

THE APOSTLES' CREED:

UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

santa barbara community church • spring 2020

An Introduction p2

The Apostles' Creed p3

Daily Bible Reading Plan p4

WEEK 1 p5

WEEK 7 p.20

WEEK 2 p8

WEEK 8 p.22

WEEK 3 p.11

WEEK 9 p.25

WEEK 4 p.13

WEEK 10 p.28

WEEK 5 p.15

WEEK 11 p.31

WEEK 6 p.18

WEEK 12 p.34

I believe...



THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

believe



These paintings of Peter, Paul, Andrew and John, dating back to the 4th century, were discovered in the Roman catacombs of St. Tecla. These portraits are now considered to be the oldest known images of Christ's apostles.

The Apostles' Creed is one of the earliest and most widely-accepted summations of the Christian faith. For almost 2,000 years, believers around the world have used these confessions to declare their belief in the Triune God and his redemptive work on our behalf. This spring and summer, SBCC will join our voices, minds, and hearts with those of our Christian family throughout the ages and across the globe as we explore the depths of truth contained in the Apostles' Creed.

Because we find ourselves living through strange times as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt our usual rhythms of life, this study is designed to be enjoyed both personally and corporately. For your personal growth, it is our prayer that you will find these studies to be biblical, reflective, and encouraging while also containing appropriate challenges for your journey of faith. An additional element of this study is a Daily Bible Reading Guide that corresponds to the great themes of each week of this study. As you meditate on the Scriptures each day, we are confident that you will personally encounter God in his Word and that his Spirit will minister to your spirit.

Corporately, this time in the Apostles' Creed will certainly serve to remind us that theology is best done in community. To that end, plan to discuss with your online homegroup the insights you're gaining through your study of the Scriptures. If you're not yet a part of such a group, it's not too late to join in! (*You can click here to register for a 13-week Apostles' Creed small group.*) As you make your way each week through the Scriptures and the questions in this study guide, be mindful of what insights, challenges, or encouragements you might share with your group.

Ultimately, even in a season of life as unique as the one we find ourselves in, the aim of this study is the same as always: to glorify God by becoming better students of his Word, his work, and his world in order that we might live our lives in greater faithfulness to him. It is our great hope that, by considering the great truths found in the Apostles' Creed, we will know God better, worship him more robustly, and follow him more faithfully with increased courage and confidence.

-Your pastoral staff

I BELIEVE

in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

AND IN JESUS CHRIST,
his only Son, our Lord.

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.

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

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

AMEN.

I believe...



Apostles' Creed Daily Readings

Each week during our exploration of the Apostles' Creed, you are invited to take time daily to meditate on a passage of Scripture related to the week's theme. Author Richard Peace has some helpful guidance.

"Contemplative Bible reading is both a simple and a profound way to approach Scripture. It consists of a four-part movement beginning with the text and ending with prayer. This style of Bible reading can be used by individuals and groups.... We ask the Holy Spirit to speak the Word of God to us, to show us what we need to see and hear through the Scripture....We offer to God all the concerns we have brought with us today; we lay them in God's hands so we may hear God's Word clearly.

The four steps that make up contemplative Bible reading are:

- **Reading/Listening:** Read aloud a short passage of Scripture. As you read, listen for the word or phrase that speaks to you. What word or phrase 'shimmers' or has neon lights around it? What is the Spirit drawing your attention to?
- **Meditating:** Repeat aloud the word or phrase to which you are drawn. Make connections between it and your life. What is God saying to you by means of this word or phrase?
- **Praying:** Now take these thoughts and offer them back to God in prayer, giving thanks, asking for guidance, asking for forgiveness, and resting in God's love. What is God leading you to pray?
- **Contemplating:** Move from the activity or prayer to the stillness of contemplation. Simply rest in God's presence. Stay open to God. Listen to God. Remain in peace and silence before God. How is God revealing himself to you?

When your attention begins to wander, you go back to the text and start the process over again, listening for a new word or phrase. You read it again, listening for what else God might have for you. Or you end your prayer experience with a "thank you, Lord" or "praise God" and enter into the tasks of the day, taking with you this sense of God's presence, this experience of God's love and guidance. This 'presence' sits in the background as you greet others or start work on the report you must finish that day. It sustains you in your tasks. It softens you with others. It takes the edge off the urgency that so often makes you feel burdened. You live in the world of sense and time, but with the impression of eternity in your heart."

-from *Contemplative Bible Reading* by Richard Peace

Week 1.

Intro: Why creeds? Faith and belief

1. Eph 2:4-9
2. 2 Thess 2:13-15
3. Jude 1:20-21
4. 1 Cor 15:1-8
5. Gal. 5:1
6. Psalm 119:65-68
7. 2 Cor 4:16-18

Week 2.

