

John 10:22-33; 1 Corinthians 15:1-17

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A sermon outlining history, origin, purpose – and some difficult bits!

- *“If I can see it, then I can do it. If I just believe it, there's nothing to it I believe I can fly. I believe I can touch the sky”*

These are the words to a song... a song I don't like. A lot of people like the sentiment of this song. But the thing is – just because you believe something doesn't make it true! Ask anyone who BELIEVED they would pass an exam but didn't! What we believe is important. But what is also important is WHY we believe and **how true** those things are that we believe. Today, as we look at the Apostle's Creed, we're not just looking at WHAT we believe, but WHY we believe. WHY were these things written? And are they truthful - are they consistent with the Word of God?

Origin:

The Apostles' Creed came to us in its final form by around 700AD as a summary of the Apostles' teaching. It was most likely based on this Old Roman Creed, written around 200AD: (page 142 of *Eusebius* – from Hyppolytus, c 200):

I've highlighted a few lines in red that were added after 200AD. There were other lines added as well, like “creator of heaven and earth”. But when we see these red words added, it's good to ask the question “WHY? Why did they need to be added?”

- I believe in God the Father Almighty.
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,
who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary;
crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried;
He descended into hell
the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
And in the Holy Spirit;
The Holy **Catholic** Church;
The communion of Saints
The forgiveness of sins;
The resurrection of the flesh.
and life everlasting

Purpose:

They were added because a Creed generally has 2 main purposes:

1. **To preserve truth** in the teaching of the church.
2. **To prevent false teaching** in the church.

This is WHY we say this together nearly every week. To preserve truth and prevent false teaching. Today we'll have a look at 5 of the trickier lines, and ask:

- What **truth** is this teaching us, or what **false teaching** is it warning us against?

Please note though: There are varying interpretations of these lines. I can only share with you what I believe the Bible teaches, so I encourage you to ask questions and to always go back to God's word.

1. He descended into hell.

Sometimes this line has slight variations:

- “He descended into hell”
- “He descended to the dead”
- “On the cross he descended into hell.”

There are a few words for “hell” in the Bible. The word “hades” (Greek) or “sheol” (Hebrew) means “the place of the dead”. Then there's the word “Gehenna” (Greek), which is hell as the place of eternal punishment.

So what does it mean to say “he descended into hell”? Well, lots of people think very differently on this. Here are two things we can **definitely** say from the Bible:

1. **Jesus really died.** He definitely went to “the place of the dead”. He didn't just fall into a coma on the cross. He died. 1 Corinthians 15:3-
• *“... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...”*
2. **Jesus defeated hell** for us. Through the cross, and his death and resurrection, Jesus triumphed over hell for us. Colossians 2:15 says:
• *“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”*

So we CAN say that Jesus really died, and he triumphed over hell.

2. the holy catholic church

A lot of people find this the trickiest line. But it's possibly the easiest to explain. The line changes in different versions:

- “the Holy Catholic Church”
“the Holy universal church”

Today, in everyday chat about religion, we often use the word “Catholic” when we’re taking about the **Roman** Catholic Church.

But the word “Catholic” actually means “universal”. It’s not referring to the **Roman** Catholic Church.

So when we say we believe in the holy Catholic Church, we’re saying that we believe that there is one true universal church of God. We believe God has only one church. And it’s not based on denominations. It’s based on faith in Jesus. Colossians 1:18 –

- “And he (Jesus) is the head of the body, **the** church...”

There is one church, **the** church, **the** body of Jesus. And Jesus is the head of that one universal (catholic) church. Those who have Jesus as their Lord and King are members of the one true universal (i.e. catholic) church of God – the body of Christ. This is a helpful line to remind us that faith is not about denominations. It’s about Jesus.

3. the communion of saints;

What does it mean to **believe** in the communion of Saints? Well, “communion” simply means “community”. The body of Christ is a community made up of many parts. Each of us is a part of His body. 1 Corinthians 12 –

- “The body is a unit though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body... “the eye cannot say to the hand ‘I don’t need you!’” (verses 12 and 21)

“Communion” or “Community” is not an **optional** part of the Christian life. We are made, created, to be in communion, in community.

We **believe** in the communion of saints. We believe we are one body.

4. the forgiveness of sins;

This one seems obvious, doesn’t it? We believe in the forgiveness of sins. But there were a group, in history, known as the “Gnostics”, who believed that it didn’t matter what you did in your body. Because eventually we’ll escape our flesh body. Some of the Corinthian church believed this. So Paul said, 1 Corinthians 6:19 –

- “Do you not know that your body is a temple the Holy Spirit?”

What we DO in our flesh matters! God made us **body and soul**. So when we sin, in our flesh, it affects our relationship with God and each other. And for that, we need forgiveness. When we say that we believe in the forgiveness of sins, we’re not **only** saying

that we believe Jesus **can** forgive us our sins. We’re also saying that we believe we **NEED** our sins forgiven – we believe forgiveness is necessary for our relationship with God. ***

5. the resurrection of the body,

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul speaks about this because there were some then, just like today, who believed that the physical resurrection was not important. Like the Gnostics and the Corinthians. But Paul says:

- “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith... for if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, you are still in your sins.” (1 Corinthians 15:14-17)

Death is the **punishment** for sin. So if Jesus can’t deal with death, he can’t deal with our punishment. If he can’t deal with our punishment, we’re still stuck in our sin!

If you get caught speeding in your car, your punishment is a speeding fine. If I can’t pay your speeding fine, I can’t help you. For Jesus to have power over our sin, he needs to have power to pay our fine – he needs to have power over death. Belief in the resurrection is belief that Jesus can pay our fine, our punishment, for sin.

So let me ask – what does all this mean for us today? What does the Apostle’s Creed mean for our faith?

- 2 things: To **preserve truth** and to **protect against false teaching**.

I’ve heard a Church Bishop say on national television that Atheists will certainly go to heaven. I’ve heard a minister say they didn’t believe the Bible was relevant for today’s society. I’ve heard a priest say he didn’t believe Jesus died for our sins.

- Creed on screen

There **is** false teaching in God’s church. When we say the creed together, we are saying “As part of God’s church, this is what I believe!” This is an affirmation of the Bible’s teaching on our core beliefs as Christians. And it’s a call to uphold the truth that God has taught us.

This puts the microscope on our faith. We say these words to remind each other of the truth. And to encourage each other as we take the next steps in our faith – that we are taking steps that are in line with God and his word. We say this creed to correct each other when it’s necessary. But most of all, these words impact our lives. When we say “I believe”, we’re saying – “**this is the truth by which I live.**” Every step of faith I take, is a step in **this** faith that I believe.