

The Apostle's Creed
An Introduction to the Creeds
By Brian Borgman

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Tuesday, May 23, 2000

Grace Community Church
2320 Heybourne Rd
Minden, NV 89423

Website: www.gracenevada.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/gracenevada

Well, let's pray together.

Eternal God and everlasting Father, we come to your once again tonight and we, Lord, we feel a sense of inadequacy in our own selves. Lord, we know that we have not been the men and women that we should be, that we have not pursued your truth as we should. And, Father, I pray that you would forgive us of our slothfulness and that you would remind us and stir us up afresh that it is your truth which is forever settled in heaven and is the most precious and glorious commodity that you have given to us. And so, Father, may our attitude be that of Proverbs 23:23 to buy truth and to sell it not. Father, may we love it and revel in it. Father, we ask for your help tonight. We pray that you would guide and direct our time of study together in Christ's holy name. Amen.

We are going to take a look at the Apostle's Creed, but I thought it might be helpful if I just give you a sort of a road map as to where we will be going in the weeks to come. We will be looking in detail next week at the Council at Nicea and then the Nicene Creed and also we will be looking at the Creed of Constantinople and then the Definition of Chalcedon. Both of those latter confessions or creeds end up being absolutely critical in our understanding of the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then we will look at the Council of Orange, probably a lesser known council, but the ramifications of the decisions made at the Council of Orange shapes Church history for the next 1000 years.

Then we will also look at the Athanasian Creed which probably should be a study in and of itself because of the wonderful way in which the triunity of God and the deity of Christ and the humanity of Christ are expressed.

And then we will take a look after the Athanasian Creed we will start looking at some of the confessions that came into being at the time of the Reformation: the Augsburg Confession, which is a Lutheran confession; Helvetic Confession, which is Swiss Reformed; and then we will take an interesting look at the counter reformation, the Catholic counter reformation.

Obviously during the time of the Reformation, Rome knew that things were falling apart. And so in their efforts to regroup they held the Council of Trent and it is often called the counter reformation.

And then we will look at the Thirty-Nine Articles which is the statement of faith for the Church of England and then we will take two whole sessions to look at what is called the Three Forms of Unity, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort, basically comprising the Dutch and German reformed perspectives.

Then we will take a look at the Westminster standards, the Savoy declaration and the Baptist confessions which I mentioned earlier. And then we will conclude with a cursory look at modern, 20th century creeds.

But tonight we are going to take a look at the Apostle's Creed. And, in fact, I gave you a handout that has the Apostle's Creed on it. There are two versions printed there for you. I would like to read to you the one on the right.

Many of us grew up saying this week after week and it still rings in our heads.

"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 the 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."

The Apostle's Creed is in a classification that is known as the ecumenical creeds. The ecumenical creeds would be primarily three, sometimes four: the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. Sometimes the Definition of Chalcedon is included, but by and large the reformed churches recognized the three ecumenical creeds often excluding the Definition of Chalcedon.

These creeds, these three are called ecumenical because they have been recognized by all three major branches of Christendom. They are recognized by the eastern church known as Greek Orthodox. They are recognized by the western church, that is the Roman Catholic Church. And they are recognized by the Evangelical Protestant Church. And, thus, they have received the ecumenical creeds.

Now, when we come to the Apostle's Creed we begin to see that in the early Church there arose a need for some kind of confession of faith and some way in which to instruct new believers. In fact, we see—even as we saw in the last lecture, this great question: Who is Jesus? Who do people say that I am? You are the Christ. You are the Son of the living God, a confession of faith.

What prevents me from being baptized? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Then you may be baptized.

All of the sudden as the gospel began to spread, the Church needed a way in which to be able to identify those who were truly converted to the Christian faith. And so the very simple question of: Who is Jesus? What do you believe about Jesus? Ended up being a very vital question for those who wanted to submit themselves to baptism.

In fact, Alistair McGrath in his interesting little book on the Apostle's Creed says, "A central part of the baptism celebration was the public declaration of faith by each candidate. Anyone who wished to be baptized had to declare publicly his or her faith in Jesus Christ. Historically, then, the creed was the profession of faith made by the converts at their baptism and it also formed the basis of their instruction."

The Apostle's Creed begins to emerge because they needed to answer the very fundamental question: What do Christians believe? What do I believe if I am a Christian?

