

Redeemer OPC, Hawaii
Adult Sunday School
The Apostles' Creed (2)
“General Characteristic - I Believe”

- I. Introduction. In the last lesson we began with the history of the creed and an overview of its general characteristics. As we prepare to move into the body of the creed, we need to examine another general characteristic, one that is repeated in the body of the creed. It is the assertion, “I believe,” which marks each of the three sections of the creed in its modern form.
- II. Initial Observations about Faith’s Importance to the Creed.
 - A. The Occurrences of “I Believe.”
 1. In the original. We have said that in the modern form, “I believe” appears three times. In the original, it appears once, at the beginning of the first section. At the beginning of the next two sections, it simply says, “And in...” as a continuation from the first “I believe.” (“I believe in [the Father]...and in [the Son]...and in [the Holy Spirit]...”)
 2. Implied occurrences. There are at least 12 times that “I believe” could have been used, at the beginning of each article. However, it could even be used before each statement in each article: “I believe in God,” “I believe He is almighty,” etc. This shows us that most fundamentally, a creedal statement is a statement of faith, a statement of belief.
 - B. The Purposes of Creedal Statements. As a statement of faith, is it simply a compendium of the content of the faith? Or is it a statement of what must be believed to be Christian? Or is it a statement of what one does believe by the one who cites it? The answer is that it can be viewed as all three. What, among those,

is its primary purpose? That is hard to distinguish because it fulfills all three purposes anytime we use it. It assists in anchoring and preserving one's understanding and conviction of Biblical doctrine; it holds up the fundamentals that must be believed to be Christian; and it serves as a way to confess what we believe. In all these ways, it points out that faith is essential to salvation, and implies the nature of faith. So, we must also ask...

- C. What Is Faith? The Shorter Catechism asks, "What is faith in Jesus Christ?" It answers, "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel." The Larger Catechism is a bit more comprehensive with its answer. Q. "What is justifying faith?" A. "Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation." What appears explicitly or implied in the Larger Catechism are the elements of faith. This leads to the next consideration...

III. The Elements of Faith.

- A. Knowledge. This refers to the content of the Christian faith; i.e., the doctrines that must be believed for one to claim that he is legitimately a Christian. How much and what must one know to be saved? One must know the bare basics of the gospel, at least. One cannot believe something that he knows nothing about or has never heard of. But God is a gracious God, and does not require one to be an accomplished theologian. In fact, He requires very little. 1 Tim. 1:15 is one Scriptural summary:

“It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost.” Paul knew he was a sinner who needed a Savior; he knew that the promised Savior who had come into the world was the God/Man, Christ Jesus; he knew that Jesus’ work was saving work; and he knew that he could accept God’s truth by trusting faith to have that salvation. It could be boiled down to this: “I am a sinner who deserves hell, and Jesus Christ is my great God and Savior who has made sure I have forgiveness of my sins. As far as the saving work of Christ itself, a brief statement of it is found in 1 Cor. 15:3-4 - “For I delivered to you as of first importance that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

- B. Assent. Agreement that what one knows is true. One can know the content of the faith as that which Christianity teaches and believes, but not agree that it is true, nor believe it oneself. One can know the content of the Bible, but not believe it true. This has been the case in many instances past, such as with scholars like Rudolph Bultmann. Are knowledge and assent enough to constitute saving faith? Jas. 2:19 indicates that the demons know the gospel and understand that it is true. But that is only enough to make them shudder with the terror of judgment, because knowledge plus assent, while essential to saving faith, do not address matters of personal application or personal responsibility. So, the third element...
 - C. Trust. Trust “receiveth and resteth” upon its Object, so that it believes that the gospel applies to oneself, individually and personally, and is effective for him. This points to...
- IV. The Object of Faith. This is what, or Who, is believed in. The Object of saving faith is Jesus Christ and the work He accomplished for salvation of the sinful, yet elect, people He came

to save. When the Westminster Larger Catechism says “his righteousness,” it includes both His active and passive obedience: His active obedience in fulfilling all that God’s law demands to keep it perfectly in thought, word, and deed; His passive obedience in suffering (His “passion,” from the old meaning of that word, “suffering”) and satisfying the penalty of wrath and death that God demands for the transgression of His law. Scripture in several places uses the phrase “believe Christ,” and in other places “believe in Christ” or “believe on Christ,” but these are all interchangeable. In order for faith to be saving faith, it must rest upon Christ and no other, upon His work and nothing else. If “faith” has any other object, it is not saving faith, but false confidence that will lead only to eternal judgment in hell.

- V. The Place of Testimony in Saving Faith. By “testimony,” we refer to how we find out the content of the Christian faith, and the source of the information that must be known to be saved, not one’s personal testimony about how salvation came to him or changed his life. If someone tells you something, representing it as truth, what is necessary in order for you to place belief or confidence in it? The one giving you that information must be trustworthy. This is essential to the gospel and saving faith in that there can be no one more trustworthy than God, who is immutable. Therefore, one can rely upon the word of God and the gospel of God to be completely true and unchangeable, and what it reveals of Christ and the doctrine of salvation to be the full and only content of the faith to be believed. Saving faith takes God at His word and trusts that the salvation it reveals applies personally and individually to the one who believes.