

LIBELLE



I BELIEVE

## **I BELIEVE**

David Holcomb

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# INTRODUCTION

In 1529, following visits to several churches throughout Germany, Martin Luther wrote what would come to be known as *Luther's Little Instruction Book* (or *The Small Catechism*). It is perhaps one of his most influential works—read by generations—and used by many today.

Luther had observed that while the “Protestant” gospel (one emphasizing God’s Word as the ultimate source of authority and guidance), had been preached for over ten years, there was still great confusion and “shameful neglect” regarding biblical teaching, in both the church and the home. His brief guide was intended to fill the gap in the deficiency of basic, essential Christian doctrine, and provide a template for instruction to church leaders and parents.

To address these concerns, Luther emphasized three historical Christian texts: The Lord’s Prayer, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Ten Commandments. He was adamant that believers should know, memorize, and—most importantly—genuinely comprehend the significance of these three statements of faith in order to learn, love, and live out God’s Word.

In the preface to his catechism, Luther makes clear the parents’ responsibility for educating children in Scripture, yet strongly condemns leaders who have failed to prioritize doctrine in discipleship. He writes:

You withhold the cup in the Lord’s Supper  
and insist on the observance of human laws,

yet you do not take the slightest interest in teaching the people the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, or a single part of the Word of God. Woe to you forever!

At River Oaks, we are especially grateful to be part of a local body that embraces biblical teaching and is passionate about knowing and loving God through His Word. The opportunity to grow alongside each of you in understanding and application is a true blessing. Against this charge from Martin Luther, we reflect on our own churchwide teachings of the past year. In the “Life of Moses,” we gained perspective on the Exodus with an opportunity to study the Ten Commandments. Then, a series set at the feet of Jesus through the Sermon on the Mount provided an overview of the Lord's Prayer. And now, for ten weeks this fall, we will devote our time to the Scriptural fundamentals of the Apostles' Creed with a series titled *I Believe*, a study for which we have identified four primary objectives.

1. To learn the Apostles' Creed. Yes, we certainly want to learn the words; but—more importantly—we want to learn how the Apostles' Creed underscores the essential doctrines of our faith that define the minimum beliefs of Christianity. Let it remind us that knowing (heart and head knowledge) the core claims of our faith is an important matter. As expressed by Keith Drury: “Every Christian ought to believe more than what is stated in the Apostles' Creed; however, no Christian should believe less—they are the minimum beliefs for which all Christians agree.”<sup>2</sup> We want to know what we believe.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Noll, *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 2004), 62.

<sup>2</sup> Keith Drury, *Common Ground: What All Christians Believe and Why It Matters* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House), 14.



2. To apply the Apostles' Creed. When we know the essentials of what we believe, and can express them confidently to others, we can then apply the Creed to our daily life. For example, the Creed helps us define the doctrinal points that truly matter. There is far too much disagreement among faith traditions and denominations over non-creedal points, and we need to be more generous and gracious in those matters. However, those who reject the doctrines of the Creed, yet profess Christian faith, are promoting heresy. The Creed helps us define sound doctrine. Likewise, the Creed can help unite us, transform our outlook and our worship, and remind us that we are locking arms with believers everywhere from all times and all places.
3. To equip us with the “foundations of our faith.” The three statements of faith, referenced by Luther, have often been referred to as the “foundations of our faith.” Winfield Bevins, pastor at Church of the Outer Banks, has spoken to them in a way that truly resonates. He says that the church has historically regarded them as the Ethical Foundation (Ten Commandments), the Spiritual Foundation (The Lord's Prayer), and the Doctrinal Foundation (The Apostles' Creed).<sup>3</sup> Throughout the study guide and sermon series, an intentional effort has been made to encourage us in reflection and discussion on these foundations.
4. To introduce church history. When we study and recite the Apostles' Creed, we are reminded of what Christians have always believed, and we avoid cutting ourselves off from two thousand years of orthodox Christianity.<sup>4</sup> This idea, coupled with the timing of October 31, 2017 (the

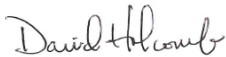
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<sup>3</sup> Winfield Bevins, *Creed: Connect to the Basic Essentials of Historic Christian Faith* (USA & Canada: NavPress, 2012), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Drury, *Common Ground*, 17.

five-hundred-year anniversary of Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* posting, and—in essence—the start of church reformation), has encouraged us to include brief “Profiles in Christian History” with each unit. In most cases, the attempt has been made to connect the individual(s) with the specific Creed emphasis for the week, which hopefully heightens the insight and interest of the essential doctrine.

For some of us, the Apostles' Creed is a familiar element of our past and present worship. For others, there has been little-to-no exposure at all to the Creed. Wherever you might find yourself along that continuum, we are excited to search God's Word along with you, seek what He has in store for us as a congregation—as families and individuals—and reestablish with one another to the world around us those life-transforming truths that we believe.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Holcomb".

David Holcomb  
Minister of Discipleship,  
River Oaks Community Church

# KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Before we begin Week One of *I Believe*, it might be helpful to review a few of the background details to the Apostles' Creed.

First, it's important to note that when he issued his *Little Instruction Book*, Martin Luther was not developing a new framework for engaging with God's Word, nor was he creating new instructions for living a faithful life as a maturing disciple in Christ. From the earliest church records we find that a high priority has always been placed on the Commandments (ethical foundation), the Lord's Prayer (spiritual foundation), and the Apostles' Creed (doctrinal foundation).

Specific to the Apostles' Creed, one example comes from Cyril's *Catechesis* of the mid-fourth century, where the Creed was instrumental to the sacraments of the church. Cyril, the Bishop of Jerusalem, writing on how the church should introduce baptismal candidates to the Creed, states, "I want you to memorize it word for word, and to recite it very carefully among yourselves. Inscribe it in your memories and in your hearts." (Cyril's *Catechesis* 5.12).<sup>5</sup>

As to the origin of the Apostles' Creed, the earliest records indicate that it likely emerged from the church in Rome in the mid-to-late second century (ca. AD 175). Known as "the Old Roman Creed," the earliest written form is found in a letter to the bishop of Rome in AD 341. It is first referred to as the Apostles' Creed in a late fourth-century letter written in Latin

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<sup>5</sup> Edward S. J. Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem* (USA & Canada: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2000), 38.

by Ambrose. Interestingly, the English word, “creed,” comes from the Latin, *credo*, meaning, “I believe.”

The precise wording of the Apostles’ Creed developed over several centuries, with the present form finalized circa AD 700. However, the early Roman Creed was extremely similar to its final form. In fact, as evidence to the consistency of thought, fragments dating back even earlier than the Old Roman Creed (circa AD 125) declare simply: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord. And in the Holy Spirit, the holy Church, the resurrection of the flesh.”<sup>6</sup>

From its inception through the Middle Ages, the Apostles’ Creed was primarily used as a declaration of faith at baptism, in most cases recited by the candidate immediately after coming out of the baptismal. Because it was a teaching tool, catechism candidates used the Creed as a learning aid, or supplement, to Scripture. Today, some faith traditions continue to utilize the Creed for catechism classes and baptism. Many, however, use it as a congregational declaration of faith.

It should also be noted that what was true of Cyril and Luther, and for the many who have come before and after, the spirit for which believers learn and proclaim the Creed is not that of mindless repetition or puffed-up knowledge. The true intention of these statements is the profession of core beliefs. In fact, that’s why the creeds of the church are often referred to as confessions; we confess our core beliefs to one another and to the world.

Finally, the Apostles’ Creed is never a substitute for God’s Word; yet the Apostles’ Creed is biblical. We will see this

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<sup>6</sup> Walter L. Ellwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001) 87.

unfold each week as we find specific passages and verses that have comprised the creedal statements. And if there is any uncertainty as to the early origins in this matter, we refer back to our brother Cyril, who wrote the following in his explanation of Christian teaching and the use of creeds:

Let us not presume to speak of what is not in Scripture ... but just as a mustard seed contains a great number of branches in its tiny grain, so also these summaries of faith bring together in a few words the entire knowledge of what is written in the Testaments.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Yarnold, *Cyril*, 56.