And it is out of that need for a confession and a basis for instruction that we have the Apostle's Creed.

Interestingly enough, the Apostle's Creed is one of the very few creeds that come to us not out of controversy, but out of necessity in relationship to baptism and Church membership.

Now, we do need to say right away that the Apostle's Creed as not written by the apostles. There is a legend about the Apostle's Creed that was propagated around the 300 or 400s and then confirmed by pope Leo in the sixth century. And the legend goes like this.

On the day of Pentecost the apostles were in the upper room and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Simon Peter stepped forward and said, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth."

And then James stepped forward and said, "And I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord."

And then one of the other apostles stepped forward and said, "Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary."

And then all of the sudden you had forming right there before their very eyes the Apostle's Creed.

Well, it is clear historically that the apostles did not write the Apostle's Creed, but one thing that we do affirm about the Apostle's Creed is that it is thoroughly and completely

apostolic. It may not have been written by the apostles directly, but it certainly is a wonderful summation of the teaching of the apostles.

Philip Schaff says, “It is an admirable popular summary of the apostolic teaching and in full harmony with the spirit, even the letter of the New Testament.”

Now the Apostle’s Creed did not spring up over night even though the legend of how it came into being was propagated and many people believed it all the way up, really, into the Reformation. The Apostle’s Creed itself did not just spring into existence. It, in a sense, emerged from the life of the Church.

In fact, there are numerous what are called Ante-Nicene fathers—Ante-Nicene meaning before or prior to Nicea—who used what were called rules of faith or creeds. In fact, if you do have the book by Leif, *Creeds of the Churches*, there is a section on page 20 and following that deal with the rules of faith. And you will see how these rules of faith were utilized in the early Church.

But what is interesting is that starting with Irenaeus in about 180 AD you started to have these rules of faith. But perhaps the one that we will take a look at will be Tertullian who around 200 AD made this statement in one of his works.

“The rule of faith which is one everywhere and unalterable, teaches us to believe in one God almighty, creator of the world and his Son Jesus Christ, born from the virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised on the third day from the dead, taken up into heaven, now sitting on the Father’s right hand, destined to come to judge the living and the dead through the resurrection of the flesh.”

And, of course, it sounds very familiar or similar to the Apostle’s Creed itself. And yet actually it predates the Apostle’s Creed as we know it.

A fellow by the name of Marcellus in about 340 AD wrote a creed, a rule of faith in Greek which follows the very same pattern.

Ambrose in 380 also wrote a creed or used a creed. It is hard to tell whether some of these men wrote these themselves or actually used something that was actually in existence. But it is a fellow by the name of Rufinus who in 404 AD actually writes a commentary on what he calls the Apostle’s Creed.

And if you listen to Rufinus’ attempt at the creed it reads like this.

“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 he rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, sittith on 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 forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the flesh.”

And so what we end up seeing is that there is a similarity in all of these rules of faith that really show that a common creed was emerging in the early Church and that common creed would end up becoming known to us as the Apostle's Creed.

Now the creed comes to its final form after the Council at Nicea. In fact, the very fact of the matter that the creed is not mentioned at the Council at Nicea is evidence that it did not exist in any kind of fixed form until after Nicea which would have been 325 AD. But it was around the late fourth century that the creed began to take on a very fixed form.

Now there would be variations. In fact, if you heard the edition by Rufinus there were a few things that were vitally left out that made it much different like "he descended into hell," for instance.

But it was around the fourth century, late fourth century that it became fixed and there were variations, one of which I just mentioned. But in the eighth century, in the 700s it finally gained its place as the creed of Christianity.

Alistair McGrath notes that, "By the fourth century the Apostle's Creed as we now know it had assumed a more or less fixed form. What variations did exist were slight and these were finally eliminated in the 700s."

And so what we have in the Apostle's Creed itself is the emergence from the life of the Church, a concise summary of the apostle's teaching.

Now what I would like for us to do is I would like for us to consider what the Apostle's Creed actually teaches.

It begins with this statement. "I believe."

In fact, that ends up being an absolutely critical statement for us to understand the creeds. The early Church did not believe that to merely believe the creeds made you a believer, but it was being a believer that made you believe the creeds.

In other words, the creeds never precede faith, but always presuppose faith. And so when the creed begins, "I believe," it is making a statement of biblical faith. It is making a biblical credo that rests on the acknowledgement of objective, biblical truth.

