

I Believe

SCOTT HOEZEE

The power of believing; even in non-religious stories, you often run across the idea that belief is a powerful force. In the *Peter Pan* stories, there is the so-called Tinker Bell effect: Things exist if you believe in them strongly enough. Peter Pan can fly if only he believes; but that is just fantasy. In real life, what we believe shapes who we are, and that is powerfully true for Christians. Today on *Groundwork*, we wonder about the scriptural support for written statements summarizing what we believe, like in something like the Apostles' Creed, the most famous statement of belief in Church history. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, with this program we are kicking off what will end up being a fairly long series here on *Groundwork*: It will be on the Apostles' Creed; I think we are going to be doing a dozen programs ultimately. We will kind of be breaking them up into sections, following the Trinitarian parts of the Creed on Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; but today, for this program, we are going to think about the place and the function of creeds just generally, and what kind of biblical backing these kinds of statements have.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, we begin just with the word *creed* itself. A creed is basically a short summary of the Christian faith. There is more than one, certainly. Perhaps the best known among Protestants is the Apostles' Creed, so that is the one we are going to look at. The word *creed* itself comes from a Latin word, *credo*, which means: I believe. So, creeds are summaries of what we believe.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, for a very long time, Dave, in Church history...long before the invention of the printing press in the 15th Century...people...what they knew...what they believed...had to be something they could carry with them in their hearts. It had to be portable; they didn't have pamphlets, they didn't have booklets; a lot of people couldn't read for a long time, and why would you, there was nothing to read anyway.

DAVE BAST

They didn't have Bibles...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, you couldn't just go look it up in your Bible, or go read the Gospel of John or something like that; so yes, you needed some kind of way of boiling down...condensing...the most important elements of the Gospel...of the New Testament...and the Old Testament as well...that you could memorize and recite.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And ultimately in this program, before we are finished, we are going to wonder: Well okay, that was then, but in our digital age now, do creeds still have a place; and we will think about that before we close out this program; but right, it is a short summary...and in fact, some think that sort of the earliest catch phrase, which would be a real, real, real miniature creed, was simply saying: Jesus is Lord. Romans 10:9, Paul writes: If you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Jesus is Lord—that summarizes a core Christian conviction...

DAVE BAST

Yes; in fact, Paul mentions it in another place, in 1 Corinthians, where he says: ^{12:3b}No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the power of the Holy Spirit. So, that does seem to be the very shortest and very earliest, as you say, catch phrase that identified what Christians most fundamentally believe.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Of course, Jesus is Lord...it is a little short on content, right? It is a core conviction, but it doesn't explain a lot about the faith. The whole New Testament would have been a little bit too long to memorize, so you needed something longer than: Jesus is Lord; but a whole lot shorter than the Gospels or the entire New Testament, and that is where the creeds started to develop; and Dave, they actually started to come out of baptism, and what happened at baptisms.

DAVE BAST

Probably, because we know, again from the New Testament, that the early Christians baptized...the book of Acts sometimes says they baptized in the name of Jesus, but in the Gospels, and a little bit later, we understand that they actually performed baptisms in the name of the Trinity...the triune God...so, at the end of Matthew, for example, as part of his Great Commission, Jesus says: ^{28:19}Baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. So, when these early Christian candidates for baptism came...and they were adults...they were converts, by and large, they would be asked at the time of their baptism: What do you believe? And they would reply: I believe in God the Father. What do you believe: I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son. I believe in the Holy Spirit. So, thus the form of the creed began.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and in those baptisms they would often conduct them in Latin, so they would just simply say: Do you believe in God the Father? And the baptized person, when being baptized would say: Credo. Do you believe in God the Son? Credo. Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? Credo. Credo, credo...and that is where we get a creed affirming each part. So, that sort of began in baptism with that simple affirmation that you believe in all three persons in God; and then the Church started to expand on that and filled in the content under each of the three persons in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and by the 7th Century...by the 8th Century...what all of us today would recognize as the Apostles' Creed had come into existence and was being circulated throughout the Church as something all believers—pastors, leaders, teachers, but every believer—would memorize.

DAVE BAST

So, it wasn't actually written by the apostles; we should note that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But it was a summary of what the apostles *did* write—what they *did* teach. So, it does go back to the New Testament. It distills for us these central truths of our faith; and thus, the Apostles' Creed. Maybe it would be a good idea for us simply to read that now.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So it begins: 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 and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to hell.

DAVE BAST

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. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

To which we both say:

Dave Bast/

SCOTT HOEZEE

Amen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, as you said, Dave, the apostles didn't write it because they were long dead by the time this came into being, but it is built on the foundation of the apostles' teaching; so, in that sense, it is their creed—the creed of the apostles—of those witnesses to Jesus. So, it is built on them; and again, Trinitarian in formula: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We will be unpacking each section in this series. The section on the Father is relatively short, but we will begin taking that up in the next two programs; but that focuses on creation, providence—the idea that the overall superintending of the whole universe—that is the work of the Father; and then we move on to the Son.

DAVE BAST

Right...

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is the longest.

DAVE BAST

It is the longest, and it rehearses the historical facts of Jesus' career; and as we will see in just a moment in this program, it traces sort of the descent and then ascent of Jesus. Think of a big capital U, how Jesus goes lower and lower in humility, and finally he goes as low as hell itself; and then he is exalted—he is raised, and ascends to sit at the hand of God, the Father Almighty.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Then the final section is on the Holy Spirit, and on the work of the Spirit, which will focus on the Church and the communion of the saints, and the...you know, the assurance of our forgiveness...that is all the work of the Spirit; but again, as we said at the head of this program, Dave, that is the Creed...it is a human creed...it was written by people; but are there things in the Bible itself that indicate the value of such summaries of the faith? There are, and we are going to dig into some of those passages in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are just launching a new series of programs about the Apostles' Creed; and Scott, you were just asking the question of whether the Bible sort of might contain creed-like statements or point the way for the value of doing this. The fact is, there have been certain traditions in the Christian Church that have rejected the idea of creeds. In fact, I can remember a famous slogan from some churches that would say: No creed but Christ—no book but the Bible; as if these things were somehow encroachments or traditionalism that crept in; and the truth is, everybody has some kind of creed, because everybody has to boil down—the Bible is a big book, so how do you extract from that the heart...the core...of what it is trying to teach us; and in fact, that began already in the Bible itself, didn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we can see some early anticipations of creeds. Hebrews 11 comes to mind: ¹Now faith is the confidence in what we hope for; an assurance about what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for. (And then this verse especially, verse 3) By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

And that line right there sounds a little like the beginning of the Apostles' Creed: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth—we begin with God, the Father—we begin with the act of creation; and then, of course, if you know Hebrews 11 and 12, from there it will go on to summarize the arc of salvation from Abraham all the way down to Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Yes; reciting all the heroes of faith. I referred earlier in the program, Scott, to the middle section of the Creed, where it sort of traces the descent of Jesus into suffering and humiliation and death and hell; and then his ascent at the resurrection; and that, of course, is exactly the theme and the shape of one of the most famous creedal passages in the whole Bible, from Philippians Chapter 2, where Paul is quoting what most scholars call the Christ Hymn of a Christlike creed that may have been sung, and it begins like this:

⁵In your relationships with one another have the same mindset as Christ Jesus; ⁶who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷rather making himself nothing, by taking the very nature of a servant, and being made in human likeness, ⁸and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁹And therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth; ¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

That is a well-known passage, Dave; but again, as you just said, what is really significant about that is that scholars are convinced this was something Paul wasn't composing when he wrote Philippians, he was quoting it; which tells you that even while the New Testament was still being written...well before the Gospels were written down...and even as Paul was composing his epistles, along with James and John and Peter, even then the Church realized: We need a summary, and this quote...this creed...this creed set to music, perhaps...is an indication that even while the Bible was being written, Christians were sensing the value of what today we would call a creed—a summary of the faith that you can memorize and carry around with you.

