

What We Believe

“Christianity has always been a ‘creedal’ religion in that it has always been theological. It was rooted in the theological tradition of ancient Israel, which was unified by its historical credos and declaratory affirmations of the faith. No pretheological era has been discovered in the New Testament or in the history of the Christian community. From the beginning Christianity has been theological, involving men in theological reflection and calling them to declarations of faith. A nontheological Christianity has simply never endured....”

~ John H. Leith, *Creeeds of the Churches*

“We believe that the cause of unity in the church is best served, not by finding the lowest common denominator of doctrine, around which all can gather, but by elevating the value of truth ... seeking unity that comes from the truth, and then demonstrating to the world how Christians can love each other across boundaries rather than by removing boundaries.”

~ The Bethlehem Baptist Church Elder Affirmation of Faith 15.2

The earliest church—that of the New Testament—speaks often of commonly held theological truths by a variety of different names: the gospel (Romans 1:1; 1:16; Galatians 1:6), the/our confession (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14; 10:23), the tradition (2 Thessalonians 3:6); the faith (Acts 6:7; Colossians 2:7; Jude 3), the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 1:2; 12:17; 19:10), and the teaching or doctrine (1 Timothy 4:16; Hebrews 6:1). That first church also used creedal statements to summarize their common and essential beliefs.

Some of these *Apostolic Creeds* can be found cited below:

- ❖ Acts 2:22: “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”
- ❖ Romans 1:1: “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...”
- ❖ 1 Corinthians 15:3: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.”
- ❖ Philippians 2:5: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
- ❖ Colossians 1:15: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”
- ❖ 1 Timothy 3:15: “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 truth. ¹⁶ Great indeed, we confess, 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.”

The next generations of Christians—borrowing the theology and language of Scripture—devised their own creedal statements, including the Apostles' Creed. Some of these *Post-Apostolic Creeds* are cited below:

- ❖ Be deaf, therefore, whenever anyone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ, who is of the stock of David, who is of Mary, who was truly born, ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of beings of heaven, of earth and the underworld, who was also truly raised from the dead... **IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH (c.107)**
- ❖ In the Father, the Ruler of the Universe, And in Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, In the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, In the Holy Church, And in the Forgiveness of Sins. **EPISTULA APOSTOLORUM (c.150)**
- ❖ We worship the God of the Christians, whom we consider One from the beginning, the creator and maker of all creation, visible and invisible. And the Lord Jesus Christ, the Servant of God, who had also been proclaimed beforehand by the prophets as about to be present with the race of men, the herald of salvation and teacher of good instructions **JUSTIN MARTYR (c.165)**
- ❖ We also know in truth one God, we know Christ, we know the Son, suffering as he suffered, dying as he died, and risen on the third day, and abiding at the right hand of the Father, and coming to judge the living and the dead. And in saying this we say what has been handed down to us. **PROFESSION OF THE PRESBYTERS OF SMYRNA (c.180)**
- ❖ Confesses the faith... I believe in God the Father Almighty [*pantokratora*] And in his only begotten Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, And in the Holy Spirit, And in the resurrection of the flesh In the holy catholic Church. **DER BALYZEH PAPYRUS (c.200 or later)**
- ❖ The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father “to gather all things in one,” and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, “every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess” to Him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all; that He may send “spiritual wickednesses,” and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire; but may, in the exercise of His grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept His commandments, and have persevered in His love, some from the beginning [of their Christian course], and other from [the date of] their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory. **IRENAEUS (c.190)**
- ❖ We however as always, the more so now as better equipped through the Paraclete, that leader into all truth, believe (as these do) in one only God, yet subject to this dispensation (which is our word for “economy”) that the one only God has also a Son, his Word who has proceeded from himself, by whom all things were made and without whom nothing has been made: that this [Son] was sent by the Father into the virgin and was born of her both man and God, Son of man and Son of God, and was named Jesus Christ: that he suffered, died, and was buried, according to the scriptures, and, having been raised up by the Father and taken back into heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father and will come to judge the quick and the dead: and that thereafter he, according to his promise, sent from the Father the Holy Spirit the Paraclete, the sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **TERTULLIAN (c.200)**

In the tradition of the tradition of summarizing the Tradition (i.e. the gospel, see 2 Thessalonians 3:6) in creedal or confessional form, New Covenant Church holds to the follow beliefs. **Our members** must hold to the Articles of Faith—the Apostles Creed, Nicene Creed, and Ten Articles of College Church (our sending church), as well as the Standards of the Christian Life. **Our elders** also affirm the Confessional Statement of the Gospel Coalition.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall 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 life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The following ten articles of faith are essential beliefs of **College Church**:

WE BELIEVE that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are given by inspiration of God, are without error in the original writings and are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. 2 Tim. 3:16,17; 1 Th. 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:19-21

WE BELIEVE in one God—the Creator and Ruler of the universe, existing in a divine and incomprehensible Trinity—the Father; the Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit—each possessing divine perfection. 2 Cor. 13:14; Mt. 28:19; Jn. 14:26, 15:26; 1 Pet. 1:2