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

1. Gen 1:31-2:3
2. Eph 1:3-6
3. 1 Jn 3:1-2
4. Acts 17:22-28
5. Ps 121
6. 1 Cor 8:6
7. Ps. 103:13

Week 3.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,

1. John 1:1-5
2. Luke 1:30-33
3. Heb 1:1-3
4. Jn 1:10-13
5. Eph 1:3-10
6. Col 1:15-20
7. Matthew 16:13-16

Week 4:

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,

1. Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6-7
2. Luke 1:26-35
3. Matt 1:18-23
4. John 1:14
5. Heb 4:14-16
6. Gal 4:4-7
7. Phil 2:5-11

I believe...



Week 5.

suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;

1. Isaiah 53
2. Luke 23:44-56
3. Acts 4:8-12
4. Romans 6:1-11
5. Deut 21:22-23 & Gal 3:13
6. Phil 2:5-11
7. Heb 2:14-15

Week 9.

I believe in the Holy Spirit

1. Isaiah 63:7-14
2. Joel 2:28-29
3. John 14:15-18
4. John 14:25-26
5. John 16:7-15
6. Acts 1:8
7. Eph 1:13-14

Week 6.

he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again

1. John 11:25-27
2. Luke 24:1-11
3. Rom 6:3-11
4. Eph 2:1-10
5. Col 3:1-4
6. 1 Peter 1:3-5
7. 1 Cor 15:12-26

Week 10.

the holy catholic church, the communion of saints,

1. Matt 16:13-18
2. Acts 2:41-47
3. Eph 2:11-22
4. Eph 4:1-6
5. Romans 12:4-8
6. 1 Cor 12:12-20
7. Eph 4:11-16

Week 7.

he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,

1. Luke 24:50-53
2. Acts 1:1-11
3. Rom 8:31-39
4. Heb 7:23-28
5. Eph 1:18-23
6. Heb 1:1-4
7. Eph 2:4-7

Week 11.

the forgiveness of sins

1. Psalm 130
2. Luke 1:76-79
3. Acts 10:42-43
4. Rom 3:21-26
5. 2 Cor 5:17-21
6. Heb 10:11-18
7. Col 1:9-14

Week 8:

and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

1. Matt 25:31-46
2. John 5:19-29
3. 1 Cor 4:5
4. Titus 2:11-14
5. 2 Thess 1:6-12
6. 1 Cor 15:24-26
7. Rev 21:1-8

Week 12:

the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

1. John 5:28-29
2. John 11:17-27
3. 1 Cor 15:12-26
4. 1 Cor 15:51-57
5. Rev 20:4-6
6. John 3:14-17
7. Romans 6:22-23

THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



I believe

Week 1.

Intro: Why creeds? Faith and belief

1. Eph 2:4-9
2. 2 Thess 2:13-15
3. Jude 1:20-21
4. 1 Cor 15:1-8
5. Gal. 5:1
6. Psalm 119:65-68
7. 2 Cor 4:16-18

Week One Why Creeds?

1. What is a topic you have sought to learn thoroughly about? Be prepared to share with your homegroup or with friends as you discuss this study.

As we dive into our time considering the wonderful summary of Christian belief that is contained in the Apostles' Creed, it is important to get our bearings on the role that creeds can play in our life of faith.

John H. Leith has written, "What cannot be thought through critically and expressed with reasonable clarity cannot demand the allegiance of [one's] whole being."¹ The Apostles Creed is the most-widely accepted of all such attempts to summarize the Christian faith with "reasonable clarity."

Yet, as we will see as we do a deeper investigation of the Book of Jude, the value of creeds moves far beyond mere intellectual alignment. No, such encapsulations of Christian doctrine can actually prove to be immensely valuable in everyday Christian living.

2. Read the Book of Jude and, as you do, make a note here of anything that stands out to you.

¹ John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 1.

3. False teachers have invaded the church and it is obvious that Jude is writing out of great concern for the endurance of his readers' faith. What evidence can you find of the content or intent of these false teachers?

In Jude's view, the antidote to false teaching is renewed resolve in "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (verse 3). For centuries, creeds and catechisms have helped to ground Christians in the foundational truths of "the faith."

4. While Jude uses the term "saints" in verse 3 to refer to the earliest disciples, throughout the New Testament this word is applied to any who are a part of God's family by faith in Christ. And, notably, the same Greek term that Jude uses here for "entrusted," Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15:3, where it is most often translated as "passed down." Reflecting on this, who are some of the saints that served to pass down the faith in your life?

5. Why do you think that Jude uses such strong language in verses 4-19? What might that tell us about the significance of holding fast to truth?

6. Jude gives multiple commands in verses 20-21. What are they? What do you think living out these encouragements might look like in your day-to-day life?

7. Notice that the benefits of such steadfastness in faith do not end with the Christian community but extends outward to others in verses 22-23. How might living into the commands of verses in the preceding two verses empower you to more confidently reach out to others?

8. We shouldn't miss the beautiful promises and reminders embedded in the benediction that concludes Jude's letter in vs. 24-25. These words serve Jude's purpose of encouraging steadfastness, faithfulness, and perseverance. List some of the people you've been praying for lately. Pray these words of blessing and worship on their behalf. With whom could you share these verses this week?

