

What We Believe

2 Peter 1:1-21

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the **knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord**, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the **knowledge of Him** who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue **knowledge**, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though **you know** and are established in the present **truth**. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we **made known to you** the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

The Apostle Peter made it a point to emphasize to his readers to know what they believe. "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the **knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord...through the knowledge of Him who called us...though you know and are established in the present truth...we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

What we find from studying the Scriptures, that is, the Old and New Testament, which we call the Bible or the Holy Bible is that the God of the Bible, in His own Words, says "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (**Revelation 1:8**) What we find, in God being the same God, from beginning to end, is a noticeable comparison to His ways in the Old Testament with His ways in the New Testament. In the Old Testament God is recognized as man's salvation, as we find in the "Song of Moses" in **Exodus 15:2**, "The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him." Also God is spoken of by King David as his salvation in **Psalms 27:1**, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" In the New Testament we find the salvation of God to be revealed to us in "Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God", as the Apostle Peter claimed in **Matthew 16:16**. The Apostle Peter elaborated on Jesus the Christ in his sermon to the Jewish rulers in Jerusalem, "let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (**Acts 4:10-12**) Before Jesus' disciples even understood what truly was Jesus' mission on earth Jesus declared, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (**John 3:16-17**)

The early church, as it is even today, was constantly being barraged with attacks on the doctrine behind the gospel of Jesus Christ. Even I myself have said, in the past (in ignorance), "what is the deal with doctrine? What is wrong with just believing on Jesus and leaving all of that doctrine stuff to the bookworms, or phrased more respectfully, to the Bible scholars? Jesus gives us the answer when He said, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (**John 10:10**) Steal what? The truth. Yes, it is important for us to know the Truth, that is in Jesus Christ, as there is a thief out there that will try and get us away from that

truth, just as Satan said to Eve in the garden of Eden, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" (**Genesis 3:1**) What is truth? Once again Jesus has our answer, "**Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."**" (**John 14:6**) Steal the truth, kill us, and destroy what? Destroy our faith. Similarly to what the Israelites were told by Moses in the Old Testament times to, "choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may **cling to Him**, for He is your life and the length of your days." (**Deuteronomy 30:19-20**) Similarly we have what it says in **Hebrews 12:1-2**, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **looking unto Jesus**, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The key component and need for our understanding is that as we are to cling to God and keep looking unto Jesus, that He is our Wisdom, the wisdom that comes only from God, He is our Righteousness, the righteousness that is necessary for us to be reconciled with God, and He is our Sanctification, where He sets us apart from the world from those who are perishing, in His holiness, and then that He is our Redemption. (**1 Corinthians 1:30**) Even the measure of faith we need to believe comes from God. "For by **grace you have been saved through faith**, and that **not of yourselves**; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (**Ephesians 2:8-9**) No matter what we do, we can't earn our salvation. It is in Christ alone that we are saved! "Let him who glories, glory in the Lord." (**1 Corinthians 1:31**) The salvation that only comes from God, IS through Jesus Christ, which ensures us of eternal life in Christ. Hard to believe? Lord, help our unbelief!

Even now Christ is building His church. Until He comes back and takes us out of here, He's still building His church. Once again, as you've undoubtedly heard before, the church of Jesus Christ is not just a building that we go to, like the temple of Solomon was, like the church buildings that are all over the place. It is comprised of all of the body of believers in Jesus Christ, where, as the Apostle Peter said, Jesus is the cornerstone and we are all of the precious stones that are built up with Christ. "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (**1 Peter 2:4-5**) "**To offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**" That part of the Scripture sometimes tends to be overlooked, but it does tell us that in Christ we aren't intended to just do whatever we want to do.

It is exactly what is spoken of in **Romans 12:1-2**, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a **living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Once again though, it is in Christ that God is doing His work in us, we alone cannot be righteous or wise or holy or acceptable to God; only in Christ Jesus! And also, it is important for us to let God establish in us an unshakeable faith which comes from us letting Him renew our minds in the knowledge of His will and purpose. It is believing on Jesus, from the beginning to the end "that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." (**Philippians 1:6**)

Another analogy that is used, as the Apostle Paul spoke of, is of the body of Christ, to which He is the head of the body, and then we make up the rest of the body. One more analogy that Jesus used was that He is the vine and we are the branches. (**John 15**) No matter which analogy helps you the most, the common denominator in all of the visuals that illustrate Christ and His people, is that there is Jesus THE Christ, who is our source and then there is us, His people. "But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and **practices a lie**." (**Revelation 22:15**) Yes, we are to know the truth, that is Christ Jesus. "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, **"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."** (**John 8:31-32**)

