

I. The Apostles' Creed in Biblical Perspective

"I Believe..."

"Confessions and Creeds"

I Timothy 3:14–4:2

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

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In the various things the Lord has allowed us to do to fulfill our mission of God's glory, equipping Christians to worship God to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ we are going to look at I Timothy 3 and a little of I Timothy 4. I'll start with I Timothy 3:14–16a which says *[14] I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, [15] if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. [16a] Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I confess unabashedly that I do love you and I also love God's Word. I love God's Word dearly because it tells me how to love you, it's inspired, inerrant and sufficient but I love God's Word because when God's Word came to me with the pinnacle message of the Gospel I found out that God loves me and that He loves me through His Son to save me from my sins. You can know the Word of God and not know the God of the Word but you can't know the God of the Word without knowing the Word of God. I love the Word of God because I can know God as my Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. I found out the love of God from His Word through His Son Jesus who came and died on the cross to save me from my sins by the Spirit of God. He took me from where I was but didn't leave me where I was. God's Word informs me, shapes me and exhibits God's patience with me. I am not where I want to be but I praise God I'm not where I was and that's because of the Spirit of God and the Word of God.

I love what I have seen from God's Word by His Spirit to the glory of Christ do in my family. I've been blessed by God's Word as I've seen it work in the life of my wife, my children, their spouses and my grandchildren and this has blessed me in so many ways. It has done a saving work in our children and their spouses' lives and now we're seeing it do a work in our grandchildren's lives. I love God's Word because of the Gospel, the whole council of God and its implications are glorious. I have had the privilege to pastor three churches and I have been blessed to see what it has done in God's people. I have seen God's Word save people, change people, save marriages, at work in families and even in these last two and a half months during this COVID 19 situation I've seen God working in the lives of people.

This is why the main menu of the ministry of the Word that I am supported to work hard at the preaching and teaching of the Word, is what is called expository preaching. It's an attempt to obey Paul's word to Timothy to preach the Word but even then you need wisdom. As you preach the Word of God consecutively through a book I ask things like – what book would God lead me to preach from, what should I be preaching. In the last seven weeks I've also done topical expository knowing all the questions that were coming in the context of how to respond to government, culture, medical and viruses and all of that. This was a series titled Crisis and the Christian and how a Christian is to respond during crises. We looked at seven cases from the Bible to distill how a believer responds to crises in light of the sovereign sufficiency of God's grace and mercy.

As I was getting to the end of the seven lessons Governor Ivy of the state of Alabama came on and said we could start meeting together with strict social distancing. I think she heard that I finished my series on that so it was time to make a change (smile). Thankfully she did make that change and then I began to think ‘where do I go from here?’ I decided not to do a book of the Bible for a number of reasons but to give you just one it comes back to God’s Word. I have had the privilege during this time of this present distress to see many people benefit from God’s grace and how He sovereignly was over them in what He did. I have seen people come to Christ as they have grappled with the Word that they hadn’t grappled with before. This present distress caused them to stop and listen and then God gave them eyes to see and ears to hear. I have seen believers who were wandering called back. I have seen people renewed, recalibrated and realigned yet I know we still have challenges ahead of us.

So how can we grow from where God is working on us in these last couple of months, anticipating what He is going to do in our world but what will He continue to do in us? How can that realignment go even more aligned? How can that recalibration get deeper in the habits of my heart? How can we get focused on the essentials of our lives? I do not form my Christianity by what I see or experience. I form my Christianity by what I’ve heard from God’s Word that allows me to understand what I see and experience. Many of us want the sophisticated insights but what we really need are the essential insights that lead to sophisticated abilities to understand. What are those essentials? I honestly do not know a better collection of essentials than to develop a life that is framed, filled and founded upon the Word of God than the foundational doctrines that are collected in the Apostles’ Creed which have been used in the church for 1800 years. This is when I was convinced what I would do next from the pulpit.

In other words, there are 13 doctrines in the Apostles’ Creed and each Lord’s Day we’ll look at one of them as we go to the key texts that those doctrines come from, explained by and founded upon. Then we will try to understand them. This creed has been so gloriously used in the lives of God’s people and we’ll look at how it can be used in your life as a new Christian, in the renewal God is doing in your life or the realignment God is accomplishing. We’ll make sure the recalibration is from God’s Word starting with the essentials.

