

A Study on Creeds and Their Importance Today

Creeds are declarations of faith, statements of Christian belief. Some churches make their own creeds, while others adhere to a creed from church history. Many Christians have differing views of creeds and which ones we must agree on; however, our ultimate goal as believers is to honor what is biblically accurate. If a creed is not biblically correct, we shouldn't agree to it, but if a creed honors Scripture, then there is no reason to be afraid of proclaiming it within churches.

Comparing the Gallican Creed & Old Roman Creed

The Gallican Creed and the Old Roman Creed are similar to one another and the well-known Apostles' Creed. The Old Roman Creed was written in 150 A.D., and the Galician Creed came into being during the 6th century. There are twelve statements listed in the Creeds, with the main difference being that the Old Roman Creed contains the first statement as, "I believe in God almighty;" whereas the Gallican Creed alters this to say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty." Not a major change, but it is still noteworthy.

The Gallican Creed also says in their fourth statement that Jesus descended into hell, but the Old Roman Creed does not contain this. Another difference is that the Gallican Creed changes the Old Roman Creed's statement of "The holy church" to "the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints." Moreover, the Old Roman Creed lists a thirteenth creed because it separates the resurrection of the flesh from eternal life, as compared to the Gallican Creed, which keeps these two aspects together.

These differences are noteworthy because they show differences between churches. For example, the Gallican Creed is more likely to be seen in a Catholic church rather than a Protestant church. Similarly, churches that choose to exclusively use the Apostles' Creed will also have slightly different doctrine than those who adhere to the Gallican Creed or the Old Roman Creed.

Challenge Questions:

- Do you believe different creeds make a difference when it comes to theology? Why or why not?
- The Gallican Creed includes a statement that Jesus descended into hell, but the Old Roman Creed does not. Why do you think this is?
- Have you seen different creeds cause discord within any churches? If so, what helped resolve the discord?

The Nicene Creed's Focus on Combating Heresy

The Nicene Creed indicates that the Early Church was trying to combat the heretical belief of Arianism, directly stating, "We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty [pantokrator], the maker of all things seen and unseen. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God; begotten from the Father; only begotten—that is, from the substance of the Father; God from God; light from light; true God from true God; begotten not made; being of one substance with the Father [homoousion to patri]; through whom all things in heaven on earth came into being; who on account of us human beings and our salvation came down and took flesh, becoming a human being [sarkothenta, enanthroposanta]; he suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended into the heavens; and will come again to judge the living and the dead" (McGrath, Alistair. *The Christian Theology Reader*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 10-11).

The Nicene Creed directly states that Jesus was "not made" and that He is one with the Father, which would bluntly refute Arianism, which says that Jesus was a created being and is not equal to the Father nor preexistent. Arianism taught that Jesus was a "creature," and since He was a "creature," He could not redeem mankind. The Nicene Creed combated this belief by demonstrating that Jesus is not a created being because He has been in existence since before the beginning of time with the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 1:1, 10:30). Jesus declares His eternal nature when He says, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58b).

The Nicene Creed covers several major doctrines of Christianity; however, it is mainly Christological. The quote above from the Nicene Creed supports the doctrine of Christology because it shows that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is God, that He is preexistent, and that He is equal to the Father. Having a Christological aspect of a creed protects a body of believers from heresy creeping into their church. Even though we often only associate heresy with the Early Church, heresy can be found today. This is why it is important to have established beliefs, statements, and doctrines within a church.

The doctrine of soteriology is also present in the Nicene Creed because it verifies that salvation only comes from believing in Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, as the Creed states: “our salvation came down and took flesh...he suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended into the heavens” (McGrath, Alistair. The Christian Theology Reader. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 11). Through this statement, the Nicene Creed protects its adherents from heresies that claim Jesus cannot save an individual. Sadly, this was a common misconception within the Early Church and is still present today within certain churches.

The Nicene Creed’s statement, “He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end” demonstrates the doctrine of eschatology because it shows that there will be a Second Coming of Christ, a day of judgment, and the Eternal Kingdom. The doctrine of Pneumatology is also present in the Nicene Creed as the Creed states, “And in the Holy Spirit,” meaning that the church believes in the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Nicene Creed covers the doctrines of Christology, soteriology, eschatology, and pneumatology, and it was written to protect the church from heresies as well as to confirm in written statements what the church believed.

Challenge Questions:

- Why do you think the Nicene Creed was so important for the Early Church?
- Does your church adhere to the Nicene Creed?
- What aspects of the Nicene Creed do you think were the most helpful at combating heresy?

What Is the Purpose of Creeds in Today’s Church?

Creeds should have a role in modern church services and in our own spiritual lives. They were established to prevent heresies from breaking into the church, and having creeds acts as a barrier and defensive wall to ensure that no heresies poison the church. In church history, the Nicene Creed prevented Arians from entering the church because they would not agree with the Nicene Creed. This led to them not being able to join the church, which worked in a positive way to keep heresy out.

In our own home churches, we may have creeds that we follow, and the purpose of these creeds is to prevent false teachings from coming into the church. The Apostles' Creed is a creed that churches recite quite often, and it is often required to be memorized and declared before public baptism. You may remember when you had to first declare the Apostles’ Creed in your own church and the impact it made on your Christian walk.

Creeds can be taken to extremes, where people simply recite them to recite them; however, creeds are supposed to have meanings behind them that Christians can connect to. Christians should connect to them because creeds are short, but beautiful, statements confirming what the person or the church believes. In fact, the Latin term of the word creed means “I believe.” Furthermore, creeds can be used in a person’s individual spiritual life because they can act as a reminder of what they personally believe. Creeds can offer encouragement and inspiration for the Christian because they reemphasize what they believe and live out, such as faith in the glorious resurrection of Jesus our Lord.

Challenge Questions:

- Are you currently utilizing any creeds in your church?
- How has studying creeds affected your view of theology?
- As an exercise, write a few creeds or statements concerning what you believe within theology. What are a few creeds you have thought of?

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