It has been common in times past, and even in churches today for the people in the church to recite a creed, one of which is called the Apostle's Creed. Once again, the church and the Word of God has been under attack from the very days of the Garden of Eden, and the Liar and father of all lies will not give up in distorting the truth that comes from God. The early New Testament church had the Gnostics to contend with. They claimed that the creator God was not THE God almighty. They claimed that Jesus either wasn't really human or that Jesus wasn't God incarnate since they believed that the spirit world was good and the flesh was evil. There have been, over and over again, various attempts to distort God's truth and God's plan of salvation and the Apostle's Creed was in defense of all of those lies. Yes, ultimately we find God's truth in His Word but the Apostle's Creed helped sum up those areas of doctrine that were essential to the faith. what we believe is ultimately where we are going. That goes for our eternal destination but it also leads us in our day to day walk on this earth. To clarify on all this creed stuff, first off we can look to the Old Testament passages of Scripture to find that creed making precedes Christianity. Ancient Israel had a creed. A creed used by the people in Moses' time can be found in the book of Deuteronomy and it is called the Shema. (sheh-

mah) Shema, which means "hear", also known as listening, is the Hebrew word that begins the most important prayer in Judaism. The whole prayer is in **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**, but the call to hear, to listen, is in that first verse, and it is spoken daily in the Jewish tradition:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

Later Jewish tradition developed a three-part Shema prayer that also included **Deuteronomy 11:13-29** and **Numbers 15:37-41**. Tradition states these three parts cover all aspects of the Ten Commandments. The Shema prayer was so influential and important that Jesus used it as the beginning of His answer to what is the "greatest commandment" question in **Mark 12:28-31** "Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered him, "**The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'** This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'
There is no other commandment greater than these."

When Jesus began His answer with the Shema prayer, He acknowledged the Lord God as most important and that complete devotion to Him is the most important of the commandments. It is no surprise that the scribe replied this way in **verses 32-33**: "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Even today, Christians can look to the words of the Shema as a wonderful expression that the Lord is the one true God. As we acknowledge the Sovereignty of God, that He alone reigns supreme, that same call to response for us remains, to "hear" Him, love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. They are the central creed of Judaism to this day. Almost every synagogue says the Shema in every worship service.

New Testament Christians also have creeds. Most scholars believe that **Philippians 2:5-11** was a creed of the church in Paul's time that Paul inserted into Philippians. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be **equal with God**, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the **likeness of men**. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." There's others in the New Testament such as what the Apostle Paul declared in **1 Corinthians 15:3-8**, "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time."

Our word "creed" comes from the Latin "credo," (cree-doh or cray-doh) which means "I believe." A creed expresses what we believe, it is a statement of faith. Because we have minds, because we are instructed by the Word to think about our faith (to love God with all of our minds), to know in what we are believing, we also have the need to articulate our faith, as part of the sharing of the love AND the gospel of Jesus Christ. Of course there is no way that we can have a creed that fully explains God and His ways but it can say what we know of God and what we are to know about Him and His message to us. There are critical points of emphasis that separates our faith in Christ from any other belief system. It is in knowing as the Apostle John said, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." (**1 John 5:12**) The Christian church in all its denominations and variations has many creeds and affirmations, but the Apostle's Creed is the most widely used creed in the church. More Christians around the world say this creed than any other.

We are not exactly sure about the origins of the Apostle's Creed, but creeds were being established even in the writings of the apostles', as I mentioned earlier, in order to combat the false doctrines that were being spread in the early church. However, we know that the Apostle's Creed was based on earlier baptismal creeds of the Roman church. In the early church, when parents brought their children for baptism, or when an adult came for baptism, they were asked to publicly affirm what they believed. What they affirmed was a version

of the Apostle's Creed. It was in question and answer form, but they affirmed most of the same elements that we affirm in the creed. So we can easily trace the creed back to the early third century church.

The Apostles' Creed in Modern English

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,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
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 to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic (universal) Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

Amen.

What God's Word tells us, and what is in the Apostle's Creed is that we need to know what we believe and in whom we believe. The Holy Spirit is revealing to us the truth of God's plan of salvation for us in Christ Jesus. God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus to be born of the virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit, He suffered and died on a cross for our sins, taking our sins upon Himself, and then raising from the grave on the third day, conquering death, and that we too will overcome the grave and have eternal life in Christ Jesus, to all who will believe on Him. One area that isn't in the Apostle's Creed that should be there is this, "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (**1 Corinthians 6:20**) We become God's when we put our faith and hope in Jesus. We become His children. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." (**John 1:12**) When we believe on Christ we receive His Holy Spirit that "guide[s] us into all truth." (**John 16:13**) We can't do it on our own. It all starts with **Romans 10:9-10** that says, "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Heavenly Father,
I confess that I have sinned against You.
I ask that You forgive me of my sins.
I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins,
I confess with my mouth that Jesus is my Lord,
and I believe in my heart that You raised Jesus from the dead,
so that I can have forgiveness of sins,
and be reconciled to You, God, My Father.
I now commit to You, that I will repent of my sins,
and live in the newness of life,
being led by Your Holy Spirit,
all this I pray, in Christ Jesus, my Savior and Lord. Thank You Lord!