

DEVOTIONAL



THE

APOSTLES'

CREED



DISCOVERING

AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY IN AN

AGE OF COUNTERFEITS

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DAY 1

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” **MATTHEW 28:18-20**

The Apostles’ Creed was not written by the apostles, but it does reflect the early church’s effort to express and summarize the faith given by Christ to the apostles. Early Christians called the creed “the rule of faith” and turned to it as they worshipped and taught the faithful. But the question arises: Why today, do we need a book on the Apostles’ Creed? What relevance could it have and what benefit can come from examining it? Some object to the very idea of accountability to old words. Still others claim that Christians are to hold no creed but the Bible and to have “no creed but Christ.” The problem is, of course, that we all need a summary of what the Bible teaches, and the church needs a strong standard for recognizing true Christianity and rejecting false doctrines.

What is more, behind some objections to the Apostles’ Creed is something exceedingly dangerous: a desire for a doctrineless faith. Some argue for a Christianity that requires no formal doctrines or doctrinal mandates. The history of Christianity, however, is littered with the debris of many such movements, each of which left behind shattered lives of people whose faith dissolved without the structure of doctrine.

The idea of a doctrineless Christianity stands at odds with the words of Christ, who revealed himself to the apostles in explicitly doctrinal terms. Jesus revealed himself in truth claims. He identified himself as the Son of Man and demonstrated his deity, even referring to himself as “I am” repeatedly in the gospel of John—bearing the name God had given himself from the burning bush as he spoke to Moses (Ex. 3:13-16). A doctrineless Christianity also stands in contradiction with what Christ commissioned his apostles to do—to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to obey all that Christ commanded (Matt. 28:18-20). This command requires doctrine. . . .

Each stanza of the Apostles’ Creed begins with the Latin credo, “I believe.” Like Paul’s response to the Philippian jailor, the creed affirms the integral connection of faith to the Christian life. Christians are a believing people, and they place their belief in the objective truth claims of the Scriptures. Truth, therefore, does not rest in subjective feelings of right and wrong. Truth flows from the objective reality of the blood of Jesus Christ, where God revealed his glory, his will, and his purpose for all mankind. Truth comes from what God has done for sinners in Christ. As the church recognized this truth, it sought to enshrine it in creeds or affirmations of what Christians believe to be true, essential, and splendid—splendid because they allow the splendor of truth and the splendor of Christ to be fully seen.



DAY 2

*He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”
Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ,
the Son of the living God.”* **MATTHEW 16:15-16**

Christians are defined by one primary mark: we believe in and are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever beliefs may separate churches and denominations, a true Christian is someone who has repented of his or her sin and embraced Christ as the only Lord and Savior. We are a people of Christ. In fact, we instinctually use language such as “Christ-centered” to describe our worship and our lives. This commitment to Christ is not just a modern evangelical phenomenon; it is also reflected in the ancient faith of the Apostles’ Creed. The largest portion of the creed is devoted to Christ. As a matter of fact, we should see the Apostles’ Creed as a confession of Christ with an introduction and a conclusion. The creed chronicles the storyline of Jesus, from his conception by the Holy Spirit to his elevation and his ascension—from his exaltation to his promised return as king.

One thing to note immediately is how the creed confronts today’s tendency toward theological minimalism. It is not enough to simply say “I love Jesus” or “I follow Jesus.” Many who say they love Jesus and follow Jesus do not follow Jesus as he has revealed himself in Scripture. As the confession reminds us, we must confess that we believe in “Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord”—the Jesus whose true identity and mission is revealed in Scripture. . . .

We’re living in this strange time in which it appears to people that heresy is exhilarating. Just as in the early centuries of the church, it takes courage to be an orthodox Christian. It takes courage to confess the “faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). It takes courage to believe the orthodox faith of the church, rooted in Scripture—but confessional courage is exhilarating. Throughout Christian history, many believers have faced persecution, imprisonment, and even death for the sake of the gospel. Their courage in the face of immense adversity should inspire us. . . .

