

# THE APOSTLES CREED

## ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN CONFESSION

### Background

The term “creed” is from the Latin *credo*, meaning simply “I believe.” As it is commonly used, this creed refers to a confessed belief in foundational Christian doctrine. The Apostles Creed is nonsectarian or nondenominational. It is a statement of widespread, mutually agreed upon Christian truth. The Apostles Creed confesses the critical elements of faith held by the historic, authentic Christian Church throughout the world as embraced and taught by its earliest leaders.

This confession is considered an unwavering and trustworthy statement of the Church’s foundational faith; a summary of beliefs about essential doctrines of the Christian Church. By embracing the Apostles Creed with understanding and commitment, believers worldwide identify themselves with the apostolic doctrines of Christianity. The Creed is an affirmation of personal belief as well as a collective acknowledgement of the true faith of the Church through the centuries.

Christian believers do not accept and believe the Apostles Creed merely because it is longstanding and widespread. We accept the Apostle’s Creed because the Creed teaches what the Old and New Testament Scriptures teach. In other words, believers do not give their allegiance to this creed because it was accepted and embraced by prominent early Christian councils or theologians, but because the Creed is a genuine and useful statement of the divinely revealed truth taught in the Bible.

The Apostles Creed, then, is a form of confession or affirmation of what Christians believe, summarizing the basic articles of faith to which Christians pledge their loyalty. Something like the Apostles Creed is referred to in 1 Timothy 6:12.

Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called  
when you made your **good confession**  
in the presence of many witnesses.

Because faith is never confessed in a vacuum, we must realize the Apostles Creed was first formulated amidst important events and challenges swirling around the life experiences of the early Church. In the first century, Christian truth differed greatly from opposing pagan doctrines. The Apostles Creed

became an early rule of faith for Christians to separate true belief from pagan and heretical deviations and alternatives.

Consequently, the Creed has effectively served as:

- ✓ A confession of faith for someone publicly announcing their trust in Christ
- ✓ An affirmation of true Christian worship
- ✓ An outline of basic doctrine in Christian catechetical instruction

The Apostles Creed is noteworthy because in the early era of the church age it was thoughtfully determined and accepted by representatives of the entire Christian Church worldwide, not merely by one local or regional group of congregations; the Creed was truly ecumenical. At the time of the Protestant Reformation (16<sup>th</sup> century), the Protestant Reformers quoted the Creed with the specific purpose of proving to their opponents they were not innovating new doctrines of a church-divisive nature, but in fact shared the universal faith of the ancient and original Church.

While the Apostles Creed makes no claim to be infallible, like Scripture, it does claim to be an accurate and true declaration of Scriptural teaching. This earliest of Christian creeds is a simple but precise statement of biblical truth proclaimed by the original apostles and church leaders as essential Christian belief.

### **THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER OF THE APOSTLES CREED**

The name “Apostles Creed” does not require or claim the Twelve Apostles of Christ themselves actually wrote the lines of the Creed. They did not. Rather, the title emphasizes the *content* of the Creed; it contains those principles of faith which are apostolic in character. The authority of the Creed rests not upon its authorship but upon its conformity to the revealed truth of God in his Word as written by apostolic men under the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Some people are bothered by the traditional phrase “the holy catholic church.” It is most important to understand first and foremost the term “catholic” only means universal or all-embracing. The designation “**Roman Catholic**” came about to distinguish western (Latin) congregations from eastern (Greek) congregations. The western city of Rome, as the capital of the Roman Empire, claimed dominance in Christian affairs and considered its administration universal or catholic. However, Eastern congregations, centered in Constantinople (renamed Istanbul in 1930), thought of themselves as being geographically closer to the origins of Christianity, and more familiar with the

Sometimes foolish and silly questions are put forward, like: “Can God make a rock so big he cannot lift it?” God *cannot* do anything contrary to his essential nature and attributes. For example, he cannot sin nor tolerate the presence of sin because he is righteous and holy. God can never do anything to diminish or deny who he is.

## **MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH**

Here is the unequivocal insistence of Scripture.

- Genesis 1:1 – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” There is an intriguing insight in Psalm 119:160, which in the NIV begins: “All your words are true.” However, several other translations prefer an alternate translation emphasizing “The beginning of thy word is truth;” “Your word is true from the beginning;” “Your words are true from the start.” (Wycliffe Bible, Geneva Bible, KJV, 21<sup>st</sup> Century KJV, Modern English Bible, Expanded Bible.)
- Isaiah 42:5 – “This is what God the Lord says—the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it.”
- Isaiah 45:12 – “It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts.”
- Revelation 10:6 – “He swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it.”
- Hebrews 11:3 – “By faith we understand the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

We do well to note:

- The book of *nature* tells only of God’s power, glory, wisdom and goodness.
- But only the book of *Scripture* tells of God’s Person, will, mercy, love, and grace.

Further assurances of God’s omnipotence, among many others, are given in:

Exodus 20:11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day.

the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31).

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT**

This is the third Person of the Trinity. God is Three in One and One in Three. There are not three separate Gods, only One. The power and operation of all the Persons of the Trinity are one and undivided. Whatever is willed or done, each Person in the Trinity is the immediate and perfect cause of the whole; they share absolute oneness and harmony. The Trinity is *mysterium tremendum*, a profound mystery and beyond our ability to comprehend. Someone has sagely said: If you try to explain the Trinity you will lose your mind, but if you deny the Trinity, you will lose your soul.

To help us in our finite thought processes, theologians sometimes speak of the will of the Father, the work of the Son, and the witness of the Holy Spirit; but these actions come from a perfect Oneness. And unquestionably, including whatever is past as well as whatever is future, GOD creates, redeems, and sustains. But the power which creates and the love which redeems and the grace which sustains are one and the same and altogether shared equally by the Trinity. But alas, all this is but a stumbling, imperfect attempt at an explanation.

## **THE HOLY CATHOLIC [UNIVERSAL] CHURCH**

“**holy**” means separate, distinct, different. Indeed, God truly is holy—different, other. And his people (believers, the family of God) are likewise separate, distinct, differentiated from God-less people.

“**church**” is a neutral word meaning simply an assembly or grouping. Such a gathering could be civil, political, criminal or religious, depending on how a given assembly/church is described.

“**catholic**” was discussed earlier and means only universal or all-inclusive; in the Creed it carries the sense of non-sectarian. This phrase is simply meant to affirm a distinct gathering of Christian people who are not encumbered by barriers or separators. The “holy catholic/universal church” includes godly Bible believers from everywhere and anywhere. This grouping is worldwide and has no barriers of race, color, class, social/economic status, party or sect.