



ECO

A Covenant Order
of Evangelical
Presbyterians

Understanding the Confessions
Nicene and Apostles' Creeds

The Patristic Period

- Essential doctrines were given form between ca. 100 and the Council of Chalcedon in 451AD
 - 1st half of this period was focused on defining what it meant to be the church: faithful in mission and doctrine midst a hostile culture
 - Then(ca. 312/337AD) Constantine converted and persecution comes to an end
- The church turns to theological issues via deliberation and debate

- The Church defined essential doctrines and foundational standards of faith and practice:
 - The triune nature of God
 - The two natures of Jesus Christ
 - Salvation by grace
 - The nature of the church
- Many creeds were produced.
- The current Book of Confessions contains two from this period:
 - *Nicene Creed*
 - *Apostles' Creed*

Importance of Creeds for Today

- They provide a clear and succinct articulation of the essential elements of the Christian faith as discerned by the Church of the first centuries uniting us to our ancient foundational standards.
- These creeds provide a unity of faith which transcends denominations, sects, and traditions.
- The truths expressed in these creeds determine the faith and life of the church and eliminate heresy.
- We join ourselves with this Patristic Creeds which express:
 - Witness of God's nature
 - God's saving work
 - The existence of the church

Creed summaries: The Nicene Creed

- **AD 325 Constantine presided over a convened council in Nicaea, with Bishops, theologians and representatives from all over the known world.**
 - Primary issue: Arius' teaching on the Trinity as a chain of divine beings (Son and Spirit as lesser than the Father)
 - This Creed's first form was to explain the equal divinity of the Father and Son. One divine essence and being.
- **Debate over this continued up through AD 381 when another Council gathered in Constantinople defending now the equality of Father, Son AND Spirit.**
- **What we have today is a combination of both Councils**
- **This creed unites Christians from Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and many Protestant traditions.**

Creed summaries: The Apostles' Creed

- We have no origin date for this Creed as it was most likely emerged as a baptismal liturgy in the early Church
- Eventually codified into the “Old Roman Creed” by the end of the 2nd Century
- Attained its current form by the 8th Century
- It is not the result of a specific council or specific event.
- It emerged out of the practice of the early Church
- Trinitarian in outline:
 1. Our ultimate faith and trust is in God - We Believe in Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 2. The remaining material describes the life and activity of God
 3. The phrase ‘catholic church’ means universal

Compare the two Creeds

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, 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 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 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.

Apostles' Creed

I believe In God the Father Almighty Maker of Heaven and Earth

And in the Lord Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilot, was crucified, dead and buried, he descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of God the Father, Almighty. From there 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

Connections: Essential Tenets and Creeds with BOC

- **God is Triune - 1 God, 3 Persons**
 - *Apostles' Creed (2:1-3)*: I believe In God the Father Almighty Maker of Heaven and Earth And in the Lord Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord. I believe in the Holy Spirit
 - *Nicene Creed (1:1-3)*: We believe in one God, the Father... 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. . . . 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.
- **The Son is eternally begotten of the Father:**
 - *Nicene Creed (1:2)*: 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.
- **The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son:**
 - *Nicene Creed (1:3)*: 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.

- **Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human**
 - *Nicene Creed (1:2)*: 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. . . . For us and for our salvation . . . he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.
- **Jesus offered himself for us on the cross**
 - *Nicene Creed (1:2)*: For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.
 - *Apostles' Creed (2:2)*: suffered under Pontius Pilot, was crucified, dead and buried, he descended into hell.
- **Jesus is ascended in his resurrected body and remains truly human**
 - *Nicene Creed (1:2)*: 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.
 - *Apostles' Creed (2:2)* The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of God the Father, Almighty.
- **Jesus will return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead**
 - *Nicene Creed (1:2)*: He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.
 - *Apostles' Creed (2:2)*: From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Questions for discussion:

1. How has going through these slides helped your understanding of the Creeds?
2. If someone asked you what it is that you believe, what would you say and how would you say it?
3. How do you see the creeds fitting into a personal statement of faith, and the church's corporate statement of faith?
4. What place do the creeds have in a statement of faith in a *missional* setting?
5. Do you feel your faith is adequately expressed by these Creeds?
(Does it say things you wouldn't? Does it leave things out you would want to leave in?)
6. What do you think is the function of reciting these Creeds?
7. Do these creeds aid in that function?
8. What have these creeds taught you about our Reformed heritage?

Watch/listen to the music video at <https://youtu.be/X-m9sRRN9MA> and consider how this song might be helpful in teaching the Creeds

