring the Apostles' Creed, A. McGrath, IVP:1997

Study 1:
**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

As we study the Apostles' Creed, we will be breaking it down into phrases/clauses, and examining God's word for their substance. There will be a fair bit of hopping around the Bible! Moreover, we must remember two other aspects: first, the Creed is not about persuading people but about summarizing the historic orthodox Biblical truth; second, the Creed speaks the truth of God's word to the nature of our world.

'I believe in'

1. How do we use the word 'believe', and what do we mean by it?

2. What must 'belief' always have, and why?

3. Read Mark 1:14-15.
How does Jesus use the word 'believe', and in what context?

'God'

1. When we say 'I believe in God', what do we mean by 'God'? Have a look at the following passages, and see what they say:

Exodus 3:1-15:

Exodus 34:5-7:

John 1:1-18:

Matthew 28:18-20:

'the Father Almighty'

1. What emphasis does the definite article 'the' achieve here?
2. How is the idea of 'Father' used in the passages that follow?

Genesis 1:26-28:

Ps.68:5:

Malachi 2:10:

Matthew 6:

John 1:14-18:

John 10:14-18, 30:

Acts 17:28:

3. The concept of 'almighty' carries with it the idea of unrivalled power. How does God use that power? And how does the word of God respond to that power?

Luke 1:37:

Ephesians 1:3-12:

Psalms 99:1-5:

'creator of heaven and earth'

1. What do the following passages affirm about God as 'creator'?

Genesis 1-2:

Romans 1:18-25:

John 1:1-18:

Psalm 104:

Revelation 4:11:

Application....

1. Given all we have learned, how does this opening statement of the Apostles' Creed speak to:

our nature and identity?

our worldview?

the nature of God as personal?

the nature of God as transcendent?

the relationship between God and his creation?

the nature of creation itself?

Study 2:

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,**

Here we move to the 'guts' of the Creed. In this sense, what we have here is the development, the 'fleshing-out', of the early Christian creed, 'Jesus is Lord' (Rom.10:8-9; 1 Cor.12:3).

'I believe in Jesus Christ'

1. What does this simple statement immediately assert about Christian belief (look back at the opening line)?
2. 'Jesus' refers to a historical man with a name. What does 'Christ' mean?

1 Samuel 24:5-7:

2 Samuel 7:1-17:

Isaiah 45:1

Mark 8:27-30:

'God's only Son'

1. Look through all the passages below, and see what they say (and this is NOT exhaustive) about Jesus' 'sonship':

2 Samuel 7:1-17:

Psalms 2:

Matthew 2:15; 3:17; 11:27; 17:5:

Mark 1:11; 14:36:

John 1:14-18; 3:16; 5:16-27; 17:1-26:

Romans 1:3-4:

Hebrews 1:103:

'our Lord'

1. What is significant about the personal pronoun here... and how does it 'combine' with the personal pronoun that starts the Creed (and this section)?

In the Old Testament, 'LORD' is the translation used for 'Yahweh' - the personal covenantal name of God. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the Greek word 'Lord' was so used. So, when New Testament writers used the Old Testament, this was often what they were referring to when they used passages that described God as 'LORD/Lord'.

2. How is God described?
(This is a two verse sample of hundreds of such references in the Old Testament)

Genesis 12:1; 15:6:

How is this applied to Jesus?

Acts 2:21 (using Joel):

Philippians 2:5-11 (using Isaiah 45:23-24):

3. How is Jesus described as 'Lord'?

Acts 2:36:

Romans 14:9:

Philippians 2:5-11:

Colossians 2:6:

‘who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary’

1. What do the accounts of Jesus’ conception and birth make clear?

Matthew 1:18-25:

Luke 1:26-38:

2. Why are these two facts so crucial?

Genesis 3:15:

Genesis 12:1-3:

2 Samuel 7:1-17:

Psalms 51:1-5:

Isaiah 7:10-17:

John 8:41b:

Application....

1. Given all we have learned, how does this statement of the Apostles’ Creed speak to:

Jesus’ nature?

the importance of the Incarnation for forgiveness?

the love of God for his creation?

the nature of Jesus’ authority over his people?

the balance of individualism and community in Christianity?

the heresies of docetism and adoptionism?

**Study 3:
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended into hell.**

‘suffered under Pontius Pilate’

1. This seems such a jarring note—why Pilate? Look at the two passages below and see why...

Luke 1:1-4; 3:1-3

2. The idea of ‘suffered’ is not something we talk of much—why is this verb here?

Isaiah 52:13-53:12:

Matthew 16:21:

Mark 8:31-33:

Luke 9:21-27:

1 Peter 2:21-25:

Hebrews 2:17-18; 5:8-10:

‘was crucified, died and was buried’

1. We need to break this down into the parts...

‘crucified’

Matthew 27:26-44:

Mark 15:15-32:

Luke 23:32-43:

John 19:16-24:

'died'

Matthew 27:45-56:

Mark 15:33-41:

Luke 23:44-49:

John 19:28-37:

'buried'

Matthew 27:52-66:

Mark 15:42-47:

Luke 23:50-56:

John 19:38-42:

2. But we need to look not just at the event, but also the meaning of the event:

Isaiah 53:6:

John 3:16:

Acts 2:23:

Romans 5:8-11:

I Cor.1:23-25; 15:1-5:

Ephesians 2:4-5:

Hebrews 12:1-4:

1 John 4:8-10:

As we turn to 'he descended into hell', J.I. Packer's comments are helpful:

'The English is misleading, for 'hell' has changed its sense since the English form of the Creed was fixed. Originally 'hell' meant the place of the departed as such, corresponding to the Greek *Hades* and the Hebrew *Sheol*. That is what it means here... But since the seventeenth century 'hell' has been used to signify only the state of final retribution for the godless, for which the New Testament name is *Gehenna*.'

