



The Apostles' Creed

Study 7: Its Value To Us (Jude 3-4, 20-25)

o The Apostles' Creed, together with the Five Points of Calvinism and the Five Principles of the Reformation, will help individual Christians in their faith, and churches in inter-church fellowship, in a globalised world.

I. Challenges posed by a globalised world.

1. Improved technology brings improved transportation and communication, resulting in increased travel, migration, and interaction between people and nations. Ideas spread fast, some of which affect people temporarily as a flash in the pan, others more permanently. Wrong teaching on the Bible may appear to be new when, in fact, they are different manifestations of old errors. "There is nothing new under the sun (Eccl. 1:9)."
2. From our study of the Apostles' Creed we may conclude that it was drawn up under the pressures of *paganism*, which appeared in the forms of Gnosticism and schism arising from persecution. Gnosticism speculated that the God of the Old Testament was different from that of the New, and denied the incarnation, claiming the divine could not have taken on human nature since matter is inherently evil. The schism of Novatianism (3rd century) arose, which refused readmission to church of those who were repentant after denying the faith while under persecution. (Similarly, Donatism in the 4th & 5th centuries.)
 - Today, the doctrine of the Trinity is denied by Islam and misunderstood by those from Hindu background. Islam believes in an absolute god, "Allah", while Hindus believe in many deities.
 - The person of Christ is also misunderstood or denied. The Muslims reject the deity of Christ, claiming that if Jesus is the Son of God that would entail God having a wife. The Jehovah's Witnesses deny the deity of Christ, claiming that He is the highest of God's creation.
3. The Five Principles of the Reformation was directed at countering the wholesale doctrinal, practical and spiritual corruption in the Roman Catholic Church, known as *sacralism*. This was paralleled in the Orthodox Churches in the Eastern Roman Empire.
 - "Sola scriptura" became the *formal principle* of the Reformation, upon which the other principles rested. "Soli Deo gloria" may be called the *crowning principle* of the Reformation, for that is the ultimate purpose of restoring the teaching of Scripture. The other principles, viz. "sola fide", sola gratia" and "solus Christus", together declare the doctrine of salvation, or the gospel.
 - Underlying these principles is another undeclared one, viz. "semper reformanda", meaning "always being reformed". This is may be called the *spirit* of the Reformation, which the Particular Baptists were most anxious to demonstrate in their church life.

- Today, there are those who adopt Reformed theology without seeing the practical implications. They would hold to non-cessation of the sign gifts, adopt contemporary worship, and engage in questionable contextualisation in missions.

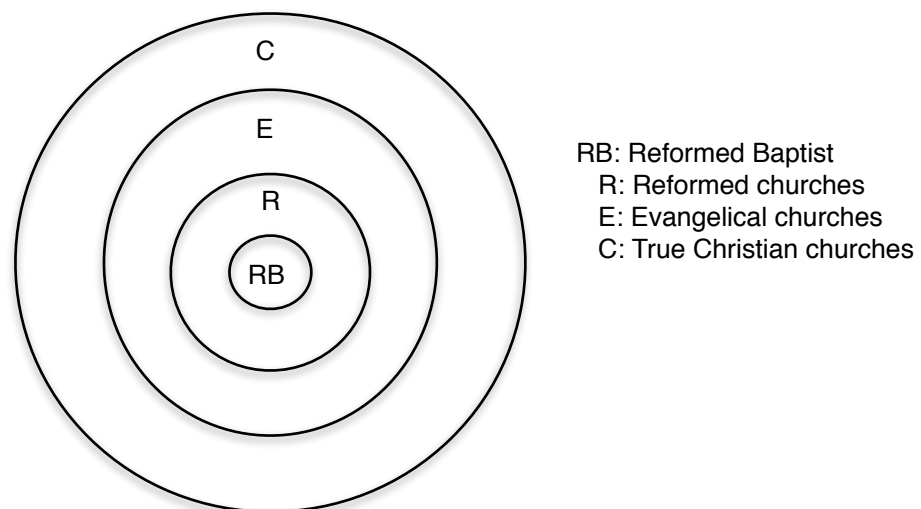
4. Arminianism arose in the early 17th century to challenge the Reformed doctrine of salvation. The Synod of Dort met and declared the Five Articles of Remonstrance drawn up by followers of James Arminius as erroneous.

- The Synod of Dort put forth the biblical doctrine of salvation under five points of doctrine, which was later rearranged under the acrostic TULIP, and called the Five Points of Calvinism.
- Today, there are those who stop short at the Five Points while claiming themselves to be “Reformed”, practise the altar call, adopt a worldly ethos (“Young, Brash, and Reformed”), and are non-cessationist (or “continuationist”).

II. The Use of the Apostles’ Creed.

1. Not all who profess believe in the Apostles’ Creed (e.g. the RC & the Orthodox Churches) understand the doctrines of the creed in the way we do. For example, the RC claims itself to be the “mother church” within which alone salvation is found, and perverts the ordinances and the gospel.
- In a globalised world, with pagan religions surrounding us, the Apostles’ Creed will help Christians to both confess their faith as well as defend themselves against the onslaught of contrary teachings.
- The Apostles’ Creed, together with the Reformation Principles and the Five Points of Calvinism, will help churches in practising selective fellowship based on the truth of Scripture, and separation from churches guilty of sin, doctrinal errors, and worldliness. The more truths are held in common, the closer the possibility of fellowship, and vice versa.

2. We may represent selective fellowship between churches as follows:



3. To be Christian, a church needs to hold to the doctrines of the Apostles’ Creed. To be Evangelical, a church needs to hold to the sole authority of Scripture, the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone, and the necessity of evangelism. To be truly Reformed, a church would need to hold to Reformed theology, uphold the primacy preaching and teaching God’s word, be confessional, adhere to the Regulative Principle of worship, and

have the spirit of Reformation (i.e. hold to “semper reformanda”). There are churches today claiming to be Reformed when they are not really so. Upholding the Apostles' Creed is a first step towards defining the Christian faith in a pluralistic world. We must then proceed to define ourselves as Reformed in the broad Evangelical world.

= It makes no sense fighting for the Christian faith in the pagan world and then allowing it to be perverted in the Christian circle. It is, therefore, necessary to practise separation and selective fellowship between churches.

Review Questions

1. What circumstances connected with paganism caused the Apostles' Creed to be drawn up?
2. Which religion and which cult deny the deity of Christ?
3. What is the system of error held by the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches called?
4. What sort of principles of the Reformation may we regard “sola scripture” and “soli Deo gloria”?
5. What do “sola fide”, “sola gratia” and “solus Christus” together teach?
6. What undeclared principle may be called the *spirit* of the Reformation?
7. What acrostic helps us to remember the Five Points of Calvinism?
8. How does the Apostles' Creed help the Christian in his faith?
9. What are the documents that, together, may help churches in inter-church fellowship?
10. Give the three characteristics of an Evangelical.

Assignment/Discussion

Discuss the value of memorising the Apostles' Creed, and how this may be encouraged among God's people.

Memory Passage (The Apostles' Creed)

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

We 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.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, [who inspired the writing of the word of God].

[*We believe in*] the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

(The Apostles' Creed, slightly amended.)

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