# THE APOSTLES' CREED



I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
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,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of the saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.





# WHAT WE BELIEVE MATTERS



## 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

According to Thomas Oden, contemporary author and theologian, “to say ‘I believe,’ is to speak from the heart, to reveal who one is by confessing one’s essential belief, the faith that makes life worth living.”<sup>8</sup> (Interestingly, Mr. Oden was a highly-regarded expert on the early church, its leaders, practices and creeds. It’s been noted that his study in this area led to a surprising mid-life shift from “liberal Protestantism to biblical Christianity.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, the Apostles’ Creed spoke Scripture to Oden in ways that cultural relevance did not.)

What we believe matters, and what we profess to believe should reveal our heart’s true testimony. In considering the unifying power of the Apostles’ Creed, we should begin with an understanding of why these core beliefs are important to our faith and to Christ’s church. Yet, we should also note that Paul instructs the Corinthian believers to be united in the same “mind and judgment,” implying there is a right and wrong mind and judgment.

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<sup>8</sup> Michael F. Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 40.

<sup>9</sup> Kate Shellnut, “Fairness for All: Evangelicals Explore Truce on LGBT and Religious Rights,” *Christianity Today*, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/december-web-only/fairness-for-all-evangelicals>.

*As you meditate on this week's Scripture passage, speaking to unity and doctrinal priorities, ask yourself these three questions and record your thoughts:*



- What does the Scripture say? (or, “just the facts”)
- What does the Scripture mean? (or, the “so what!”)
- What is the personal application that I can take from this Scripture and apply in the week ahead? (or, the “personal application.”)

*For the following study questions, consider the EPC (Evangelical Presbyterian Church) motto:*



**IN ESSENTIALS, UNITY;  
IN NON-ESSENTIALS, LIBERTY;  
IN ALL THINGS, CHARITY**

1. Why does it matter that followers of Jesus agree on the “essential” truths of our faith? Could you name some essentials if you were asked, “What do you believe?”
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why do you believe Christians tend to disagree and divide over non-essential doctrines? Have you personally experienced a relationship that has been broken due to non-essential disagreements?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Do you find evidence in 1 Corinthians 1:17 regarding the priorities of our faith? Without denying the importance of a non-essential idea, does there seem to be room for grace regarding the theological or interpretational differences in non-essentials?

4. Were you aware of the EPC motto? Does it resonate with you, or does it make you feel uneasy? Why?

5. The essentials spoken of in the EPC motto and the Apostles' Creed speak to one's salvation through Christ and the true understanding of who God is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. With this understanding, are there non-essential doctrines that you have attempted to make a matter of salvation? Potential areas might be: modes of baptism, practices of communion, speaking in tongues, theories of atonement, or others. In this light, how might you view essentials and non-essentials with other believers? Across denominations or faith traditions?

# LEARN - KNOW - SHARE

*We can all learn, know, and share these declarations of our faith. Take time to memorize a few lines each week and reflect on them daily.*

## **THE APOSTLES CREED** *(our doctrinal foundation)*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER** *(our spiritual foundation)*

*(Matthew 6:9b-13 NKJV)*

**Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.**

## **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS** *(our ethical foundation)*

*(See Exodus 20:3-17)*

**1. You shall have no other gods before me.**

## PROFILES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

St. Augustine, the Roman North African Bishop of Hippo (present-day Algeria), is the most influential early theologian of Western Christianity. Though not always perfectly aligned, Augustinian doctrines of sin, grace, and man's relationship with God are often cited as support for the traditions that we are most familiar with at River Oaks—that of reformed theology and evangelicalism.

ST. AUGUSTINE  
OF HIPPO  
(AD 354-430)



A master rhetorician, Augustine coined many phrases in his writing that may be familiar to you, including: “Thou has made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” (also known

as the “God-shaped hole” in every person); “...With love for mankind and hatred of sins,” (eventually translated to, “Love the sinner and hate the sin.”); and—with a nod to our aforementioned EPC motto—it was Augustine who wrote, “Unity in things necessary, liberty in things doubtful, charity in all things.”

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

Augustine's most famous works include *City of God* (a classic in Christian literature), *Confessions* (an auto-biography), and *On Christian Doctrine* (a treatise on Scripture and preaching). A recommended reading for more on Augustine is *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, by Peter Brown.

## UNIT 2

# GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY



Ephesians 3:14-21; Psalm 121

When we approach the Apostles' Creed with intentionality, as opposed to rote memorization and response, we discover the power and significance that has been assigned to each word of the Creed. In this seemingly simple opening sentence of the Creed ("I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"), the architects of the Creed have given us an abundance of Scriptural truth.

This initial proclamation confesses that we believe in one true, living God; not simply that we believe a god exists, but that we believe "in" our God and trust Him fully. We declare that He is "Father," making an early statement regarding the Trinitarian (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) aspects of His character. By "Father," we are also declaring that He is a relational God, one more interested in fallen man for having broken relationship with Him than having simply violated His law. As "Father," He is provider and sustainer of all life.

Further, we confess our belief in God as almighty, most powerful. He created all out of nothing. This should remind us that the entirety of this world is His and we are to treat His creation (humanity, living creatures, His earth) in ways that acknowledge this truth.

*As you meditate on this week's Scripture passage, speaking to God the Father and His almighty reign over creation, ask yourself these three questions and record your thoughts:*



- What does the Scripture say?
- What does the Scripture mean?
- What is the personal application that I can take from this Scripture and apply in the week ahead?





4. If we believe “in” God, and not simply believe there “is a” god, how might we view Psalm 121 relative to trusting the God we proclaim belief in? Are there currently areas of your life in which you need to be reassured of belief “in” God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. By beginning with, “God, the Father almighty, creator,” we establish a biblical narrative in our creed that moves us from Genesis to Revelation. More importantly, we ground our understanding in the character of God as the beginning of the Gospel message. What attributes of God’s character do you readily proclaim and identify with? What attributes of God are difficult for you to grasp and understand? You might consider that God is holy, omniscient, loving, eternal, ever-present, just, and more.

# LEARN - KNOW - SHARE

*We can all learn, know, and share these declarations of our faith. Take time to memorize a few lines each week and reflect on them daily.*

## **THE APOSTLES CREED** *(our doctrinal foundation)*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER** *(our spiritual foundation)*

(Matthew 6:9b-13 NKJV)

**Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.**

## **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS** *(our ethical foundation)*

(See Exodus 20:3-17)

- 1. You shall have no other gods before me.**
- 2. You shall make no idols.**

## PROFILES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

John Wycliffe and William Tyndale, English-born scholars and theologians, are perhaps two of the most instrumental Bible translators in Christian history.



**JOHN  
WYCLIFFE**  
(AD 1330-1384)

Wycliffe is often referred to as the “Morning Star of the Reformation” because he was one of the earliest to call for a reformed church—a church with greater access to God’s Word. Wycliffe understood that for believers to better

know, love, and obey God, it was necessary for them to read the Bible. The official position of the church, Wycliffe had observed, not only restricted access to printed Bibles, but also restricted its translation to Latin, a language known only by the elites and scholars of this time.

Wycliffe began the laborious task of translating the Latin Vulgate into English. He did not complete it before his death, but his followers—referred to as the Lollards—completed final copies by 1395. Wycliffe also had great influence over one of his Czechoslovakian students, Jan Hus of Prague, who would seek reform in the early 1400s, carrying forward the call for change.

