



Creeds

A creed is a statement that describes what we believe. It comes from the Latin word *credo*, which means “I believe.”

The creeds of the early church are different from the confessions of the Reformation.

Creeds contain the content necessary for salvation.

Confessions are much more thorough and are typically written for a particular denomination or school of theology.

Creeds usually apply across denominations.

Origin

Deuteronomy 6:4

1 Corinthians 15:3–7

1 Corinthians 12:3

Philippians 2:5–11

Authority

Creeds only have authority when they are derived from and subordinate to Scripture.

Creeds summarize truth, not create new truth.

Creeds summarize Scripture while at the same time are subject to Scripture.

2 Timothy 1:13

2 Thessalonians 2:15

Purpose

The purpose of creeds:¹

¹ Parsons, *Why Do We Have Creeds?*, 30-32 (emphasis original).



1. To *glorify* God according to his truth and to enjoy him forever by believing, confessing, and proclaiming our doctrine in accordance with what he has revealed and not according to the superstitions of men, the deceitful schemes of Satan, or the arrogant and presumptuous notions of our own hearts.
2. To *affirm* the one true God almighty who has revealed himself to us and whose glorious attributes, gracious laws, and grand story of redemption point us to himself as our only God to the end that we might love him rightly and as fully as possible with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength.
3. To *guard* the unchanging, sound doctrine of Scripture against false teachers and heretics outside the church, and to guard against the vain and false notions of Scripture from within the church as a shining witness of God's truth to the watching world out of which God calls his elect through the preaching of the gospel and inward call of the Holy Spirit.
4. To *discern* truth from doctrinal error and to discern truth from half-truth as we contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints that we might grow up in every way into Christ, who is the living head of the church, who is the way, the truth, the life, and the only way to the Father.
5. To *remain* steadfast through the ages until Christ's return as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of Christ who believe, confess, and proclaim the pure and unadulterated Word of God and who rightly administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, including our consistent exercise of church admonition, correction, and discipline.
6. To *uphold* the life-encompassing doctrine of the inspired and inerrant Word of God as our sole, infallible authority that is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness to the end that every man of God might be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.
7. To *maintain* freedom for individual Christians as well as the entire church from extra-biblical laws, traditions, and superstitions of men that bind men's consciences, perplex men's souls, lead our children astray according to their sin, and bring about man-exalting pride instead of God-exalting humility.
8. To *confirm* men according to the church's doctrinal standard who have been elected to serve as officers of the church as well as to equip, examine, and prove those men who have been called as pastors and elders over the flock of God, and to ascertain their suitability to teach and pray with and for the sheep of Christ for whom he gave his life.
9. To *preserve* the purity and, thereby, the peace and unity of the church visible as the outward witness of Christ and his elect bride, the church invisible, to the end that we might stand together as one family with one Father, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, unwaveringly according to and because of the truth, never in spite of, disregard for, or ignorance of it.
10. To *fulfill* the Great Commission in our united affirmation and proclamation of the one true gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the only power of God unto salvation to all who believe, by making disciples in our homes, churches, communities, and in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all things that our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us.

Creedal testimony helps us in three ways:

1. It protects us by setting boundaries for our thinking.



2. It instructs us by helping us see biblical truth expressed in its briefest form.
3. It unites us, so that everywhere in the world, Christians can share the same clear confession of who Christ is and what He has done.²

Gnosticism

1 Corinthians 1:22–23

Jews rejected the idea that the Messiah could come under God’s curse and suffer crucifixion. The Gentiles thought it was crazy that a supposed god could be crucified.

The threat from the Jews and the pagans came mostly in the form of persecution, but the threat of false doctrine came from within the Church.

The term Gnosticism comes from the Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*.

The gnostic sects believed they possessed a special knowledge that the rest of the Church did not have.

Matter is evil, but spirit is good.

1 John 4:1–3

Colossians 2:8–9

Docetism

The Docetists said Christ was purely a spiritual being and simply seemed to be human.

Marcion

Marcion contrasted the God of justice in the Old Testament that required an “eye for an eye” with the loving Father of the New Testament.

The Father God of the New Testament was completely unknown until Jesus revealed him.

He not only rejected the incarnation but also tried to establish the first biblical canon by eliminating the Old Testament and much of the New Testament. What he did include was revised by him.

² Sinclair Ferguson, “Does Christology Matter?” Ligonier Ministries, accessed January 5, 2019, <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/does-christology-matter/>.



Valentinus

The true Gnostics were elect and were people of spirit (*pneuma*) whose salvation was certain. Regular church members who had faith but did not have the special knowledge were of the soul (*psyche*), and everyone else were just bodies (*soma*).

Early Creed Like Statements

The bishop of Rome or Antioch were the source of authoritative teaching, not the gnostic teachers.

The second way the early church combatted the gnostic heresies was through beginning the formation of the New Testament canon.

The third weapon against heresy was the Rule of Faith.

The Rule of Faith

There were many verbal forms of the rule of faith, but the content was fairly stable.

The Rule of Faith was not written it cannot be considered a creed, but can be considered normative.

Tertullian gives us the basics of the Christian faith, such as creation, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the kingdom, and judgment.

What we find is common concepts, not common words.

Baptismal Formulas

Other creed like statements found in the early Church were baptismal formulas.

Baptismal formulas were most likely tied to Matthew 28:19

The baptismal formula corresponds closely to the Apostles' Creed.

The question about Jesus is much longer than the questions about the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Rule of Faith was a brief way for the new believer to publicly declare for Christ and renounce the world before they were baptized.

Apostles' 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 Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he



ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

The creed proclaims the conception of Jesus was by the Holy Spirit and the birth of Jesus was by the Virgin Mary.

The creed states that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. The suffering and death of Jesus took place at a certain point in history in a specific place.

“He descended into hell” indicates Jesus suffered all forms of human suffering.

Psalm 16:10

Acts 2:29–31