When it comes to answering the central question, “Who is Christ?” it is Jesus himself who forces the question. Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15). Later Jesus again asked the question, “What do you think about the Christ?” (Matt. 22:42). In reality, there is no more important question than this. It defines who we are. On the Day of Judgment, we will be defined by our Christology. We will meet the Christ either as Savior, or we will meet him as Judge. We face the temptation of theological minimalism and confusion. We want to say something other than what the church knows through Scripture. But we must always confess with Scripture and with the creed: “I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.”



DAY 3

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and
shall call his name Immanuel. ISAIAH 7:14*

Both Matthew and Luke support the virginal conception of Jesus. Matthew says, “Before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18). Mary fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6–7 according to the Gospel writer: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (Matt. 1:23). Luke, in his narrative, emphasizes the fact that Mary was a virgin by repeating it three times. The angel Gabriel came “to a virgin” and “the virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:27). Then Mary replies to the angel, “I am a virgin” (Luke 1:34). Luke also provided greater detail about the role of the Holy Spirit. He explained, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). The Gospels feature both the virginity of Mary and the miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit.

Understood in light of salvation history, these Gospel accounts of the virgin birth satisfy the Old Testament yearning for a savior. God made a promise in Genesis 3:15 to annihilate the one who brought corruption, and, in the birth of Jesus, God accomplishes his promises to redeem his people, destroy sin, and usher in a new creation. Jesus was the seed of the woman whose heel would strike the serpent and reverse the curse. Ironically Eve seemed to think the birth of Cain would result in the end of the curse (Gen. 4:1). But no child conceived as Cain was conceived could reverse the curse because no child conceived as Cain was conceived would be without Adam’s inherited and imputed sin. In order that the death of Christ might fully atone for sin, he had to be fully God and fully man—born of the Holy Spirit through the virgin Mary. Jesus offers salvation to the world as the perfect representative on behalf of humanity.

Also, Mary and Joseph are models of how to receive the virgin birth by faith. When Joseph found out about the pregnancy of his betrothed, as an upright man he did not want to humiliate her. Not desiring to prosecute her, he tried to put her away privately. Then, when the angel appeared to Joseph and explained that this child within Mary had been conceived of the Holy Spirit, he believed. He did exactly what the Lord told him: “Do not fear to take Mary as your wife” (Matt. 1:20). Also, an angel visited Mary and announced to her that God had chosen her as a vessel for the birth of Immanuel. Mary responded, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Mary and Joseph modeled faith in God and faithfulness to his plan.



DAY 4

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.*

ISAIAH 53:7-9

The affirmation “suffered under Pontius Pilate” enshrines the prophetic pronouncement of Isaiah 52–53 and the fulfillment detailed in the sufferings of Jesus Christ. The creed affirms the reality of the historicity of the event by including the name “Pontius Pilate.” The suffering of Jesus constitutes an actual historical event that occurred in a certain place and time as revealed in Scripture. The creed, however, affirms much more than mere historicity in affirming the suffering of Jesus under Pilate. It captures a vital component of Jesus’ ministry, without which the gospel would be emptied of its power. The creed highlights the significance of Christ’s suffering. What, therefore, did the Christ suffer?

BODILY SUFFERING

Contemporary Christians often fail to consider the physical sufferings of Jesus. Perhaps, cautious Christians find themselves unwilling to broach the topic because of the quagmire of Christology. Christians have difficulty in thinking about the reality of the two natures in the one person of Jesus Christ—namely, his humanity and his divinity. The difficulty of this doctrine for our fallen, fallible minds, however, must not inhibit Christians from the clear teachings of the Scriptures. The Bible allows Christians to think of the God-man as suffering in his body. . . .

That Jesus experienced suffering as fully human only magnifies the glory of his intentionality and obedience to suffer and fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah. The Son of God willingly placed himself into the intense, horrific, and excruciating pain of Roman torture and crucifixion. This he did for his people. His sufferings demonstrate the infinite love of God in Christ for his people in our place. He endured the pain, contempt, reviling, and his very flesh ripped from his body out of divine love for a rebellious, sinful people.



SPIRITUAL SUFFERING

In addition to the physical suffering that Jesus endured for God's people, he also suffered as a curse under the wrath of God in our place. This he did in order to accomplish redemption, propitiation, and the forgiveness of sin. In short, he endured the wrath of God to purchase the good news of the gospel. . . .