While Wycliffe’s translation was the first complete English Bible, it was William Tyndale’s translation of 1525 that is considered the most accurate and widely distributed of early Bibles. The difference was Tyndale’s mastery of Greek and Hebrew, which allowed him to translate from the original languages. Additionally, with the invention of the printing press (1440—Gutenberg), Bibles were printed in mass in continental Europe and smuggled into England. Tyndale was subverting the authority of both the Roman Catholic Church and the King of England’s rule at this time. When Christians

in England received the Scripture, they would secretly meet in the early morning hours to read God's Word for the very first time!

Because of his passion for God's Word, William Tyndale was captured in the Netherlands and burned at the stake in 1536. According to historian John Foxe, His final words were, "Lord, open the King



WILLIAM  
TYNDALE  
(AD 1494-1536)

of England's eyes!" Interestingly, when the King James Authorized Version of the Bible was developed in 1611, translation discussions favored William Tyndale's version eight of ten times.

#### FOR FURTHER STUDY

John D. Long's *The Bible in English: John Wycliffe and William Tyndale* is a wonderful overview of how Scripture was translated from the Septuagint and Vulgate to English.



### UNIT 3

# JESUS CHRIST, OUR LORD



Luke 1:26-38, John 3:16, Philippians 2:5-11

This second section of the Creed is a linchpin for Christian theology. It's here that Christianity differs from other monotheistic religions (Islam, Judaism), who also claim an almighty, creator god. It's here we proclaim that Jesus was more than a very good man; we proclaim that He is God, the second person of the Trinity. In making this declaration, consider what else the Creed summarizes in this statement of Jesus.

First, He is “the Christ.” Often, we mistake “Christ” as Jesus’ surname, but it’s His title, meaning the “anointed one, messiah.” He is the One, spoken of by the prophets, who has fulfilled the covenant that God made with ancient Israel to bless all nations.

He is also God’s only Son, the One who was in the beginning, and He now lives in relation to Father and Spirit as God. There is no other who fulfills the role of John 3:16, except for Him, God’s only Son, Jesus the Christ.

Further, He is our Lord. One way to consider creeds and confessions might be to think of Romans 10:9 as the very first creed. In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes, “Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord ...” In the Apostles’ Creed, we are reaffirming our initial confession that we do believe that Jesus is Lord (of our lives, of His church, of this world).

Finally, we proclaim that God, as Holy Spirit, was present at Jesus' conception; thus, He is 100 percent divine. We also proclaim Jesus is born of the Virgin Mary; thus, He is 100 percent man. God in human flesh—a great mystery of the incarnation that points us to the plan that a sinless Jesus might save a people who are unable to save themselves.



*As you meditate on this week's Scripture passage, speaking to the birth, mission, and lordship of Jesus, ask yourself these three questions and record your thoughts:*



- What does the Scripture say?
- What does the Scripture mean?
- What is the personal application that I can take from this Scripture and apply in the week ahead?

*For the following study questions, consider this section of the Apostles' Creed:*



**“I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary ...”**

1. What significance is there in knowing that Jesus is “the Christ” (the Anointed or Chosen One?) Can He ever be “demoted” to simply a good man, prophet, or teacher? Do you ever forget that “Christ” refers to His recognition as Messiah?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why was it important that Jesus be born of a virgin?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. According to Philippians 2:5-11, what was involved in Jesus’ becoming human?

4. All three Persons of the Trinity were involved in God's coming down to man. How? What are some reasons that this is important? Where else in Scripture might we see all three Persons present?

5. Paul says to "have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." Then he goes on to list the various attributes we see in Jesus' humanity. "This mind" refers to the previous verses, Philippians 2:1-4, where Paul instructs believers to demonstrate love, humility, and selflessness. By proclaiming Jesus as Lord on a regular basis, are you better able to "have this mind"? In what areas of this instruction would you want to be more consistent? How will you go about this?

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## THE APOSTLES CREED *(our doctrinal foundation)*

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,

## THE LORD'S PRAYER *(our spiritual foundation)*

(Matthew 6:9b-13 NKJV)

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS *(our ethical foundation)*

(See Exodus 20:3-17)

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall make no idols.
3. You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.

## PROFILES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

At a time in history when the heresy of Arianism was threatening the core beliefs of Christianity, a deacon—and later bishop—of Alexandria, by the name of Athanasius became the theological voice of his era.

In short, Arius, a North African priest, professed that Jesus was less than God. Famously, the Arians believed that “there was once when he was not,” meaning that Jesus was a created divine and did not exist eternally. Because of this, they taught what amounted to a polytheistic version of Christianity, where Jesus the Son was a lesser god, and thus denied the full divinity of Jesus.

**ATHANASIUS**  
(AD 296-373)



Athanasius stood up to the Arians at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) with an uncompromising scriptural defense of “one God,” in which Jesus, the Word, had been with God and was

God in the beginning. Athanasius added to this his understanding of redemption—or salvation—in that only God himself could save fallen humanity, insisting this required the Savior to be fully God.

From Nicaea, in large part due to Athanasius, would come the Nicæan Creed, a more theological creed purposed to proclaim the Person of Jesus as fully God, and to further define the Holy Spirit. The council was nearly unanimous in its condemnation and expulsion of the heretic Arius. However, many believe that, had it not been for Athanasius’ passion for maintaining the essential beliefs of Christianity, at this critical moment in church history, the church could likely have fallen into the hands of Arians.

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

A recommended reading is *Eagle in Flight: The Life of Athanasius, the Apostle of the Trinity*, by Allienne R. Becker. There are limited works on Athanasius, but this historical writing, presented much like an autobiographical novel, is by far the most enjoyable.

## UNIT 4

# JESUS CHRIST, THE SUFFERING SERVANT



Matthew 27:11-61

Keith Drury, author of *Common Ground*, points out that:

The Apostles' Creed leaps from God's incarnation to the death of Jesus. We are swept from the happy story of a baby's birth to the painful story of a man's suffering. We move from Christmas to Good Friday in just a few words.<sup>10</sup>

Because of this quick succession of events, we might ask why the Creed leaves out the teachings and stories of Jesus? Though we can't presume to fully understand why it was crafted in this manner, we can be mindful that the Creed was never intended to replace the Bible; rather, it serves to underscore the most critical, most essential, most vital biblical doctrines.

We can also know that without the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the teachings and stories are nothing more than great ethical lessons from a first-century rabbi.

In this stanza, we notice the inclusion of Pontius Pilate, a reference to a chronicled event, fixed in time, enacted upon Jesus by a historically-recognized figure. The cross was

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<sup>10</sup> Drury, *Common Ground*, 76.

an actual event, fresh on the minds of these early-century believers. Through the Creed, we move back through history to confess our belief in the historical life, death, and burial of Jesus.

Finally, in early manuscripts, where the Creed states, “He descended to the dead,” the word translated, “hell” was initially used in lieu of “the dead.” The key to understanding this statement is to know that the word for hell was taken from the Hebrew Old Testament word *sheol* (or “grave”) and the Greek word *hades* (the equivalent of *sheol*). Thus, the original meaning indicated only this: that Jesus descended to the place of the dead and that He experienced death fully and completely. To early believers, this was the idea of the Creed’s use of “hell.” However, later in history, “hell” came to be associated with the New Testament word *gehenna*, thought to be the place of smoldering fire and brimstone, named after the smoking trash dump outside of Jerusalem.

Bottom line: most translations today use “dead” to retain the original intent, without the confusion of the original wording.”

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<sup>11</sup> Drury, *Common Ground*, 82.



*As you meditate on this week's Scripture passage, speaking to the trial, crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus, ask yourself these three questions and record your thoughts:*



- What does the Scripture say?
- What does the Scripture mean?
- What is the personal application that I can take from this Scripture and apply in the week ahead?