If you build a truss for a roof and you want the two trusses to meet if you get off even a quarter of an inch at the foundation it will be off inches or maybe even feet at the top. We don’t need to go immediately to the superstructure but to those foundational doctrines to make sure we understand them. Because when you get to the more difficult texts and issues of life you will know that God will never contradict these foundational doctrines so you need to know them. Therefore I believe the Apostles’ Creed is helpful to accomplish this and more than that I believe it’s the right Biblical function of a creed, a confession. So I want to show you this from a text of Scripture in I Timothy.

This is Paul’s letter to Timothy, the first of two and it’s to him as he is engaged in a particular ministry. Before we look at these verses, I want to give you some context. Paul was the founding pastor at the church of Ephesus which is where Timothy is pastoring when Paul sends him this letter. Paul was in Ephesus for three years doing ministry which is the longest he stayed at any place. While he was there God called him to go back to Antioch, Jerusalem and there he will be put in prison but before he left Paul called the leadership of the church at Ephesus together in Acts 20. Paul gave them an exhortation and they were so emotionally moved by it that the Bible says they fell upon his neck hugging and kissing him.

In the middle of that text this is what Paul says to them at Ephesus in Acts 20:28–31,
[28] Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made

you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. [29] I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; [30] and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. [31] Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

In other words, Paul's departure was going to create a vacuum and they needed to fill that vacuum because Satan would relentlessly and inevitably attempt to use that vacuum to put false teachers teaching perverse things and false leaders who lead to themselves. So Paul wanted the leadership to be ready and on the alert. Sadly, it seems as if they didn't listen to Paul because after his release from his first Roman imprisonment he hears that Ephesus is being decimated. So he sends his best man, Timothy, a man of proven worth whom he called his son in the faith and very dear to Paul. Paul then gives Timothy a handbook on how to lead a church back to Gospel health and vitality. In the first chapter he shows him true teaching and true teachers and to get rid of the false ones. In the second chapter Paul shows Timothy about prayer and evangelism. In the third chapter, I Timothy 3, he gave him the qualifications of true leaders and shepherds. When he finishes he gives a summation of what he has yet said in I Timothy 3:14–15 which says [14] *I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, [15] if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.*

You can't know without the Word of God. You can speculate or be intuitive, imagine or be philosophical about it but you can't know. Christianity is not a religion of intuition or imagination. It is knowing and trusting God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer by divine revelation, the Word of God. Then he adds an ethical word – ought. He doesn't give a moral word – should. The church of God is all kinds of things but one thing it is, is a family and this family is built on and for something. It is not the pastor's church or the denomination's church or even the member's church but it is God's church – God's household.

How should we as God's people conduct ourselves as His family? We know from the Word of God. According to this text the church is the pillar and the buttress of the truth. In other words, the church of God is built upon the Word of God and is built to uphold the Word of God. A pillar holds something up. A buttress is there to hold something up. So the church is being held up by the Word of God on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets and it is called to uphold the Word of God because Satan is going to attack the Word of God with false teachers and false leaders. So you are called to uphold the Word that you are built upon. The church is the pillar and support of the truth.

Then what does Paul do? This is the reason we are doing this series. When Paul talks about the importance of the truth he goes to a Biblical instrument used to teach Biblical truth. That instrument is a creed, a confession. This is not the only confession and creed in the Bible. Creeds and confessions are found in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, in the books of the minor Prophets, Philippians, Titus, and Ephesians. Creeds and confessions have been developed in order that the truth has something used to collect it, to teach it around an issue or they are developed to maintain a truth that is under attack. There are multiple confessions in the history of the church and the majority were developed to ward off errors.

In the early church there were errors on the Trinitarian doctrine of God, on the person of Christ who was fully God and fully man and on others so what would happen is the church would pull elders together in order to establish a creed to refute the error. There is the Chalcedonian Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Nicene Creed but I want to take you to the

Apostles' Creed. It has been used to defend truth but its primary purpose was to teach essential truth as it was first collected in the second century. God uses creeds in the Bible to teach the Bible and that's why I want to look at this. The Apostles' Creed is an extra Biblical creed to teach Biblical truth therefore it has to be checked against the Bible which I propose to do for you in the coming studies doctrine by doctrine by doctrine that is contained in this creed.

I also want to show you something else. I Timothy 4:1–2 says *[1] Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, [2] through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.* The Spirit tells us here that Satan will try to undermine the truth you are built upon and uphold by bringing false leaders and false teachers into the church. With brazen faced Satan will have those false teachers occupying pulpits that were once occupied with those teaching God's Word and they will purposely distort, deter and detour people from God's Word.