In becoming the curse, Jesus experienced the fullness of God's wrath and judgment for the sin of mankind. God poured on Christ the eternal punishment due for each and every sin committed by his people. Jesus endured it all, suffered it all, took it all upon himself. For the several hours he hung on the cross, Jesus suffered the eternal punishment of a sinner, thus satisfying God's wrath. "Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God" (Rom. 5:9). Paul proclaimed the splendid riches and accomplishment of Christ's sufferings on the cross. By his blood, he satisfied the wrath of God. Through his suffering, he accomplished salvation. He, furthermore, endured the punishment for sin which all deserve *yet none who have faith in him will ever experience*.



DAY 5

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ROMANS 5:8

In our current culture, the cross is used to decorate our homes and drape around our necks as jewelry. Some use the cross as a symbol of moral and ethical teaching—a call to serve our fellow man. These manifestations divorce the cross from its true meaning—the place where God poured out his wrath on his Son to forgive our sin. The Scriptures clearly detail that when God created the world, he purposed his Son to redeem sinners by the shedding of his blood (Eph. 1:3-10).

Unfortunately, sentimentality and emotionalism invade the ranks of Christianity. This gospel of sentimentality preaches that the cross merely transforms us by example into more loving creatures. This false gospel upholds Jesus' love on the cross as an ethic for all to imitate rather than an event necessary for salvation. Thus, the cross did not accomplish atonement. Rather, the cross merely pictured a kind of suffering love that ought to cause us creatures to change our disposition toward God and others. This theology assumes a lack of a sin problem in the creation. The cross, in this heterodox theology, serves as God's attempt at good public relations where he displays love as a coaxing mechanism to draw humanity into trusting him.

The cross, however, did not solve a divine public relations problem. It satisfied the burning wrath of God against our sin. The cross, no doubt, demonstrated God's love. His love, however, shines infinitely brighter when viewed through the paradigm of sin. As we have seen, Romans 5:8 says, "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Those who would make the cross a mere ethical lesson and public relations event of God's love empty the cross of all its loving effect. The cross thundered forth the love of God in spectacular power as God sacrificed his own Son in place of us. God poured his wrath upon his Son, executing justice for our rebellion against him. At the same time, he placed upon sinners the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. He credited our sin to Christ and gave us his righteousness through faith. This is true love. This is scandalous love. This is glorious love that calls us to worship. . . .

The words *crucified*, *dead*, and *buried* reveal the foundation of the Christian hope. The picture of a crucified King marks the symbol and message of the Christian gospel. Believers who desire to see the gospel of Jesus take root in their homes, nation, and around the world, must preach the *cross*. The Old Testament anticipated the crucifixion and prophesied its coming. Jesus understood the purpose of his time on earth. Every move he made, he did with his mind set on the cross.



DAY 6

*Great 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.*

1 TIMOTHY 3:16

The framers of the creed penned into its affirmations only what they understood as essential to the Christian faith. The Bible, therefore, served as the source of their work in delineating the fundamentals of Christian theology, doctrine, and worship. The assertion that Jesus ascended into heaven and sits enthroned at God's right hand made its way into the creed because of its significance to the New Testament and to the faith of the church.

The gospels of Mark and Luke contain the fullest and most detailed accounts of Jesus' ascension. Luke also included the ascension in the book of Acts. While Matthew and John provided no explicit account of the ascension, it nonetheless permeates as a theme of their gospel narratives. Matthew's gospel centers on the inauguration of the new kingdom under Jesus Christ and points to his ascension to God's right hand. Indeed, the Great Commission in Matthew 28 contains sweet promises of Jesus to his disciples. He promised his enduring presence with them throughout the end of the ages and that all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to him. John's 3:13 and the entirety of John 14 speak of Jesus' coming ascension and heavenly reign then yet to come.

The gospels of Mark, Luke, and the book of Acts, however, contain explicit historical accounts of the final moments of Jesus' time on earth with his disciples:

- "While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God." (Luke 24:51-53)
- "So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs." (Mark 16:19-20)
- "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...' And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight." (Acts 1:8-9)

These three accounts testify to the intimacy and drama of Christ's final moments with his disciples. Mark and Luke recorded this event for the benefit of the whole church. Their narratives preserve the beauty this moment encapsulates and the hope that Christians have in the eternal reign of Christ over the creation. Christ's ascension reveals three pillars that are essential to Christian theology. First, the ascension of Christ grounds his exaltation. Second, the ascension establishes the giving of the Holy Spirit. Finally, the ascension secured a place for Christians in heaven for all eternity.



DAY 7

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:10

No matter our worldview, human beings have an instinctive yearning to know the future and to live our lives in light of the future. We understand the present through recollection of the past and anticipatory hope for the future. This understanding of the future is necessary in order to understand how we can live, how we can love, how we can hope, and how we can be faithful in the present. Both past and future explain the present.

Scripture provides us with a grand metanarrative that takes us from creation to new creation. The Christian gospel is expressed as a story—past, present, and future. The past: our sin and what God has done for us in and through Christ. The present: how we are to respond to what God has accomplished for us in Christ. And the future: how we are to hope with confidence as we anticipate the fulfillment of all God's promises. The Apostles' Creed reflects this same future orientation in the words: *whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

Up to this point, most of the creed has been in the past tense. "He *was conceived* by the Holy Ghost, [*was*] *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. He *ascended* into heaven." All of that is history. As we look at the Christian story, all those facets of the gospel are in the past. That is God's provision for us in space, time, and history through Christ.

Then the creed moves to the present tense, which is reflected in the work of Christ for us now. He reigns as Prophet, Priest, and King—as our mediator before the Father. He "sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." And then the creed moves to the future tense: "*whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*"

The story of the Bible is framed by its eschatology, expressing God's glory in his dealings with humanity with respect to a complete timeline. We move from creation to fall to redemption to consummation; and if any one of these chapters in God's great work were missing or minimized, we lose the comprehensive glory of God that is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.



DAY 8

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. JOHN 16:7

One way to understand the doctrine of the Trinity is to consider that the doctrine emerged out of a need to affirm and explain that God is one—and yet also Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Monotheism is basic and ascribed to God as revealed in both the Old and New Testaments. The Shema, the most central verse of Israel’s faith, sets this truth majestically: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One” (Deut. 6:4). That single verse could not be clearer. The entire Bible testifies that God is One.

Yet, at the same time and without the slightest consideration, the Bible also reveals and affirms the following propositions: **1.** The Father is God. **2.** The Son is God. **3.** The Holy Spirit is God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is the faithful churches’ way of holding all these revealed truths together, consistently and without confusion. . . .

Many Christians fall, shamelessly short in understanding the Holy Spirit, or the third person of the Trinity. When we confess together, “I believe in the Holy Spirit,” we believe as Jesus Christ taught his church to believe. This phrase of the creed contains only six words, but these are six thundering words, revealing the mystery of God and reminding believers of our continual dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Despite the glories contained in this affirmation of the creed, so few of us today have any familiarity with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, or what theologians call pneumatology. In some evangelical circles, the Holy Spirit has faded into the background of our theological interests, leaving us with an anemic view of the Spirit, and subsequently, a deficient relationship with the third member of the Trinity. Jesus himself said, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7). Jesus told his disciples and all of us that to have the Spirit is actually better than to have the physical Christ in our presence. Astounding as this claim is, how often do believers think of the Spirit and his ministry? Do we really believe the words of Jesus found in John 16?

Our silence on the Spirit indicts our faith, dampens our worship, robs our churches, empties the gospel of its beauty, and fails to glory in the resplendent mystery of the Trinity. The reason for our silence, perhaps, stems from the innumerable misunderstandings and misappropriations of the doctrine of the Spirit. The endless debates and controversies have plagued Christian spirituality, causing many of us to shrink away from pneumatology altogether. Falling away and surrendering the ground of the truth of the Spirit, however, subverts our own spirituality and those who espouse false notions of the Spirit. We must not remain silent about this glorious doctrine. We must press head-on into the Scriptures and uncover the beauty that the Apostles’ Creed affirms in this short article, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”



DAY 9

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ROMANS 12:4-5

A belief in the holy catholic Church and the communion of saints simultaneously rejects the rugged individualism that has infested American evangelicalism. To be sure, admittance into Christ's church comes through an individual profession of faith and an individual confession of the truths of the gospel. We must give individual testimony to his transforming effect on our lives.

That must not, however, give rise to the notion that we go it alone. We are never alone. The thought that we can walk this Christian life alone carries with it a toxicity and poison that has deeply encumbered the American church. This individualism not only betrays the church, it betrays the gospel. It insinuates that the gospel is about God saving people without pointing to a bigger story of God creating a *people*. From the Old Testament to the New, the covenants, God's purposes, indeed the very creation of the world, all point to God's design of creating a people—a people that will be made up of every tribe, tongue, and nation. By God's grace, we come through faith to Christ and thereby stand united as the whole people of God.

When we make this walk of faith about "me," we forsake the fullness of the gospel. The gospel does not allow us to boil down its glory to a story about "I" and "me." The story of the gospel encompasses in resplendent unity all the people of God, together, as one people. The gospel is God's story as he, through Christ, made a people for his pleasure. God's people, therefore, never find themselves alone. The sinner who comes to faith in a hotel room reading a New Testament is not alone. The saint dying as a martyr for the faith does not die alone. The missionary taking the gospel to the far reaches of the globe does not go alone. At the moment of our death, if we are in Christ, we are not alone. Brothers and sisters, we are never alone!

A great tragedy has besieged so many in this generation. Few Christians live today who cannot tell their story without telling the church's story as well. A failure of true fellowship has robbed believers across this nation of the riches of all that is contained in the Apostles' Creed on the subject. If you were asked to tell about your testimony and Christian walk, how central would the church be to your story?

We must repent from our anemic ecclesiology and embrace all that the Apostles' Creed espouses in the belief of the holy catholic Church and the communion of saints. Believers must embrace their identity as a *people* bought with blood of Christ. We must seek to live as those who will one day spend all eternity together, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, singing together as one people the glories of our God.



DAY 10

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. 1 PETER 3:18

Christians find themselves in a crisis of truth. A deficient grasp of the horror of sin empties the cross of Christ of its splendor. It is necessary, therefore, to understand the total and universal depravity of all mankind. Christians must go where David did. All must see their sin as God himself sees it. The failure to grasp the horror of sin rests in the miniature god Christians have fashioned in their own image. Christians are guilty of diminishing the holiness and grandeur of God's incomparable glory. We cannot rightly understand the graveness of our offense if we do not behold the glory of the One we offended. . . . Sin, therefore, must be measured in the depth of its offense against the splendor of the one it offended. If God be so infinitely glorious, more glorious than all the stars of the galaxies combined, then the weight of our sin against this God embodies evil of the highest order. . . .

Christian, your sin amounts to nothing less than a desire for God to cease being God. Your sin rebels as cosmic treason. Your sin against God beckons him to step off his throne that you might ascend its steps. Your sin wishes the Creator to relinquish his rightful rule and claim to glory and give way to your will. We fail to grasp the weight of sin because we fashioned a small god to worship rather than the splendid, infinite, supreme, excellent, beautiful, and eternal Creator. We have a shallow view of his glory. . . .

If Christians are to glory in the riches of the forgiveness of sins, then they must first cast down the inglorious, unholy idols they have fashioned and called "God." Christians must come and behold the terrifying and awesome glory of God in order to grasp the horror of sin. Failure to see God in all his glory necessarily leads to a diminished view of sin. An anemic view of sin will give way to a cheap gospel, a pointless cross, and a Messiah who need not to have shed his blood. . . .

All humanity stands condemned before God for the horrific sin that indwells each person. The revulsion of sin cannot be fully comprehended, as we cannot measure the fullness of God's holiness. Man stands, nonetheless, as the perpetrator of the highest treason all the universe has known. We cannot escape this impending doom and judgment of God. We are indeed guilty of all the crimes laid at our feet. What can we do? Nothing. What do we need? Forgiveness. Thus enters the atonement of Jesus Christ, bursting into the cosmic courtroom. This is where hope breaks in like bolts of lightning across the night sky.

The atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross becomes the only hope for all humanity.