



## CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS

1824, Samuel Miller, long-time professor of church history at Princeton Theological Seminary:

*No church can hope to maintain a homogeneous character; no church can be secure either of purity or peace, for a single year; nay, no church can effectually guard against the highest degrees of corruption and strife, without some test of truth, explicitly agreed upon, and adopted by her in her ecclesiastical capacity: something recorded, something publicly known, something capable of being referred to when most needed, which not merely this or that private member supposes to have been received, but to which the church as such has agreed to adhere, as a bond of union.*

### WHAT IS A CREED?

The word “creed” comes from the Latin word credo, which simply means “I believe.”  
The plural form is credimus, which means “we believe.” In short, when we recite a creed, we are simply making a statement concerning what we believe. What this means is that if you believe anything, you have a creed. What if you say, “I believe in no creed but Christ”? Well, then, that’s your creed. It’s a short creed, but it is a creed.

The Bible itself uses creed-like summaries.

Probably the most well-known example of this is the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4, which begins “Hear, O Israel: The lord our God, the lord is one.” This short creed-like statement is expanded upon by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:6 to take account of the further revelation concerning Jesus Christ. Other creed-like statements in the New Testament are found in Romans 10:9–10 (“Jesus is Lord”) and 1 Corinthians 15:3–4.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/5-things-creeds>

### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CREED AND A CONFESSION?

Creeds and Confessions: What’s the Difference? SEPTEMBER 22, 2021 | DONALD FAIRBAIRN

#### *Pledges of Allegiance*

*The answer to this question may come as a surprise. Confessions are about what we believe; creeds are about in whom we believe. Creeds are not meant as comprehensive statements of the Christian faith; they’re instead pledges of allegiance to the three persons of the Trinity.*

*...In the early centuries of the church, creeds were intended to be recited in public worship (as some of us still recite them) as public professions of faith in God the Father, in his Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit. Over time, in order to combat specific mistakes (heresies), the creeds added specific statements about each of the persons and other affirmations as well (like the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting), but they were never meant to be comprehensive statements of what Christians believe about all aspects of the faith.*



*Fundamentally, creeds were meant as pledges of allegiance. As a result, creeds came first in Christian history, and confessions followed later. The statements by which all Christians pledged allegiance to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were supplemented over time with statements about what Christians believed regarding this, that, or another aspect of the Christian faith.*

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/creeds-confessions-difference/>

## WHAT FORM SHOULD CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS BE?

The Role of Creeds and Confessions in the Church Published Friday, July 1, 2022 By Guy M. Richard

*The point is that creeds and confessions must be more than simple statements of biblical doctrine—although they are certainly not less. They must also be written, public documents that have been agreed upon and accepted by the church to be an expression of what it has historically believed the Bible teaches.*

<https://modernreformation.org/resource-library/articles/the-role-of-creeds-and-confessions-in-the-church/>

*...Within the tradition of the Reformation, creeds and confessions have always been considered as authoritative ecclesial standards. Their authority, however, has been regarded as only being secondary and derived. The Bible alone holds pride of place as the one standard that rules over all others (norma normans). It is primary in its authority. Creeds and confessions are secondary (norma normata); their authority flows from the authority of the Bible. This means that confessional documents speak with the Bible's authority when and where they faithfully express the Bible's teaching. It also means that confessional documents can be amended or updated whereas the Bible, as God's infallible rule of faith and practice, cannot be.*

"No Creed but Christ, No Confession but the Bible!"

*...The "no creed but the Bible" approach is misleading at best and dishonest at worst, because it hides the fact that it really does have a creed or a confession—in the most basic of senses discussed above—so that it doesn't have to make that creed or confession available for all to see and examine. It thus puts itself beyond accountability and at the same time offers no help for church members in disputes and controversies, and it may actually leave them open to harm.*

<https://modernreformation.org/resource-library/articles/the-role-of-creeds-and-confessions-in-the-church/>

## WHY HAS THE CHURCH FOUND THEM NECESSARY?

### THEY PROMOTE UNITY

*(1) by providing a set of standards around which we can all come together and to which we can all agree, and (2) by providing a moderated standard or consensus document that allows for some amount of diversity in strategic areas. In regard to the first idea, it is important to point out that unity always assumes some kind of standard or common bond. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed may well provide for a broader unity than the Westminster Confession of Faith or London Baptist Confession. But the fact remains that all creeds and confessions are designed*