"I believe...." And then the truth is set forth in systematic fashion.

But we need to understand that biblical faith is always more, but never less than the acknowledgment of objective biblical truth. In fact, it is never ever less. To be less is to be unorthodox. But it is always more. It is a whole souled response to the one who is revealed through that biblical truth.

One has said that faith is the response of our whole person to the person of God. It is our joyful reaction to the overwhelming love we see revealed in Jesus Christ. It is the simple response of leaving all to follow Jesus. Faith is both our recognition that something wonderful has happened through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and our response to what has happened.

And so when the creed begins, “I believe...” it is a statement of personal faith, personal faith, yes, in objective revealed truth, but more than that, personal faith that embraces the truth in such a way that one embraces the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are not talking here about a mere formal credalism which is dead and lifeless. We are talking, rather, about an “I believe,” of the creed that should reflect a personal, dynamic relationship with the one who is about to be confessed.

And, of course, that is always the concern that we have, is it not, that if we teach our children the creeds or if we teach our children the catechisms that they will just memorize these things by rote and they will be meaningless and lifeless and dead and won't have any power.

Well, the fact is that until a person has a new heart those truths will be dead and lifeless and powerless. But just think about what happens when you take the truths that are comprised in our creeds, catechisms and confessions and put them into the heads of our young people, of our children and hear it. Yes, it is just rote. They just know it. But then what happens when God opens their eyes and gives them a new heart. All of the sudden they now have a treasure house filled with truth that means everything to them.

And so it is not a waste of time to teach our children the creeds and the confessions and the catechisms because what it is is the raw material that the Spirit of God can use later on in their life to make it the living truth of almighty God.

So the Apostle's Creed begins with the, “I believe.”

But notice also the creed is very trinitarian. In fact, if you notice in the edition on the right which is a modern version it is, “I believe in God the father almighty.”

Next paragraph. “I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord.”

And then the final paragraph. “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

And so the very structure itself of the Apostle's Creed is trinitarian.

Although not nearly as explicit in its doctrine as the Nicene Creed or the Definition of Chalcedon, we must remember that the Apostle's Creed is not a response to heresy. It is a teaching tool for baptismal candidates and new converts.

Notice, “God the Father almighty, Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord and the Holy Spirit.”

We need to understand that when the early creeds do mention God the Father it is not speaking primarily about God as our Father, but God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because the line that follows about Christ is always in reference to his only Son our Lord.

Now what is going to happen in the subsequent history of the Church is that there will be a whole plethora of heresies that will revolve around two primary doctrines. One, the doctrine of the trinity, but usually, more focused, the doctrine of the person of Christ. And so what we have here in bare bones form, so to speak, will end up to be a challenged a number of times throughout the subsequent centuries. And that is why the Nicene Creed, for instance, ends up being about twice as long as the Apostle’s Creed because it needs to be more definitive as it talks about the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why the definition of Chalcedon almost focuses exclusively on the two natures of Christ. That is why the Athanasian Creed focuses on the trinitarian formulation of Christian orthodoxy.

But the next thing that the creed focuses on is what we call Christology. And notice what it teaches us about the Lord Jesus Christ. And what is interesting is if you look at almost all of the rule of faith of the early Church prior to Nicea, it is an expression of Jesus Christ, Christ being the designation for him as Messiah, our Lord, the Son of God our Lord and then always conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried.

Every one of these rules of faith that end up culminating in the Apostle’s Creed all focus on the virgin conception and birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. To them this was absolutely vital that it be made known that Christ was the virgin conceived, virgin born Son of God.

Now, critical scholars in the past have tried to say, “Well, that is... the whole issue in Christianity about the virgin birth is simply some kind of reduplication of the Greek mythologies and pagan religions that were around.”

And actually that is only a surface appearance, because the reality is that in the pagan religions there were no virgin conceptions and births because the gods came down and had physical intercourse with a virgin and therefore a god was conceived.

What is distinct about Christianity is that Jesus is conceived and born of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit apart from any physical act of intercourse.

This has been one of the long standing tenants of the Christian faith. If the Christian faith wanted to make it believable, if this was simply a concoction of the early Church, do you really think that they would have put this one in there for everybody to believe? It begins to become incredible, unbelievable which actually ends up supporting the very idea that it comes to us not from the imaginations of men, but from the truth of God.