*For the following study questions, consider this section of the Apostle's Creed:*



**“... suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.”**

1. Why would the Apostles' Creed recognize that Jesus suffered “under Pontius Pilate?” What might this say to our trusting in human governments? What is the significance of Pilate washing his hands and saying he was innocent of Jesus' blood?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why did Jesus have to die? Or, what was the purpose of Jesus' death? How might Matthew 27:51 help to explain this purpose?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Was it necessary for Jesus to die by crucifixion? (See Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.)

4. What is the significance to proclaiming that Jesus “died and was buried”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. In Matthew 12:40, Jesus says, “As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Does that help in understanding Jesus’ “descending to the dead”? Jesus shared in the same consequences of death that you and I do—physical, soul-separating death. Hebrews 2:9 describes it as His tasting death for everyone. What are your reflections on this section of the Creed?

# LEARN - KNOW - SHARE

*We can all learn, know, and share these declarations of our faith. Take time to memorize a few lines each week and reflect on them daily.*

## **THE APOSTLES CREED** *(our doctrinal foundation)*

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
**suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.**

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER** *(our spiritual foundation)*

(Matthew 6:9b-13 NKJV)

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
**On earth as it is in heaven.**

## **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS** *(our ethical foundation)*

(See Exodus 20:3-17)

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall make no idols.
3. You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.
4. **Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.**

## PROFILES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

In a 1505 thunderstorm, the twenty-two-year-old Martin Luther was dropped to the ground and faced head-on a religious crisis



MARTIN LUTHER  
(AD 1483-1546)

in his life. The young German law student made a vow to God that, should he survive, he would become more devoted to Him. And he did. Once safe, Luther transitioned from a student of law to an Augustinian monk. The rest is history.

Martin Luther is best known as a leader of the German Reformation. He remains an influential theologian among many Christians today, some five hundred years since he ignited the Reformation movement.

Luther fought intense spiritual struggles in the monastery as he sought to work out his salvation through adherence to rules and continuous confession. He would later discover great liberty from God's Word on the matter of salvation. Most notably, in what Luther refers to as his "tower experience," he made a major breakthrough in the understanding of justification—or God's grace and our faith (a view much in line with Augustine's understanding of God's initiative and the sinner's cooperation).

In addition to his differences in doctrinal interpretation with the church in Rome, Luther was further dismayed at the worldliness and religious indifference that he observed in church leaders with his visit to Rome in 1511. The final straw in the eventual demand for church reform occurred in his protesting the major abuse in the sale of indulgences for the construction of St. Peter's Basilica. (Note: Indulgences were a perfect example of the corruption in the church during the reign of Pope Leo X. Traveling monks would go

through the villages and towns selling forgiveness of sins. Germans were offended, and Luther had seen enough).

On October 31, 1517, Luther distributed his *Ninety-Five Theses*, or ninety-five questions and propositions, for debate over the use of indulgences. It should be noted that the posting of these “debate invitations” was common. It should also be stated that Luther never intended, nor desired, the splitting of the church. His mission was reform, which many within the Roman Catholic Church readily admitted was necessary. The church had lost her way through the Middle Ages, mostly as a result of temporal power and greed. Ultimately, reform was not achieved and the Protestant Reformation (protest for reform) officially began.

#### FOR FURTHER STUDY

Luther’s most famous works include *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, *Table Talk / Divine Discourses* (a collection of informal conversations Luther shared with his students), and the *Large and Small Catechisms*. A recommended reading for more on Martin Luther is Roland H. Bainton’s *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*.

# JESUS CHRIST, THE VICTOR



1 Corinthians 15:1-28

Having just professed our belief that Jesus went down as far as humans could go—unto death—we now proclaim that death could not hold him. He rose again. This proclamation is the celebration of Easter, but not just for Easter Sunday. The truth of Jesus' resurrection should lead us to approach every Sunday as a mini-Easter, celebrating the resurrection and giving thanks that Jesus lives. The Apostles' Creed reminds us to acknowledge the empty tomb in our worship.

Further, we are reminded that Jesus ascended into heaven. Scripture tells us that after forty days, Jesus returned in victory to heaven. Most of us don't give a lot of thought to the ascension, and many churches ignore the idea of Ascension Day (in lieu of Mother's Day or Memorial Day). But consider its significance. We are told the resurrected body of Jesus, the very God and the very man, returned to heaven. This is why we can look to Christ as our high priest, our representative among the Trinity. He did not leave His "humanness" here on earth. The ascension gives us hope as we look toward our own resurrection.

We are also at a point in the Creed where an important grammatical shift takes place. We see an intentional move from past tense to present and future tenses. Jesus "was born," "was conceived," "was crucified," and "did ascend." But now, Jesus "is seated" at the right hand of the Father. We boldly proclaim that Jesus sits with the Father today, alive, and interceding on our behalf.

*As you meditate on this week's Scripture passage, speaking to the resurrection of Christ and of all the dead, ask yourself these three questions and record your thoughts:*



- What does the Scripture say?
- What does the Scripture mean?
- What is the personal application that I can take from this Scripture and apply in the week ahead?



*For the following study questions, consider this section of the Apostles' Creed:*



**“On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father.”**

1. Why is the bodily resurrection of Jesus considered to be an essential belief of our faith? Can you claim a Christian faith without this belief? Consider Romans 10:9.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. In 1 Corinthians 15:4, Paul writes that Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day “in accordance with the Scriptures.” To which Old Testament verses is Paul referring?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What evidence does Paul give for the resurrection of Christ?

4. If the cross reminds us of the suffering and sacrifice for which Jesus took on our sins, and burial reminds us of the great depths for which His humanity descended as our substitute, then of what does the empty tomb remind us? Do the words of Peter (1 Peter 3:15) help?
5. In 1 Corinthians 15:32, Paul writes, “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’” What do you think he means by that? Is this a popular worldview today? How might the resurrection impact how we spend our time in this world?

# LEARN - KNOW - SHARE

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born of the Virgin Mary,  
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,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,**

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER** *(our spiritual foundation)*

(Matthew 6:9b-13 NKJV)

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

## **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS** *(our ethical foundation)*

(See Exodus 20:3-17)

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall make no idols.
3. You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.
5. **Honor your father and your mother.**

## PROFILES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

There were many reformers in the early-sixteenth century who influenced the history of the church and the manner in which many of us worship today. In Unit 4, we learned of Martin Luther. In this unit, we identify three individuals who are often found at the top of the list with Luther relative to importance and impact.

Desiderius Erasmus is best known for the publication of a Greek and Latin New Testament in 1516. Up to this point, a unified Greek New Testament version had not yet been



DESIDERIUS  
ERASMUS  
(AD 1466-1536)

published. With access to the original language, and with the opportunity to study it against the Latin Vulgate translation, Martin Luther would stand confidently behind his theological discoveries; such as the Greek meaning of “repentance” against the church’s traditional Latin translation of “do penance.” Luther would also use Erasmus’ second edition in 1519 to translate a German Bible, while William Tyndale would use his third edition in 1522 to translate the English New Testament. Erasmus remained a member of the church of Rome; he sought reformation through scholarly effort, historical research, and by challenging modern ritual. He was criticized by both Romans and Reformers for his middle ground. One of his lighter writings, *Praise of Folly*, is a humorous satire well worth the read.

Ulrich Zwingli, an ordained Swiss priest, after studying Erasmus’ Greek New Testament in early 1517, was led to proclaim a belief in the sole authority of Scripture and in justification by grace, through faith alone. In 1519, Zwingli denounced relics and—in what’s considered a major marker in reformation history—began preaching by *explaining* the Scripture to his congregation in Zurich,

rather than simply reciting in Latin the weekly authorized readings. Zwingli would break from Luther and Calvin in some areas of theology, particularly around communion, as well as in the church-state

ULRICH  
ZWINGLI  
(AD 1484-1531)



model that he embraced (one that appealed to England's Queen Elizabeth). Zwingli was recognized as being of noble character with a high commitment to Scripture, marking him as one of the most appealing reformation leaders.

