

“I Believe”
Apostles Creed
Romans 10:9-10
06/18/2023

Introduction

Happy Fathers Day. 1 Timothy 4:1-16. Pray.

I have a very simple and specific goal for our time together this morning. I want to get you to be excited and eager (or at least passably willing) to spend 12 weeks together working through the *Apostles Creed*.

Now, depending on your church background or your history or experience with the Christian faith, that statement could elicit a couple of reactions.

- The first might be **instant excitement**. No convincing here Tim, you had me at Apostles. If you grew up in a more “high-church” or liturgical background – Roman Catholic, Anglican, or Reformed Presbyterian – maybe hearing the creed brings back fond memories or maybe you’re excited to really dive deep into some of the theology of our faith.
- The second reaction might be one of **dread**. This sounds weird, or boring. Or why do we care about what some people 1800 years ago said. Or maybe you had a bad experience with the Creed growing up – you saw it as some lifeless statement of faith where people recited it in a monotone way and then moved on with their lives.
- The third reaction might simply be one of **confusion**. Apostles Creed? You mean Assassins Creed? What is a creed? Like the movie franchise? Or the band? Why don’t we just talk about the Bible?

And listen – wherever you’re at entering into this series, there’s freedom to be there, that’s why I want to take today to just orient us together around what we’re doing this summer and why.

1 Timothy 4:1-16

And let me just give you the why from the start.

We are studying the Apostles Creed together this summer to **form our doctrine and fuel our discipleship.**

Turn with me to 1 Timothy 4. Before we get to the creed let’s look at this together.

We’ll work through the whole chapter just to understand what’s happening, and then we’ll hone in on the final verse:

1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons...

Paul is writing a letter to his disciple, Timothy. And he warns him – hey a future time is going to come where people will walk away from Jesus because of false teaching. People will come into the church, teach some things that are contrary to the correct doctrine of God and that will cause people to stumble.

In verses 2-5 he goes into the specific of some of that false teaching, it’s important, just not for our purposes today. Skip to v6...

6 If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. 7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.

In other words – have nothing to do with these false teachings. Don't humor it. Don't entertain it. Don't joke around about it. Warn people that it's wrong, and then move on from it.

Rather train yourself for godliness;

Don't entertain false teaching. Rather put in the work to live a godly life. He goes on to talk about the value of godliness, how important it is to live holy, sanctified, set apart lives for God. Skip down to v13...

13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. 14 Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. 15 Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.

Here's the key for us, Paul's summary of the last 15 verses:

16 Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. OR as the NIV puts it – Watch your life and doctrine closely.

Pay attention, Paul says to his young mentee Timothy. You've got to make sure that you are thinking correctly. That you don't give in to false teaching or heresy or these viewpoints or worldviews that are not of God. Don't let people convince you of something about God or yourself that is not true.

But also – watch your life. Pay close attention to how you live. Don't just make sure you've got good theology, make sure that theology has actually made its way into a changed heart and a changed life. Don't just acknowledge some good truthful things, let those truths change what you love, shape how you live.

Watch your life and doctrine closely.

For by doing so, here's the promise – **Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.**

That word save doesn't mean in an eternal sense – like salvation – rather it means rescue and preserve them from the very false teaching Paul just warned them about. Hey – guard your doctrine and guard your discipleship – because that's how you avoid running after foolish ungodly myths and teachings. That's how you avoid deconstructing your faith because of some tiktok. That's how you avoid believing wrong things about God that then mess up your whole life.

So, this summer we want to help watch our lives and doctrine closely.

Or, to use the larger theological terms for it, (and these will be hugely important for us over the next few months) – we want to be a faithful church of **orthodoxy** and **orthopraxy**.

Let's break these terms down, again – wildly important for you to grasp for this summer:

- **Ortho – Right, Correct, True**
- **Dox – Viewpoint or Doctrine**
- **Praxis – Action or Practice**

Orthodoxy – Right Doctrine.

Orthopraxy – Right Living.

We're spending our summer asking the Lord to holistically shape our doctrine and fuel our discipleship.

Background to the Creed

Enter the creed. Now, before we talk about how the Apostles Creed will help with this, let's start just by talking about the Creed itself.

First, let me read it for us. We'll actually read it all together at the end today, but let me just start by reading it:

THE APOSTLES CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come 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. Amen.

A creed, very simply, is a statement of the basic beliefs of a religious faith. Creed is the English version of the Latin "Credo" which means "I believe." Creeds are statements of belief.

