

## What You Believe

*Hebrews 13:7-10, Ephesians 4:11-15*

If someone asked you, what do Christians believe, how would you summarize the faith? John 3:16? Something simple like “Jesus saves?” What if we rephrased the question...“Christian, what do you believe?”

Two goals for our time this morning:

The **first goal** is to help new members of our congregation understand the portion of our liturgy where we recite the Nicene Creed. You may be wondering why we use it and what kind of authority it has.

The **second goal** is to help all of us, new and experienced, better appreciate the value of this part of the liturgy, the value of the Creed to provide you with a Biblical summary of the Gospel that is faithful and confessional.

### The Necessity of a Creed

Both Hebrews and Ephesians mention the importance of doctrine (of right teaching). These passages presuppose and require a creed (a statement of correct doctrine). But the use of creeds often comes with possible objections:

- 1) “No Creed but Christ”, or “We don’t use Creeds, just the Bible”. The problem is that “I don’t believe in creeds” is a creed. The issue is not whether you have a creed, but which one you will have.
- 2) Doctrine divides and creates conflict, so avoid being too specific about what we believe so we don’t rock the boat. We want to keep unity. The problem is that somebody must define the basis of unity...unified in what?

If we must have a creed, can it be one that keeps us closer to God’s Word and brings unity?

### History of the Creed

The Nicene Creed, dated 381 AD, comes from the Council of Constantinople, which was building off a text that was originally put in place at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. The goal of that council, in simple terms, was to deal with the Arian heresy. That was a particular doctrine that many parts of the church had given way to, that denied the full deity of Jesus Christ. The Gospel was at stake, because if Jesus is not God, we have no salvation or atoning work of the cross. Ultimately, this creed was a pastoral issue. This was a bunch of pastors coming together to kill wolves because they loved their sheep and they loved the Savior who bought them.

### Authority of the Creed

The church created the Creed, and for Protestants, we hold the Church to be a true and just authority, given by God, with duties and tasks that only it has the authority to perform or conduct. But it is an authority that must be subordinate to the Scriptures as the rule of law. When a pastor preaches, to the degree to which they bring the Word to bear, they are the voice of God to you. But they hold no special infallibility. As with preaching, a creed is essentially a fallible summary of infallible truth. It is not Scripture, but it can be a faithful summary of it.

### Elements of the Creed

Part I: *I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.*

- 1) We are monotheists. We believe in one almighty God over which there is no authority. (*Deut 4:39, 6:4*)
- 2) We come to God as our Father, not as some angry deity who we are hoping to appease (*Romans 8:14-17*)
- 3) God, in his sovereignty, is Lord over all. We believe in creation ex nihilo, out of nothing. (*Genesis 1:1*)

Part II: *And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God...by whom all things were made;*

- 1) We have one Savior, one Lord, one Messiah. Jesus is unique. (*John 1:1-4, 14:8-10; Philippians 2:5-7*)
- 2) Christ is begotten of the Father and His begetting is an eternal one that does not describe a time period, but a relationship. He who sees the Son, sees the Father. He is God of God, Light of Light. (*John 1:1-4; 14*)

- 3) God, the creator, created through the Son. (*John 1:1-4*)
- 4) The Son and Father are of the same essence. One is not less God than the other. This must be true, as Christ our redeemer cannot simply be a creature in order to do what He did for us. If we lose this, we lose it all.

Part III: Who, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from Heaven...whose kingdom shall have no end.

- 1) The creed does not allow us to separate who Christ is from what he came to do.
- 2) Christ's humanity is attested by the virgin birth (*Matthew 1:20-21*). Athanasius: "If Jesus Christ the incarnate Son is not true God from true God, then we are not saved, for it is only God who can save; but if Jesus Christ is not truly man, then salvation does not touch our human existence and condition." (*Philippians 2:5-7*)
- 3) Salvation happened in real time, in a real place, with real people. It was objective. (*I Corinthians 15:14-19*)
- 4) He died and rose again for our salvation. He suffered death that we might live. (*I Corinthians 15:3-4*)
- 5) These events are "according to the Scriptures." The creed is not claiming some special authority. It is pointing to an authority. It says, in so many words, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so".
- 6) Christ's work will end in judgement by God, through Christ, in Whom all men will be subject. (*Ephesians 1:20-23; Daniel 7:13-14; Mark 16:19-20, Luke 1:32-33, Acts 17:31*)

Part IV: And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord, and Giver of Life...and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

- 1) The Holy Ghost is the Lord and Giver of Life. The Spirit of God hovered over the face of the water in creation (*Genesis 1:1-2*) and the Spirit of God gives spiritual life (*John 6:63*).
- 2) The Spirit is referred to as a personal "He" in Scripture, not an impersonal force (*John 14:16, Acts 8:29*).
- 3) The Spirit proceeds from the Father (*John 15:26-27*) and works through both the Father and Son (*Acts 2:33*).
- 4) The Holy Ghost is, with the Father and the Son, worshiped and glorified. To blaspheme the Spirit is to be outside salvation (*Mark 3:28-29*). We are baptized in His name (*Matthew 28:19*). Lying to the Spirit is lying to God (*Acts 5:3-4*). The Spirit is praised in the ancient doxology with the Father and Son (*2 Corinthians 13:14*).
- 5) The Spirit is the source of the Scriptures. He is the agent of revelation. (*2 Peter 1:20-21*).
- 6) The Church is a creation of the Spirit, the bride of Christ (*Revelation 21:2*). We are holy (set apart), we are catholic (universal, all tribes, tongues, nations, *Zeph 3:8-10*), we are apostolic (tradition from the Apostles).
- 7) We have one baptism, in the Triune name. Our faith is unique and not one option of many. (*John 14:6*)
- 8) And our hope is in the final resurrection (*Acts 23:6*). Jesus wins and we know it and the Creed declares it.

### **Final Things to Remember**

Creed as Worship – Reminding ourselves of our baptism vows. Who the Father is and what he did, who the Son is and what He did, and who the Spirit is and what He did. This is confession of a good conscience (*I Peter 3:21-22*).

Creed as Unity - Doctrine, rightly used, unites. The Creed does not cover everything; it can't. But it truly is amazing how much ground it does cover. It has a core orthodoxy which helps you decipher fundamental problems and see unity versus error. (Lutheran/Anglican/Baptist vs. Jehovah's Witness, LDS, liberal Christianity).

Creed as Preacher - The last thing the Creed intends to be is a competitor with the Word. Like a preacher it is doing everything it can to ground itself in the Scriptures and drive you to know them better. Use it for that.

Creed as Shield and Sword - The Creed can shield you from all kinds of errors because it is a faithful exposition of the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Don't neglect the older guides, the ones that have been refined and tested. They have a good testimony. That's why we make it our testimony.

Suggested Resources **Faith of our Fathers** (L. Charles Jackson); **Creeds, Councils and Christ** (Gerald Bray); **The Creeds of Christendom: Volume 1** (Philip Schaff)