

# WHY DO WE HAVE CREEDS?

by Burk Parsons

**TO THE GROUP LEADER:** This resource is designed to help you lead others to better understand one of the “Basics of the Faith” booklets published by P&R. The numbers in brackets indicate the page number in the booklet. Below each question is an answer based on what the author presents, or advice on how to discuss the question. You have the freedom to adapt the questions to best fit your group.

A good teaching technique is to distribute the questions to the group and have them write down how they would answer BEFORE reading the booklet. After reading, members can refine their answers based on their reading. As a group, members can discuss their views to affirm or modify what they wrote.

1. When you use the phrase “I believe,” what do you mean, and what is your belief based on? (5-7)  
*When you ask the group to answer this question, the replies might go in many directions. Try to keep the focus on the second part of the question. Is their belief based on something solid, like the Bible, or is it more like wishful thinking? What their belief is based on will determine how they live out their belief.*
2. Who, or what, grants us our “rights?” Your answer to this will determine your creed, that is, what you believe. (7-8)  
*There are those who believe all rights are given to us by the State. If this is so, the State is supreme, and we should unquestionably obey the State. If we believe all rights are based in God, then we should obey Him, and also do all we can to insure the State upholds those rights. Your creed, therefore, is what you believe about your view of God and the world, and your life is lived out according to your answer.*
3. What does the word “religion” mean? (9-12)  
*Religion means “that which joins or binds us together.” It is those beliefs we share in common which determines how we live out our lives as a church body.*
4. Do we have to live according to what we believe? (12-15)  
*As an extreme example: We can say we believe a red traffic light means stop, but if we do not do according to what we say we believe, the consequences will catch up with us. The same is true in Christianity. Read Matt.7:21-13. These people had a belief system, but for whatever reason it was not based in faith leading to their salvation. They believed the red traffic light did not mean stop.*
5. Do you see anything wrong the phrase: “I have no creed but Christ.” (15-18)  
*Sadly, this is an empty and short-sighted, although well meaning, statement. As soon as you ask this person what he believes about Christ, his answer forms his creed. If you ask what he believes about the Bible, again his answer adds to his creed. Our creed, therefore, is the culmination of all we believe the Bible teaches. The Bible is our **only** infallible rule of faith and life, and in it we learn about what we believe. We believe God can be trusted, since He created everything, and He is perfect; therefore He gave us a book for us to know Him and all He expects of us.*
6. If we write down what we believe the Bible teaches (a creed), why can’t we consider that as authoritative as the Bible? (19-20)  
*We teach the Bible to be the **only** infallible book. When we write out, or even when the greatest team of Bible scholars together write out what they believe, there will always be room for error. No one has a perfect belief system! However, we believe written creeds, like the Westminster Confession, are accurate explanations of the system of doctrine taught in the Bible. But, because they were written by fallible men, written creeds can only, at best, be considered as “subordinate to and derived from the only divine authority, namely, the inspired and inerrant Word of God.” (19)*

7. If Creeds do not teach us anything new, and if creeds exist simply to affirm what Scripture teaches, how are creeds useful? (20-25)  
 "...it may be helpful to think of creeds as maps, or guides, to help us navigate our way as we study God's Word, looking to the doctrinal map keys formulated by our forefathers." (20) There is no one place in Scripture that answers the question, "what is God?" Therefore, a creed, or in this case, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, gives us a good summarization: "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."
8. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-7; Philippians 2:6-11; 1 Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:3-8. What might these "trustworthy" or "faithful" sayings be considered? (25-29)  
 Contained within the Bible we have what might be called "mini-creedal statements." These were used by the early church to help believers memorize Scriptural statements which formulated specific doctrines. The later creeds were based on this formulation.
9. What might be some useful ways to use creeds? (29-32)  
 Go over Dr. Parson's list in this section. This may prove the most useful section in the booklet to help the group navigate their way through applying these creeds in their own lives.
10. How should we view a Bible-believing church which holds a different creed than ours? (32-35)  
 Not all doctrines are worth dying for. We should be willing to die for what we believe about the Person and Work of Jesus to save sinners, but not over what events might take place before His second coming. We all agree that baptism is commanded, but not all agree on how the water is to be administered or upon whom. We are not enemies! Remind the group of the famous phrase: "in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

After going through these questions, read the text and fill in the answers in preparation for class, noting other questions you might have. [By the way, if you do have any other questions about what you read, write them down here so you remember them at class time.]

## APPLICATION

### For the Group

For each week you study together, try to bring in the part of your church's creed which seeks to clarify the area you are studying.

### For the Members of the Group

Get a copy of your church's creed. Read it slowly, trying to digest its deep truths. Look up every Scripture reference given to back up the statement. Write down any questions you have and share them with the group.

## For Further Study

*Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, G.I. Williamson. P&R, 2003.

*Assured by God: Living in the Fullness of God's Grace*, Burk Parsons. P&R, 2007.

*Connected: Living in the Light of the Trinity*, Sam Allberry. P&R, 2013.

*Training Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Shorter Catechism*, Starr Meade. P&R, 2000.

Find this and more at [www.pcabookstore.com](http://www.pcabookstore.com).

## The Nicene Creed

(originally written in A.D. 325 at the Council of Nicea updated in A.D. 381 at the Council of Constantinople)

### The Nicene Creed

**We believe in one God the Father, the Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**"We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.**

**"We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son). With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.**

**"We believe in one, holy, catholic\* and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen."**

\* The word "catholic" with a lower case 'c' does not mean the Roman Catholic Church. It is a Latin word that means "universal."