It's interesting to me in my Christian life that I have read sermons from pastors in pulpits and I know the pastors who used to be in those pulpits and what they used to preach, yet what I'm reading is completely apostate, heretical, error filled doctrine concerning the serious issues of the faith and is able to do it brazen faced. They are taking the money of God's tithe for their support, have abandoned the Word, put their mind over the Word instead of submitting to the Word and they're teaching the doctrines of demons instead of the doctrines of the Word of God and then I have asked myself 'how can they do that?' Then I realize, 'Harry, if it were not for the grace and Spirit of God you would do it.' Consciences are seared and hardened teaching false doctrine.

Here's the positive. God's church is built upon the truth to uphold the truth. Here we are warned by the Spirit of God that Satan is going to attack the truth. Here is the admonition and the warning as well. In between is the creed that talks about the mystery of Godliness that is found in the Incarnate Christ who saved us, ascended and who is coming again. That creed is in between the negative and the positive. In other words, the creed was given in the Word of God to show us that a creed can be used to teach truth to God's people and to ward off false truth to protect God's people. There it stands with its right use. The creed is in the last verse of I Timothy 3; *[16] Great indeed, we confess (creed), is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.*

This leads me to the takeaway of how we would want to handle this as the people of God. The takeaway is the Apostles' Creed is a gift of God's providence to His church, containing essential foundations of the faith 'once for all delivered to the saints' as an instrument of discipleship, confession and unity. We learn by looking at Biblical creeds that have Biblical truth how to use this creed.

I want you to know the Apostles' Creed was not written by the Apostles. Basically this creed was put together about the middle of the second century. The Apostles' Creed is apostolic doctrine faithful to God's Word but it was written by disciples of disciples of disciples of the Apostles. It is called the Apostles' Creed because it's faithful to the apostolic doctrine found in the New Covenant but it wasn't even called the Apostles' Creed for hundreds of years. In fact, the Gospel work will go up into Europe and the language of reverence and knowledge was Latin. Wherever this creed was uttered it was uttered with a particular formula.

Normally as this creed was used in worship it began with the leader and then a response from the congregation as follows;

Leader: Christian, what do you believe concerning God the Father?

Congregation: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

Leader: Christian, what do you believe concerning God the Son?

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

Leader: Christian, what do you believe concerning the Holy Spirit?

Congregation: 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. (*universal)*

This started in Latin as ‘Credo’ which means believe and we get the word credible from this word.

Latin—**Credo in Deum** Patrem omnipotentem, Creatorem caeli et terrae.

English—***I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.***

The great creeds, like the great hymns that stay with us seem to all be Trinitarian. They revolve around the majesty of God in His three Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When the truths of this ancient creed was recited all 109 words for 1800 years, modified for a couple of hundred years, this is what it would say.

You are saved by faith and you can’t be a Christian until you believe. The question isn’t whether you believe or not for Satan believes but the question is what do you believe so they begin to understand their statement of faith (noun), the faith was decreed. The act of believing is credo – I believe, in what? This statement of the faith – this distillation of the essentials. Not all the essentials of Christianity are in the Apostles’ Creed but the statements that are in there are essentials. Why are we going to try and understand this creed? It is because we ought to be using it three ways – discipleship, confession and unity.

When we are faced with days of challenge – viruses, pestilence, war, failures, difficulties, days of victory – how do I not get carried away with myself, descend into self pity in the one or exalt myself in the other – I have to know who God is so using this creed in discipleship will help in all that. To have a sound life in this world you have to have sound doctrine. Sound lives are built on sound doctrine. When you build sound doctrine you don’t build at the secondary (the super structure level), you build on the foundational level to make sure you’re building on sound doctrine.

Probably around my 6th grade level on growing up, when I got home from school I liked to look at the newspaper. The newspaper had already been looked at by my parents for it had been folded up into sections. The section I always read first was the sports section with no shame at all. After that I went to the comics section and the first comic I always went to was Mr. Schultz (Peanuts comics) for he (his comics) was my guide for life then. Lucy and Linus were my favorite of the characters. Here is one I want to share with you where the two of them are at a window looking out into the rain and Lucy is discouraged. Here is how the comic goes...

Lucy: Boy look at it rain...what if it floods the whole world?!

Linus: It will never do that...in the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow...

Lucy: You've taken a great load off my mind...

Linus: Sound theology has a way of doing that!