PRAYER

As we embark on this great investigation of the glorious truths contained in the Apostles' Creed, take some time to write out a prayer to God asking him to use this study to do in you the very things that Jude highlights: confirm and grow your faith to the ends that you will know him more, follow him more closely, and reach out to others more readily.

THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



I believe

Week Two I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

Read the text of the Apostles' Creed slowly. (See page 3.)

There is so much packed in the twelve words that kick off the Apostles' Creed! Before jumping in to this study, pause for a moment and ask God to help you understand the power of this tremendous confession.

The first exclamation of faith in the Creed speaks to three truths about God we'll explore. That God is Father; that he is almighty; and he is maker of all. Each of these things have huge implications for our lives and we'll consider each in turn.

The Fatherhood of God

1. How has your relationship with your earthly father helped or hindered your ability to think of God as your Father?

While there are a few instances in Scripture in which God is spoken of as Father by virtue of his creating all things (Mal 2:10, Acts 17:28), these passages are more about origins than intimacy. But most passages about the Fatherhood of God are rich with meaning and implications for us, as they speak in intimate and loving terms of the Father's relationship to Jesus the Son and to those who have been adopted into the family through faith in Jesus.

Week 2.

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

1. Gen 1:31-2:3
2. Eph 1:3-6
3. 1 Jn 3:1-2
4. Acts 17:22-28
5. Ps 121
6. 1 Cor 8:6
7. Ps. 103:13

2. Read the following Scriptures that speak to the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. What do they tell us about their relationship?

Mark 1:11, John 5:9-23, 8:28-29

3. The Bible teaches that through Jesus, we can share in this same loving and trusting relationship with the Father! Can you think of any other passages of Scripture that help fill out the picture of the goodness of having God as our father? (If you're unfamiliar with the Bible, you might start by looking at Matthew 6.)

The Almighty

4. J.I. Packer writes, "Men treat God's sovereignty as a theme for controversy, but in Scripture it is a matter for worship."¹ Read the following verses that exult in God's power.

Ps 115:3, Ps 135:6, Ps 145

The theological word for how God's sovereign power is exerted in the events of history is *providence*. The Heidelberg Catechism, written in 1563 in Heidelberg, Germany as a tool for instructing people in the faith and which we will repeatedly look at in this study, unpacks the significance of the truths we proclaim in the Apostles' Creed. In the section related to the phrase we're looking at today, we find these questions and responses:

Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

A. Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which He upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty—all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from His fatherly hand.

Q. How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?

A. We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love. All creatures are so completely in His hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.

¹ J.I. Packer, *Affirming the Apostles' Creed*, p45.

5. Which of these implications of God's almightiness speak to you most right now? Is there something you need to do? (Repent for ingratitude, impatience, or mistrust? Praise God for his generosity and provision? Ask God for a deeper trust in his care for you?)

The Maker

6. Not long ago we studied the opening chapters of Genesis, so this should be familiar territory for us. Nevertheless, it is a topic that cannot be emphasized too much. Read and reflect on the following verses.

Ps 50:10-12, 100:3, 146:5-7

7. How does the fact that God is creator shape our understanding of...

... God himself?

... the world we live in?

... ourselves?

Finally, let's put it all together. The Maker of all--the Almighty!--he is the one we're invited to call Abba Father. Wow!

8. How does knowing that God delights in us and loves us deeply impact how we navigate the joys and challenges of this season of life?

PRAYER

Spend some time reveling in the fact that the Almighty God has chosen to make himself your Father! Use whatever words of praise come to mind for you as you consider this stunning truth. You may even want to respond with writing or art below.

THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



I believe

Week Three And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

1. Think back to the first impression of Jesus you can remember. How would you have described Him to a friend?

Read the Apostles' Creed slowly out loud. (See page 3.)

The Creed describes Jesus as Christ, God's Only Son and our Lord. He holds three roles that are significant and unique. Today we'll consider the importance of these titles.

2. Read Matthew 16:13-17. What responses do you think he'd get today to the question "Who do people say I am?"

Week 3.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,

1. John 1:1-5
2. Luke 1:30-33
3. Heb 1:1-3
4. Jn 1:10-13
5. Eph 1:3-10
6. Col 1:15-20
7. Matthew 16:13-16

The Christ

Now let's look closer at the title *Christ*. This is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term *Messiah*. It means "anointed one." Anointing with oil was done to show someone was set apart for a God-ordained purpose.

In the Old Testament, anointed roles included prophets (revealers of God's will to the people), priests (offering sacrifices and intercession for the people to God), and kings (appointed by God to govern His people).

3. How is Jesus the *ultimate* fulfillment of each of these roles?
 - a. Prophet (John 1:18)

b. Priest (Hebrew 7:23-28)

c. King (Luke 1:30-32, Rev.19:11-16)

God's Only Son

To be a "son" of someone means to be of the same substance, the same nature. God is eternal, uncreated. Jesus is in every way equal to and one with God the Father (Hebrews 1:1-3).

