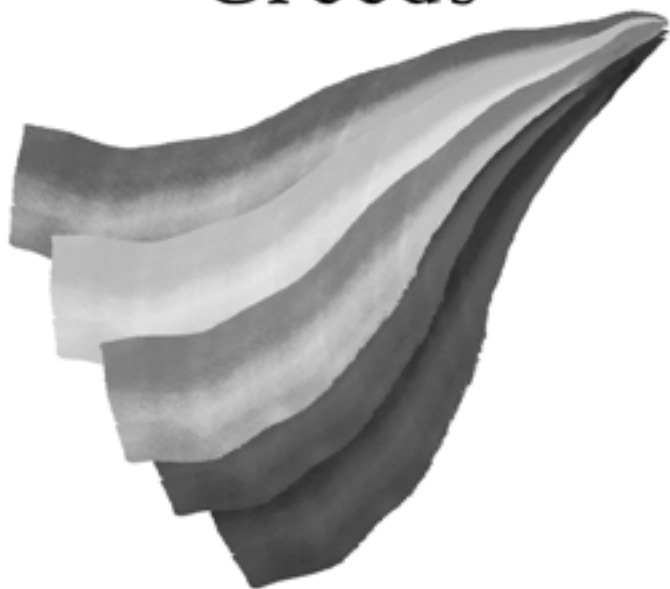


QUICK THEOLOGY

# Five Christian Creeds



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Published by Every Woman a Theologian LLC

Cover design by Eric Novak.

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Printed in the United States of America.





## Introduction

Christian creeds, or statements of faith, have been passed down throughout history to Christians today. If you grew up in a liturgical church environment you might be familiar with creeds (when I say liturgical, I mean Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox, and some Methodist and Presbyterian denominations). Reciting creeds or statements of faith that have been passed down through history from the early church is a typical liturgical church tradition. Churches that are more evangelical—or that do not adhere to some of the traditions we see among our liturgical brothers—may not be as accustomed to hearing these creeds recited. However, most of us are at least a little familiar with them, whether from attending a religious high school, reading theological books, or from simply studying the Bible, because everything in these creeds is taken from Scripture.

What is a creed? Let's just start there.

A creed is a distinctive mark of Christians. It is called a creed because it is an accurate summary of the apostles' faith. In reciting creeds, we are looking at the early church and asking, "What did the church that Jesus founded believe about God, Jesus, the Trinity, salvation, and themselves?" A creed sums up those beliefs for us. Historically, creeds were used in worship and also to teach new converts, essentially saying to them, "You are building your life around this. This is what you are saying you will give your allegiance to." In a way a creed is almost like a pledge of allegiance to Christ.

In America, we have something called the Pledge of Allegiance. It is basically a patriotic statement that says, "I give my allegiance to my country that I love." This allegiance is obviously a patriotic one, not just a spiritual one. For a Christian, a creed is kind of like that. It is similar to a pledge of allegiance, describing what we believe and who we have built our life on—Jesus Christ.

In this book, we are going to look at five Christian creeds. There are more than just these five, but these are some of the most common ones.





## The Apostles' Creed

I am going to start with the most well-known creed of all: The Apostles' Creed.

This creed is believed to have been based on an earlier statement called The Old Roman Symbol. Over time it was developed into what we now call the Apostles' Creed. It was finalized, some say, in the fifth century, but it might have originated even earlier than that, as it is believed to predate the Nicene Creed, which we will look at next. The Nicene Creed came along in AD 391, so if the Apostles' Creed existed before that it was likely developed in the 200s or 300s. The Nicene Creed was very explicit about the Trinity, and we will discuss why that is in the next section, but the Apostles' Creed was fairly general, allowing it to serve as a unifying creed across almost all denominations. The Apostles' Creed is used in Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational

churches as well as Evangelical churches. It is not used in the Orthodox Church (Greek and Russian Orthodox churches use the Nicene Creed).

Some claim that each tenet—or statement—of the Apostles' Creed was contributed by a specific apostle. This is very unlikely because of the timeframe in which it was likely compiled. However, it was based on the teachings of the apostles as expressed in the New Testament and the gospels. The Apostles' Creed was likely used as a confession of faith prior to baptism or as a part of a discipleship process before someone was baptized into the church. If you have listened to our episode or read our book on baptism, you will know that baptism was often used as the pathway—or the first step—to church membership. So, this confession of the creed would come before that baptism into church membership as the believer would confess, "I believe these things" before they were baptized as a member of the body of Christ.

The creed is also included in some martyrdom accounts. If you have ever read *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* you will recognize in some of these martyrdom accounts that Christians affirmed the creed as well. The Apostles' Creed is our baseline for orthodoxy, or sound teaching (this is different than the Greek and Russian Orthodox



Church). The term 'orthodoxy' simply means that which is the core of Christianity, or that which must be held to in order to call oneself a true believer and follower of Jesus Christ. I love the definition of orthodoxy by G.K. Chesterton, who said, "The creeds and the historic conduct of those who held such a creed are what qualifies someone to be called a Christian." Essentially they are what qualifies someone to be within sound teaching. I think that definition is excellent, because it is affirmed throughout those first 100-300 years of the early church, and should continue to be affirmed today.

So, the Apostles' Creed is our baseline for orthodoxy. It reads as follows:

"I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God, the Father almighty. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe