

THE APOSTLES CREED

**NOTES TO ACCOMPANY A SERMON SERIES
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**EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH - RADFORD
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Bible Verses

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Apostles Creed (EFC 2012)

I believe in God

The Father Almighty;

Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

Born of the Virgin Mary,

Suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, dead and buried:

He descended into the grave;

The third day he rose again from the dead;

He ascended into heaven,

And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;

From where he shall 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.

THE APOSTLES CREED 1

Introduction to the Creed

General

Thomas Oden (a US theologian) writes: *'The Apostles Creed is the most common confession of Christians'*.¹

-Apostles Creed is one of the 2 main creeds used in the Christian churches, the other is the 'Nicene Creed' (see handout), which has more details and is longer than the Apostles Creed.

-Apostles Creed is used by most 'traditional' denominations, eg:

-Church of England, at Morning & Evening Prayer.

In the '39 Articles' of the C of E, Article 8 ('Of the Creeds') says: *'The Nicene Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.'*

-Roman Catholic Church.

-Lutheran, Presbyterian, Congregational & Methodist Churches.

-Historically, the Apostles Creed has not been used much, or at all, by the Baptist, Pentecostal, or other 'New Churches'.

-Some groups see a tension between 'spontaneity' and prepared 'liturgy' in public worship.

Why is it called the *Apostles Creed*?

1. An old, early church tradition says it was written by the 12 Apostles (with Matthias taking Judas' place, as Acts 1) to ensure they all taught the same basic teachings as they went on their separate evangelistic missions. A related tradition suggested the 12 apostles each contributed a separate clause, making up the whole Creed.

-However, these traditions are probably only a 'pious fiction'!

-Instead it is thought the Apostles Creed developed out of one of several similar creeds of the different regional churches (eg in Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople).

-Apostles Creed gradually became widely accepted, particularly in the churches of Western Europe.

2. A further (and perhaps better) reason: The Apostles Creed agrees with the apostles' teachings as contained in the New Testament.

What is the *Apostles Creed*?

-A short statement of 'the Christian faith', ie the truths that Christians believe.

- 'Creed' comes from Latin word, 'credo' = 'I believe'.

-The Apostles Creed is similar to the EFC 'Basis of Faith' in our church constitution, and to the Elim 'Statement of Fundamentals' (see copies in handout), and to 'statements of faith' of other churches/Christian groups.

1. Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p8.

-The Apostles Creed and these other documents are all intended as useful/essential summaries of the teachings of Scripture.

-There are several passages in the New Testament (apart from the Gospels & Acts) that read like 'creedal' statements, eg: Romans 1:2-4; 1 Corinthians 8:6 & 15:1-8; Ephesians 4:4-6; Philippians 2:6-11; 1 Timothy 3:16 & 6:13-16; 2 Timothy 1:9-10 & 2:8 etc.

-The Apostles Creed has '3 articles', or sections, that reflect the three persons of the Trinity/ Godhead: first, about God the Father; second, about Jesus Christ; third, about the Holy Spirit.

What is the Creed used for?

a. As a public declaration of our shared Christian faith

-Spoken out aloud together by the congregation during a service.

-Such use also declares our unity with other Christian believers & churches around the world.

-It is important for an 'independent' church to see itself as part of the 'universal' Church.

-Saying the creed also links us to the Church through the ages.

b. As a basis of Christian Teaching/Instruction:

-The creed may be considered to be a short 'systematic theology'.

-Some churches use the Apostles Creed as the framework/basis for teaching children & converts about the Christian faith.

c. In relation to Baptism:

-Historically, one view of the creeds is that they developed out of the questions that new Christians were asked when they were baptised.

-In some churches, new believers are required to learn the Creed off by heart and then recite it at their baptism or confirmation.

d. For private devotion/prayer:

-Famous Christian bishops & teachers Ambrose & Augustine instructed their followers to say the Creed as part of their devotions.

-Saying the creed can be a helpful reminder of the truths of Scripture as we come to pray.

e. To Resist False Teaching:

-Another reason the various creeds developed was to define the 'orthodox' (correct) Christian teachings/beliefs as a way of resisting various false teachings in the early church centuries.

-An example: In the 4th Century a man called Arius promoted the idea that Jesus was not equal with God the Father but was only a created being. The Nicene Creed specifically states Jesus is God ('God from God') and always existed with God ('eternally begotten').

Looking at the Apostles Creed

In the next few weeks we will go through the Apostles Creed in more detail to help us grow in understanding what we believe as Christians and how the creed relates to Scripture.

THE APOSTLES CREED 2

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth

1. 'I believe'

The Creed is a declaration of FAITH: 'Credo' = 'I believe' in Latin.

- 'I believe' means more than just 'intellectual assent', agreeing something is true.

- 'I believe' involves 'personal trust' and sincere 'conviction', eg as John 20:31: *These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

- Biblical faith involves acting on that faith, eg as those mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11.

2. 'I believe in God'

The Creed is a statement of what Christians believe about God.

- We believe our God is the 'true and living God': 1 Thessalonians 1:9.

God reveals himself to us, otherwise we cannot know him.