4. How is it that we are also called "sons" and how is our sonship different than His? (Romans 8:15-17)

Our Lord

5. The Heidelberg Catechism, Day 13, asks, "Why do you call Him our Lord?" Ponder the answer one phrase at a time. Underline words that stand out to you and note why.

"Because He has ransomed us, body and soul, from all our sins, not with silver or gold, but with His precious blood, and has freed us from all the power of the devil to make us his own possession."

Read John 13:13-15 and Luke 6:46-49.

6. What are some ways you can serve those around you in the name of Christ?

PRAYER

Matthew 11:28-30 assures us the lordship of Jesus is good. Name the things weighing heavy on your heart this week during the pandemic. As you give Jesus your burdens, thank Him for the ways He brings rest to your soul.

THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



I believe

Week Four ...Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary

1. What is one Christmas tradition that you enjoy?

Though our cultural celebrations of Christmas sometimes demonstrate little theological significance, in this study we will be reminded of the history-changing truths of the first Christmas.

Recite the Creed slowly, out loud. (See page 3.)

Jesus' birth represents more than the sentimentalized picture of a perfectly calm stable that we often see on Christmas cards. Rather, the theological implications of what is known as the Incarnation are sweeping.

2. Read Luke 1:26-38. Though this story may be familiar, as you read, take note of what emotions may have arisen in Mary during this conversation.

3. What promises does Gabriel make about the child that is to come?

Week 4:

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,

1. Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6-7
2. Luke 1:26-35
3. Matt 1:18-23
4. John 1:14
5. Heb 4:14-16
6. Gal 4:4-7
7. Phil 2:5-11

4. Read Matthew 1:22-23. How does this fill out the significance of what is taking place with the birth of this child?

5. The early church leader Gregory of Nazianzus wrote, "That which is not assumed [or taken on] is not healed." Read Hebrews 2:14-18. Based on what you read there, try to summarize why the full humanity of Jesus is so important.

6. Yet, the New Testament is equally clear that alongside sharing in our humanity, Jesus retained his divinity. Read Colossians 1:15-20. Why is Jesus' unique combination of divinity and humanity critical for our redemption?

PRAYER

What aspects of your own humanity are most frustrating to you right now? Take these to Jesus in prayer, remembering his full humanness. In what areas of life right now are you in need of God's power? Pray about that, remembering Jesus' full divinity.

THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



I believe

Week Five Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

Week 5.

suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;

1. Isaiah 53
2. Luke 23:44-56
3. Acts 4:8-12
4. Romans 6:1-11
5. Deut 21:22-23 & Gal 3:13
6. Phil 2:5-11
7. Heb 2:14-15

1. Think for a moment about something that has truly shocked, surprised, or even offended you. What was it, and why did it have this effect on you?

When I (Caleb) was in college, I worked at the same summer camp we take our junior high school students to. One memory that has stuck with me from my time working at camp is the reaction one student

had to hearing about Jesus' death and the reason for his death: sin. He was completely shocked, appalled even, that the same Jesus he had heard about all week doing amazing things was wrongly accused, mocked, and executed as a criminal. At first I felt like I needed to correct his reaction, but the more I have reflected the more I have realized he was the one correcting me. If the suffering, crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus, of God, on our behalf doesn't move and even shock us, then perhaps we are the ones who need correcting.

Read Luke 23 and take in the story.

2. Read Luke 23 again, I know you will be tempted to skip this step, but don't. Take some time and read it again. Take note of any details that stick out to you, surprise you, or you missed the first time round. (For example, I had never previously noticed that Herod and Pilate became friends.)

3. I promise this is the last time, but read Luke 23 again. This time write down any and all questions you have about the text. (One of mine: It seems to me that Luke emphasizes the verbal and emotional abuse Jesus received and says little of the physical suffering. Why is that?)

4. During Jesus' trials under Pilate, what reasons are given for Jesus to be put to death? How do these conversations underline the true reason for his death?

5. In verses 39-43, both criminals make requests of Jesus. What is the difference between the two requests? What do these verses teach us about how we are saved?

6. Look at each Matthew 27:45-54, Mark 15:33-39, and Luke 23:44-47. What do the supernatural events coinciding with Jesus' death tell us about its significance?

7. Read Romans 6:1-11. According to Paul, what did Christ's death accomplish for us?

8. Now, let's get practical. How does the death of Jesus on account of our sins impact your daily life? If your answer is, "Not much," try to imagine how greater awareness of it might influence your daily life and then write down some thoughts here.

PRAYER

Take some time to consider why Jesus came down from heaven and was crucified, dead, and buried. Take time to confess your sins to God. Thank God for the grace and forgiveness available through Jesus Christ. Praise God that his love for us was so great that he made a way for our redemption from sin and death.

THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



I believe

Week Six He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.