And that is what the Apostles Creed is. It is a summation of the core beliefs of our Christian faith.

It's called the Apostles' Creed, not because it was written by the apostles, the first leaders within the early church, but because it is a summation of what the apostles taught. Those teachings from God, through the Apostles, is what we have now written down for us in our New Testament.

So really the goal of the Apostles Creed is to summarize the doctrine and teachings of the New Testament.

And this is really important. A HUGE thing I want you to remember as we go through this series – We are not going to be preaching the creed, but rather using the creed to preach the Bible. Because creeds do not hold any authority in and of themselves, but rather they point outside of themselves to the ultimate authority of the Word of God.

Sun + Moon. Maybe this is a helpful illustration. The moon is awesome. But the moon gives out no light of its own. The light you see from the moon is simply a reflection of the light from the sun.

The same is true of the Creed. The creed is reflecting the light of the Word of God. The creed has no authority in and of itself, and we would never preach it like it does, but rather it points back to the authority that is the Word of God.

So Christian creeds in general seek to summarize as succinctly, clearly, and helpfully as possible the truths of God from His Word. And the Apostles Creed, in particular, is perhaps the most-helpful, if not at least the most well-known and used throughout history of the creeds of our faith.

In these 8 sentences we have an entire summary of what Christians have agreed upon as the essential doctrines of our faith. From AD 100, just 70 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, until now – Christians across centuries, continents, cultures, languages, and denominations have agreed – these are the core things you must hold to as a follower of Jesus.

In the words of theologian **Albert Mohler** – “**All Christians believe more than is contained in the Apostles’ Creed,** (there are more doctrines than just what is said here – the AC doesn’t speak to the inerrancy of Scripture, or the mode or meaning of baptism for example) **but none can believe less.**”

You cannot be a Christian within the bounds of historical Christian orthodoxy and not believe what the Creed teaches. And this is not just me saying this, this is church history.

Let me explain – It was no easy thing to join the Church in the first century. People think we have a long membership process because there’s a class and then a sit down conversation with a pastor. We’re like a walk in the park comparatively. In the first century if you expressed a desire to follow Jesus and join the church, you went through a process known as catechism, where you were trained in the teachings and ways of Jesus for anywhere from 1-3 years.

And the tool early churches would use to train their prospective converts was the Apostles Creed. They would work systematically through the creed – teaching these new Christians the core tenets of the faith, culminating on Easter Sunday, when they would enter the waters of baptism. And before they were immersed under the water, they would be asked 3 questions, directly from the creed:

- Do you believe in God the Father Almighty? (And then they would dunk you under the water)
- Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and Mary the virgin and was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was dead and buried and rose on the third day alive from the dead and ascended in the heavens and sits at the right hand of the Father and will come to judge the living and the dead? (And then they would dunk you under the water)
- Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and the holy church and the resurrection of the flesh? (And then they would dunk you under the water)

Do you believe? That’s what they needed to know. Does the new professing Christian believe?

Not believe in a generic sense. This gets lost a lot in modern day conversations around faith – we think faith, specifically sincere faith, is the point. When in Christianity faith isn’t the key, but rather *who your faith is in*. We don’t put our faith in faith. We don’t believe in belief. We believe in God. More specifically we believe in the God of the Creed. The God who is one God, three persons. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Creator of the world. Forgiver of sins. Head of the Church.

But also not believe in a strictly knowledge sense. To believe is not simply to affirm some truth statements. You don’t enter into the kingdom of God because you are willing to mentally acknowledge God exists. Belief is not less than mental ascent, but it’s much much more than that. **Belief in the NT is a total life surrender and reorientation around what you have found to be true.**

So they wanted to know – do you surrender your entire life in trust to the God of the Creed and His work in the world and your life? Do you affirm and align with the orthodox beliefs in this creed?

Ben Myers – “**The creed comes from baptism. It is a pledge of allegiance to the God of the gospel – a God who is revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; a God who is present to us in the real world of human flesh, creating, redeeming, and sanctifying us for good works.**”

Doctrine + Discipleship

What does Paul say to watch/to guard? Your doctrine and your discipleship.

How has the creed been used to serve Christians for centuries? Doctrine and discipleship.

Our prayer is that the Creed would do the same for us over the next 12 weeks – We are studying the Apostles Creed to form our doctrine and fuel our discipleship.

Let's consider how.