- In the past, God revealed himself, eg to Moses at the burning bush: Exodus 3:1-15.

- God continues to reveal himself:

- In Scripture: the Bible, both Old & New Testaments, God's inspired written word.

- In Jesus Christ: the 'Living Word' of God: John 1:14: *The Word became flesh and lived among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

- By the Holy Spirit: 1 Corinthians 2:10-13.

In particular Christians believe these two things about God:

- 'We believe in **one God**' (as Nicene Creed): Stresses the 'unity' of God, as Deuteronomy 6:4.

- 'God exists in **three persons** – Father, Son and Holy Spirit' (as EFC Basis of Faith clause 1):
We believe God is 'Trinity', as Matthew 28:19.

3. 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth'

God the Father is the '1st Person of the Trinity'.

- In the New Testament (NT) 'God' usually means 'God the Father'.

'Father'

'Father' is a very 'personal' name/title for God, which we understand in 3 ways:

a. 'Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'

- Jesus often spoke of God as 'his Father', 'my Father', eg throughout John's Gospel.

- God the Father is frequently described like this in the NT, eg in many of Paul's letters.

b. 'Our Father'

- God is 'Father' to those who are 'in Christ', to Christians who are his children: 1 John 3:1.
- To his disciples, Jesus spoke of God as 'Your Father' eg Matthew 5-7 (Sermon on the Mount), and taught us to pray to "*Our Father in heaven*": Matthew 6:9.
- The Holy Spirit leads us to say, "*Abba, Father!*": Romans 8:15.

c. 'Father of all creation'

- As creator of everything, God is the source, the father of everything.
- Paul prays to *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named*: Ephesians 3:14-15.

God is 'the perfect Father': Safe, protecting, all-wise, powerful, responsible, loving, & good!

'Almighty'

- a. By 'almighty' we understand God is all-powerful, he is able to do anything.
- God asked Abraham: "*Is anything too difficult for me?*" Genesis 18:14.
 - God can do anything, but always acts in ways that are consistent with his nature and will.

b. 'Almighty' (in Greek) also means 'all-ruling': God is the ultimate ruler, governor of the universe (see EFC Basis of Faith clause 1).

- God's 'government', or 'sovereignty', is complex though, as it also allows people and angels to make choices, including many bad choices, that allows evil to exist in the universe that God originally created 'good'.
- God himself does not do evil, or cause evil: 1 John 1:5: *God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*
- God's rule gives us great comfort: *In all things, God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose.* Romans 8:28.

'Creator of Heaven and Earth'

The Bible continually re-states what the first verse says: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* Genesis 1:1.

- God is the creator of 'all things' (see Nicene Creed: 'all things seen and unseen'.)
- Creation is the work of a 'personal creator', not the product of 'impersonal evolution'!
- Creation is the work of a 'good God'; the Father: the material universe is not 'bad' in itself.

4. God's Character

God's character is not stated in the Apostles Creed, but see EFC Basis of Faith clause 2: 'God the Father...is holy and just, faithful and loving.'

- This brief statement about God's character comes from Exodus 34:6-7.

God has many characteristics (also called 'attributes') but it is important we keep together these two: The LOVE of God (1 John 4:7-9) and the HOLINESS/JUSTICE of God (1 John 1:5, noted above).

THE APOSTLES CREED 3

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.

Introduction

Christianity is unlike Judaism & Islam: Not just about the invisible, creator God.

-Instead C is focussed on a human being, Jesus Christ, whom we also believe is God.

-*I believe in Jesus Christ ... Faith in Jesus is what makes a person a Christian.*

In the Apostles Creed, the 2nd section (or 'article') about Jesus is the largest section in 2 parts:

a. About Jesus' Person & Identity: Who he is (this week's subject).

b. About Jesus' Works: What he has done, is doing and will do (Next week's subject).

Some key scriptures

Read these scriptures which are all about 'who Jesus is': Matthew 1:1, 1:18, 20-21, 16:16; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:30-33, 35; John 20:28, 31; Acts 2:36; Romans 1:1-7, 9:9; Galatians 4:4;

We have a wonderful Saviour: the Lord Jesus Christ!

1. 'Jesus...conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary'

a. 'Jesus of Nazareth': We believe in a real, historical human person.

-Main records: the New Testament, also various other Jewish & early Christian writings, eg Josephus, and Jesus is mentioned by a few Roman writers, eg Tacitus.

b. 'Born of the Virgin Mary': Again, locates him in history & geography (time & place):

-Luke 2:1-7: In the time of Caesar Augustus, Quirinius governor of Syria...Mary gave birth.

-Affirms Jesus' full humanity: 'the Word became flesh...' (as a descendent of David)

-Jesus is fully man, yet lived a life without sin.

c. 'Jesus' is the name given by the Angel Gabriel:

-Jesus = Greek form of Hebrew name 'Joshua' in Old Testament: Means 'God saves'.

-In the Old Testament, God is the Saviour.

-Matt 1:21: *He (Jesus) will save his people from their sins* (shows sin is the primary problem).

d. 'Conceived by the Holy Spirit':

-Whilst fully human, Joseph was not Jesus' 'biological' father: see Matt 1:18 & Luke 1:34-37.

