

Dear Friends,

The Presbyterian Church has first and foremost the Bible to instruct us and help us make our way in the world in a faithful and grace filled manner. We also have the “Book of Order” (the way our governmental structure does its work) and the “Book of Confessions”, which serves as guidance to understanding the Bible. Our confessions were written at times of great turbulence for the church and people of faith. The confessions were written by people of faith stating their faith and living it even at cost of great persecution and even death. Today I would like to take a minute to look at the Apostles' Creed, a statement of faith we often use on Sundays. (Below are excerpts from the commentary on the “Apostles’ Creed” from our “Book of Confessions.

"Although not written by apostles, the Apostles’ Creed reflects the theological formulations of the first century church. The creed’s structure may be based on Jesus’ command to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In a time when most Christians were illiterate, oral repetition of the Apostles’ Creed, along with the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments, helped preserve and transmit the faith of the western churches.

In the early church, Christians confessed that “Jesus is Lord” but did not always understand the biblical context of lordship. The views of Marcion, a Christian living in Rome in the second century, believed Jesus was not the Messiah proclaimed by the prophets, and the Old Testament was not Scripture. Marcion proposed limiting Christian “Scripture” to Luke’s gospel (less the birth narrative and other parts that he felt expressed Jewish thinking) and to those letters of Paul that Marcion regarded as anti-Jewish. Marcion’s views developed into a movement that lasted several centuries.

Around A.D. 180, Roman Christians developed an early form of the Apostles’ Creed to refute Marcion. They affirmed that the God of creation is the Father of Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, was buried and raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven, where he rules with the Father. They also affirmed belief in the Holy Spirit, the church, and the resurrection of the body.

Candidates for membership in the church, having undergone a lengthy period of moral and doctrinal instruction, were asked at baptism to state what they believed. They responded in the words of this creed.

The Apostles’ Creed underwent further development. In response to the question of readmitting those who had denied the faith during the persecutions of the second and third centuries, the church added, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.” In the fourth and fifth centuries, North African Christians debated the question of whether the church was an exclusive sect composed of the heroic few or an inclusive church of all who confessed Jesus Christ, leading to the addition of “holy” (belonging to God) and “catholic” (universal). In Gaul, in the fifth century, the phrase “he descended into hell” came into the creed, meaning that there was no limit on Jesus’ love. By the eighth century, the creed had attained its present form.

I hope this gives us a little more background on perhaps the favorite creed for most Presbyterian churches, but also many other churches that adopt creeds as part of their understanding of scripture.

Peace,

Pastor Eric