DAVE BAST

But, we could even go further back than that, into the Old Testament, can't we?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; the Israelites also had things they needed to know; and so, we go to the book of Deuteronomy, and Deuteronomy 6; and again, this is Moses' grand sermon as the new generation of Israelites are going to take possession of the Promised Land in Canaan; and as they get ready to do that, Moses says there is a lot of stuff

you need to know and remember, and that you need to rehearse regularly with your children; and so, Deuteronomy 6:

“These are the commands, decrees and laws of the Lord your God, that he directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess; ²so that your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live. (And then...) ³Hear, O Israel; be careful to obey so that it may go well with you, that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

And now, Dave, this part: ⁴“Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children; talk about them when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down, when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”

DAVE BAST

Which is, as you said, the *Shema*, from that, which means *hear*,

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right...listen...

DAVE BAST

From the first word of this great creed...listen...and it is really the creed of the Old Testament believer...of the House of Israel; but it is also still used as a creed. Ultraorthodox Jews actually obey this literally, so they will bind...the phylactery is a little box that has scripture verses in it, and bound around the wrist or the head...and a little thing on the doorpost of the house. So, they will follow this literally; but really, it is an emphasis on memorizing and passing on in a form so that your children can memorize it, too. So, it goes down the generations.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and indeed, that *Shema*: Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God, and so forth...that was recited morning and evening, every night it was like: Now I lay me down to sleep, you know, for Jewish children. That was what they carried with them in their hearts so that they could pass it on to their children and so forth and so on.

We also have, Dave, in the Old Testament, what are sometimes called the great historical psalms, like Psalm 105.

DAVE BAST

Give praise to the Lord! Proclaim his name. Make known among the nations what he has done. ²Sing to him; sing praise to him. Tell of all his wonderful acts...which it then proceeds to do for the next 45 verses...or again, you think of Psalm 136 with its refrain, you know, constantly: Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever; and then every other phrase is reciting these historical acts that happened, beginning with God calling Abraham, and the Exodus—the great deliverance from slavery in Egypt—and his acts along the way to bring them to the Promised Land; and in a sense, the Apostles' Creed does the very same thing with Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It recites the historical acts: He was born of the Virgin Mary...he suffered...he was crucified, died, buried, descended, raised, ascended; and so, that is what a creed essentially does. It repeats the things God has done in order to save us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and something like Psalm 105, Dave, was written down before the Bible had started to get written down; but even when the Bible did get written down, the average person wasn't carrying Torah scrolls around in their backpack. You had to have something you could memorize, so you set something to music, like Psalm 105, and you summarized the person and the acts of God, and now people can sing it, and they can memorize it, and they can sing it to each other; and that was the great value of something like that; and as we said, Dave, that was true for a long time. When you didn't have access to written materials or even a Bible, what you knew, what you believed, had to be in your head.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Of course, we don't live in a day like that anymore.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I know; you could raise the question, perhaps legitimately: Do we still need creeds? I mean, everybody has a smart phone in their pocket, right? There is Google. You want to know something, just look it up. The whole art of memorization seems to be in decline. People don't even do math anymore; so, it is a legitimate question that we want to ask and answer: Do creeds still have value for us today? We will turn to that before we wrap up this program.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are finishing up this first introductory program, Dave, to the whole notion of creeds, and we are paying particular attention in this new series to the Apostles' Creed, one of the great ecumenical creeds, recognized pretty much in one form or another by basically all Christians in the world; but we were just saying, Dave, that we live in the age of Google. You can look up anything in a nano-second. You don't have to memorize things. People don't even memorize phone numbers anymore...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, most of us back in the day used to carry a couple dozen phone numbers in our head: for our parents, our kids, our neighbors; now, we just hit their name on our phone. Frankly, I have sometimes don't know the cell phone number of my own kids because I never dial it—I never punch it in. So, if creeds are handy for people who had to memorize, or they didn't have access to anything, what about us?

DAVE BAST

Right; and you know, perhaps you could begin by making the argument that it would be good to have something to fall back on in case your phone failed you. We have come to be dependent on modern technology for almost everything; and the question is: What if the power goes out, or what if something bigger happens, what would you do then? So, maybe it would be good to have something that you don't need to look up, that is just there; it's in your head and available—it is accessible whenever the need arises; but I

think we could say something more significant even about that...about the idea of memorizing scripture or memorizing a creed for example.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; because I think these days, Dave...you know, we've got Google, but Google gives you information. What we forget is that the Christian life is not only about information, it is about *formation*; it is about being formed as a disciple of Christ, whose worldview is shaped so that whatever you see, whatever you encounter in life, you view it through a certain lens; and that is the idea of a creed that we still need today. Yes, you can look up information, but to get formed for formation, you need something like the summary truths of the Apostles' Creed to seep deep into your bones, to become part of your spiritual DNA; because that then becomes a habit of mind: what you know; what you believe. You know who God is, and that is exceedingly important, even today.

DAVE BAST

You know, one of the things Martin Luther advocated was using things like the Creed or the Lord's Prayer in personal devotions. So, as you are perhaps reading the Bible in the morning, you kind of go over this in your mind and you say: This is what I believe: I believe in God, the Father Almighty; I believe in Jesus, his only Son; or you pray through the Lord's Prayer and you expand on those phrases and those clauses; and that has a formative effect—that has a deepening impact on our faith; but the other thing...and actually, frankly probably most of us, if we do say the Creed, we are going to do it in corporate worship alongside other people, and it is possible to just rattle off the words or read them off a sheet of paper without thinking too deeply about them; but if you think about what you are saying, and if you mean it, you are really saying: *I believe this.*

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DAVE BAST

It is not *they* believe it, or even *we* believe it, but *I* believe this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think you mentioned earlier, Dave, certain traditions that say: No creed but Christ; and they sort of make Christ the living Christ and a dead creed—they kind of make them opposite or in opposition to each other; but of course, there is no need for that. Yes, you can rattle off this creed mindlessly, and yes, I suppose most of us who have it memorized have now and then *not* thought deeply about it; but then again, we can and we do. Indeed, it becomes a part of us. It becomes part of our living relationship with Christ. Creed and Christ don't have to be in opposition to each other. It is part of our living relationship with Christ to lovingly and reverently rehearse who God is: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and what all the actions of the three Persons of the Trinity did to save us; and that is also why, Dave, you just mentioned...right, we say this in corporate worship, but isn't it interesting that when we are in a congregation or in a group and we recite the Apostles' Creed, as we did earlier in this program, even there we don't say *we* believe in God, the Father Almighty...*we* believe in Jesus Christ, his Son our Lord. We say *I*; even when we are together with other people, we say *I* believe. Why might that be significant?

DAVE BAST

You are staking your personal claim on this truth, and you are saying: I am betting my life on this. I was struck again, Scott, when we read the Creed earlier in the program, how we end it. Here is another word that we kind of mindlessly repeat: Amen...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But, as you know and I know, in our tradition we have another sort of doctrinal statement called the Heidelberg Catechism; and the last question and answer focuses on this little word *amen*. What do we mean when we say *amen*? We mean *so be it*. I am all for this. I am 110% into this. This is for me. This is my life; I am investing it in this truth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, when you say this is who Mike is...this is who Garcia is...this is who Min Suk is...who Sally is...the Creed, by using that first-person pronoun: *I believe*; it locates you inside God's grand story...it locates you inside that larger arc of salvation that we also saw summarized in some of those Bible passages we looked at in the previous part of the program; and again, Dave, it is not just information, it is *formation*—the forming of you as a disciple of Jesus.

DAVE BAST

This is who I am, I believe. I am the one who believes in God, the Father Almighty. I am the one who believes in Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior; I am the one who believes in the Holy Spirit—God within me—who gives me hope for eternal life and everlasting life. That is not just information, that forms my very being, the core of who I am, and I hope it does for you as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope you will join us again next time as we study the second part of the Apostles' Creed, opening line, that we believe in God, the Father Almighty. Connect with us on our website, groundworkonline.com. Share what *Groundwork* means to you, or make suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

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