John Calvin is universally considered the Father of Reformed doctrine and Presbyterianism. Younger than the early reformers,

JOHN CALVIN  
(AD 1509-1564)



Calvin was an influential French theologian and pastor whose most notable contribution to the Reformation was his massive work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Outlining thoughts

and theology, referred to by Calvin as “Basic Instruction in the Christian Faith,” *Institutes* has been used for study, catechism, and in shaping denominational confessions of faith. The first edition was printed in 1536, with the fifth and final edition, used today, completed in 1559. Additionally, Calvin completed commentaries on the entire New Testament and twenty-three Old Testament books.

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

A recommended reading for more on the Reformation is *Theology of the Reformers* by Timothy George—an easily readable, historical, and well-organized overview of the Reformation and its primary figures.

## UNIT 6

# JESUS CHRIST, THE COMING JUDGE



Matthew 24:36-51, 25:31-46

Christians often differ on interpretations of Christ's return and judgment. There are various schemes on how, when, and what will happen throughout the end-times. However, despite these debates, all Christians agree that Christ will return and there will be a final judgment. Whether Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or Protestant, we find common ground in the Bible's core teaching that these events are certain to happen. We can debate tribulation, rapture, and millennium theories in the classrooms and over coffee, but His church can confidently proclaim with one voice that Christ died, Christ arose, and Christ will come again to judge.

The Bible tells us that we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. For believers there is great joy in this knowledge—for judgment and justice bring restoration. As Keith Drury points out, “In the end, all things will be made new. All wrongs will be righted. All the foes of Christ will be banished from the kingdom, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”<sup>12</sup> What's not to be excited about in looking forward to His return, His judgment, and our complete restoration!

Of course, it's more pleasant to speak of Jesus' coming again than to speak of His coming judgment. The Creed reminds us,

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<sup>12</sup> Drury, *Common Ground*, 114.

however, of the core beliefs and essentials of our faith, and—in that—it would seem that judgment is just as important a statement to profess as any other. In fact, when we recite, read, or pray the Apostles' Creed, this phrase should convict us of our call to share the Good News of Jesus. There is great urgency in our proclamation of return and judgment. Our hearts should be broken for those who cannot yet make this proclamation with us. It is therefore with joy, gratitude, love, anticipation, heartbreak, compassion, and conviction that we boldly profess that Jesus “will come again to judge.”





*For the following study questions, consider this section of the Apostle's Creed:*



**“...and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.”**

1. In Matthew 24:36-51, what is the emphasis of Jesus' teaching? What should “readiness” look like to believers in the twenty-first century? Is it difficult to live in readiness? Why?
  
2. Will everyone—even believers— appear before the judgment seat of Christ? (See 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 and 2 Corinthians 5:10.)
  
3. As believers, what have we have done that will be judged adequate enough to pass His judgment? Is judgment a review of works, and therefore a works-based salvation?

4. When we do appear before Jesus for judgment, how might we be assured that it will be a favorable verdict and joyful occasion? Are there any other passages of Scripture that provide this assurance?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. If you were asked by an unbeliever to explain what is meant by Jesus' coming again to judge the living and the dead, how would you do that with grace and truth? Pray especially for those who cannot in good faith recite the Apostles' Creed along with you. May their hearts be transformed by the Gospel of Christ and may they look joyfully to His return.

# LEARN - KNOW - SHARE

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On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER *(our spiritual foundation)*

(Matthew 6:9b-13 NKJV)  
Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS *(our ethical foundation)*

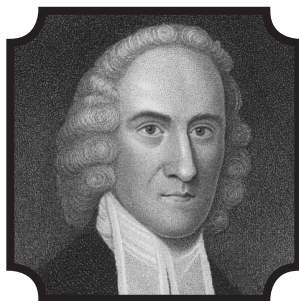
(See Exodus 20:3-17)

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall make no idols.
3. You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.

## PROFILES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Recognized as one of America's greatest theologians, Jonathan Edwards was instrumental to the increased religious activities in the 1730s and 1740s among the New England colonies—a period that is often referred to as the Great Awakening.

This Puritan, Congregationalist minister of Northampton, Massachusetts, emphasized a personal religious experience grounded in prayer, piety, and



JONATHAN  
EDWARDS  
(AD 1703-1758)

daily Scripture reading, with a theology that was based on the Augustinian (beliefs held by Augustine) description of human sinfulness and God's sovereignty. He preached that human depravity was the result of Adam's fall and that we are all bent toward sin as a result. Unless we receive a "new heart," offered by God in His grace toward us, we will be condemned at judgment. One of his most well-known sermons is "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God," for which he explains our natural antagonism toward God and God's justification in judging us for it.

After serving for almost twenty-five years in Northampton, Edwards spent the next several years laboring along the Massachusetts frontier as a minister to congregations of Native Americans and colonists. He was also a mentor and friend to one of the more well-known missionaries to Native Americans, David Brainerd.

Jonathan Edwards died in 1758, just weeks after beginning work as president of the College of New Jersey (later renamed Princeton University).

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

A recommended reading for more on Jonathan Edwards is *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, by George M. Marsden, routinely recognized as one of the very best Christian biographies.

# THE HOLY SPIRIT



John 14:15-31, 15:26-27, 16:7-15

The next lines of the Apostles' Creed have us reflecting on God's Spirit and God's people. Considering the biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit, this is a natural pairing. God's Spirit has always gone with, rested upon, been poured out on, and promised to God's people. From His people Israel to His disciples at Pentecost to all who believe and receive Jesus, God himself, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, lives in us; this we believe.

In Scripture, we find that the Holy Spirit has been, and is, a key, active agent in the work of God in this world. The Holy Spirit's involvement includes taking part in creation, revelation, and salvation. In believers, the Holy Spirit, acts as an Advocate, bringing discernment, conviction, and comfort. Further, the Holy Spirit, if we don't neglect His presence, can enable us to pursue a more Christ-like standard of virtue, illuminate our interpretation of Scripture, and can stir us to share the Good News of Jesus Christ to the nations. The work of the Holy Spirit reminds us of the coeternal and coequal Persons of the Trinity.

In his book, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, Michael Bird puts it this way:

When Christians confess their belief in God, they mean the triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the member of the Trinity whose unique job it is to impart life, to quicken, and to provide breath to every living

thing. All men and women, if they are to live for God, need the Spirit's regenerating work to bring them from darkness to light, to change their heart of stone to a heart of flesh, and to open their eyes to see the God who is there.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe*, 192.



*As you meditate on this week's Scripture passages, speaking to the Holy Spirit, ask yourself these three questions and record your thoughts:*



- What does the Scripture say?
- What does the Scripture mean?
- What is the personal application that I can take from this Scripture and apply in the week ahead?

- *For the following study questions, consider this section of the Apostle's Creed:*



## **“I believe in the Holy Spirit ...”**

1. What are the titles that Jesus has given the Holy Spirit and what do they tell us about His work in the world and in us? Do you recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit as the most direct relationship with God that we have in this world?
2. Why do you think Jesus said it was to our advantage that He leave His followers and send someone else (John 16:7)?
3. How does the Holy Spirit guide believers “into all the truth” (John 16:13)? Have you ever sought the Spirit’s guidance in decision making, through temptations, or in times requiring great ethical or spiritual discernment?

4. In John 16:14, Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit will glorify Him. How does that work? Has the Holy Spirit enabled you to know the glory of Jesus?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. When Paul tells us that our “bodies are a temple,” he has neither weight management, physical fitness, nor the avoidance of taboo vices in mind. True, those things are good common sense and practical behaviors, but not in this context. Rather, Paul admonishes the Corinthians to always remember that their bodies are a temple because they house the Holy Spirit. We move daily through this world as a temple of the Holy Spirit. How does that make you feel? With this in mind, does belief in the Holy Spirit, help you modify behaviors, change attitudes, or guard your words?