WE BELIEVE that our first parents were created holy and upright, that they fell from this condition, and that in consequence the whole human race is by nature dead in trespasses and sins. Rom. 5:12; Gen. 1:27,28,31; Eccl. 7:29; Eph. 2:1-5

WE BELIEVE in the Incarnation, death, and bodily resurrection of the Son of God; and that salvation is attained only through repentance and faith in Him. Jn. 1:1-14; 1 Cor. 15:3,4; Acts 4:10-12

WE BELIEVE in the necessity of a radical change of heart and that this is effected through the truth by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Jn. 3:3, 1 Pet. 1:23; Ti. 3:5

WE BELIEVE that the Christian is called with a holy calling to walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Because he has become a new creation in Christ Jesus and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, yet during his earthly pilgrimage never delivered from the flesh with its fallen nature, he must be in constant subjection to Christ and His commandments by the power of the Holy Spirit. 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:22,23; Jn. 15:10

WE BELIEVE that only those should be admitted to membership in the visible church who have experienced a change of heart. Jn. 3:5; 1 Cor. 5:6

WE BELIEVE that the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, together with the observance of the Lord's Day, are of perpetual obligation in the church. Recognizing both immersion and affusion as valid, we leave the determination of the mode of adult baptism to the candidate. Provision shall always be made for the baptism or dedication of infants of believers. (This article shall be either printed in the church bulletin or read before baptism services at College Church). Mt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-26; Ex. 31:16,17, with Mt. 5:17,18

WE BELIEVE in the resurrection of the dead and future judgments from which the righteous go away into everlasting life and the wicked into everlasting punishment. Dan. 12:2; Mt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15; 21:26,27

WE BELIEVE in the personal bodily return of Christ in power and great glory as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and in Christ's ultimate and complete triumph and the establishment of "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Acts 1:11; 2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 19:16, 21:1-7

STANDARDS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

We believe the Scriptures establish basic principles to guide the actions and attitudes of a Christian and that it is the responsibility of each Christian, through constant submission to Christ, to glorify God through the application of these principles. We affirm the Scriptures as the Christian's final source of teaching and training for all of life's activities. Consistent reading and study of the Word of God is essential for growth in the Christian life.

We believe the life of a Christian empowered by the Holy Spirit, is characterized by love for and dependence upon God and love toward all people. A Christian loves God by worshipping Him, giving thanks for all He has done, obeying Him, and making Him known to others. A Christian loves others by sharing their burdens, remaining intolerant of their sin, forgiving their personal offenses yet seeking to restore them to fellowship with the Lord, demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, and loving others as himself.

We believe, for example, that the Scriptures call a Christian to be joyful, to trust in God, to live a life of holiness in the world, to exhibit humility and honesty, to deny self in submission to the sovereignty of Christ and to be a faithful steward of things God has given—mind, body, time, abilities, funds, and opportunities.

We believe that a Christian must strive to live a life in which Christ is Lord of all thoughts, actions, and words. A Christian must recognize that there are actions and attitudes that are inconsistent and inappropriate, such as sinning against the body of Christ or one's own body. A Christian led by the Holy Spirit will, after prayer and studying of the Scriptures, exercise freedom responsibly with loving regard for the weaknesses of others.

We further believe that, based on Scriptural teaching and concern for our individual and corporate witness, we must refrain from any practices of sexual impurity, stealing, coveting, lying, gossiping, drunkenness, and all other condemnable practices.¹

¹ Fornication, pornography, homosexuality, and adultery are all included in the phrase "sexual impurity."

CONFESSIONAL STATEMENT

from the Gospel Coalition

(1) The Triune God

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in his love and in his holiness. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration. Immortal and eternal, he perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about his eternal good purposes to redeem a people for himself and restore his fallen creation, to the praise of his glorious grace.

(2) Revelation

God has graciously disclosed his existence and power in the created order, and has supremely revealed himself to fallen human beings in the person of his Son, the incarnate Word. Moreover, this God is a speaking God who by his Spirit has graciously disclosed himself in human words: we believe that God has inspired the words preserved in the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, which are both record and means of his saving work in the world. These writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, which is utterly authoritative and without error in the original writings, complete in its revelation of his will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and final in its authority over every domain of knowledge to which it speaks. We confess that both our finitude and our sinfulness preclude the possibility of knowing God's truth exhaustively, but we affirm that, enlightened by the Spirit of God, we can know God's revealed truth truly. The Bible is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. As God's people hear, believe, and do the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the gospel.

(3) Creation of Humanity

We believe that God created human beings, male and female, in his own image. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, serving as God's agents to care for, manage, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments.

(4) The Fall

We believe that Adam, made in the image of God, distorted that image and forfeited his original blessedness—for himself and all his progeny—by falling into sin through Satan's temptation. As a result, all human beings are alienated from God, corrupted in every aspect of their being (e.g., physically, mentally, volitionally, emotionally, spiritually) and condemned finally and irrevocably to death—apart from God's own gracious intervention. The supreme need of all human beings is to be reconciled to the God under whose just and holy wrath we stand; the only hope of all human beings is the undeserved love of this same God, who alone can rescue us and restore us to himself.

(5) The Plan of God

We believe that from all eternity God determined in grace to save a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation, and to this end foreknew them and chose them. We believe that God justifies and sanctifies those who by grace have faith in Jesus, and that he will one day glorify them—all to the praise of his glorious grace. In love God commands and implores all people to repent and believe, having set his saving love on those he has chosen and having ordained Christ to be their Redeemer.

(6) The Gospel

We believe that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God's very wisdom. Utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved, this good news is christological, centering on the cross and resurrection: the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if his death and resurrection are not central (the message is "Christ died for our sins . . . [and] was raised"). This good news is biblical (his death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures), theological and salvific (Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God), historical (if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others), apostolic (the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events), and intensely personal (where it is received, believed, and held firmly, individual persons are saved).

(7) The Redemption of Christ

We believe that, moved by love and in obedience to his Father, the eternal Son became human: the Word became flesh, fully God and fully human being, one Person in two natures. The man Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary. He perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. As the mediatorial King, he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising in heaven and on earth all of God's sovereignty, and is our High Priest and righteous Advocate. We believe that by his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ acted as our representative and substitute. He did this so that in him we might become the righteousness of God: on the cross he canceled sin, propitiated God, and, by bearing the full penalty of our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe. By his resurrection Christ Jesus was vindicated by his Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it, and brought everlasting life to all his people; by his ascension he has been forever exalted as Lord and has prepared a place for us to be with him. We believe that salvation is found in no one else, for

there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. Because God chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, no human being can ever boast before him—Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

(8) The Justification of Sinners

We believe that Christ, by his obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. By his sacrifice, he bore in our stead the punishment due us for our sins, making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice on our behalf. By his perfect obedience he satisfied the just demands of God on our behalf, since by faith alone that perfect obedience is credited to all who trust in Christ alone for their acceptance with God. Inasmuch as Christ was given by the Father for us, and his obedience and punishment were accepted in place of our own, freely and not for anything in us, this justification is solely of free grace, in order that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners. We believe that a zeal for personal and public obedience flows from this free justification.

(9) The Power of the Holy Spirit

We believe that this salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to his people by the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as the "other" Paraclete, is present with and in believers. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and by his powerful and mysterious work regenerates spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, baptizing them into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. By the Spirit's agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God's family; they participate in the divine nature and receive his sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

(10) The Kingdom of God

We believe that those who have been saved by the grace of God through union with Christ by faith and through regeneration by the Holy Spirit enter the kingdom of God and delight in the blessings of the new covenant: the forgiveness of sins, the inward transformation that awakens a desire to glorify, trust, and obey God, and the prospect of the glory yet to be revealed. Good works constitute indispensable evidence of saving grace. Living as salt in a world that is decaying and light in a world that is dark, believers should neither withdraw into seclusion from the world, nor become indistinguishable from it: rather, we are to do good to the city, for all the glory and honor of the nations is to be offered up to the living God. Recognizing whose created order this is, and because we are citizens of God's kingdom, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, doing good to all, especially to those who belong to the household of God. The kingdom of God, already present but not fully realized, is the exercise of God's sovereignty in the world toward the eventual redemption of all creation. The kingdom of God is an invasive power that plunders Satan's dark kingdom and regenerates and renovates through repentance and faith the lives of individuals rescued from that kingdom. It therefore inevitably establishes a new community of human life together under God.

(11) God's New People

We believe that God's new covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; they are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies. This universal church is manifest in local churches of which Christ is the only Head; thus each "local church" is, in fact, the church, the household of God, the assembly of the living God, and the pillar and foundation of the truth. The church is the body of Christ, the apple of his eye, graven on his hands, and he has pledged himself to her forever. The church is distinguished by her gospel message, her sacred ordinances, her discipline, her great mission, and, above all, by her love for God, and by her members' love for one another and for the world. Crucially, this gospel we cherish has both personal and corporate dimensions, neither of which may properly be overlooked. Christ Jesus is our peace: he has not only brought about peace with God, but also peace between alienated peoples. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. The church serves as a sign of God's future new world when its members live for the service of one another and their neighbors, rather than for self-focus. The church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit, and the continuing witness to God in the world.

(12) Baptism and the Lord's Supper

We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordained by the Lord Jesus himself. The former is connected with entrance into the new covenant community, the latter with ongoing covenant renewal. Together they are simultaneously God's pledge to us, divinely ordained means of grace, our public vows of submission to the once crucified and now resurrected Christ, and anticipations of his return and of the consummation of all things.

(13) The Restoration of All Things

We believe in the personal, glorious, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ with his holy angels, when he will exercise his role as final Judge, and his kingdom will be consummated. We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the just and the unjust—the unjust to judgment and eternal conscious punishment in hell, as our Lord himself taught, and the just to eternal blessedness in the presence of him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb, in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness. On that day the church will be presented faultless before God by the obedience, suffering and triumph of Christ, all sin purged and its wretched effects forever banished. God will be all in all and his people will be enthralled by the immediacy of his ineffable holiness, and everything will be to the praise of his glorious grace.