

# Grounded in the Faith

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A Guide for New Disciples  
Based on the Apostles' Creed

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Fontes Press

*Grounded in the Faith:  
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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

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**T**his work is intended for pastors, elders, church leaders, and laymen to use to disciple new believers. When a person repents, trusts in Christ, and begins following him, we must disciple them (Matthew 28:18–20). Discipleship includes teaching the faith and modeling it with our lives, which involves an ongoing relationship with God and with those whom we are discipling.

This guide serves as a crash course on the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Ministers, leaders, or capable laypersons can work through this guide with new believers to ensure that they understand the faith to which they have committed themselves. The time spent together in this guide will also form the basis for an ongoing spiritual mentorship.

The content is intentionally aimed at the intellect, although content and discussion questions do invite the reader to reflect on whether they have truly been saved. The reason for omitting life-application content and discussion questions is to ensure that this guide has a singular, measurable objective: to confirm that new believers actually understand the faith they claim to hold. Leaders can move toward practical application if they wish, given their own setting and abilities. But the guide is written so that each user will achieve the same goal of comprehending the basics of the faith, which should create a firm foundation on which to grow in the faith. The final chapter provides the user with “next steps,” including the various ways in which we grow in our faith and some resources to set them in the right direction.

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## THE ANCIENT CHRISTIAN CONFESSION

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

**W**hen we repent of our sin and turn to Christ for salvation, we make a confession—that is, we make a public declaration that we believe something. According to Romans 10:9, that confession is that “Jesus is Lord.” But simply chanting the words “Jesus is Lord” as a magical formula does not save us. We must understand the proper meaning of this confession

so that the content of our faith is true. This guide for new disciples aims to help the reader understand the proper meaning of the confession “Jesus is Lord” by teaching the basics of the biblical story from the creation of the world to the final judgment when Jesus returns. Only within this broad story that God gives us in his Word can we understand the true meaning of “Jesus is Lord.”

Since the early days of the church, its leaders have wanted to ensure that new disciples understood the faith they proclaimed. They typically would teach these new disciples the basics of the Christian faith to prepare for baptism. While there was no formal document that all the churches used, there were similar informal “creeds” (statements of belief) that we find scattered throughout the writings of church leaders from as early as the second century. By AD 390, these informal creeds from different regions had become so similar that one church leader named the entire tradition “the Apostles’ Creed.” This title reflects the (erroneous) ancient belief that the creed was written by the apostles after Jesus’ resurrection and before they dispersed to



preach the gospel.<sup>1</sup> But the title is appropriate enough, since the language and teaching of the creed is drawn directly from the teaching of the apostles as recorded in the New Testament.

By around AD 400, the form of the Apostles' Creed as it was found in churches around the world had essentially the same teaching, with very minor differences in wording. The final form of the Apostles' Creed that churches around the world recite today was solidified by around AD 700.<sup>2</sup> Since church leaders have used this creed to teach new disciples for more than 1,600 years, we can be assured that it stands as a true representation of the Bible's teaching. Its use by

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<sup>1</sup> This traditional belief that the apostles wrote the creed is testified by Rufinus in the fourth century (*A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*, trans. and annotated by J. N. D. Kelly, *Ancient Christian Writers* 20 [New York: Newman Press, 1978], 29–30).

<sup>2</sup> See John H. Leith, ed. *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, 3rd ed. (Atlanta, GA: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 22–25; Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder eds., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 25–26; Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes*, 6<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers), 1:16–20.

millions of church leaders to teach new disciples also suggests it contains the most essential teachings of the faith that all new disciples should know. As one eminent church historian put it, the creed “contains all the fundamental articles of the Christian faith necessary to salvation, in the form of facts, in simple Scripture language, and in the most natural order—the order of revelation—from God and the creation down to the resurrection and life everlasting.”<sup>3</sup> For these reasons, we will use the Apostles’ Creed as our guide to the Bible’s message. Our goal is to gain a broad understanding of the Bible’s teaching so we can truly comprehend the confession that leads to salvation: “Jesus is Lord.”

The text of the Apostles’ Creed, as churches have used it since around AD 700, reads as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 1:14–15.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator 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, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead;  
on the third day, he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is sitting at the right hand of God the  
Father almighty,  
from where he is coming to judge the living  
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy universal<sup>4</sup> Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.

Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> This word is usually translated “catholic,” which means “general” or “worldwide,” not “Catholic” in the sense of the Roman Catholic Church.

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## GOD THE FATHER

### I BELIEVE...

**T**he word “creed” comes from the Latin verb *credo*, which means “I believe.” The Apostles’ Creed is a statement of what Christians believe. But before we can examine what we believe, we have to ask, “what is belief?” Or better, what is faith?

Scripture speaks often of faith “in Christ.” The essence of faith is not simply believing in something, but placing our absolute trust in a person. “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”

(Romans 6:23). By placing our trust in Christ as our Lord and Savior, our sins are no longer counted against us and we receive God's free gift of eternal life.<sup>1</sup>

Our ability to place our faith in Christ is not based on our own ability. Scripture says we were "dead in our trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1; see also Colossians 2:13) before God saved us. We were "enemies" of God (Romans 5:10) and completely unable to save ourselves, or even to bring ourselves to believe the glorious truths of the gospel. "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9). Salvation through faith, then, is a gift of God.

But at the same time, faith is a personal decision that is made because of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. It involves a personal decision to turn from the idols of our heart to the true and living God and to Christ our Savior.<sup>2</sup> It is also a genuine commitment that

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 3:28; 5:1; Galatians 2:16; 3:11, 24.

<sup>2</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Apostles' Creed: A Faith to Live By* (London: Continuum, 2004), 8–9.

results in a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26). This commitment results in a new way of living for God rather than for sin. The Bible rejects any idea of faith that simply claims to confess Jesus as Lord without actually resulting in a new way of life. “Faith without works is dead” (see James 2:17).

### **Discussion**

1. Read Ephesians 2:8–9. How are we saved?
2. Read Galatians 2:16. Can we be saved through our own good works?
3. Read Ezekiel 36:26–27, which describes what happens when we are saved through faith in Christ. How is a new believer’s life different than before salvation?
4. How has God changed your heart since you started following Christ? How does your life look different?

I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER, ALMIGHTY,  
CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

The Bible begins with God the Father: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). God existed before everything else and has always existed. He spoke everything into existence by his word (Genesis 1:3–31). By these truths, we see that God is *Almighty*. “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases” (Psalm 115:3). As creator of the universe, he is incomparably stronger and greater than every part of creation. Jesus could even refer to the Father as “the Power” (Mark 14:62).<sup>3</sup>

But at the same time, God is intimately relational with his people, so that we can call him *Father*. He first described himself as a father to his chosen people Israel. As they were enslaved in Egypt, God declared to Pharaoh, “Israel is my firstborn son...let my son go that he may serve me” (Exodus 4:22–23). It follows that God is only “Father” to those whom he saves and adopts into his spiritual family (see Romans 8:15).

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<sup>3</sup> Capitalized rightly in many modern English translations (Cranfield, *The Apostles’ Creed*, 15).

God uses this human relationship of fatherhood to signify how he relates to us. Of course, he is a *perfect* Father, and carries none of the abuses or failures of human fathers. We must judge human fathers by the perfect standard of God as our Father, rather than viewing God through the lens of our imperfect fathers. To make the mistake of viewing God in light of our human fathers would give us a drastically distorted view of who God is.

While God is the adopted Father of those whom he saves, he is also the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup> We know this fatherly relationship with his Son is eternal because Scripture says that all of creation was made “through” the Son, “and nothing that was made was made without him.”<sup>5</sup> So God’s fatherly relationship to the Son existed before creation, and the Son was never created. Even God’s name “Father” suggests that the Son has always existed—if the Son did not always exist, to whom would God have been a Father?<sup>6</sup> The Father and Son have therefore existed

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 15:6; 2 Corinthians 1:3; Ephesians 1:3; Colossians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3.

<sup>5</sup> John 1:3; see also Hebrews 1:3 and Colossians 1:16.

<sup>6</sup> Rufinus, *A Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed*, 33–



together eternally (John 5:26), both equally God while also distinct as persons. Here already we are encountering the mysterious doctrine of the Trinity, to which we will later return.

### **Discussion**

1. Read Psalm 148:4-5. How should we respond to the news that God is our creator?
2. An ancient false teaching (Arianism) claimed that Jesus was a created being, and some religions today teach the same (for example, Mormonism). Explain why this teaching is incorrect and why it matters. Read John 1:1–3 to help you answer.