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*to provide unity among Christians and among Christian churches.*

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#### **THEY ENSURE PEACE AND PURITY**

*They do this in at least two ways. First, they provide a standard to which all church officers and all church teaching must conform. Every church that is governed by a creed or confession—which, as noted, is every church—must ensure that its incoming officers are examined to ensure adherence to what it believes.*

<https://modernreformation.org/resource-library/articles/the-role-of-creeds-and-confessions-in-the-church/>

(Used to resolve conflicts):

*They are never the final court of appeals in matters of dispute. The Bible alone serves in that capacity. But confessional documents are, as previously indicated, secondary standards designed to provide a public record of what the church has understood the Bible to teach for centuries on end. It is precisely this historical connection that gives confessional documents such a weight of authority in the church. It is not one or two isolated individuals who are responsible for crafting confessional documents, but the church down through the ages.*

<https://modernreformation.org/resource-library/articles/the-role-of-creeds-and-confessions-in-the-church/>

#### **THEY PROVIDE PROTECTION**

*First, they provide a public and permanent record of what the church believes. They do this because they typically cannot be changed without great difficulty and near-unanimous agreement...*

*The second way creeds and confessions provide protection is by limiting the authority of the church. No rogue minister or church officer can impose his will concerning any number of matters relating to the Christian life, because the church's creed or confession limits what can be imposed upon its members. The church governed by "no creed but the Bible" may respond to these kinds of situations in the same way a confessional church would. But the members of that church wouldn't have the same assurances and protections going in that the confessional congregation does, because creeds and confessions protect people from abuses and errors in regard to church authority and the ways in which it is imposed on them.*

*The third way that confessional documents provide protection is by allowing for diversity of conviction and practice within a context in which the peace and purity of the church are preserved. Let me give an example of what I mean here. When my son was first learning to walk, my wife and I lived in a house that had a staircase in the kitchen that went up to an extra room over our garage. To ensure his safety at all times, therefore, we decided to put up a gate in front of the staircase to limit his access to them. Our son had the freedom to play as he wanted in the rest of the house without fear of serious injury. The gate protected him from the areas that were most dangerous. Creeds and confessions work in much the same way as that gate. They protect church members from those areas where the church has concluded it is theologically or practically dangerous for them to go, while giving them genuine freedom of*



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*conviction and practice everywhere else without fear of serious spiritual injury. They do this by virtue of taking up moderated topics and practices with moderated language and by serving as consensus documents within the church.*

<https://modernreformation.org/resource-library/articles/the-role-of-creeds-and-confessions-in-the-church/>

## HISTORY OF THE CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE THREE CREEDS by David Meager

<http://hiskingdom.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Brief-History-of-the-Creeds.pdf>

### The Apostle's Creed

*The Apostles Creed is the creed most widely used in Christian worship in the western world. Throughout the Middle Ages it was generally believed that this creed was composed by the Apostles on the day of Pentecost and that each of them contributed one of the twelve sections. This appears to be a legend dating back to somewhere between the 4th and 6th Centuries. However it still has good reason to be called the Apostles Creed because its content is in agreement with apostolic teaching...*

*The Creed seems to have had three uses,*

- 1) as a confession of faith for those about to be baptised,*
- 2) as a catechism (an instruction for new Christians in the essentials of the faith)*
- 3) as a 'rule of faith' to give continuity to orthodox Christian doctrine.*

*... The Creed is Trinitarian in form but the heart of the creed is its confession concerning Jesus Christ and the events to do with his conception, birth, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and coming judgement.*

### The Nicene Creed

*It is known for certain that the Nicene Creed was adopted by the Council of Calcedon in 451AD which claimed it was the faith of the Council of Constantinople of 381AD. Its origin however goes back to the Council of Nicea (in modern day Turkey) called in 325AD by the Emperor Constantine to address the Arian controversy. Eusebius submitted a Creed from his own Diocese, Caesarea, and this appears to have formed the basis of the creed propagated at Nicea although there were other older creeds that could have been considered. The Creed affirmed the unity of God, insisted that Christ was begotten from the Father before all time, and declared that Christ is of the same essence (homoousios) as the Father. It had only a single brief clause on the Holy Spirit.*