1. Who is someone you've known and loved that has died? What's one cherished memory you have of them?

At some point, the fact of death will touch close to home for every one of us. In this study, we're going to explore how the death and resurrection of Jesus matters significantly to our faith and our hope.

Read the Apostles' Creed slowly out loud. (See page 3.)

In today's section we come to a line with a murky past – “he descended to the dead,” or as you may be more familiar with it, “he descended into hell.” This phrase was not found in the earliest versions of the creed and when it appears for the first time, in AD 390, it clearly does not refer to hell (Greek: Gehenna), but to the place of the dead (Greek: Hades). As Wayne Grudem puts it, “Rufinus, the only person who included it before A.D. 650, did not think it meant that Christ descended into hell, but understood the phrase simply to mean that Christ was ‘buried’” (Grudem, Systematic Theology, p586).

Of course, we've already confessed that Jesus was crucified, dead and buried. So why include the line at all? That is a good question and why Christians may land at different conclusions. Some may exclude it altogether since it has a questionable past and may be understood as redundant. Some may understand it to mean that Christ experienced spiritual suffering, which was hellish, by nature of his death for our sins. And some may choose to see this as simply another emphatic statement that he fully experienced death like the rest of humanity.

2. Some may prefer rendering this phrase as “he descended into hell.” If that's you, share what that means to you and some Scriptures that align with your understanding.

Week 6.

he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again

1. John 11:25-27
2. Luke 24:1-11
3. Rom 6:3-11
4. Eph 2:1-10
5. Col 3:1-4
6. 1 Peter 1:3-5
7. 1 Cor 15:12-26

Of course, “he descended...” provides a fitting contrast and set up for “he rose again...”. The resurrection is at the center of the creed and of course is at the center of our faith.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-32.

Over the course of the centuries, some have tried to frame Jesus' resurrection as a spiritual rather than physical or historical event. Early Christians would have no part of that!

3. What evidence does Paul cite for Jesus' physical, historical resurrection?

4. Try to follow Paul's logic about the importance of Jesus' resurrection. What are the consequences if there is no resurrection of the dead/if Christ had not risen from the dead?

Don't get hung up on 15:29 which mentions baptism for the dead. While this verse gets interpreted in different ways by various scholars, it seems best to understand that Paul is not referring to normal Christian practice (notice his use of generic “people” in verse 29 and his use of “we” in verse 30), but is rather indicating that even those Corinthians whose practice he does not condone points to the reality of the resurrection.

5. In verse 19 Paul says, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.” Is he suggesting that our faith has no value for the present? If not, what do you understand him to be saying?

In verses 30-32, Paul makes the connection between our belief in the resurrection and our ability to make sense of our present sufferings.

Read Romans 8:18-25. Here again Paul is bringing together our experience of suffering with our hope of glory (bodily resurrection).

6. How can the resurrection of Jesus help sustain you in times of suffering?

PRAYER

Thank God for the love which led him to send his Son in the flesh to be given over to death and for the power he exerted when he raised Jesus from the dead! Ask the Spirit of God to conform us to the crucified and risen Son of God, so that we, too, may live as those who are dead to sin and alive to God.

THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



I believe

Week Seven He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father almighty.

Week 7.

he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,

1. Luke 24:50-53
2. Acts 1:1-11
3. Rom 8:31-39
4. Heb 7:23-28
5. Eph 1:18-23
6. Heb 1:1-4
7. Eph 2:4-7

Most Christians do a fairly good job of remembering and pondering Christmas, Easter and even anticipating the eventual return of Christ. But have you ever wondered where Jesus has been and what he has been doing for the last 2000 years or so?

The Apostles' Creed, relying on numerous scriptures, helps us with the words: He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

1. It's easy to spend time thinking about Jesus' death and resurrection, and pass over his ascension into heaven. Read Luke 24:50-53 and Mark 16:19. Write down any questions or observations that arise.

2. Read Acts 1:6-11. What do you learn about the ascension from the passage? In what sense did Jesus go to heaven?

3. Read these passages that refer to Jesus sitting at the right hand of God the Father almighty: Acts 2:32-35, Romans 8:33-35, Hebrews 1:3,13, Hebrews 10:12, Hebrews 12:2. What does it signify that Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father?

4. Read Romans 8:34-35 and Hebrews 7:25. How does Jesus' presence in heaven benefit believers here on earth?

5. Read John 16:7. Though we will consider the Holy Spirit more thoroughly in coming weeks, do a little thought experiment now. What if Jesus, having been crucified and resurrected, had stayed on earth indefinitely instead of ascending into heaven? Since the bodily-resurrected Jesus could not be everywhere at once, how is the ascension helpful to Christians around the world?

6. Now, with all of this in mind, consider the significance of the ascension for your daily life. How might the truths about Jesus' ascension and place at God's right hand impact your day-to-day reality?