1. Doctrine – Orthodoxy

It was AW Tozer who famously said – **“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”**

We want to be a people of right doctrine. We want to read the Scriptures, interpret the Scriptures, and understand the Scriptures correctly. Know God rightly. We don't want to know a God of our own imagination or fantasy. We want to know God as He has revealed Himself in His Word.

Some today in American Christianity want to throw out the importance of doctrine. Let's agree on the essentials and the rest is just fluff for seminary or pastors or nerds. And we've lost our way. And the stats prove it.

The state of doctrinal orthodoxy in America among Christians is not good.

Ligonier Ministries, a group out of Orlando, Florida does a bi-annual survey known as “The State of Theology”. And it's their goal in the survey to track the theological understanding of Americans and American Christians.

Let me just give you a few of the results from the 2022 survey. These are self-identified evangelical Christians:

- 56% said God accepts the worship of all religions.
- 73% said that Jesus was the first and greatest being created by God.
- 43% said Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God.
- 60% said The Holy Spirit is a force but is not a personal being.
- 57% said Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature.

Just in these 5 questions alone, and there were more, the majority of self-identified followers of Jesus answered in ways that **go against** core orthodox doctrines that the church has taught for thousands of years.

That's not a good thing. That the majority of Christians surveyed are getting, not like fringe positions of our faith wrong, but core theological and Biblical positions wrong.

And I think the reason for this lack of theology is ultimately because of our Biblical illiteracy. We don't know the Bible.

- 73% of Christians can wrongly say that Jesus was the first and greatest being created by God even when John 1:1 tells us – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 57% of Christians can wrongly say most people are good by nature, even when Eph 2:3 tells us - 3 we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

What it seems is that, by and large, American evangelicals are terribly confused about who God is, what he's up to, what he's like, what he's about. It seems like we've lost our way.

And I think there's a couple of reasons for that:

First, the American church is built on pragmatism. Our first question when we approach the Bible and theology and doctrine is not “is it true?” but rather “is it helpful?” Does it work for me right now? What do I need right now in my life – I need to read about that, I need to hear a sermon on that. THIS SERMON IS BORING – aka it doesn’t immediately apply to my current struggle.

There's no real thirst or hunger for spiritual formation as God has designed it to be – you, over time, being formed by staring at, marveling at, being blown away by God and His work in the world – and then that slowly rooting you and producing fruit over the long haul.

Second, is that we’ve bought into a really weird, over-romanticized, over-emotionalized version of Christianity that is no historic orthodox Christianity at all. We prioritize the way God or Christianity, or worship, or a sermon makes us *feel*, not how it shapes our minds and hearts over the long haul.

Third, we're obsessed with being entertained. I know this because of what I ask Harper every Sunday afternoon, my first question – “Did you have fun at CitiKids?” – As if, subconsciously I've bought into the lie that whether or not it was a good morning was whether or not she had fun.

And the problem is that we don’t move past that once we become adults, do we? Is it fun? Is the Gathering fun? That becomes our sole metric for whether it was good or not. And listen – it’s ok to have fun and enjoy church but that’s not the primary goal. The primary goal of what we do on Sundays is not fun, it’s formation. It’s not primarily meant to be a fun experience for you to enjoy. It’s meant to be formative for your heart over the course of your life.”

Fourth, we’re all a bunch of chronological snobs. Something shifted, and we’ve bought this hook, line, and sinker – that somewhere along the line old became bad and new became good. Like if something is historical, or ancient, it’s outdated or oppressive or at best just lame. We’re smarter now, everyone before 1950 just didn’t know enough. We’re the enlightened ones, we’re the informed ones, we’re educated and progressive. Like we just kind of default to thinking because people didn’t know how the internet worked they were all dumb.

And one of the incredible weaknesses of the American church is that because of our chronological snobbery we’ve become untethered to church history.

- And it creates a sort of chaos because we think we have to invent theological positions, as if no one has written on the issue of homosexuality ever in history.
- We think we’re the only ones who have faced a culture hostile to Christianity, because we don’t stop to learn about the 300 years of martyrdom where you were more likely to be murdered than die of old age as a Christian in the first 3 centuries of the Church.

But hear me on this – The Church has been just fine for 2,000 years. Jesus has been doing what He said He’d do – building it up as His bride.

He’s been protecting it from what would harm it from the outside and within. Christians have, even through other disagreements, defended the core doctrines of our faith. Our faith is not new, it’s old.

