

made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son). With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.¹

The Definition of Chalcedon (A.D. 451)

We then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before

¹ Again, we have used the 1975 translation of the International Consultation on English Texts, as published in appendix A of Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ (InterVarsity)*, 1984). The words “and the Son” were not in the Greek text, but were added when a translation was made into Latin.

all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures; inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us; and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.²

² Translation from Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, sixth edition, vol. 2 (Baker reprint of 1931 edition), pages 62-63.

Three Historic Christian Creeds

A creed is a brief statement of faith used to enumerate important truths, to clarify doctrinal points and to distinguish truth from error. The Bible contains a number of creed-like passages.

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A creed is a brief statement of faith used to enumerate important truths, to clarify doctrinal points and to distinguish truth from error. Creeds are usually worded to be easily memorized. The word *creed* comes from the Latin word *credo*, meaning, “I believe.” The Bible contains a number of creed-like passages. For example, Jews used the *Shema*, based on Deuteronomy 6:4-9, as a creed. Paul wrote simple creed-like statements in 1 Corinthians 8:6; 12:3 and 15:3-4. 1 Timothy 3:16 also appears as a creed, a concise statement of belief

As the early church spread, there was a practical need for a statement of faith to help believers focus on the most important doctrines of their Christian faith. The Apostles’ Creed is appropriately named not because the original apostles wrote it, but because it accurately reflects the teaching of the apostles. Church fathers Irenaeus, Tertullian, Augustine and other leaders had slightly different versions of the Apostles’ Creed, but the text of Pirminius in A.D. 750 was eventually accepted as the standard form in the Western church.

As the church grew, heresies also grew, and the early Christians needed to clarify the defining boundaries of the faith. In the early 300s, before the canon of the New Testament had been finalized, controversy developed over the divinity of Jesus Christ. At the request of Emperor Constantine, Christian bishops from across the Eastern Roman Empire, with a few from the West, met at the

town of Nicea, near Constantinople, in A.D. 325 to discuss the matter. They wrote their consensus in the form of a creed, called the Creed of Nicea.

In 381, another major council was held at Constantinople, at which the Creed of Nicea was expanded slightly to include a few more doctrines. The resulting Creed is called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, or more commonly, the Nicene Creed.

In the next century, church leaders met in the city of Chalcedon (also near Constantinople) to discuss, among other things, various theories about the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ. They also developed a creed to explain what they believed to be true to the gospel, true to the apostolic teaching, and true to the Scriptures. This creed is called the Creed of Chalcedon.

Creeds can become formal, complex, abstract, and sometimes assumed as equal to Scripture. When properly used, however, they facilitate a concise basis for teaching, safeguard correct biblical doctrine, and create a focus for church fellowship. These three creeds are widely accepted among Christians as consistent with the Bible and as statements of true Christian orthodoxy, or right teaching.

The Apostles Creed (about A.D. 750)

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of Father. He will come again 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.¹

The Nicene (or Niceno-Constantinopolitan) Creed (A.D. 381)

We believe in one God the Father, the Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was

¹ We have used the 1975 translation of the International Consultation on English Texts. What is here translated as “descended to the dead” is traditionally translated “descended into hell,” possibly based on Acts 2:27; Eph. 4:9; or 1 Pet. 3:19. Wayne Grudem points out that the phrase first appeared in A.D. 390, when it was explained as meaning “descended into the grave” (*Systematic Theology*, Zondervan, 1994, pp. 583-594).

The word “catholic” means “whole world” – it does not refer to the Roman church. For further commentary on the creed, see Alister McGrath, *“I Believe”: Exploring the Apostles’ Creed* (InterVarsity, 1998).