



“The Apostles Creed: A Clear Confession of Our Christian Faith”



I) Reconsidering the Role of Creeds in SBC Life

- Creedal confessions are simply summary statements of the Christian faith. Throughout the history of the Church, councils and leaders have written these creeds to clarify biblical truths, unify Christians in their belief of those truths, and distinguish those truths from other conflicting beliefs of the outside world. The corporate reciting of creeds during weekly worship services is a tradition that spans more than 1,500 years and transcends Christianity’s denominational borders. Southern Baptists have sometimes avoided the weekly reading of creedal statements in corporate worship to separate themselves from other denominations that adhere to a structured liturgy that is handed down from denominational leaders.
- Many Southern Baptist pastors in recent years have begun making the argument that rejecting the corporate use of creeds because it sounds less “Southern Baptist” is throwing the theological baby out with the bathwater. Being a Southern Baptist does not mean rejecting anything that sounds or looks commonplace for other Christian denominations; it just means that SBC worship services should reflect the culture of each local church while maintaining the biblical truth of God’s Word and exalting our Creator in full honor and glory. Therefore, Southern Baptists are wisely reconsidering the role of reciting the historic “Apostles Creed” in weekly worship, and as Cedar Street Baptist Church we should also reconsider including this practice during our Sunday morning services.

II) Christianity’s Most Historic Summary Statement

- The Apostles Creed is Christianity’s foundational creedal statement that summarizes what we believe as born-again believers of Jesus Christ. It gives us a clear picture of the triune God we worship, describes what Christ endured for our salvation, boldly reminds us of why He is worthy of our worship, and reminds us of the glory that will come upon the return of Jesus Christ. Here is a modern version of the creed: *“I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, died and was buried. On the third day, He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, The holy universal church, The communion of saints, The forgiveness of sins, The resurrection of the body, And the life everlasting. Amen.”*
- Contrary to Roman Catholic teaching, the Apostles Creed did not come from the Apostles themselves. This creed is a summary of the Apostles teaching, and in its original form it was written around 140-150 AD. It is the oldest creed in the history of Christianity, and it is the basis for all other creeds that have followed (Nicene, Chalcedonian, Athanasian). Although the creed itself is not found in Scripture but is instead a summary of what Scripture teaches, there are still biblical passages that point to the value and need of creedal statements (1 Timothy 6:12). Two theological issues churches have discussed regarding this creed are these: (1) The statement “Jesus descended into hell” (which was a line added in later forms of the creed); and (2) The use of the word “catholic” in the line “holy catholic church.” Both of those issues are easily resolvable and should not deter churches from using the creed today. Most evangelical congregations have removed the entire line about Christ descending into hell to avoid any confusion about what Jesus was doing after His crucifixion. Churches have also recognized the word “catholic” in this creed does not mean the Roman Catholic denomination but the fact that the Church is universal as one body, so they replace the word “catholic” with “universal” or “Christian.”

III) A Calling to be Clear About our Confessions

- In today's churches, the name and identity of the one true God is being misrepresented by droves of "so-called" Christians who have become biblically illiterate and been heavily influenced by culture. As Christians, we need to be clear about what we believe and most importantly about *who* we believe in. Our God is triune as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and that separates us with every other religion in the world. When someone walks into our sanctuary, we should want them to know that we are not worshipping some generic, unknown God. We are worshipping the one true God – the only one who is worthy of our worship and praise. So, let's take a closer look below at this confessional creed that summarizes our triune God according to the truth of the Bible.

IV) God the Father: Almighty Maker of Heaven and Earth

- A way to understand the triune relationship of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is to consider this simple alliteration: God the Father *assigns*, God the Son *accomplishes*, and God the Spirit *applies*. In this picture, God the Father assigns because He is the creative agent of the Godhead who initiates everything. When Jesus Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit were sent to this earth, God the Father sent them. When everything was created, it was the Father who initiated the process of creation. He is not more important than the Son, or the Spirit, but it is the Son and Spirit who willingly submit to His initiatives. God the Father is Almighty in His power, and the design and purpose of Heaven and Earth originated from His sovereign will.

V) Jesus Christ: God's Only Son our Lord

- When we proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ, we must begin with His identity as God's only Son. Jesus was fully God and fully man. In His deity, He is eternal and has always existed. In His humanity, He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Through His messianic ministry, He was sentenced to death by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate. After His crucifixion He died, was buried, and on the third day He rose again to fulfill prophecy and offer salvation. Several days after His resurrection, He ascended into heaven, where He now sits at the right hand of Almighty God. According to Scripture, we believe He will come again to judge the living and the dead. This is what Scripture teaches about Christ. He was not simply a good, moral teacher; He is our Lord.

VI) The Holy Spirit: The Giver of New Life

- The Holy Spirit is the member of the Godhead who applies Christ's work of redemption. He began with implementing Christ's conception in the womb of the virgin Mary. He now applies the finished work of Christ's redemption to human hearts through regeneration, by awakening them to the reality of their sin and their need for a savior. Finally, it is the Holy Spirit who established the Church at Pentecost, and now He indwells believers to provide guidance, protection, and the progressive cleansing of sin through sanctification.

VII) Affirming that We Live in the 'Already and Not Yet'

- We live in a stage of redemptive history that theologians call the "already and not yet." The closing statement of the Apostles Creed helps us clarify what has "already" taken place for us to be born-again members of a church, but also what has "not yet" taken place as we await the return of Christ. What has already happened is that the universal Church has been established, there is a special communion among each believer in the Church, and there is forgiveness for the sins of each believer through faith in Jesus Christ. What has not yet taken place is the resurrection of the body and the beginning of eternal life. These events will both happen through the process of glorification upon Christ's return.

VIII) Confessing the Apostles Creed at CSBC

- For all the reasons listed above, this study makes a strong case that we should consider reciting the Apostles Creed corporately during our Sunday morning worship services at CSBC. When we read the Apostles Creed, we celebrate a rich heritage of biblical truth that the Church has protected for almost two Millenia. This is a time to be clear, bold, and consistent about the triune God that we worship.