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suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
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he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER** *(our spiritual foundation)*

(Matthew 6:9b-13 NKJV)

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.

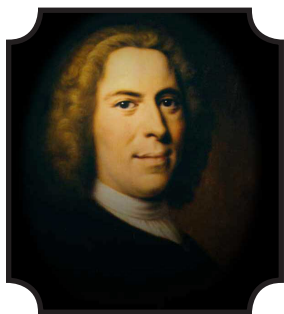
## **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS** *(our ethical foundation)*

(See Exodus 20:3-17)

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall make no idols.
3. You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.

## PROFILES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Count Nicolaus Zinzendorf, as a young man in Germany, accepted a civil service position with the government. A devout Lutheran, his travels outside of Germany provided him with a broader understanding of Christendom and God's global church. His compassion for believers under persecution in foreign countries led him to invite refugees from Bohemia onto his estate in Saxony



COUNT  
NICOLAUS  
ZINZENDORF  
(AD 1700-1760)

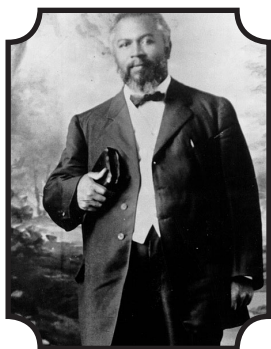
in 1722. There, he organized the group into a community called Herrnhut (the Lord's Watch), and the seeds for what would eventually become the Moravian Church were planted.

Zinzendorf left the government in 1727 and became a preacher and teacher of spiritual disciplines. His emphasis was on Christianity as a "heart religion," maintaining communion with God through the Holy Spirit. He believed that when one's existence was oriented to Christ through the Spirit, participation in kingdom work for the common good would be advanced. It was also in 1727 that the brothers and sisters at Herrnhut began an around-the-clock prayer watch that continued non-stop for over one hundred years. During this time, the small Moravian community sent out three hundred missionaries. Zinzendorf became one of the most influential leaders in global ecumenical missions and Christian community fellowship. It was built on joy, proclamation of the Gospel, and dependency on the Holy Spirit.



William Joseph Seymour was born in Centerville, Louisiana, to recently-freed slaves, Simon and Phyllis Seymour. Blind in one eye and slow in speech, Seymour's long-term prospects were not overly optimistic.

At age thirty-five, the waiter and part-time pastor enrolled in a Bible school in Houston. Due to segregation, Seymour was required to sit in the hall to listen to the lectures.



WILLIAM  
SEYMOUR  
(AD 1870-1922)

Despite his physical disadvantages and prejudicial treatment, Seymour was convinced of the Holy Spirit's calling on his life. Not only that, he was specifically convinced of the Spirit's role in a believer's everyday worship.

The following year, William Seymour traveled to Los Angeles to serve a mission. His first sermon was on Acts 2:4—being filled with the Holy Spirit. He returned for an evening service to find the doors padlocked. (Apparently, the Holy Spirit was not welcome at the Santa Fe Mission.) Seymour and a few members found a warehouse on Azusa Street where they could meet. This soon became the cradle of Pentecostalism.

For over three years, between 1906-1909, William Seymour preached three services a day, with thousands coming from across the country and the world to share in the worship. One of the reasons they came was the uniqueness of Seymour's multi-cultural congregation. It was recognized as the first anywhere to bring all races together for worship. It was said that the "color line has been washed away in the blood." Seymour himself would write:

This meeting has been a melting time. The people are all melted together by the power of the blood and the Holy Ghost. They are made one lump, one bread, all one body in Christ Jesus. There is no Jew or Gentile, bond or free, in the Azusa Street Mission.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Douglas, A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the*

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

One recommended reading is *The Lord of the Ring: Uncovering the Secret Origins of Praying 24-7*, by Phil Anderson, a concise history of Zinzendorf and the early Moravian movement.

Another recommended reading is *William Seymour, A Biography: The Story of an African American Leader Who Launched the Azusa Street Revival and the Pentecostal Movement*, by Craig Borlase, perhaps the most popular biography on Seymour, providing details of his life and ministry, as well as a glimpse into the segregated century between Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr.





## UNIT 8

# THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH



1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Ephesians 4:1-16, 5:22-33

There is a new brand of “Christianity” that has become increasingly popular over the past several decades: a church-less denomination. There is nothing formal about the many professing believers who have divorced themselves from the church, except for their willingness to go it alone. To disconnect for a variety of reasons—some understandable, most not. But the Bible tells us that this brand of individualized faith does not work. While they call themselves Christians without a church, Hebrews 10:25 says they are neglecting the fellowship—including encouragement and accountability—of God’s gift to us, His church.

Our belief in a holy church makes clear that we profess the church to be God’s church, not one of this world or of our making. God has sanctified the church for His purposes and His glory; we are but members of an assembly made holy by the working of the Holy Spirit among us.

The church is also a catholic church. This is a wonderful word that is often confused with our misunderstanding and contemporary terminology. The word *catholic* means “universal” or “world-wide.” It was used by the early church to differentiate the true church from heretical churches. For example, Augustine would defend the catholic church against the Donatist church or gnostic church or Arian church. For almost one thousand years, there was only one true orthodox Christian church, so “catholic” was used to speak to the true world-wide Christian church. In AD 1054, the church experienced her first major split. Rome laid claim to the word

"catholic," forming Roman Catholicism in the west, while the church in east, Constantinople, would favor the term, "orthodox"—Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, et. al.

When we speak of one holy catholic church, we mean that the church is comprised of all people, races, nationalities, political parties, and worship styles. It's a reminder to those who hold a westernized perspective of God's church that less than twenty percent of global Christians reside in North America (with that number decreasing regularly, mostly due to the increase in the number of believers in Asia and Africa; praise the Lord!) This is a strong indicator of the faithfulness of other Christians across the globe.

Finally, when we recite the Apostles' Creed, we are encouraged that there is no fundamental difference between a small church or mega-church or rural church. There are gatherings of Christians who come together to worship, serve, and grow. Ultimately, they are connected to a communion of saints—both past and present—much greater than any single, local body.

*As you meditate on this week's Scripture passages, speaking to the Lord's church, ask yourself these three questions and record your thoughts:*



- What does the Scripture say?
- What does the Scripture mean?
- What is the personal application that I can take from this Scripture and apply in the week ahead?

*For the following study questions, consider this section of the Apostle's Creed:*



**“I believe in the holy catholic church, the communion of the Saints...”**

1. With a view to the Creed statement this week and Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians 12, why do you think the metaphor of a “body” is used for the church? How do you explain it? Do you think in local, national, or global terms?
  
2. What is the significance of unity and the way we relate to one another when we consider the church in the context of a holy, catholic communion? (Do you consider Jesus' call that we be one, as He and the Father are one?)
  
3. In Ephesians 4:11-21, Paul gives instructions for what should occur within the body of Christ. Can you identify this important mission of the local church? What are ways that this mission is accomplished?

4. How does Christ feel about His church and what does He do for His church (Ephesians 5:22-23)?

5. What are ways you can demonstrate the call to greater communion with all saints and not simply those who look and speak and think (non-essentials) as you do? Can the Apostles' Creed be a starting point to our embracing a more catholic perspective of the universal body of Christ?

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he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
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I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
**the holy catholic church,**  
**the communion of the saints,**

## THE LORD'S PRAYER *(our spiritual foundation)*

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Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.  
And do not lead us into temptation,

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS *(our ethical foundation)*

(See Exodus 20:3-17)

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall make no idols.
3. You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.

## PROFILES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

John Wesley, founder of Methodism and the European counterpart to the Great Awakening in America, was born in England and attended



JOHN WESLEY  
(AD 1703-1791)

Oxford, where he joined a small Bible study that had been formed by his younger brother Charles. The commitment to studying God's Word, along with the notoriously selfless acts of charity performed by the group, would lead to their being known as "The Holy Club" by the university students. Eventually, they would be called "Methodists," for Wesley's extremely methodical approach to study and service. Many consider the "Methodists" club as the original small group (it also included Wesley's friend George Whitefield, of Great Awakening fame).