It is interesting that if there is any doctrine that has been under attack for many, many decades now it is the virgin birth. And yet what are the bases of attack upon the virgin birth? Virgins don't give birth.

It is our anti supernatural biases that end up leading us to denying the virgin conception and virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Also the creed tells us. The next expression, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate."

Now what is interesting is in about 75 percent of these rules of faith Pontius Pilate is always mentioned. What is fascinating about that is that Pontius Pilate was really a nobody. He was a hard nosed dictatorial puppet ruler who didn't distinguish himself in history other than having the Son of God crucified.

And so why the insistence on Pontius Pilate? Because the early creeds, the early rules of faith wanted to convey to those converts who were coming into the Christian faith the fact that this faith is not from the imagination of men, but is rooted in history. And if you want to know how historical it is, we will tell you who Jesus suffered under, the rule Pontius Pilate who is in the annals of secular history.

But he suffered under Pontius Pilate.

In reality the entirety of the incarnation of our Lord was marked by suffering. In a sense his suffering climaxed under Pontius Pilate, culminating in the crucifixion.

His suffering, of course, leads to his death.

"Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried."

You have five little words.

"Was crucified, dead and buried."

And yet there are probably no more words in all of the world that would have more weight and significance than "And was crucified, dead and buried."

In his death by crucifixion as the substitute for his people, dead to dispel all myth that Jesus simply swooned or that the disciples hid him away or whatever the case may be. He was dead. And to prove that he was dead, he was buried.

And then you have after crucifixion death and burial then this expression that we will look at in a minute. "He descended into hell."

And then notice you have, "The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From thence he shall come to

judge the living and the dead.”

After Jesus’ death the creed tells us of the resurrection and then the exaltation of the Son of God. And, in fact, what is interesting is that if you notice in the preaching of the apostles in the book of Acts, it is not the death of Jesus that receives their foremost attention. It is the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus that receives the most attention. His resurrection and exaltation is predicated upon his death, but it is his resurrection and exaltation which now seats him at the right hand of the majesty on high from where he rules and reigns and is subduing his enemies under his feet.

That culminates in future judgment.

“He will come to judge the living and the dead.”

And so right there in a very compact and compressed manner we have a Christology that has all of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith pressed right in those very few words.

Now, there is also the statement, “I believe in the Holy Ghost.” And that is all they say.

It is going to later take the Creed of Constantinople and then later the Athanasian Creed to further define it. You understand, this was not an issue at that time.

Do you see how heresy begins to sharpen orthodoxy?

“I believe in the Holy Spirit.” And then we run into the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints. We will look at those, “The forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen.”

He goes from objective trinitarian truth about Father, Son and Holy Spirit now to the Church. Notice the role that the Church has in the Apostle’s Creed. In the early Church there was no such thing as lone ranger Christians. To become Christian was to become now a part of the Church, to be visibly associated with the gathering of God’s people. And so they believed in the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the personal appropriation of the work of Christ, the resurrection of the body which happens, of course, when the Lord Jesus returns and life everlasting.

Now, there are a few difficult statements. And in, fact, every time we read the Apostle’s Creed, we read the Apostle’s Creed at our annual business meeting. We read the Apostle’s Creed alternating between that and the Nicene at our Lord’s Supper services. Every time we read through the Apostle’s Creed I just cringe a little bit when we read, “I believe in the holy catholic Church,” because you know what everybody is thinking.

We are not Catholics. Why are we reading this? I thought we were Protestants. I thought you liked Luther. What’s the deal? Why are we reading, “I believe in the holy catholic

Church?”

Well, it does deserve a word of explanation. Notice, they believe the Church, first of all, is holy. That is, it was a set apart group of God’s people.

But when they say the word “catholic” it is not catholic, capital C, it is catholic small c, catholic in the sense of universal or general. The belief is in the universal body of Christ which is holy, sanctified and set apart. In other words, the creed itself is simply identifying the fact that it believes that the Church of Jesus Christ is a universal Church that is not relegated to Jerusalem or Constantinople or Rome, but rather it is a Church that is universal throughout the whole world.

And then this statement, the communion of saints. That statement is a reference to our relationship to Christ and our horizontal relationship with one another. The communion of saints focuses us first of all on our communion with Christ through faith by the power of God’s Spirit. But the early Church and, again, this is one of the major deficiencies that we have in our own day and that is churchless Christians. That should be an oxymoron. That should be a contradiction in terms. There is no such thing as a churchless Christian. And yet because of the way that we present the gospel, because of the way in which we have presented the Church, we have utterly neglected the concept of the communion of saints, the fact that once a person puts their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, they now have communion with Christ and communion with all others who have put their faith in Christ.

Now we get to the knotty—K N O T T Y—something naughty, the other spelling—section of the Apostle’s Creed.

“He descended into hell.”

Now, you might notice the two versions that you have in front of you, the one on the left the traditional version, “He descended into hell.” The one on the right, “He descended to the dead.”

The first thing we should recognize about this expression, “He descended into hell or the dead,” is that this expression is not found in any of the rules of faith or versions of the Apostle’s Creed prior to the fifth century. The second thing that we should notice is that the Apostle’s Creed comes to us in Latin and the expression is *descendit ad inferna*. That is, he descended to, literally, the lower world.

In the Latin Vulgate, Latin Jerome translated the Scriptures into Latin and continually he takes the word “sheol” or “hades” in the New Testament meaning the place of the dead and translates it with the word *inferna*. And so it is the lower world, the place of the dead. But it can also be a reference to the place where the lost are tormented. And so throughout the history of the Church there have been basically three attempts to interpret this very knotty little whine that I also cringe every time we... not because I don’t believe what it is saying, but because of the way in which it is open to misunderstanding.

The first attempt is that this is a statement, “He descended into hell,” about Jesus actually going to sheol to proclaim redemption to the saints. And that comes to us from 1 Peter chapter three, or at least the interpretation comes to us from 1 Peter chapter three verses 18 through 20.

Peter says:

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.¹

Now, you can see just from the reading of 1 Peter 3:18-20 that that in and of itself is a difficult text. Some have taken it to mean that after Jesus died, after he gave up his spirit on Calvary, that his spirit, his body went into the grave and his spirit went to sheol to preach the proclamation of the gospel to those who were in sheol and, in fact, proclaimed victory and redemption.

Now, this is the major text that this comes from. I don't actually buy it myself because I think that what the reference is that in verse 19 it says, “In which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison.”²

Verse 20 explains who they were. “Who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah.”³

And so somehow Peter construes that Jesus in the Spirit went and preached to the spirits who were now dead who were alive in the time of Noah. And that either happens by him descending into hell to make proclamation there or it happened by the Spirit of Christ through the preaching of Noah in the days of Noah.

Now, if you just turn back a couple of pages to 1 Peter chapter one we know that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. He himself was a prophet of God. We know that he preached for those 120 years. Notice 1 Peter 1:10.

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these

¹ 1 Peter 3:18-20.

² 1 Peter 3:19.

³ 1 Peter 3:20.

things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.⁴

It is on the basis of 1 Peter chapter one we can say that as Noah preached, he was preaching by the Spirit of Christ in him and therefore I don't think we need to take 1 Peter chapter 3:18-20 and speculate that Jesus went into hell. We can actually say that Jesus preached to the spirits who are now in prison—because they are all dead via the flood—by preaching through Noah to them through Noah's ministry.

So the second explanation is that this is simply an emphatic statement on the reality of Jesus' death. In other words, the modern version, "He descended to the dead," that is he actually went into the place where the dead go, that is, to the grave.

This is the position of Alistair McGrath. He says, "In other words, Jesus shared the fate of all those who have died. Again, we find the same point being stressed. Jesus really was human like us. His divinity does not compromise his humanity. Being God incarnate did not mean he was spared from tasting death. He did not merely seem to die. He really did die and joined those who had died before him."

Now, it is Calvin's criticism of this position that I think is very good. He says, "Here we have a very short, concise document, right? And so if the expression, 'He descended into hell or to the dead,' is merely an explanation of what has already been said, why would we take a concise document, explain something that is already clear with a statement which is very unclear?"

I think he is right. To say that Jesus descended to the place of the dead is already implied in that he died and was buried.

The third position is the position that I think is the correct one and that is that this, in and of itself, is a statement regarding the death of Christ's suffering on Golgotha.

The Heidelberg Catechism asks in question 44, "Why is there added, 'He descended into hell?'" Answer: "That in my greatest temptations I may be assured in holy comfort myself with this, that my Lord Jesus Christ by his inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors and hellish agony in which he was plunged during all his sufferings, but especially on the cross, has delivered me from the anguish and torment of hell."