-God is Jesus' Father through agency of the Holy Spirit: = the 'Virgin birth'.

-Affirms Jesus' full deity ('God-ness'): So, Matt 1:22-23: 'Emmanuel' = 'God with us'.

-Jesus is God, the Saviour, with us.

-Alcuin (a Middle-Ages church leader) said: "*What but God could have been born from God?*"²

So, Jesus is fully man AND fully God! This especially brought out in the Nicene Creed (eg 'God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God...of one being with the Father', and, 'he became incarnate...and was made man').

2. Quoted in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 3rd ed., 1972), p378.

2. 'Christ'

Properly this name is a 'title' rather than a surname:

- Christ = Greek form of Old Testament Hebrew word 'Messiah': meaning 'Anointed One'.
- Messiah = Israel's deliverer from God, anointed King to defeat all enemies, like David.
- Anointed One = Anointed with Holy Spirit, to do God's works: eg Isaiah 61:1-3.
- The Christ/Messiah was foretold by Israel's prophets: So Jesus is fulfilment of OT prophecies.
- In New Testament, Israel's Messiah is revealed as the Saviour for all people everywhere!

3. 'Only Son of God'

a. Jesus is Son of God 'by nature'; Christians are sons of God 'by adoption & grace'.

- John 3:16: *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...*
- 'Only' = Greek 'monogenes': Meaning 'Unique', 'the only one like this'.
- Older translations say 'only begotten', but NIV says 'one and only' (uniqueness).

b. Jesus did not 'become' God's Son: He always was God's Son: John 8:58

- Jesus existed as 'Son of God' before becoming man: John 3:17: *God sent his Son*
- Hebrews 1:2: *In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*
- 'Adoptionism': A false teaching that says Jesus only 'became' God's Son (eg at his baptism).

c. God sent his only Son...The supreme expression of God's love for mankind: 1 John 4:9-10.

d. Jesus is Son of God, such that he fully reflects his Father:

- John 10:30: *"I and the Father are one."*
- John 14:8-9: *Jesus answered: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."*

4. 'Our Lord'

'Jesus is Lord' was probably the 1st Christian creed: Romans 9:9, 1 Corinthians 12:3.

- Jesus is called 'Lord' over 600 times in New Testament.
- Based on Jesus' claim in Matthew 28:18: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."* See also famous passage: Philippians 2:6-11.

'Jesus is Lord' means:

- Jesus is rightful ruler, King of the universe: seated on God's throne: Lord of all creation.
- Jesus is God! 'Lord' = Name of God in Old Testament, now applied in NT to Jesus.
 - Often, no distinction between Lord = 'God', and Lord = Jesus, eg in Acts.
 - Eg Romans 10:9 (Jesus), 10:13 ('Lord' = OT 'YHWH', via Joel).
- Jesus is 'our' Lord: We are his subjects, servants; He is our master.
 - 1 Corinthians 6:20: We are bought with a price: His blood!
 - Therefore, we are to submit our lives to Him, obey his instructions, serve Him.

Finale: 'Ichthys'

'Ichthys' is a Greek word for 'Fish': The sign of the fish was an early Christian Symbol:
I = Jesus; Ch = Christ; Th-y = God's Son; S = Saviour.

THE APOSTLES CREED 4

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and buried. He descended into the grave.

Introduction

Part of the '2nd Article' of the Creed, about the 'works' of Jesus Christ: What Jesus has done.

NB not all of Jesus' 'works' are in the Creed:

-As Pre-incarnate Son: He was the agent of Creation: Hebrews 1:2 (cf Nicene Creed : 'through whom all things were made').

-In his Incarnation: 'He became man' (See Handout no.3).

-In his earthly ministry: He performed many miracles, exorcisms, and he taught, prophesied and prayed (cf Elim 'Statement of Fundamentals': His 'sinless life, authoritative teaching').

Jesus' works in the Creed are his major 'redemptive' works applicable to all people everywhere

(cf Nicene Creed: 'For us men and for our salvation...' and 'for our sake...').

-As Christians we benefit from each of Jesus' works: They are 'for us'.

1. He suffered under Pontius Pilate...

Key Scripture: 1 Peter 2:21-24.

'Under Pontius Pilate': Another historical reference: these are real facts, not invented 'beliefs'.

-Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, AD26-36: Jesus' death & resurrection c30-32AD.

-Pilate was a cruel man, so linking Jesus' suffering to PP seems appropriate.

'He suffered': Can refer to whole of Christ's Passion, including his death and burial, or more specifically to his pre-crucifixion suffering: eg when arrested and flogged/tormented.

-Christ suffered in prayer in Gethsemane, then under Caiaphas, Herod & Pilate by verbal insults & mockings, and physical abuse. He was spat upon, hit, beaten, wounded, & flogged.

-NB clear Isaiah 53 references in 1 Peter 2: Jesus is the OT 'Suffering Servant' of God.

-NB Peter was a *witness of Christ's sufferings*: 1 Peter 5:1.

Benefit: 'Christ suffered for you'

-This is key point: It was 'Vicarious suffering': on behalf of us sinners: We gain from his loss.