PRAYER

Spend some time thanking God for the truth that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. Praise God for the mysterious truth that because Jesus has ascended to heaven Christians in every country around the world can now enjoy the ministry and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Pray for any you know of who are struggling during this time-- including yourself if applicable--to experience the comfort of the Holy Spirit and the confidence that comes from having our Lord in heaven. Pray that those who don't know the exalted Jesus as their Lord would come to know him through these circumstances.

THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



I believe

Week Eight He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

1. Take a few moments to consider your life in this unique season. Though much has been cancelled or interrupted, each of us still has (at least some) optimism about changes to come. What is something you're looking forward to? Consider asking the same question to a friend, family member or housemate.

Week 8:

and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

1. Matt 25:31-46
2. John 5:19-29
3. 1 Cor 4:5
4. Titus 2:11-14
5. 2 Thess 1:6-12
6. 1 Cor 15:24-26
7. Rev 21:1-8

Read the Apostles' Creed slowly out loud:

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

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

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

The Creed wraps up its treatment of Jesus with the statement, "he will come again to judge the living and the dead." This week we will consider selected passages from the Book of Revelation. Though it's filled with poetic language and remarkable imagery, hang in there! Engage your mind and your heart with these verses that serve to highlight the prominence of what the New Testament will label our "blessed hope."

2. As you read each of the following passages about Jesus' return, make a note of anything that stands out to you.

Revelation 19:11-16

Revelation 20:11-21:5

Revelation 21:22-22:7

3. What emotions arise in you as you read these passages?

4. We can all think of a time when we were excited about something only to find that it didn't match our expectations. Look again at the Revelation passages. How do these promises address our deepest longings and needs? In other words, which aspects of these passages sound like good news?

5. The New Testament authors saw day-to-day relevance in Jesus' promised return. Read the following passages and, as you read each, make a note of what the author indicates about how the reality of Christ's return can impact our day-to-day lives.

Titus 2:11-14

2 Peter 3:8-14

6. Take inventory of your own life. How could the promise of Christ's triumphant return affect your decisions, your thinking, your perspective?
7. In light of all that we've considered about the return of Christ and its practical implications, what is one specific way that your homegroup or other spiritual community can pray for you and come alongside you as you seek to grow in your life of discipleship?

PRAYER

Begin your time of prayer by thanking God for the promise of Christ's return and the various ways that things will be made right at his coming. Confess any ways in which you have placed your hope in lesser things than that which is promised in the pages of Scripture. Ask the Holy Spirit to actively point out the practical relevance of the good news of the Lord's return as you make your way through your daily life and to give you perspective in the midst of any challenges you might be facing right now.

THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



I believe

Week Nine I believe in the Holy Spirit

1. What is something that you use every day that you are not sure you could do without?

After spending the last 7 studies considering the first two members of the Trinity, this week we finally come to the third member of the Godhead: the Holy Spirit. The Creed treats the Spirit very briefly with the simple confession, "I believe in the Holy Spirit."¹ The brevity of these words, however, in no way means that the person and work of the Spirit is of minimal importance. In fact, the activity and character of the Spirit has profound daily relevance for those who are a part of the family of God.

2. There is arguably no chapter in the Bible that mentions the Holy Spirit more consistently than Romans 8. Read Romans 8:1-27 and make a note in the space below of all that this great chapter has to say about the Holy Spirit.

Week 9.

I believe in the Holy Spirit

1. Isaiah 63:7-14
2. Joel 2:28-29
3. John 14:15-18
4. John 14:25-26
5. John 16:7-15
6. Acts 1:8
7. Eph. 1:13-14

3. Is there an aspect of the Spirit's ministry as described in Romans 8 that most resonates with you? Be prepared to share your thoughts with your homegroup.

¹ This study guide will focus on the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Should you wish to explore passages relating to the Spirit's co-equality with God the Father and Jesus the Son, here is a partial list for your personal growth and study: Matthew 28:16-20; John 7:37-39; John 14:15-18; Acts 5:1-4; 1 Peter 1:1-2.

4. Romans 8 is far from an exhaustive treatment of the Holy Spirit. There are a number of biblical passages that describe the Spirit's person and work. Choose one of the following passages to read and consider and then, in the space that follows, make a note of what that passage adds to what you've already discovered in Romans 8.

John 14:23-27

1 Corinthians 2:11-16

John 16:12-15

1 Corinthians 12:4-13

Acts 1:1-8

Galatians 5:16-25

Now, let's try to put the pieces together by considering what Jesus had to say about the coming of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus told his disciples of the suffering and trials that would come both for himself and for those who follow him, he made this astonishing claim: "Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7).

5. How might all that you've considered in this study help to make sense of Jesus' claim? In other words, how does the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit demonstrate that it is for the good of Jesus' followers that he went away?

6. Which aspects of the Spirit's ministry that you've looked at in this study do you find yourself benefiting from each day?

7. What is one element of what you've considered that you would like to see more of in your life? Consider sharing your response with your homegroup or other spiritual community.