In other words, the expression, "He descended into hell," is an expression of the depth of his suffering on Calvary, not making any statement about what happens to him after he is buried, but rather pointing us to his hellish agony that he suffers on our behalf on the cross.

Calvin concurs with this and argues strenuously against the mere grave position or the place of the dead. And he goes on to make this statement.

⁴ 1 Peter 1:10-12.

“If Christ had died only a bodily death it would have been ineffectual. No, it was expedient at the same time for him to undergo the severity of God’s judgment to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment. Those who, on the ground that it is absurd to put this after his burial what actually has preceded it say that the order is reversed and in this way they are making a very trifling and ridiculous objection. The point is that the creed sets forth what Christ suffered in the sight of men and the appositively speaks of that invisible and incomprehensible judgment which he underwent in the sight of God in order that we might know not only that Christ’s body was given as the price for our redemption, but that he paid a greater and more excellent price in his sufferings, in his soul with the terrible torment of a condemned and forsaken man. Therefore, by his wrestling hand to hand with the devil’s power, with the dread of death, with the pangs of hell, he was victorious and triumphed over them that in death we may now not fear those things which our prince has swallowed up.”

And so Calvin is saying that this statement, “Was crucified, dead and buried,” that is what man saw. That is the human perspective of what happens on Golgotha and it is the next expression that tells us the divine perspective of what happens on Golgotha. So when our Lord Jesus Christ cries out, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani... MY God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?”⁵ he was experiencing our hell in his suffering on Calvary on our behalf.

The Apostle’s Creed throughout the ages has had a tremendous influence. In fact, Philip Schaff says, “As the Lord’s Prayer is the prayer of prayers and the Decalogue the law of laws, so the Apostle’s Creed is the creed of creeds. It is by far the best popular summary of Christian faith every made within so brief a space.”

In the traditional version there are about 104 words and, perhaps, no 104 words have ever had more effect and influence on the people of God than these 104 words. In fact, you can go through the scope of Church history and you find that Augustine expounded the Apostle’s Creed in his classic work *The Enchiridion* on faith, hope and love. Luther used the Apostle’s Creed as the foundation of his small catechism. The Heidelberg Catechism expounds the Lord’s Prayer, the 10 Commandment and the Apostle’s Creed. Calvin expounded the Apostle’s Creed in his classic *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. And, in fact, the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms are structured around the creed itself along with the 10 Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer.

And so how should we use the Apostle’s Creed today?

Well, first of all, it is a helpful guide for giving us the fundamentals of our faith.

Now there is much more to our faith than what the creed expresses. But it does in Calvin’s words “sum up in a few words the main points of our redemption.”

⁵ Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.

We should use it as a helpful guide for instructing us in the foundational truths, but we should also use it as a common confession. I believe that it is appropriate and it is right for the people of God to with one voice confess their faith together.

Do you understand that from the earliest times the people of God have corporately confessed their faith together through a common confession? There is something that is wonderfully powerful about standing with other believers and reciting, "I believe in God the Father almighty."

C E B Cranfield says, "It would also be help giving for those churches in which the creed is seldom if ever used to discover the thrill and inspiration of confessing together our common faith in a formula that binds us to our fellow Christians across denominational and national boundaries and across the centuries.

As we stand and confess the creed together, we not only are making common confession of what we believe as the people of God, but we are, as it were, linking our arms by faith with all of the generations of the faithful who have gone before us.

There is a hymn that we sing in our church, "The God of Abraham Praise." And the last stanza says, "Hail Abraham's God and mine."

When we stand and confess a common creed we are linking arms with those who have been men and women of faith throughout the centuries and we are saying, "Hail Abraham's God and mine. Hail Moses' God and mine. Hail David's God and mine. Hail the apostle's God and mine. Hail Augustine's God and mine. Hail Calvin and Luther and Zwingli's God and mine."

It links us with the past, with the saint who are already perfected in heaven.

Let us pray.

Father, I pray that you would impress upon us the power of what it means to say "I believe." And, Father, I ask that these precious old document would become more and more valuable to our heart with each passing day. Father, we thank you for the men and the women who have confessed the faith using these very words and then have had to lay down their lives for the faith which they have confessed. Remind us, Father, that it is no slight thing to link arms with generations who have gone before and to confess, "I believe." In Christ's holy name. Amen.