-Part of the 'atonement', Jesus' brought peace between holy God & sinful man.

-1 Peter 2:24: *By his wounds we are healed*: His wounds bring us healing: Healing of our spirits/souls and of our bodies: In part now, completely when we received new bodies!

Also, Christ suffered as our 'example': As Christians we are called to *participate in the sufferings of Christ*: 1 Peter 4:13.

2. He was crucified, and died...

Key Scriptures: Matthew 27:31-50.

'He was crucified': At the Jewish leaders' request, Roman soldiers crucified Jesus.

-All 4 Gospels describe J's death by crucifixion: An excruciating, humiliating, public death, with criminals besides him & crowds milling around. NB The Acts & the Epistles explain it.

-NB Islam says Jesus was NOT crucified, but another 'who looked like Jesus', eg Simon of Cyrene.

Meaning/Benefits:

a. A sacrifice for sins: *Christ died for our sins*: 1 Corinthians 15:3 & elsewhere.

-The central fact of the Gospel/Bible.

-Jesus was foretold as the 'Saviour from sin' (Matthew 1:21), and this is his principal work.

-His death on the cross takes away our sins, and therefore God's wrath against us.

-So, we can receive forgiveness of sins, and reconciliation ('peace') with God.

b. A representative death: *One died for all, and therefore all died*: 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

-Believers are united with Christ's death (by faith, baptism & the Holy Spirit), and, as 'dead people' are freed from the power of sin, and enabled to live new lives in Jesus.

c. A victory over Satan: *By his death he destroyed him who holds the power of death – that is the devil*: Hebrews 2:14.

-By Jesus' death, the devil is 'destroyed' = 'Rendered powerless' against those 'in Christ'.

d. The supreme demonstration of God's love for mankind: 1 John 4:9-10: *This is how God showed his love among us...He sent his one and only Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

3. He was buried, He descended into the grave.

Key Scriptures: John 19:41-42, Ephesians 4:8-9; Revelation 1:18.

'He was buried': All the Gospels record Jesus' burial, after he died.

-For Paul, this was one of the matters of 'first importance' as 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

-Jesus died as a man: his body was 'buried' in the garden tomb.

'He descended into the grave': Romans 14:9: *Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of the dead and the living.* Jesus' soul went to the 'place of the dead' (Hades/Sheol).

Benefit:

-Jesus went 'through' the grave, taking authority over Hades and freeing the dead who received him there, enabling them to go with him into heaven: Matthew 27:52-53; John 5:25; Ephesians 4:8; 1 Peter 3:18-20 & 4:6.

-Now, because Jesus conquered death, when Christians die our souls go to be with Christ in heaven to await the resurrection of our bodies there, rather than in Hades: Philippians 1:23.

-NB There is no evidence in Scripture for 'Purgatory', a post-mortem (after death) place of suffering for imperfect Christians (contrary to Roman Catholic teaching).

THE APOSTLES CREED 5

On the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From where He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Introduction

Final part of the '2nd Article' about Jesus Christ & his 'works': What he has done & will do.

4. On the third day he rose again from the dead,

Key Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10.

The New Testament (NT) repeatedly affirms: Jesus rose from the dead!

-Several witnesses found the body gone & the tomb empty: As all the Gospels record.

-The risen Jesus appeared to many of his disciples: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

The NT repeatedly says God the Father raised Jesus from the dead:

-Acts 2:32: *God raised this Jesus to life, and we are witnesses of the fact.*

Jesus' resurrection was God's vindication of Jesus as his Son, and of his work: Romans 1:4.

Jesus' resurrection completed his total victory over death: Acts 2:24, 2 Timothy 1:10.

Jesus now 'lives for ever', an 'indestructible life': Hebrews 7:16, 24.

Benefits: 'You have been raised with Christ' (Colossians 3:1)

a. As Christians, we share Jesus' resurrection life now: John 5:24.

-Ephesians 2:5: *Because of his great love for us, God...made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.*

-Romans 6:4: *We were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

b. When Jesus returns, we will share in his physical resurrection: 1 Corinthians 6:14: *By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.*

-Our spirits will be united with our resurrected, but transformed, bodies to live with the Lord forever: 1 Corinthians 15: 23; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.

5. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

Key Scriptures: Luke 24:51; 1 Peter 3:21-22.

'He ascended into heaven...' A 'historical' event, as Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:9-11.

-Jesus had come from heaven, and he returned to heaven: John 6:62.

-When he ascended he took his humanity into heaven: Body & soul.

He did not ascend alone! Ephesians 4:8: *When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train:* Jesus took the spirits of the righteous out of the grave to heaven with him.

-See also Hebrews 11:39-40 (the OT believers were 'not made perfect apart from us'), 12:23; Psalm 68:18-20.

'And is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty': The place of honour & authority.
-Many times NT affirms Jesus' present position: At God's right hand.
-Based especially on Ps 110:1: *"The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.""*

Benefits: Jesus' ascension makes effective everything else he has done.

a. Jesus is Lord! Peter links Jesus' lordship to his position at God's right hand: Acts 2:36.

-We benefit from having our Saviour as Lord of the universe!

-Jesus' name is the most powerful name and his disciples are privileged to use it in prayer.

b. The gift of the Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit was 'poured out' after Jesus ascended to heaven, and Jesus continues to give the Holy Spirit to his disciples today: John 7:39; Acts 2:33.

c. Jesus 'intercedes' for us before God:

-Romans 8:34: *Christ Jesus...is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

d. In some sense Christians are seated with Jesus in heaven: Ephesians 2:6: *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.*

e. When we die, our spirits go to be 'with him', where Jesus is: Philippians 1:21-23.

-United with him in life, we will be united with him in heaven when we die.

6. From where He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Key Scriptures: Acts 1:11 & 10:42.

'From where he will come again...': In the future, Jesus will come again!

-This is the Christian's 'blessed hope': Titus 2:13

-Christ's return will complete our salvation: Hebrews 9:28: *He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*

-Acts 1:11: *"This same Jesus": We believe he will return Personally, Bodily, Visibly & in Glory.*

'to judge the living and the dead.': God appointed Jesus to be judge of the living and the dead.

Benefits:

a. Jesus Christ will be visible & present & ruling upon earth! 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.

-Everything being 'put to right': Good government at last! The Millennium! Revelation 20:4-6.

b. Christ's Judgment:

-The fundamental basis will be how people have responded to Christ 'in this life':

John 3:16-18.

-The reward of believers & judgment of our 'works' in the body: 2 Corinthians 5:10.

-The destruction & final conquest of Evil:

-Destruction of the Anti-Christ figures & Satan in Lake of fire: Revelation 19:20 & 20:10.

-The final destruction of death & Hades: Revelation 20:14.

-The condemnation of unrepentant evil-doers: Revelation 20:15, 21:8.

THE APOSTLES CREED 6

'I believe in the Holy Spirit'

Introduction

As the 1st section (or 'article') of the Creed is about God the Father, and the second is about God the Son - Jesus Christ - so the 3rd section is about God the Holy Spirit.

-In this section we confess our faith in the Holy Spirit: in his divinity ('God-ness'), in his personality (that he is a person and not a 'thing'), and that he is God's 'gift' to us through faith in Jesus.

-We also confess our faith in the other blessings of God that the Holy Spirit brings (or 'applies') to us, through our faith in Christ (membership of the Church, forgiveness, bodily resurrection and eternal life).

NB Some of the heretical cults/sects deny that the Holy Spirit is God and a person, and that he is God's gift to all believers in Jesus.

1. The Holy Spirit: Both Divine and Personal.

Christians believe in one God who is three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We therefore believe that the Holy Spirit is both 'divine' and personal', and not just a 'force', as the following passages of Scripture indicate:

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."

-Here, Jesus indicates the equality of the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit: all are equally God.

-Also, the 3 divine persons have a 'name', which indicates 'person-hood'.

1 Corinthians 12:

v4-6: There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

-Talking about spiritual gifts, the Apostle Paul says the 3 divine persons are all involved together, again indicating their essential equality.

v11: All of these (gifts) are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

-The Spirit is described as determining (deciding) the distribution of gifts: 'Choosing' like this is a basic quality of being a 'person'.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

-Here, Paul applies the Old Testament name of God - 'The Lord' - to the Spirit.

-Since 'The Lord' is both God and personal, so is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 13:14 – ‘The Grace’

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

-This is another ‘Trinitarian’ passage, implying the equality of God (the Father), Jesus Christ (the Son), and the Holy Spirit, and their shared role in our blessing.

-‘Fellowship’ is possible only if the Holy Spirit is personal, which He is!

John’s Gospel chapters 14-16

Jesus’ told his disciples many things about the Holy Spirit the night before he was betrayed. He described the Holy Spirit as a Counsellor, a Teacher, a Witness, and one who Speaks: all personal terms.

Jesus’ teaching here also suggests the unity between the Holy Spirit and himself: The Spirit will be ‘another’ counsellor (like Jesus himself) 14:15, and Jesus will be ‘in’ the disciples when they receive the Spirit 14:18, 20. Also, still speaking about the disciples receiving the Spirit, Jesus said: *“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him”*: The indwelling Holy Spirit is the equivalent of having God the Father and Jesus living in the disciple.

NB The Nicene Creed explicitly states the divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit, saying he is: ‘The Lord, the giver of life...who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.’

2. The Holy Spirit: God’s ‘gift’ to Christians

The Holy Spirit is the ‘greatest’ of God’s gifts to us as Christians.

-The Holy Spirit is given to those who believe in Jesus: John 7:39.

-The gift of the Holy Spirit is promised to all believers in Jesus: Acts 2:38-39.

‘Having the Spirit’ confirms that we are Christians:

-1 John 4:13: *We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*

-Romans 8:9: *You are not controlled by the sinful nature if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

As Christians, we are meant to ‘experience’ the Spirit, and not just ‘abstractly’ believe in him.

Some of the ways the New Testament describes Christians’ experience of the Spirit are:

-Baptism in the Holy Spirit

-Empowered by the Spirit

-Being filled with the Spirit

-Taught by the Spirit

-Led by the Spirit

-Transformed by the Spirit

-Given gifts by the Spirit

-Sanctified by the Spirit.