PRAYER

Pray that the Holy Spirit's leading would be evident in your life and that the ears of your heart would be attuned to his voice. Pray that the Spirit's power would work in your life so that you would, increasingly, be transformed into the image of Jesus. Pray that the gifts given to you by the Spirit would be used for the sake of building up the church and declaring the name of the Lord Jesus. Pray, finally, that by the Spirit's power, revival would come in our church, our city, and our country.

THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



believe

Week Ten The holy catholic church, the communion of saints

We are hoping at this point in our series, the Creed is becoming very familiar to you! Try saying as much of it as you can without looking at it. Then go back and look and see what you may have left out. Over the last few weeks, repeat this exercise until you've got it memorized (or are close!).¹

This week we will be thinking about the fellowship of believers that is an important part of the good news of Jesus. So as we begin, take a moment to reflect on your own experience.

1. What is your experience with "church"? What are the best and worst memories you have of church (either SBCC or other expressions of the Church)?

Week 10.

the holy catholic church, the communion of saints,

1. Matt 16:13-18
2. Acts 2:41-47
3. Eph 2:11-22
4. Eph 4:1-6
5. Romans 12:4-8
6. 1 Cor 12:12-20
7. Eph 4:11-16

2. How can we say the church is "holy" with a straight face in light of the scandals that regularly rock the church, not to mention the sinfulness of our own hearts that each of us know too well? Read the following verses and try to summarize in one sentence what the Creed means by this.

Ephesians 5:25-27, Colossians 1:21-22, 1 Peter 2:9

¹ Why might you even attempt to memorize the Creed? Well, for one thing, it may help you keep in mind what Christians have seen as most central to the gospel as you read the Scriptures, thereby making you more aware of how these truths are unpacked in the Bible. It also may help us as we share our faith to ensure we are not shortchanging aspects of the gospel that generations of Christians have seen as essential.

The term “catholic” in the creed confuses many who assume it refers to the Roman Catholic Church. When we say we believe in the holy catholic church, we are not saying we agree with all Roman Catholic teachings. The word “catholic” simply means “universal” and points to the fact that the church encompasses all Christians everywhere, regardless of culture or race, and unites us to one another in Christ.

3. The letter to the Ephesians was largely written to help the believers there appreciate this fact. Read the following verses from Ephesians and again try to summarize in a sentence or two why this “holy catholic church” is such great news.

Ephesians 2:11-22, 4:4-6

Now consider the phrase “the communion of saints.” This is a rich phrase that we will only be able to scratch the surface of, but you may recognize the Greek work for communion, *koinonia*. This word also gets translated regularly as “fellowship” and refers to a sharing-in-common with one another.

4. Read the following verses and consider- what do we share in common, and with whom?

Acts 2:42-47, 1 Cor 10:16-17, 2 Corinthians 8:3-4, 1 John 1:1-7

5. Have you ever had the experience of enjoying “the communion of saints” with people you just met, perhaps even with people who don’t speak the same language as you, because of your shared faith in Christ? If you have, share about that with your homegroup.

But perhaps most important is the kind of fellowship we share with our local church family. For over 40 years, SB Community has been gladly proclaiming the centrality and indispensability of the local church in the plans of God. If you’ve spent much time among us, you’ve probably heard something like this:

There is today a widespread belief that one can be a Christian and develop one’s own faith system apart from the church. The proposition is ludicrous. Everyone regenerated by God is, by definition, a part of the universal church. It’s not a matter of choice or membership. And following the pattern made normative in the book of Acts, each believer is to make his or her confession, be baptized, and become part of a local congregation with all of the accountability that implies.¹

1 Being the Body, Colson, p46

6. What does it mean to you to participate in/ to be a member of the body of Christ? How can you grow in living out what it means to be part of the Church?

PRAYER

Thank God for the gift of the church and the communion of saints. Think specifically about those who preceded us in death and those who are still alive that have left deep impressions on your life. Pray for the churches of this town and for SBCC in particular, that we would embody the type of fellowship that God intends for his church to be. And pray for the mission of the church- that many more will be brought into the family of God through faith in Jesus.

THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



I believe

Week Eleven The forgiveness of sins

Week 11. *the forgiveness of sins*

1. Psalm 130
2. Luke 1:76-79
3. Acts 10:42-43
4. Rom 3:21-26
5. 2 Cor 5:17-21
6. Heb 10:11-18
7. Col 1:9-14

1. Tell about a time when you worked to fix something that was broken. What was it and how did you go about fixing it?

One of the fundamental assertions of the Christian faith is that something is broken in our world and in our hearts. The rebellion of the man and the woman in the garden in Genesis 3 ushered sin and brokenness into God's previously pristine creation. Fortunately, every page of the Bible that comes after that fateful event tells the story of God's efforts to restore and redeem what his unfaithful image bearers broke. A key to making right what went wrong is the offer of forgiveness for sins.