J.I. Packer, 'Affirming the Apostles' Creed', p.p.86-87

'he descended into hell'

1. From where was Jesus raised?

Romans 1:4:

Colossians 2:12:

2. How does this tie to Psalm 16:10?

Application....

1. Given all we have learned, how does this statement of the Apostles' Creed speak to:

the human trial of suffering?

the call to perseverance?

the nature and purpose of Christ's death?

the nature of God's love?

Study 4:

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven.

**He is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

‘on the third day he rose again’

1. This is the third historical aspect of events of the Easter weekend... What do the Gospels tell us about the resurrection...?

Matthew 28:1-15:

Mark 16:1-8:

Luke 24:1-49:

John 20:1-18:

2. As with the death of Jesus, the event and its meaning need to be considered... what is the meaning of this event?

Psalms 16:

Isaiah 53:10-12:

Romans 1:4; 4:24; 6:1-10; 8:17:

1 Corinthians 15:12-28:

Philippians 2:8-11:

‘he ascended into heaven’

1. The ascension of Jesus, as an event, is described in two places—Luke 24:50-52 and Acts 1:1-11. The significance of the event is described a few more times—what does it mean?

John 15:26-16:15:

Acts 2:33:

Philippians 2:9:

Colossians 3:1-6:

Hebrews 4:14-16; 9:11-12:

‘seated’

1. What do we learn about Jesus being ‘seated’ at God’s right hand?

Psalm 16:8; 110:1:

Matthew 28:18:

Romans 8:34:

Ephesians 2:4-7:

Hebrews 2:7-9; 4:16; 7:25; 9:24:

1 John 2:1-2:

‘and will come again to judge the living and the dead’

1. What do we know of the return of Jesus?

Matthew 24:36-44:

2 Corinthians 5:8-11:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11:

Hebrews 9:27-28:

1 John 3:2:

Revelation 22:20:

Application....

1. Given all we have learned, how does this statement of the Apostles' Creed speak to:

the reality of bodily resurrection?

the reality of life after death?

what Jesus is doing now?

how life will end?

**Study 5:
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,**

This is the third and final section of the Creed—and confirms the heart of the Creed...

'I believe in the Holy Spirit'

1. What does this final clause state about what we believe to be the nature of God?

Matthew 3:13-4:1; 27:45-50; 28:16-20:

2. Work your way through the following passages to gain an inkling of the work/role/power/nature of the Holy Spirit:

Genesis 1:2:

Exodus 31:1-6:

Judges 13:25:

1 Samuel 16:14:

Psalms 51:10-11:

Matthew 1:20:

John 14:25-26; 15:26; 16:7-15:

Acts 1:1-8; 2:1-13:

Romans 8:9:

1 Corinthians 12:4-7:

2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 3:17-18; 5:5:

Galatians 5:16-26:

Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:11-16:

Hebrews 9:14:

1 John 5:6-7:

‘the holy catholic church’

1. What do we learn about the ‘church’ in the following verses?

Matthew 16:13-20:

1 Corinthians 12:12-31:

Ephesians 4:11-22:

Colossians 1:18:

Hebrews 12:22-24:

Jude 3:

Revelation 7:9-10:

The word ‘catholic’ comes from the Greek word ‘katholikos’, which means ‘according to the whole’ or ‘universal’.

‘the communion of saints’

1. As Paul writes his letters, he almost universally describes his recipients as ‘saints’, which literally means ‘the holy ones’, or ‘those set apart for God’. The word for ‘communion’ is the word for ‘fellowship’, which captures the idea of ‘sharing’. Just from what you have seen above, what does that involved?
2. Look at these passages to see what that ‘communion’ looks like?

Acts 2:44-45; 6:1; 9:1-9:

Romans 12:13:

1 Corinthians 14:3-5, 26:

Ephesians 4:28:

1 Timothy 5:3; 6:18:

Hebrews 10:19-25; 11:1-12:3; 13:16:

Application....

1. Given all we have learned, how does this statement of the Apostles' Creed speak to:

the importance of the Holy Spirit?

the trinitarian nature of God?

the work of the Trinity in salvation?

the importance of the local church?

the relationships amongst God's people?

the relationship in the community of God's people?

**Study 6:
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.**

‘the forgiveness of sins’

1. Glance back at the section on ‘he died’, and see how the event itself was understood... and then read these passages to examine a little more what this means:

Genesis 3; 12:1-3:

Leviticus 17:

Psalms 5:4-7; 130:4:

Isaiah 6:1-6:

Habakkuk 1:13:

Matthew 1:21; 18:23-35; 27:51:

Luke 15:11-32:

Romans 1:18:

1 Corinthians 15:3:

2 Corinthians 5:21:

Ephesians 2:1-10; 4:32:

Colossians 1: 19-23; 3:12-14:

1 Peter 3:18:

'the resurrection of the body life everlasting'

1. How do these passages help us understand resurrection...?

2 Samuel 12:15-23:

Psalms 16:

Isaiah 53:10-12:

Luke 24:36-43:

John 5:24-30; 10:10; 14:1-6:

Romans 8:16-27:

1 Corinthians 15:20-23:

Colossians 1:18-20:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

1 Peter 1:3-7:

Application....

1. Given all we have learned, how does this statement of the Apostles' Creed speak to:

the daily reality of forgiveness?

the nature of our resurrection, and eternal life?

the future for all humanity?

the hope that God's people have, and nurture?

the nature of our grief and mourning, as God's people?