It’s worth knowing that, and picking up a book, and reading about how Christians who have come before you trusted in God, followed God, worshiped God through suffering. *Water From A Deep Well* - Gerald Sittser. Pay the \$20, read it. Let it ground you in a faith much bigger than 2023 Charlotte, NC. Much bigger than Citizens Church. Much bigger than your life.

And then in reading church history, learn that Christians haven’t been confused for thousands of years about doctrines the church seems so readily confused by today.

That’s part of the gift of the creed too...

Albert Mohler – “The Apostles’ Creed collapses time and space, uniting all true believers in the one, holy, and apostolic faith. This creed is a summary of what the Bible teaches, a narrative of God’s redemptive love, and a concise statement of basic Christianity....There is such power in knowing that when we confess the Apostles’ Creed, alone or in corporate worship, we are declaring the truth of the Christian faith with the very words that gave early Christians hope, sent martyrs confidently to their deaths, and have instructed Christ’s church throughout the centuries.”

So I’m just hoping and praying and asking the Lord that over the next few months as we look at the basic historical orthodox doctrines of our faith, that even if the sermons feel a little bit boring, and even if they don’t feel as immediately applicable as say Colossians 3 or Ecclesiastes or Revelation this fall, that we would be open to the ways these truths of God’s Word, illuminated by the Creed – might ground us in what is true about God, true about the world, true about ourselves, and true about what is to come.

That we might, unashamedly as a church, test better than the survey. That theology won’t just be a pastor thing, or a nerd thing, or a seminary student thing – but a Christian thing.

2. Discipleship – Orthopraxy

And then it’s our prayer that right doctrine wouldn’t simply live in our heads, but as true belief does, it would make its way down into our hearts and then out into our lives.

That the creed would be a rallying cry, not just of theological truths, but of worship and surrender and allegiance to God.

You see, when the early church confessed their faith through reciting this Creed, it was simultaneously their greatest act of rebellion against the world and their greatest act of allegiance to God.

When the church gathered and they stood not in an air conditioned room, protected by rule of law, but when they stood, across the centuries, not knowing who would come in, not knowing who was watching them to catch them, they rejected the popular narratives of their day, whatever their day was.

So in Rome for the first 250 years, they were rejecting that Caesar was lord. They rejected the narrative of the first century and said, "No, no, no. I reject that. Caesar is not Lord. Jesus is Lord." I’m rejecting the narrative in my day, and I’m pledging myself to God.

Though the things being rejected may have changed, the heart has not. When the church recites this creed, distilled, pulled from, wrung out of the Word of God, we’re saying, "We reject the modern narrative. We believe the historic Christian narrative, the narrative that God has come into the world to save sinners, that Jesus Christ has died for our sins, and we believe and trust that he has made known to us the way of salvation and shown us how life with God is meant to be lived."

So when we read the creed in just a moment, and each week that follows – that is what we are proclaiming – we’re rejecting the narrative of the world, pledge our allegiance to God, and then seeking to live in line with that allegiance.

- When we say, as we’ll study next week – **“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth”** we’re simultaneously rejecting that we are our own gods, that we can command our own lives, and we are surrendering ourselves in trust to God Almighty. His reign over the world and over us as a part of that world. And then we learn more and more to live a life under His kingship.

- When we say **“I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.”** We’re simultaneously rejecting that there are multiple ways or paths to God, but that it’s faith and faith alone in Christ and Christ alone that we may be forgiven and brought into life forever with God. And then we learn more and more to live freely from that grace, not trying to earn our way to God, but acting in good deeds from being His beloved.
- When we say **“I believe in the Holy Spirit”** we’re simultaneously rejecting that this world is a solely material world devoid of a spiritual reality, and we are surrendering ourselves to God who lives within us, shaping us, convicting us, and empowering us for ministry. And then we step out in faith empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve, love, share the gospel, and live for Christ.
- When we say **“I believe in the communion of saints”** we’re simultaneously rejecting that we can be islands to ourselves, totally autonomous individuals living for us and us alone, and we are surrendering ourselves in trust to the reality that life with God cannot and should not be absent from life with God’s people. And then we learn to live deeper into relationships with that community.

This series church is a chance for us to let the Word of God, illuminated by the Creed, shape our doctrine and then shape our lives.

So if you would stand. If you’re a follower of Jesus I’m inviting you in just a moment to read this with me. If you’re not a Christian, you can just stand and watch us be awkward, it’ll be great fun for you. If you’re a Christian, I invite you to read this like you mean it, as a pledge of devotions and surrender to God, and a rejection of the narratives of the world.

THE APOSTLES CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come 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. Amen.