2. For Old Testament Israel, forgiveness was available through the sacrificial system prescribed in the Law. Read Leviticus 16:6-22 and make a note of anything that stands out to you.

Verse 34 of that same chapter indicates that this solemn celebration known as the Day of Atonement was instituted as an annual and perpetual observance.

3. Now, read Matthew 26:26-29. How do Jesus' words at the Last Supper connect to what you already considered in Leviticus 16?

4. There is perhaps no biblical book more infatuated with the meaning of Jesus' death than the Book of Hebrews. Read Hebrews 9:11-15 and 10:1-18. How does the author of Hebrews contribute to your understanding of the forgiveness of sins and the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection?

5. The beautiful news of the gospel is that the forgiveness of sins is an offer held out to anyone who desires to exchange their broken heart for a healed one. Read 1 John 1:5-2:2. Which aspects of what John writes there most resonate with you?

6. In Romans 8, the Apostle Paul talks about the practical implications of the offer of forgiveness. Read Romans 8:1-8. How have you experienced the freedom that Paul describes there?

7. Try to piece this all together. How does the forgiveness of Christ address the brokenness in human hearts and in the world?

8. Take a moment to do some introspection. How might the forgiveness offered to you in Christ cause you to live more faithfully this week? What would you hope would grow in your life and your heart in light of the forgiveness of Jesus?

PRAYER

Praise God that, as Psalm 130 puts it, “If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.” Praise God for being a God who delights in offering forgiveness. Praise him for the salvation made possible by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Ask that, by the power of his Holy Spirit, you might more deeply understand the forgiveness you’ve been offered and more faithfully live in light of that forgiveness. Name the ways that you have failed to live faithfully for God and his kingdom and revel in the ongoing forgiveness that God continues to offer his children each day.

THE APOSTLES' CREED: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



I believe

Week Twelve The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting

As we come to the end of the Creed this week, take a moment to say this ancient statement of faith again. As you do, consider how many generations of people have confessed these same words, savored these same truths, and have at times literally staked their lives on the reality of what is affirmed in the Apostles' Creed.

Today we get to look at an indispensable aspect of our faith- the glorious hope that is held out in the gospel, something every believer ought to regularly ponder. But before we do...

1. What are one or two things you hope to do or experience before you die?

Many people have developed a "bucket list" of such things they want to do before they die. But oftentimes these same people don't stop to consider what comes after death. There are, of course, many different ideas about what happens to a person after death. Some believe that we become angels. Others that we leave the body and become spirit beings in an entirely spiritual heaven. But what does the Bible teach?

2. Read the following verses about what believers can expect immediately upon death and make note of what you learn.

Luke 23:39-42, Acts 7:54-59, Philippians 1:20-24

Week 12:

the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

1. John 5:28-29
2. John 11:17-27
3. 1 Cor 15:12-26
4. 1 Cor 15:51-57
5. Rev 20:4-6
6. John 3:14-17
7. Romans 6:22-23

3. The verses above describe what is called the “intermediate state.” But this is not the ultimate hope for Christians. Read the following verses and make some notes about what they teach us about our future hope.

John 6:44, 1 Cor 15:35-55, Philippians 3:20-21

The Heidelberg Catechism, reflecting on this part of the Apostles’ Creed, puts it this way:

Q: *How does “the resurrection of the body” comfort you?*

A: *Not only my soul will be taken immediately after this life to Christ its head, but even my very flesh, raised by the power of Christ, will be reunited with my soul and made like Christ’s glorious body.*

4. Take some time to consider the implications of this. Consider how much of life now can be tainted by the weakness of our bodies- not just our physical health, but our mental and emotional health as well. Jot down a few frustrations you may experience now that you will never deal with again when you are raised with a body like Christ’s.

One of the most well-known verses in the Bible is John 3:16 with its promise of eternal or everlasting life to all who believe in Christ. But this “life everlasting” does not just refer to a life with no end. As J.I. Packer puts it, “*The life everlasting means not just endless existence (demons and lost souls have that), but the final joy into which Jesus entered and which he promised and prayed that his followers would one day share.*”¹

5. How do the following verses help fill out the picture of what is meant by “life everlasting”?

1 Cor 2:9, 1 John 3:2, Revelation 21:1-8, 22:1-5

Now look back at your answer to question #1. In light of the hope of life everlasting in a resurrected body with the living God and all the fullness of joy that entails, how much more ought we to look forward to what is in store for us than these real but temporal pleasures?

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul is reflecting on our hope of resurrection and life everlasting and ends the section with these words: “And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.” (1 Thes 4:17-18)

1 Affirming the Apostles’ Creed, Packer, 146

6. How can you encourage those in your homegroup and other Christians who may be suffering right now with truths we've looked at in this phrase- "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting"?

PRAYER

Considering the tremendous weight of suffering in this world, thank God for the "eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" that God is preparing for us. Pray for those who are enduring physical and mental anguish, that the hope of a new body and eternal life would give them strength to persevere. Pray for the church, that we would live as those who "look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen."