

The Apostles' Creed

What we believe

January 1, 2023—Sermon Discussion Guide

The Apostle's Creed is a statement of Christian belief that is used by Western churches, both Catholic and Protestant. While it is explicitly affirmed only in Western churches, it reflects traditions that were affirmed officially by the entire Church in the Nicene Creed.

History

An early version of what later became the Apostle's Creed was called the "Old Roman Creed." It was in use as early as the second century. The earliest written version was found in a letter Marcellus of Ancyra wrote in Greek to Julius, the bishop of Rome, about AD 341. Fifty years later a scholar named Tyrannius Rufinus commented that the apostles wrote it after Pentecost, before leaving Jerusalem to preach. In AD 390, Ambrose mentions in a letter a "creed of the Apostles which the Church of Rome keeps and guards in its entirety."



What is used now is an enlarged version of the Old Roman Creed. The process of this evolution is not known, but creeds that were nearly identical to our current version began to appear in the fifth century. Subsequently, the final form was accepted throughout France and Germany within the next two centuries. In its present form the Creed dates to about the eighth century with Charlemagne officially recognizing it early in the ninth century.

Why was the Apostles' Creed written?

The early church followed a "rule of faith," the scriptures, and the Holy Spirit acting as a guide for individuals and communities. The "rule of faith" was the authoritative core teachings and traditions of the Apostles. In Hebrews 5:11-6:3, Paul addresses the need for Christians to accept, learn, and understand the basic concepts of their faith in order to move into a deeper relationship with God. The Apostle's Creed represents those core beliefs for Christians. It is a public profession of belief and a filter for discernment and decisions regarding what is and what is not Christian.

Many of the New Testament letters were written to “straighten out” congregations who had lost their way and been swayed in their beliefs by false teachers with false doctrines, especially gnosticism, decadent Judaism, and false asceticism. Paul writes 2 Corinthians because the congregation was infiltrated by false teachers. He also mentions it in 1 Corinthians, Colossians, and 1 Timothy and other letters. Peter addresses the same problem in 2 Peter and John addresses it in all three of his letters. It is even the main topic of Jude. So as you can see there was a very serious need in the early church for a firm, written, and widely accepted statement of what to believe.

Why Believe?

The Greek word for belief is *pisteuo*. In a religious context it means to totally entrust one’s spiritual well being to the God in which you believe, to commit totally, and to be loyal and faithful to that God.

We know that not all Christians believe exactly the same things. That’s why Luther broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. That’s why there are so many different protestant denominations. But there are some core beliefs that are critical in order to call yourself a Christian. That was the reason most Christian denominations adopted the Apostle’s Creed. And that is what our study is going to be about—those core beliefs.

Read Romans chapter 4.

- Who is this chapter about? What did he believe?
- What did God do for him because of his belief?
- How important is it for you to understand the core Christian beliefs?

Personal Study

Read the Apostle’s Creed below and underline the parts that you understand and believe. Put a question mark by the parts that you either don’t understand or are skeptical about.

Pray that God will teach you what you need to know so that you can embrace these words with confidence.

Apostle’s Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,
And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord.

Who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.