

THE APOSTLES' CREED

What do you think about the Apostles' Creed? Do you agree with it? Do you know what it says? Is it biblical? What is it all about? Do we need it?

The Apostles' Creed is a basic summary of Christian beliefs, dating from the very early days of Christianity, around the 3rd century after Jesus Christ.

It began as a baptismal formula, a short confession of faith spoken at a baptism.

When we baptise someone, we use a particular baptism formula prescribed by our church, which goes "Because you have repented of your sins, I now baptise you into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, by the authority of Jesus Christ."

Something like this needs to be said, and the Apostles' Creed was developed for this sort of occasion. It was a brief statement of a few key beliefs that could be memorised and recited so Christians knew their basic beliefs, especially at a time when there were lots of heresies going around.

It isn't found word for word in the Bible, but it is a list of great truths which are taught in the Bible. Everything it says is found in the Bible. It wasn't written by just one person, so far as we know, but gradually developed over the years. Writers such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Novatian, Origen and so on used versions of it in the 2nd century, and by about 400 A.D. it had reached pretty well exactly the wording we have now, although it was in Greek and Latin, so has to be translated into English.

Let's have a look at what the Apostles' Creed says. We'll go step by step through the whole thing, and see if it matches up to the Bible or not.

◆ "I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth."

I don't think we have any disagreement with that.

If you were to be asked – what are the basic beliefs of your faith? How would you answer? This is a great place to start, that you believe in God the Father who created heaven and earth. And as we go on, you'll see the Apostles' Creed is a great summary of our main beliefs all the way through.

God is our Father – He has a personal relationship with us. He loves us as His children.

He is almighty – all powerful, but also all-loving, so He uses His authority lovingly.

He is the Creator – He didn't have to create the world, but chose to do so, to share with others.

He also sustains the creation, otherwise it would collapse. He loved the creation into existence, and He loves and enjoys His creation and is involved in it all the time.

◆ "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord."

This is the beginning of a few statements about Jesus. Much of the Apostles' Creed is about Him, because He is so vital to all of Christianity – it is centred in Him.

His only Son, or “only begotten Son” (KJV) comes from John 3:16. All of us are sons of God by adoption, but Jesus is the Only Son who has been God's Son eternally. The word “begotten” causes problems because some people take it as meaning He wasn't eternal, but most scholars say that word is a mistranslation.

There is a lot of controversy on some of these things. In the early years of the Christian Church, there were a number of heresies as people tried to understand who Jesus was. He had lived and died not long prior to their time, and they didn't have access to the whole Bible as we do, so they were trying to work out where Jesus Christ fitted in – how He could be God and also Man, and how He could be God if God is One, and where did the Holy Spirit fit in, etc.

One of the main heresies was held by Arius, who said Jesus was created by God – this is called Arianism. But we know that the Word had always been with God and came in the flesh as Jesus, and we know several places where Jesus said He was involved in Creation.

The Apostles' Creed statement succinctly summarises what we believe about Jesus Christ.

◆ **“He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.”**

Matthew 1:20 “But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit miraculously brought about the conception. This was the only time this has ever occurred, and made it possible for God to be born as a man.

This is also described in Luke 1:34-35 ³⁴ “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” ³⁵ The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”

◆ **“He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried;”**

Many scriptures show us this. My only thought on the Apostles' Creed here is that it doesn't state why Jesus did this – “so our sins can be forgiven.” But this is covered later in the Creed.

◆ **“He descended to the dead.”**

This used to be translated “descended into hell.” Of course this refers to the “the grave.”

Peter referred to this in his Acts 2 sermon: Acts 2:31 “Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that He was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did His body see decay.” He was quoting here from Ps 16:10.

◆ **“On the third day He rose again;”**

Many scriptures bear this out, e.g. Acts 10:40.

◆ **“He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father;”**

Many scriptures speak of Jesus now being at the “right hand of God”.

E.g. Romans 8:34 “Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”

And He’s there, at the position of power over the universe, interceding for us!

◆ **“He will come again, to judge the living and the dead.”**

There are many promises of His return, and that there will be a time of judgment for all.

E.g. 1 Peter 4:5 “But they will have to give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”

This is the end of the statements about Jesus.

◆ **“I believe in the Holy Spirit,”**

Remember, the Apostles’ Creed was originally a baptismal formula, so it is based on Matthew 28:19 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” so it follows the Trinitarian order given there. There are difficulties understanding and explaining who or what the Holy Spirit is, but we are all agreed we believe in the Holy Spirit.

Even theologians have great difficulty explaining the nature of the Holy Spirit, e.g. “Invitation to Theology”, by Michael Jenkins, pp 189-192.

◆ **“the holy all-embracing church,”** This used to be translated “the holy Catholic Church”. The word catholic means “universal.” It was part of the Apostles’ Creed before the word became part of the name of the Roman Catholic Church.

◆ **“the communion of saints”** refers to the fact that the true church, those who have the Holy Spirit, is a body which communes with Christ through the Spirit, and communes with one another.

1 Cor. 10:16-17 ¹⁶ “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?”

¹⁷ “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.” “participation” = “communion” (KJV).

◆ **“the forgiveness of sins,”**

◆ **“the resurrection of the body,”**

We all believe in the resurrection, but “of the body”? I had a man ring me recently and one of the things he insisted on was that we’ll still have physical bodies when we’re resurrected. Is this true?

1 Cor. 15:35 ³⁵ “But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?”

Verses 36-37 ³⁶ “How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.”

The seed by dying (decaying in the ground) gives birth to a new and different “body” yet one related to the seed it came from. A lettuce is a totally different body from its lettuce seed.

Verses 38-41 ³⁸ “But God gives it a body as He has determined, and to each kind of seed He gives its own body. ³⁹ Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. ⁴⁰ There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendour of the earthly bodies is another. ⁴¹ The sun has one kind of splendour, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendour.”

There are many different types of bodies – a world of difference between the body of a fish and the body of a star. Stars are called “heavenly bodies” – quite different from earthly bodies.

Verses 42-44 ⁴² “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.”

Our natural, weak, physical bodies will be resurrected as totally different types of bodies on a different level – imperishable, immortal, powerful, spiritual.

So our resurrected body will be spiritual, not physical, but it is still a body, so the Apostles’ Creed is correct in saying we believe in the “resurrection of the body.”

◆ **“and the life everlasting.”**

Yes, the gift of God is eternal life. The emphasis should be not only on “everlasting” but just as much on “life.” It will be real life, not the arrival at a destination, but the first step on a dynamic, even more miraculous adventure into the fullness of life. Something fantastic to look forward to!

Summing up, the Apostles’ Creed has been part of the tradition of Christianity for centuries. Although it isn’t specifically in the Bible, it is a summary of major beliefs that are all in the Bible, indeed a valid statement of Christian faith.