

Loveless Creeds

Creeds

- From the Latin word *credo*, and means “I believe.”
- If you believe something, you have a creed.
- A creed is either a written or unwritten statement of what you believe.
- Originally, a Christian creed was written to provide a doctrinal statement of correct belief, or “orthodoxy.”
- Guides used to discern truth from error. Core beliefs
- Three famous Christian creeds, (Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasius)

Apostles' Creed

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

I believe 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; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will 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.

**catholic* as used here means the church universal, not specifically the Roman Catholic Church. **communion* as in fellowship

Athanasius' Creedal Admonitions and Warnings

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith unless every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinities, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped.

He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Substance [Essence] of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Substance [Essence] of his Mother, born in the world. Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of Substance [Essence]; but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies; And shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.

This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved.

Key Phrases Placed Eternity in the Balance

“Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith unless every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.”

“He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.”

“Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved.”

Jews in Jesus' Time Recited the Shema Daily Along With the Neighbor Love Mandate

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NIV)

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Leviticus 19:18 (NIV)

¹⁸ "'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

Creedal Statements Have Been
Around A Long Time.

There Were Creedal Statements In
Jesus' Time and He Dealt With it
Constantly.

Let's Consider Mark 11 and 12

Jesus Dealt With it

Mark 11:27-33 (NIV)

²⁷ They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. ²⁸ "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?" ²⁹ Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ³⁰ John's baptism--was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!"

"...If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' ³² But if we say, 'From men'...." (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) ³³ So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

The Plot Thickens

- Mark 12:1-27 (NIV) ¹ He then began to speak to them in parables:
- The Parable of the Vineyard.
- The Application: *"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; ¹¹ the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" ¹² Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.*
- More Testing: To Pay Taxes or Not: *"Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words...Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?... Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed..."*
- The Sadducees Take a Turn: What about marriage in the resurrection? They didn't believe in the resurrection. Jesus schools them. "I am the God of..."

Mark 12:28-31 (NIV)

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, *"Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"* ²⁹ *"The most important one,"* answered Jesus, *"is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'* ³¹ *The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."*

Mark 12:32-34 (NIV)

³² *"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.*

³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, *"You are not far from the kingdom of God."* And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

God's Priority Has Not Changed

- Hosea 6:6 (ESV) For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.
- Micah 6:8 (ESV) He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?
- Matthew 23:23 (ESV) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ²⁴ You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

Creeds: A Two-Edged Sword

– Good and Bad

- The Jews of Jesus' time, who daily recited the Shema, did not include its primary message as part of their priorities.
- It may have been good that someone years ago wrote down what was believed so illiterate people could recite them and hopefully be protected from the major heresies of the day.
- There bad because they became instruments of judgment and division. They proliferated to the point that Christians were divided throughout Europe, even in the New World, the USA.
- Then, a unity movement began in the late 1700s with the intent restore Christianity to its purest condition before divisive creeds. Alexander Campbell was one of the key leaders of it.

It Became The Restoration Movement And In Seeking to Unify, Developed Many Slogans

- “In essentials unity, In opinion liberty, In all things charity”
 - “We are Christians only, but not the only Christians”
 - “Speak where the Bible speaks;
Be silent where the Bible is silent.”
 - “Let unity be our polar star”
 - “Back to the fountain”
 - “No creed but Christ”

The Restoration Movement

- Campaigned against the creeds of Europe's established churches that made their way to the new world.
- Called for unity with the scriptures as the only guide
- Tapped into the mass literacy and dissemination of Bibles that seemed to usher in an age where creeds would be irrelevant, no longer dividing Christians from each other.
- Encouraged Christians to examine the Word of God for themselves and restore the faith of the early church.

The Goal Vs. The Reality

- To unify all Christians around Christ himself and the scriptures into one unified body of believers.
- Thus, the slogan “No creed but Christ”
- There was an unintended flaws in the approach that were difficult if not impossible to diagnose from within the ranks of the movement.
- The “unwritten creeds” became as strong and divisive as any written creeds were.
- We spoke quite loudly where the Bible was silent and made opinions into laws of eternal consequence.
- Many became convinced we were the only ones with the truth. Those who disagreed were wrong or a false teachers.

Alexander Campbell's Lunenburg Letter

A lady from Lunenburg, VA (now WV) wrote and asked Campbell, *"Will you be so good as to let me know how anyone becomes a Christian?"*

His answer -- *"But who is a Christian? I answer, Everyone that believes in his heart that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God; repents of his sins, and obeys Him in all things according to his measure of knowledge of His will."*

Campbell later wrote, *"It is possible for Christians to be imperfect in some respects without an absolute forfeiture of the Christian state and character."*

Campbell also affirmed, *"It is the image of Christ the Christian looks for and loves; and this does not consist in being exact in a few items, but in general devotion to the whole truth as far as known."*

We Meant Well, Truth is Important

- Those who wrote creeds and those who espoused them in an unwritten form wanted to faithfully represent God in truth and expose error.
- The goal was pure but there was something missing.
- Not one of the ancient creeds mentioned love.
- Even our unwritten creeds did not place Love First
- Jesus said love of God and others is His first creed.
- “Truth may be vital but without love it is unbearable.”

Back to the Jesus Encounter With The Teacher of the Law

Mark 12:33-34

“To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, *"You are not far from the kingdom of God."*

The Church As Kingdom

- Kingdom: *"Where rule and reign exists."*
- God rules and reigns in the hearts of those who acknowledge Jesus as Lord.
- The church should be the clearest expression of the kingdom of God in our present world.
- If Jesus were to visit among us and observe us, would he say,

"You are not far from the kingdom of God."