Sound doctrine has a way of doing that for it calms our fears. It bids our sorrows cease. The number one usage of the Apostles' Creed initially was that when people were converted they were first disciplined with the creed and then brought to baptism. In other words, this was the curriculum of the early church's pastor's inquirers class. This is what they used to make sure one understood the faith once and for all foundationally with essentials. This is why preachers who preach the truth preach gold, silver and jewels and not wood, hay and stubble for when challenges come they will only be polished and I want people to know the truth that anchors the soul and propels the Christian life to grow.

Secondly, this creed is a confession. We use a creed to make three confessions. We confess these truths to God in worship. We confess these truths to one another in fellowship and we confess these truths to the world in witness and evangelism. We don't confess this creed every Sunday but we will do it a lot more in the coming studies. Normally at Briarwood we do it about every 5 to 6 weeks. I believe in worship and you confess this to God. It is not mumbled.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

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

I believe 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. (*universal)*

We are ready to confess this to one another as we encourage one another in fellowship, in days of challenge and victory. And we confess it before the world – I believe, yes I'm guilty of being a Christian!

Thirdly and finally, is unity. Amos 3:3 says [3] *“Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?”* So I'm thankful for the Apostles' Creed. I'm thankful that as we confess it that there are things we can do together and walk together in. Apostles' Creed Christians can do a crusade together with Franklin Graham, deal with this sanctity of life issue, minister of issues of justice, etc. We are not going to be able to walk where we disagree but we can walk here. Every church has 101 Christianity which includes the Apostles' Creed, then there is 201 Christianity which has our confession of faith but realize that everything a true Christian believes is not in the Apostles' Creed but everything in the Apostles' Creed a true Christian believes when understood in its Biblical context. The doctrine on the inerrancy of the Word is assumed in it but it's not in the Apostles' Creed. Not all the essentials are in this creed but it's one thing we surely do believe together.

I'll close this with story. One time I was with my dad. I was 14 years old. My dad said 'Son, today I want you to go with me to church for a friend of mine is joining the church and I

want us to go and support him.’ I said ‘sure Dad.’ Little did I know that six years after we went to this church I would go with my wife Cindy and would get converted there. It was a reformed Presbyterian Church and in the worship service that Sunday I was with my dad they affirmed and confessed the Apostles’ Creed. I had never heard that creed before.

I had been raised in a church that didn’t do that creed. In fact, we were proud we didn’t do that creed. The church I went to said ‘no creed but Christ, no confession but the Bible.’ Little did I know that was actually a creed and a confession but it’s a very insufficient creed and confession, because I could name five cults right now that would say that but they don’t mean the Christ of the Bible that I know nor do they mean the Bible for even the Bible I know. I can tell you denominations that will say that in professing Christendom that we don’t mean the same thing.

When I was with my dad that Sunday and did that creed I asked him ‘Dad, what in the world is this? We don’t do this creed do we?’ He said ‘no, son we don’t, but I think we ought to.’ I said ‘what?’ He said ‘Yes, think about what it says. We just walked into this church today to worship and we just heard from them what they believe and they just told God what they believed from His Word. Son, I think that’s a good thing.’

Make the good confession. Use it to disciple. Use it to confess to God in worship, to one another in fellowship and to the world as a witness and let’s walk together because we can stand firm in it, like a Martin Luther on the day of challenge, said, ‘here I stand, I believe.’ Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Take a few moments in silent prayer and let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart. You may be reading this today and you have never given your heart and life by faith to Christ as defined as I heard of Him who loves me and gave Himself for me to save me from my sins and that I can’t be saved without Him. Perhaps today you believe. If you would like to pray with someone please call us at (205) 776-5200 for we’d love to pray with you. Perhaps today you do believe in Jesus and I praise God for Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Lord, will You give us a great journey in these coming weeks through this that has come down to us from the Word of God through the people of God by the providence of God that we will know what we’re doing when we confess it, worship, witness and encouragement. We will know Him as we use it in discipleship and we will know it so that these areas we believe and walk together. O God may the unity of Your people on essential doctrine be seen. May the confessing of that doctrine to You in worship and to one another in fellowship and to the world be bold, gracious and humble. And God may we use these to grow in the foundations of our faith for Christ’s sake, Amen.

Power Point

The Apostles’ Creed is a gift of God’s Providence to His Church containing essential Foundations of the Faith “once and for all delivered to the saints” as an instrument of...

- *Discipleship*
- *Confession*
- *Unity*