### Athanasian Creed

*The Athanasian Creed...named after the famous Bishop of Alexandria (296-373) who famously defended orthodox Christianity from Arianism. There is no evidence that Athanasius wrote the creed and since the 17th Century work of G J Voss it has been accepted that the evidence points*



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*against his authorship. The original versions of the Creed appear to have been latin whereas Athanasius wrote in Greek... The Creed contains a clear and detailed statement of the Trinity (eg. 'The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet there are not three Gods but one God.' It also upholds the full Deity and humanity of Christ, his death for sins, resurrection, ascension, second coming and final judgement.*

## THE HISTORY OF CONFESSIONS:

Outline adopted from: Protestant Creeds and Confessions by Ryan Reeves

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/protestant-creeds-and-confessions>

### Lutheran Confessions

- 1) Birthed out of the fight for justification
  - a. Declared an outlaw and heretic at the Diet of Worms (1521), he worked on publishing his message in a confessional form.
  - b. Two for the church and one to defend the message in public.
- 2) Large and Small Catechisms in 1529
  - a. Large to train adult disciples and clergy
  - b. Small was for children and new converts

*He also wrote an Exhortation to Confession that same year to justify the need for confession. Though the church rests on Scripture alone, Luther argued, the need for corporate confession is essential.*

- 3) Augsburg Confession – 1530
  - a. Written by Luther and Philip Melanchthon
  - b. Not designed for the church but for Emperor Charles V and the princes of Europe
    - i. Was a defense against false accusations from German Catholics.

*The Lutheran catechisms and confessions, then, form a microcosm of the ways confessions were used in the Reformation era: one for church life, the other for public disputation against spurious claims about Protestant orthodoxy; one for every believer in the church, the other for its leaders to clarify what they hold to be orthodox teaching.*

### Birth of Reformed Confessions

- 1) Between 1520 to 1650, 40 to 50 Confessions were written (the most of any Protestant tradition).

*The Reformed faith was always led by a band of brothers (despite the modern impression that John Calvin alone created Reformed orthodoxy). But the Reformed tradition was born in several cities and countries almost at once. From 1520 onward, city after city embraced the Reformation, often piecemeal, and quite a few even before reform came to Geneva. Therefore, there was no singular voice like Luther's to shape the foundational documents of Reformed confessions.*



- 2) Confessions were based upon the local communities, why the names of their city represent the confession.
  - a. The confessions differed from the creeds in this area, this confession was for this church in this city, not for all churches.

*Still, as historians and theologians point out, there is a harmonization of these Reformed confessions that unites their diverse voices into a singular Reformed voice. Their differences are not so great that we cannot see their unity on issues of salvation, worship, and practice. Today, many churches recognize a basic harmony of what is called the Three Forms of Unity—the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism—a unity not of authorship but of witness to Reformed principles.*

### **The Remonstrants And Dort**

- 1) Synod of Dort 1618-19 in the Netherlands
  - a. Back story:
    - i. Jacob Arminius studied under Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza in Geneva
    - ii. With a letter of recommendation, he returned to the Netherlands to serve as a pastor
    - iii. Struggled with the teaching of predestination and grace

*After the death of Arminius in 1609, the Arminian position—also known as the Remonstrant faith—soon codified five points that were submitted to leaders...The Synod of Dort met in response to this and rejected each of the five points. Thus were born the so-called five points of Calvinism, though the synod's intention was not to reduce the faith to five points, but merely to give answers to the five points of Arminianism.*

### **The Westminster Standards**

- 1) Comprise: Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Directory of Public Worship, and the Form of Church Government.
- 2) Also produced two Catechisms (very similar to Luther's).
- 3) History:
  - a. A fight between Charles I and the Puritan Parliament
  - b. Commissioned in 1643 to revise the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England
    - i. Thirty-Nine Articles
      1. Henry VIII was excommunicated from RCC needed to determine what the church of England believed
      2. finalized in 1571
      3. Used today by Anglicans and Episcopalians
  - c. Decided to start from scratch
  - d. Over 120 men were commissioned taking 5 years to complete



## London Baptist Confession of Faith 1689

### History:

- 1) Left the church of England
  - a. Didn't agree with the form of church government
  - b. Role of the Monarch in determining the affairs of the church
- 2) Separation from Presbyterians and Congregationalists
  - a. Did not agree on infant baptism
- 3) Division based upon 17<sup>th</sup> Calvinistic debate
  - a. General Baptist
  - b. Particular Baptist

*With this rise in civil unrest, Particular Baptists took the opportunity to write their own statement of faith. Seven congregations sent representatives to write the document. The purpose of the document was to formally differentiate the beliefs of the Particular Baptists from the General Baptists. This was completed in 1644, and, while not very detailed, was clearly Calvinistic in tone. This was known as "The First Baptist Confession", and predates the far more well-known Westminster Confession of Faith which was written in 1646.*

*With the demise of the monarchy, the Westminster Confession was officially declared the statement of faith for both the Church of England (Anglican) and Church of Scotland (Presbyterian). The smaller Congregationalists created their own version of the Westminster Confession in 1658 called the Savoy Declaration. The original 1644 Baptist Confession, while similar in theology, was nowhere near as expansive as these two English Confessions, and it became clear that another Baptist confession be written.*

<https://www.theopedia.com/london-baptist-confession-of-1689>

### The 1677 Confession:

*The result was that, with the restoration of the Monarchy, English Baptists everywhere were suffering persecution for their faith. In 1677 a much larger group of Particular Baptists met together for the purpose of creating a more detailed confession of faith. The process was modelled on the Westminster Confession, which was being used by many Particular Baptist churches despite the differences in church government and mode of baptism.*

*The 1677 document differed from the Westminster and Savoy confessions in two important ways. Firstly, it had to define the power of the Baptist association (denomination) in its relation to individual congregations. Secondly, and most importantly from a Baptist perspective, it made clear their adherence to Believer's Baptism over and against Infant Baptism. In the latter case, it was their adherence to their view of scripture that resulted in this belief, rather than any historical link with the Anabaptist movement that arose soon after the reformation. Persecution and secrecy kept the 1677 document from being officially endorsed by Particular Baptists, though it was obvious that many Baptist church leaders were able to make its contents*





*known to church members.*

<https://www.theopedia.com/london-baptist-confession-of-1689>

Why the date 1689?:

*In 1689, The Toleration Act was passed, which enabled religious freedom and plurality to co-exist alongside the established churches in England and Scotland. This official reprieve resulted in representatives from over 100 Particular Baptist churches to meet together in London from 3 July - 11 July to discuss and endorse the 1677 document. Despite the fact that the document was written in 1677, the official preface to the document has ensured that it would be known as the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith.*

<https://www.theopedia.com/london-baptist-confession-of-1689>

## **NEXT CLASS READING:**

### **1) Articles**

10 Things You Should Know about Biblical Theology February 10, 2017 by: [Chris Bruno](#)  
<https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-biblical-theology/>

Biblical Theology AN ESSAY BY [T. D. Alexander](#)  
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/biblical-theology/>

### **2) Book**

The Mystery of Christ, His Covenant & His Kingdom  
Pages: 11-26

### **3) Follow-up Reading**

Pick Two articles below to read as a follow-up to today's class.

## **READING RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Creeds and Confessions: What's the Difference? SEPTEMBER 22, 2021 | [DONALD FAIRBAIRN](#)  
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/creeds-confessions-difference/>

The Role of Creeds and Confessions in the Church Published [Friday, July 1, 2022](#) By [Guy M. Richard](#)  
<https://modernreformation.org/resource-library/articles/the-role-of-creeds-and-confessions-in-the-church/>

Creeds and Confessions 101 February 08, 2020 by: Crossway  
<https://www.crossway.org/articles/creeds-and-confessions-101/>





The Christian Creeds: An Introduction RHYNE R. PUTMAN · JULY 7, 2021 · VOLUME 11, ISSUE  
<https://credomag.com/article/the-christian-creeds/>

The Formulation of Creeds in the Early Church BY GRAHAM KEITH  
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/the-formulation-of-creeds-in-the-early-church/>

5 Things You Should Know about Creeds Keith Mathison  
<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/5-things-creeds>

Protestant Creeds and Confessions by Ryan Reeves  
<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/protestant-creeds-and-confessions>

Westminster 101 February 01, 2020 by CHAD VAN DIXHOORN  
<https://faculty.wts.edu/posts/westminster-101/>

History of London Baptist Confession of 1689  
<https://www.theopedia.com/london-baptist-confession-of-1689>