

## Unpacking the Apostle's Creed

### An Introduction to the Baptismal Confession for Lay Readers: Notes

#### **SLIDE 3: The New Testament**

*“Therefore let us leave behind the basic teaching about Christ and advance to maturity, without laying the foundation all over again: Repentance from dead works and faith in God, instruction about baptisms and laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement” (Hb. 6:1-2).*

**NOTES:** The Apostles did not actually write the Apostle's creed. There wasn't a unifying creed that dates back to that time period. There were core beliefs and teachings.

#### **SLIDE 4: Resurrection**

*“For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received. that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, through some have fallen asleep. After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me” (1 Cor. 15:3b-8).”*

**NOTES:** Paul met with Peter and James in Jerusalem and they gave him these teachings on the Resurrection. Paul, in turn, handed these teachings on to the Corinthians. It sounds like something early Christians were expected to memorize , was not fully developed but was creedal. For two to three decades after the Resurrection there was no formal statement of belief. There are scattered sections in the New Testament that sound creedal.

#### **SLIDE 5: The Church in the Second and Third Centuries**

*Still no Universal Creedal Statement*

**NOTES:** During the 1st and 2nd centuries there were multiple creeds used throughout the churches but still no common creedal statement. Even though reference is made in certain historical documents to the existence of these creeds few of them have survived. The reason is

because the creeds weren't meant to be written down - they were expected to be memorized. The tradition was to face the 'Liturgical East' and repeat the statement of core beliefs as they existed in people's memories and hearts. Part of the reason was that people were largely illiterate and papyrus was expensive.

### **SLIDE 6: Irenaus**

*Church Father and author of Against Heresies (180 AD)*

**NOTES:** The credal form in slides 7 & 8 are among the earliest we have. It was reprinted by Irenaus in his book, Against Heresies. There were several creeds like these around the same time from different area and churches.

### **SLIDE 7 & 8:**

*The Church believes in one God, the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven, and earth,  
and the sea, and all things that are in them;  
and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God,  
who became incarnate for our salvation;  
and in the Holy Spirit,  
who proclaimed through the prophets the  
dispensations of God,  
and the advents, and the birth from a virgin,  
and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead,  
and the ascension into heaven in the flesh  
of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord,  
and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory  
of the Father  
“to gather all things in one,”  
and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race,  
in order that to Christ Jesus,  
our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King,  
according to the will of the invisible Father,  
every knee should bow  
and that He should execute just judgment towards all. (This credal form goes on for another  
several verses).*

### **SLIDE 9: THE OLD ROMAN CREED (originally written in the 100's A.D.)**

*Earliest version found in a letter written by Marcellus of Ancyra to Julius, the Bishop of Rome. A.D. 341*

It should be noted that around this time Gnosticism was gaining a foothold. 'Gnosis' pertained to secret knowledge allowing someone to escape reality. Some believed Jesus was pure spirit and could not have been human docetism. Key Christian teachings were under minded by Gnosticism which was a movement like 'The New Age Movement' where different spiritual practices are drawn from different sources. Gnostics believed that God is pure spirit and is therefore good but the physical world was evil simply because it was physical. Sex was bad, having fun was bad, everything spiritual was good, everything that was 'matter' was bad. Salvation from the material world was to 'get away' from the world to be saved.

### **SLIDE 10: THE OLD ROMAN CREED 1ST CENTURY**

*I believe in God the Father almighty;  
and in Christ Jesus His only Son, our Lord,  
Who was born from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
Who under Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried,  
on the third day rose again from the dead,  
ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father,  
whence he will come to judge the living and the dead;  
and in the Holy Spirit ,the holy Church,  
the remission of sins,  
the resurrection of the flesh,  
life everlasting.*

**NOTES:** This version sounds even more like the Apostle's Creed. The 'Received Creed' is the final form with the sections 'descended into hell and Maker of Heaven and Earth' which are not found in the Old Roman Creed. This creed was never formally recognized in the Eastern half of the church and eventually fell out of use. It is only used in the Western Church (the Roman Catholics and Protestants but NOT the Eastern Orthodox).

Therefore.....The Apostle's Creed was not written by the Apostles but was a central doctrine. Second and third century teachings were assembled and several creeds were formed with the old Roman Creed the first. The Apostle's Creed grew in popularity until 1000 A.D. and became the final form used.

### **SLIDE 11: Gnosticism: A First Century Heresy**

- *Spirit/ Matter Dualism*
- *Salvation from the Material World*

**NOTES:** Gnosticism was one of the biggest heresies in the 1st century. According to Justo Gonzalez, creedal statements were written in part to refute heretic teachings. The creeds were a border or fence to the 'uncompromisable teachings' allowing it to define what the core teachings were - what was and what was not Christian.

### **SLIDE 12: The Heretic Marcion**

- *Embraced Gnostic Teachings*
- *Put together his own New Testament*
- *Ordained his own Bishops*

**NOTES:** Marcion believed God was not the God who created everything. He was judgemental and believed that Jesus was not born of Mary. He put together his own writings of the New Testament in which Jesus was pure spirit. At this time there was no such thing as a canon of the New Testament. There was rough consensus but nothing written. So the church began to put together the actual New Testament books and develop a consensus for a creed.

### **SLIDE 13: HE DESCENDED INTO HELL**

**SLIDE 14** *“For Christ also suffered... that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the spirit. In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison, who had once been disobedient while God patiently waited in the day of Noah during the building of the ark.” –1 Peter 3:18-20*

**NOTES:** The sentence 'He descended into hell' was added shows up in a manuscript of the creed dating back to 359 A.D. There is reference in Acts:2 that Jesus descended to the 'realm of the dead' or 'Hades' which is different from what we might think of as 'Hell' - a place of torment and suffering. It supported and reinforced the awareness that Jesus was human and died...just the same as everyone else.

### **SLIDE 15: POSSIBLE MEANINGS of “He descended into hell”**

- *Jesus, like everyone else, tasted death.*
- *Jesus’ spirit descended into hell with a mission- to preach the word to the dead.*
- *Descent into hell is a symbolic expression of Jesus’ suffering on the cross.*

**NOTES:** The first item- Jesus, like everyone else tasted death is the only one of the three meanings that makes sense [to Terence, anyway!].