Despite his involvement in the Holy Club, Wesley claims that it wasn't until 1735, when he traveled to Georgia as a missionary to the Native Americans, that he discovered (in his own words) the calling for "true evangelical faith." He traveled with Moravians to America and was completely amazed at their spirit of community and peace, even when the ship was hit by the worst of storms. Wesley would return to England and eventually spend time at Zinzendorf's Herrnhut community.

John Wesley traveled over 250,000 miles throughout England and delivered over 40,000 sermons, preaching salvation by faith and pursuit of sanctification. His devotion to the established churches was well documented and his love for communion with the saints is found in many of the hymns written by him and his brother, Charles Wesley. Methodism did not officially become a denomination until after his death.

Clive Staples Lewis, born in Ireland, lived most of his years in Oxford, England. Lewis is perhaps the twentieth century's best-known scholar-author-Christian apologist. A self-proclaimed atheist, he was led to faith through his friendship and professorial relationship with J.R.R. Tolkien (*Lord of the Rings* author).

Though recognized most often as the creator of the *Chronicles of Narnia* series of children's books, C.S. Lewis authored significant works in the genre of adult Christian fiction (*Screwtape*

C.S. LEWIS  
(AD 1870-1963)



*Letters*), apologetics (*The Problem with Pain*), and Christian thought (*Surprised by Joy*). It was his collection of radio broadcasts during World War II, formatted into a book and published as *Mere Christianity*, that launched Lewis onto the global stage for both literature and the defense of Christianity.

Interestingly, as an example of Lewis' thoughts on the unity of the church and the call to a universal communion of the saints, prior to his series of radio broadcasts at the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), Lewis would confer with four clergy colleagues to ensure he was speaking for the whole of Christianity: a fellow Anglican, a Methodist, a Roman Catholic, and a Presbyterian. He wrote that he believed in mere Christianity, Creed, and Scripture. And wished to be known as a mere Christian, which meant a "Catholick Christian" in the sense of faith untainted by controversies and theological partisanship.<sup>15</sup>

That said, Lewis admitted that Christianity required denominations, for that is where discipleship is nourished and like minds go about defending the common faith. He used the analogy of a hall acting

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<sup>15</sup> Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2013), 219-220.



as the large gathering place. The goal is to bring others into this hall; this would be the universal church. There should be great unity and mission in this hall. Yet just off the hall are smaller rooms where the “fires and chairs and meals” are stored, the essentials to authentic, maturing Christian living.<sup>16</sup> The smaller rooms are our denominational preferences.

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

A recommended reading for more on John Wesley is *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, by John Wesley—a collection of sermons, letters, testimonies, hymns, and reflections on the doctrine of Christian perfection. (Note: This is not an endorsement of this doctrine, but a suggestion to better know the ideology and heart of this great and godly man).

A recommend reading for more on Clives Staple Lewis is *C.S. Lewis: A Life*, by Alister McGrath, as well as *Surprised by Joy*, by C.S. Lewis. Both offer biographical insight into a fascinating mind and life.

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<sup>16</sup> McGrath, *C. S. Lewis*, 221.



## UNIT 9

# THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS



Romans 3:19-26, 6:1-14

As we near the conclusion of the Apostles' Creed, we begin to look forward to its claim of a glorious destiny: the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Before getting ahead of ourselves, however, we should note that it is only through the doorway of sin and forgiveness that we enter this future.

In proclaiming that we believe in the “forgiveness of sins,” we boldly profess two important doctrines of our faith. First, we believe that sin is real. Not only do we believe in sin, we believe sin is the act of disobeying God’s moral law (even if that behavior is allowed, admired, or encouraged in our society), and it is the state of our rebellion against Him (our depravity). Sin came through Adam and we are all guilty.

Secondly, we believe that, through the Person of Christ, forgiveness came to us. When we confess He is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, we are forgiven from that state of rebellion in which we once lived. In other words, at the core, sin is a broken relationship. Forgiveness is the reconciliation of that relationship.

Seeking forgiveness, by way of admitting our sinful state, is a prerequisite to eternal life. According to the apostles, if anyone claims to believe in the name of Christ—yet claims also to have never sought forgiveness—that person is a liar.

Lastly, when we recite our belief in forgiveness, we are also reminded of our call to forgive others. If our almighty, holy God is willing to forgive us for the inability to perfectly live up to His law in this life, then He surely expects that we, as His church, will forgive one another. If anything is left unforgiven in our hearts, then our prayer is that this line of the Creed makes it clear and moves us to action.

*As you meditate on this week's Scripture passages, speaking to the forgiveness of sin, ask yourself these three questions and record your thoughts:*



- What does the Scripture say?
- What does the Scripture mean?
- What is the personal application that I can take from this Scripture and apply in the week ahead?

*For the following study questions, consider this section of the Apostles' Creed:*



**“I believe in ... the forgiveness of sins,”**

1. What is your definition of sin? How would you explain sin, “in grace and truth,” to an unbeliever who asks you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Romans 3:23-24 says that “we all fall short of the glory of God.” What does that mean? If we all fall short, can we ever be “dead to sin”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. WARNING - WARNING - WARNING: churchy word ahead (but an extremely important churchy word)! In Romans 3:25, Paul uses the word “propitiation.” What does that word mean? How is it used in context?

4. In regard to sin, Romans 6 says we are to be united with Christ in his death and resurrection, and thus live our lives differently. How is that?
  
5. One of the charges against the Reformation is that it skewed our understanding of grace and sin. In other words, many will point to Luther as having put forth a doctrine that means we can sin all we want once we confess Jesus as Lord, because God's grace is quick to forgive. How might you respond to that? Regarding your approach to sin, are there areas in your life where you have fallen into this "cheap grace," or where you justify disobedience as a result of living under grace and not the law?

# LEARN - KNOW - SHARE

*We can all learn, know, and share these declarations of our faith. Take time to memorize a few lines each week and reflect on them daily.*

## THE APOSTLES CREED *(our doctrinal foundation)*

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
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,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of the saints,  
**the forgiveness of sins,**

## THE LORD'S PRAYER *(our spiritual foundation)*

(Matthew 6:9b-13 NKJV)

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.  
And do not lead us into temptation,  
**But deliver us from the evil one.**

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS *(our ethical foundation)*

(See Exodus 20:3-17)

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall make no idols.
3. You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. **You shall not bear false witness.**



## PROFILES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY



**CHARLES  
SPURGEON**  
(AD 1834-1892)

Charles Hadden Spurgeon, a.k.a., “The Prince of Preachers,” is one of the most colorful and gifted figures in all Christian history. In 1854—after having accepted a call to preach at London’s Baptist Chapel—twenty-year-old Spurgeon, with no formal schooling or denominational ordination, became the most popular preacher of his day.

A Reformed Baptist (meaning he held to the reformed theology of God’s sovereignty and the Baptist tradition of believer’s baptism), Spurgeon claimed his roots in the teaching of “the Apostle Paul, Augustine, John Calvin, and John Knox.” His small congregation grew so rapidly that, by 1861, the Metropolitan Temple in London was constructed to seat the near six-thousand weekly congregants seeking to be discipled under Spurgeon’s teaching.

Through the Metropolitan Temple, Spurgeon would begin a pastor’s college and fund an orphanage. His heart for social concerns, evangelism, and God’s Word made him popular in England and across the world. Exhibiting forgiveness to many, yet speaking truth, this humble pastor wore his heart on his sleeve in practically every sermon.

Today, Spurgeon’s daily devotions and sermon collections remain popular for their directness (often creating a smile and an, “Ah-a!”) and spiritual richness. Though he had no college degree, his personal library of over ten thousand books, along with his affection for teaching God’s Word, indicated that Charles Spurgeon spent a life in study.

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

A recommended reading for more on Charles Spurgeon is *Spurgeon: A Biography*, by Arnold A. Dallimore. Spurgeon was a fascinating, humorous, faithful, and biblically rich man. Dallimore's book is an outstanding introduction for anyone with little-to-no knowledge of him.

# THE LIFE EVERLASTING



## 1 Corinthians 15:4-58

Early heresies of the church taught that the body was evil, but the spirit was good. This led to the belief in a “body-less” heaven. Early Christians stood firm with the Apostle Paul in insisting that the resurrection of the body is truth. In our final claim of the Creed, we also stand with Paul and believers of the past two thousand years in our belief in the resurrection of the body and eternal life.

Why is this specific biblical point an important one to have included in the Creed? In addition to the early heresies, we should note that in recent times, moral liberalism, or liberal theology, was founded on the principle of removing the miracles of the Bible and emphasizing the teachings of Jesus (think about a theology built solely on WWJD: “What Would Jesus Do?”). Because of this, many in the modern age have rejected the idea of bodily resurrection. Despite the mystery of this truth, we believe God’s Word and we proclaim that Jesus arose, and one day we will also rise.

It’s here, again, that we are reminded of the core doctrines of the universal church, which is essentially the purpose of the Apostles’ Creed. Much like Jesus’ second coming, many well-intentioned and genuine Christians differ in their beliefs on what happens to our bodies and souls upon death. Whatever we envision as the intermediate state between death and the final resurrection, our essential Christian doctrine ends with a resurrection of a real body. A body-less heaven is a sub-Christian idea.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Drury, *Common Ground*, 166.

Finally, according to Scripture, we are told that the eternal and resurrected body will be imperishable. The body will be present, but it will not be as our current “tent.” Our present body is but a weak, mortal, dishonorable shadow of what is to come. We will be fully restored in relationship, and—as the created images of God—will be able to enjoy His pleasure forever.

*As you meditate on this week's Scripture passages, speaking to the resurrection of the body, ask yourself these three questions and record your thoughts:*



- What does the Scripture say?
- What does the Scripture mean?
- What is the personal application that I can take from this Scripture and apply in the week ahead?

*For the following study questions, consider this section of the Apostle's Creed:*



**“I believe in ... the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.”**

1. Based on 1 Corinthians 15:40-49, what do we expect our resurrected bodies to be like? What does that mean to you?
2. When does the Bible say we receive a resurrected body? Is there a difference between a believer who dies before Jesus returns and one who is living?
3. Considering what Scripture teaches about resurrection of the body, is cremation an acceptable form of burial? Have you ever had discussions with anyone who is adamantly opposed or in favor of a certain post-death burial mode?

4. What are the various ideas and misconceptions (think books, movies, Facebook), of what eternity in heaven will be like? What can we know for certain, and what are we better off waiting to find out? Do any of these ideas harm Christianity?
  
5. As we conclude our time in the biblical doctrines that are summarized in the Apostles' Creed, what has been the most impactful lesson or insight for you personally? Does the Creed resonate with you in any particular way? If you were part of the group writing the Apostles' Creed, with a view that it should serve as a litmus test, or minimum standard, to proclaiming oneself a follower of Jesus, would you have added anything else? Would you have removed anything?

# LEARN - KNOW - SHARE

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who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
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,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of the saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
**the resurrection of the body,**  
**and the life everlasting.**

## THE LORD'S PRAYER *(our spiritual foundation)*

(Matthew 6:9b-13 NKJV)

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.  
And do not lead us into temptation,  
But deliver us from the evil one.

**For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS *(our ethical foundation)*

(See Exodus 20:3-17)

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. You shall have no other gods before me.     | 6. You shall not murder.             |
| 2. You shall make no idols.                    | 7. You shall not commit adultery.    |
| 3. You shall not take the Lord's name in vain. | 8. You shall not steal.              |
| 4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.      | 9. You shall not bear false witness. |
| 5. Honor your father and your mother.          | 10. You shall not covet.             |



## PROFILES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

The work of Christian missions is the sharing of the Gospel. The work of the Gospel reaps the reward of eternal life. When missionaries set out, it is with the burden to share God's love and—most importantly—God's plan for salvation with those who have not heard or who refuse to believe. The Apostles' Creed can help walk any of us through a presentation of the Gospel. Sharing these core beliefs is certainly what the following missionary pioneers were called to do. St. Patrick, Adoniram Judson, and Lottie Moon represent many others who gave up much, endured much, suffered much (all three died on the mission field), yet were used much to further God's kingdom.

St. Patrick was not Irish. There, bubble busted. St. Patrick was a fifth-century, Roman-British missionary, who—as a young man—was enslaved by Irish pirates. After escaping at age twenty, he returned to his family in



ST. PATRICK  
(AD 385-461)

native Britain, only to feel God's call on his life to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ back to Ireland, where he established the Christian church and converted pagan Irish for the next forty years of his life.

According to the most reliable of written witnesses, and his own Confessions, Patrick used the shamrock as a depiction of the Trinity to share the Christian faith. Ultimately, it was no “luck of the Irish”; it was the sovereignty of God and the obedience of Saint Patrick the Missionary that brought the good news to Ireland. (Wouldn't it be outstanding if the world celebrated Patrick's mission work every March?)

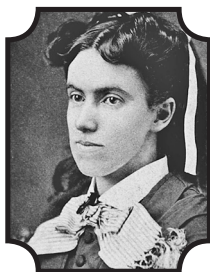


ADONIRAM  
JUDSON  
(AD 1788-1850)

Adoniram Judson, and his wife Ann, were two of the first missionaries to ever set sail from North America. Leaving Salem, Massachusetts, in 1812, the Judsons sailed first to India, and then to their ultimate destination,

Burma, or modern-day Myanmar (a country near and dear to our heart at River Oaks as a result of the partnered global-equipping efforts in Yangon each January). For almost forty years, Adoniram endured significant hardships, including a lengthy and horrific imprisonment and a great deal of family tragedy. However, he and Ann never wavered in their commitment to share their faith with the Burmese people, which included the translation of the Bible into the local language. The seeds planted by the Judsons are being reaped even today as many Burmese peoples are confessing Christ as Lord.

Charlotte Digges “Lottie” Moon, a wealthy, educated young woman from Virginia, left the comforts of home at age 32 to follow God’s calling in her life, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the people of China. For the next thirty-nine years, Lottie served and—more importantly—identified with the people of China, learning the language, and adhering to the customs of the local villagers.



LOTTIE  
MOON  
(AD 1840-1912)

Lottie’s letters home from China often challenged the American church to do more in the way of sharing the Good News with a lost world. In 1887, in one of her letters, she writes, “Why should we not do something that will prove that we are really in earnest in claiming to be followers of him who, though he was rich, for our sake became poor?”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Lottie Moon*, International Mission Board (quote by Moon in Tungchow on

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

A recommended reading is Philip Freemans' *St. Patrick of Ireland: A Biography*. The true story is much more inspiring than the myths!

Recommended reading for a classic in missionary biographies is Courtney Anderson's work on Adoniram Judson, *To the Golden Shore*.

Also recommended is Michelle DeRusha's *Fifty Women Every Christian Should Know: Learning from Heroines of the Faith*, an especially insightful and interesting collection, including a summary of Lottie Moon (pp. 213-218).



# THE LORD'S PRAYER



Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.  
And do not lead us into temptation,  
But deliver us from the evil one.  
For Yours is the kingdom and the power  
and the glory forever. Amen.

—*Matthew 6:9b-13 NKJV*



# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS



1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall make no idols.
3. You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness.
10. You shall not covet.

*(See Exodus 20:3-17)*





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