‘Baptism in the Holy Spirit’ is an ‘experienced empowering’ of the Spirit: Acts 1:4-8. It is the first of several ‘fillings’ with the Spirit (Acts 2:4), and is the distinctive gift of the risen and exalted Lord Jesus Christ to his people (Matthew 3:11, Acts 2:33).

As Christians, we should ‘know’ we have received the Spirit. If you are in doubt about this, you should ask God in faith and you will receive the Holy Spirit: Luke 11:9-13.

THE APOSTLES CREED 7

'I believe in the Holy, Catholic Church, and the Communion of Saints'

Introduction

Until this point, the Creed has been about God - Father, Son & Holy Spirit.

But this part of the Creed directs us to the Church and our relationship with fellow Christians.

Being a Christian is NOT a solitary, private endeavour, just between you & God!

-It is about being part of a people, the 'People of God', the Church.

-Jesus spoke of Christians receiving "a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:18), as well as individually receiving 'forgiveness of sins.'

-Cyprian, an early church leader, famously said: "If God is your Father, the Church is your mother", meaning God 'nurtures' us in the Christian faith and life through his Church.

1. The Meaning of 'Church'

Key Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:15b: *God's household, which is the church of the living God.*

'Church' is an Old English/Old German word ultimately deriving from the Greek word 'kuriakou' meaning 'of the Lord'. It is also related to the Scottish word 'Kirk'.

-In the New Testament 'church' is used to translate the Greek word 'ekklesia' meaning an 'assembly', or 'congregation' of people, especially the gatherings of Jesus' disciples.

-This New Testament word also relates to the Old Testament 'assembly of Israel', particularly God's people in their gatherings in the desert after leaving Egypt.

-In the Bible, 'church' always refers to an assembly of people, and never to the place of assembly, ie a building.

In the Creed we affirm the existence and the importance of God's people, the Christian Church.

-Some other names for the Church in the New Testament are: 'God's Field', 'God's Building', the 'Household of God', the 'Body of Christ', the 'Bride of Christ', the 'Flock of God'.

2. The 'Holy' Church

Key Scripture: 1 Peter 1:15-16: *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*

The Apostle Peter calls God's people 'a holy priesthood' and 'a holy nation' (1 Peter 2:5, & 9).

-'Holy' means 'belonging to God', 'chosen by God', 'set apart to God'.

-So the Church is 'holy' first because it is 'of God' and not simply a human organisation.

The Church is also holy because it is indwelt and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

-The Church is composed of individual Christians who have themselves received the Spirit.

-Scripture also speaks of the Spirit dwelling within the gathered church: *You are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.* Ephesians 2:22.

Also, the Church is called to 'be holy' by living a 'holy' lifestyle, as 1 Peter 1:15 above.

3. The 'Catholic' Church

Key Scripture: Ephesians 4:4-6: *There is one body (the Church) and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

In the Creed, 'catholic' means 'universal', or 'worldwide'.

-This statement therefore affirms there is one Church which exists throughout the whole world.

-This is not the *Roman* Catholic Church, but the universal, global church made up of all true Christians from all nationalities, whatever their 'denominational' identity or lack of such.

'Local Churches'

The one 'Catholic' and universal church is made up of many smaller 'local churches' or congregations, and it is in these local churches that most Christians experience the Church in their day-to-day lives.

-As individual Christians we each need to be part of a local church to participate in worship, fellowship and mission/witness with other Christians.

-At the same time, it is important that all local churches see themselves as part of the larger, universal Church through their shared faith in our one Lord Jesus Christ.

4. The Communion of Saints

-Key Scripture: John 17:20-21: *"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you."*

In the New Testament all Christians are called 'saints', not just a few special ones!

'Communion' is another word for 'fellowship', 'sharing' and 'participation'.

The 'communion of saints' therefore means firstly that since all Christians are joined to Jesus Christ by faith, by baptism and by the Holy Spirit, we are also spiritually joined to each other, through Jesus.

-In this sense, 'Christian unity' is already an established 'reality'!

-However, this spiritual unity has to be practically worked out as we develop good personal relationships with other Christians within and between local churches, and as we serve one another in the love of Christ.

Secondly, the 'communion of saints' refers to the fellowship that exists between God's people who are already in heaven (the 'Church Triumphant') as well as God's people on earth (the 'Church Militant' – ie still 'fighting the good fight' in order to reach heaven).

-Hebrews 12:22-24 declares this wider, 'cosmic' communion: *You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant...*

The 'communion of saints' reminds us that Christians have a 'shared life', that we do not simply live 'to ourselves', and that what we each do affects our Christian brothers and sisters too.

THE APOSTLES CREED 8

'I believe in the Forgiveness of Sins'

Introduction

The 3rd section, or 'Article', of the Creed recounts the 'benefits of salvation in Christ': All these blessings come to us from God (the subject of the 1st Article), in and thru' Jesus Christ (the subject of the 2nd Article), and by the Holy Spirit (the first subject of the 3rd Article).

'Forgiveness of Sins' is central to this group of 'benefits'.

-It is at the centre of 'The Gospel', the Christian message, eg as 1 Corinthians 15:3: *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.*

-See also these other important references to 'forgiveness of sins': Luke 24:46-47, Acts 2:36-39, Acts 10:43, Acts 13:38.

1. What do we mean by 'Forgiveness of Sins'?

'Sins' – All that we do and have done that separates us from God, or offends God.

In Scripture, sin is described in various ways:

a. A 'falling short', or 'missing the target/standard', eg as Romans 3:23: *For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*

-Sin 'misses' and 'messes up' the glory of God in us. In addition to offending God, it makes us 'less than human', less than the glory God intended for us.

b. Definite 'wrongdoing', eg breaking the commandments: immorality, stealing, lying.

c. Acts and behaviour that causes guilt (the sense of being in the wrong, and attendant fear of being found out), and/or a sense of uncleanness.

'Forgiveness of sins' is the 'wiping away' and cleansing of these things, the removal of the barrier of sin between people and God and, often, between people themselves.

-It means forgiveness from the guilt and uncleanness of sin.

-And forgiveness from the ultimate penalty of sin, eternal separation from God.

2. How is 'Forgiveness of Sins' Possible?

It is possible because of what God has done in and through Jesus Christ, NOT because of anything we have done, or can do (Titus 3:3-7).

The Apostle Paul tells us what God has done to enable sins to be forgiven: *God presented him (Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.* (Romans 3:25)

And, *For what the Law was powerless to do... God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man.* (Romans 8:3)

The Apostle Peter wrote *He himself (Jesus) bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.* (1 Peter 3:24)

-So, Jesus became the sacrifice for our sins when he died on the cross ('tree').

-Sin was 'condemned', and 'atoned for', and 'taken away' by what God did through Jesus.

-Jesus is "*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29, 1 John 2:2).

3. How do we obtain 'Forgiveness of Sins'?

Firstly by recognising this is all 'of grace', it is a gift that God offers us through what he has already done in his Son Jesus: We cannot 'earn' forgiveness.

Secondly by making the appropriate response to God's gracious gift:

-Scripture shows there are three stages to 'receiving' God's gift of forgiveness.

a. Believe in Jesus: Faith in Jesus is the fundamental basis of receiving God's forgiveness.

Acts 10:43: *"Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

-We simply need to 'believe' that Jesus died for our sins, as our own personal Saviour.

b. Repent ('turn') from our sins and change the way we live.

Acts 26:20: *"I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds."*

-It is necessary to acknowledge that we have individually sinned, and are sinners, and to recognise our responsibility for our wrong actions and behaviour.

-We should 'confess' our sins to God, and, where appropriate, to other people.

c. Be Baptised, confessing Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Acts 22:16: *"Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name."*

-Baptism is the public confession of our repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Whilst faith, repentance and baptism are necessary parts of our response to God, as Derek Tidball (a Baptist Theologian) writes, they "are not conditions of forgiveness so much as the route through which grace comes."³

4. The Effects of Forgiveness of Sins

When a person receives 'forgiveness of sins' by faith in what God has done through Jesus Christ, many further 'benefits' follow.

a. Peace with God

-We live with God, recognising his presence and rule, rather than against and away from God.

-We are brought into a new relationship with God, knowing Him as our (heavenly) Father.

-God pours his blessings into our lives.

b. Peace with other People

-We are to forgive others the wrongs they have done to us, recognising God has forgiven us.

-As far as it lies with us, we are to live 'at peace' with those around us.

-We frequently experience restored relationships with those around us.

c. Personal Healing

-Before we die, we should expect to receive at least some physical and mental healing to restore the glory of God in us, and enable us to better serve him and others.

-Physical and psychological/mental sickness and health is often (but not always) connected to sin and forgiveness in Scripture, eg James 5:14-16.

3. Derek Tidball, *Skillful Shepherds: Explorations in Pastoral Theology* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), p270.

THE APOSTLES CREED 9

'I believe in the Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting. Amen.'

Introduction

These are the final phrases of the 3rd section, or 'Article', of the Creed.

-They are the future benefits of our salvation in Christ.

The resurrection of the body and life everlasting are central parts of 'The Christian Hope'.

-They are promises & benefits for Christians: ie for those people who can say the previous parts of the Creed with real faith.

1. The Resurrection of the Body

Key Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15.

Christian hope is not only about 'going to heaven' without our bodies when we die.

-It is about the salvation of the whole person, body and soul, and so includes the promise of the resurrection of our bodies.

-Jesus' body was raised back to life, so ours will be too: 1 Corinthians 6:14: *By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.*

-The resurrection of our bodies will take place when Jesus returns: 1 Corinthians 15:23.

The Resurrection of the Body means:

a. The importance and 'goodness' of our bodies and the physical creation: God created the material world in the first place (and called it 'good') and will redeem it: Romans 8:19-21.

b. Our resurrection will be 'individual' and 'personal': We will be recognisable people, rather than just being 'absorbed into God' as some people and other religions suggest.

BUT, our resurrection bodies will be different from the bodies we have today!

As the Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 we will have new 'transformed' bodies:

-v37: The 'seed' that is planted (ie our bodies that die) is different from the plant that grows.

-v38: Different parts of creation have different bodies.

-v42: So the body that is raised from the dead will be different from the body that dies:

-The 'perishable' (wears out/dies) will be raised 'imperishable' (never wear out or die).

-The 'dishonourable' (fallen, sinful) will be raised 'glorious' (perfect, sinless).

-The 'weak' (liable to sickness, harm) will be raised 'powerful' (healthy, 'supernatural').

-The 'natural' (of this human life) will be raised 'spiritual' (of God's Holy Spirit).

Gordon Fee (an American Pentecostal theologian) writes that 'spiritual' means 'supernatural' not 'immaterial', and that the new, resurrection body will be, 'A body transformed by the Spirit to bear the likeness of Christ, fitted for the new age.'⁴

And in Philippians 3:20-21 Paul wrote: *But our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

4. Gordon D. Fee, NICNT: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p786.

2. The Life Everlasting

NB The equivalent clause in the Nicene Creed reads: 'The life of the world to come'.

-We will be raised with new, transformed bodies because we will live forever in a new, transformed world: The life everlasting in the world to come.

Key Scripture: Revelation 21:1-4.

(I call this passage 'The Compass': it tells us 'where' the story of the Bible is ultimately going!)

This passage describes the essential facts about 'everlasting life' and 'the world to come':

v1: There will be a New Heaven and a New Earth

-The old creation will 'pass away' and be replaced.

-There will be no more 'sea', that is no more forces of rebellion & evil that the sea often represents in the Bible.

-This is reflected in our own EFC Basis of Faith, item 11.

v2: There will be a New Jerusalem

-This is the heavenly Jerusalem that replaces the old, earthly Jerusalem.

-The new Jerusalem is described 'like a bride', ie like the glorified Church, the 'bride of Christ'.

-The new Jerusalem is also described as the place where God's people will live with God, eg v10 onwards.

-There seems to be a coming together of heaven and earth, of God and man's dwelling places.

v3: God will live with Mankind

-There will be no temple in the New Jerusalem: v22.

-The 'life everlasting' will be life in God's presence: see Revelation 22v3-5.

-The Lamb (the glorified Lord Jesus Christ) will also be in the city.

-We will see God's face!

V4: God will wipe away all tears

-There will be eternal comfort, healing, and justice for God's people.

-There will be no more crying, pain or death: It will be a 'new order' of things.

So, 'life everlasting' will be:

a. Life that lasts 'forever': Whether it is 'in time' or 'beyond time'!

b. Life that is 'truly life', life of a new quality, 'abundant life' that Jesus promised: John 10:10.

Summary

The final phrases of the Creed are amazing 'good news' for Christians, with a wonderful promise of future blessings.

-As we say the Creed we confess our faith in God's gift of life beyond death in a new creation.

-These phrases remind us of God's own solution for our fallen, broken world.

The Last word: 'Amen'

a. Reminds us we can use the Creed in our prayers: Lots of reasons for thanksgiving & praise!

b. 'Amen' means 'So be it', meaning 'I agree', expressing our faith each time we say the Creed.

Nicene Creed (ASB 1980)

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven;

By the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and was made man,

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;

He suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;

He ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,

Who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.

He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,

and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH-RADFORD : WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe the Bible is the inspired word of God. We accept it as the supreme authority for faith and behaviour, and so we believe:

1. The Trinity

In one God who exists forever in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit; who governs all things according to his will.

2. The Father

In God the Father, who made heaven and earth and everything in them, who is holy and just, faithful and loving, and who sent his Son into the world that the world might be saved through him.

3. The Lord Jesus Christ

In the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, who lived without sin yet died on the cross for the sins of the world, who was raised from the dead and went up into heaven, who is crowned with glory and honour and seated at God's right hand.

4. The Holy Spirit

In the Holy Spirit, and the Baptism of the Spirit, who brings to people conviction of sin, repentance and new life, who lives in Christians, and who empowers them for holy living and to take part in the life of the Church.

5. Mankind

That mankind was made in God's image, male and female, to know God's blessings. That the first man and woman were tempted by the devil and disobeyed God, and that all people have been sinful and subject to God's judgment and condemnation.

6. Salvation

That it is necessary to turn from sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to receive God's forgiveness and his Holy Spirit and to be saved from his judgment. Salvation is the gift of God through Christ alone.

7. The Church

That by faith and the Holy Spirit all Christians are joined to Christ and to each other, and comprise his Church, the Body of Christ.

8. The Commission

That the Lord Jesus Christ commanded the church to preach the gospel to the whole world.

9. Spiritual Gifts and Ministries

That Christ continues to give many gifts of the Holy Spirit to his Church, including those described at 1 Corinthians 12 v8-10 and the ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

10. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

In the baptism of believers by immersion in water, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper until he comes again.

11. The Future

That the Lord Jesus Christ will come again in power and glory to reign on earth, to destroy the devil, to raise the dead, and to judge all people. That the righteous will receive eternal blessing and the wicked eternal punishment. That there will be a new heaven and a new earth, free from evil and suffering, where God will live with his people.