

Dear friends and family,

Confessions of faith, often called creeds, have played an important role throughout the history of the church.

Many of these confessions can be found in the pages of scripture.

One of, if not the most famous, is the *Shema*.

Shema is the Hebrew word for ‘hear’, expressed in Deuteronomy 6:4-5:

*“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!
You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your might.”*

This confession, the *Shema*, was quoted by Jesus when He was asked

“Which is the greatest commandment?” (Matthew 22:36-40)

Many other confessional statements about God, His love, and His majesty can be found throughout the Old Testament. However, immediately after Christ’s ascension into heaven, those confessional statements became Christological. Peter’s confession, found in Acts 2, is the first of these. (Acts 2:22-24, 32-33, & 36).

The Christological confessions, made throughout the New Testament, are what we call ‘The Gospel’ today. They are each, in essence, confessions regarding Jesus. His deity, ministry, death, and resurrection are all Christological confessions. Throughout church history, the gospel message has been stated and restated in numerous confessional manners, some within scripture and many in the years since the canon of scripture has been closed. Today we may think of things like the ABC’s of the gospel, the Roman’s road, or the Four Spiritual Laws. Historically however, the most famous of these confessions is the Apostles Creed.

Al Mohler, President of Southern Seminary, wrote in his book titled *The Apostles’ Creed*, “This is what Christians believe—what all Christians believe. The Apostles’ Creed collapses time and space, uniting all true believers in the one, holy, and apostolic faith. This creed is a summary of what the Bible teaches, a narrative of God’s redemptive love, and a concise statement of basic Christianity. All Christians believe more than is contained in the Apostles’ Creed, but none can believe less.”

Pastor’s Point of View

The big question: **Why are confessional statements important for Christians today?**

Day 1 - READ Romans 10:8-15

1. According to this passage of scripture, at a minimum, what do we need to confess, in order to be saved?
2. What do you need to do today to keep the word near you, in your mouth, and in your heart?
3. Paul's progression of belief in vs. 14-15 states that belief comes from hearing, hearing comes from preaching, and preaching comes from being sent. This passage is not just for those who hold the office of Pastor. Instead, all believers are 'sent' to preach the good news (Matthew 28:18-20). **Who do you need to share the gospel with today?**

Day 2 - READ the Apostles Creed

The origination of the Apostles' Creed is unclear, but legend says that it was written by the Apostles themselves, on the tenth day after Jesus's ascension. According to Acts 1:3, Jesus appeared to the disciples for forty days. The feast of Pentecost took place fifty days after the Passover. Therefore, according to legend, the Apostles would have written the creed around the time of Pentecost after they had been filled with the Holy Spirit. However, this is not scripturally supported and has been deemed historically inaccurate. The first recorded version of the Apostles' Creed came around 215AD, over 100 years after the death of the last Apostle. That version of the creed took an interrogatory tone (Do you believe...) rather than a confessional tone (I believe...).

*Do you believe in God the Father All Governing?
Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God,
Who was begotten by the Holy Spirit from the virgin Mary,
Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
And died (and was buried) and rose the third day living from the dead,
And ascended into the heavens,
And sat down on the right hand of the Father,
And will come to judge the living and the dead?
Do you believe in the Holy Spirit,
In the holy Church,
And (in the resurrection of the body)?*

Later versions of the creed changed to the more common confessional tone. Likewise, the line "He descended into hell" was added. And, eventually, the holy Church was changed to "the holy catholic Church".

1. Do you agree with Dr. Mohler's assessment that "All Christians believe more than is contained in the Apostles' Creed, but none can believe less."
2. Does this creed efficiently summarize the gospel message?
3. What are some important truths contained in this creed? What questions might it bring up for you?
4. Do you think anything is missing from the creed?

Day 3 - READ 1 Timothy 3:14-16

1. Up to this point in our study of the book of 1 Timothy, we have taken note of Paul's instructions to Timothy about the conduct and officers of the Church. What is the stated purpose of Paul's letter to Timothy in vs. 15?
2. How does Paul describe the church and why is this important for us today? Does the church always "act" like the church as Paul describes it?
3. Paul closes this section with a confession. Much like other gospel confessions found in scripture, this is a succinct, verbal confession, of the gospel message. Why do you think Paul calls it a great mystery?

Day 4 - READ 1 Timothy 3:14-16

Focus today on the confession itself.

1. Reflect on: "He was manifested in the flesh". Some original manuscripts have the words "God, Who was manifested in the flesh". What does this confession tell us is true about Jesus?
2. Consider: "Vindicated (or justified) by the Spirit". This line refers to the virgin birth. Jesus, being conceived by the Spirit, born of a virgin, did not suffer from the human depravity inherent from Adam and the original sin nature. Why is this important?
3. Read: "Seen by the angels". This may have to do with the annunciation of His birth by the chorus of angels. However, it more likely speaks to His eternal nature, that He was in heaven, seen by the angels, before His incarnation. Why is this included?
4. Think about "Proclaimed among the nations". READ Matthew 3:1-3. What connection is here?
5. Consider that he was "Believed on in the world". READ John 14:1-7. What other Scriptures come to mind?
6. Reflect upon "Taken up in glory". READ Acts 1:1-11. Imagine these men, craning their necks to see exactly where Jesus is going! How does this stand true for us today?

Take note of how the Apostle's Creed as known today was so obviously influenced by Peter's confession in Acts 2 and Paul's here in 1 Timothy 3. Even though the Apostles did not write the creed as it is today, the creed was constructed directly from scriptural source material.

Do you see the importance of succinct gospel confessions and how utterly important it is that we be firmly rooted in scripture? This confession, without a firm foundation of scriptural teaching, would be useless. However, an overwhelming amount of doctrine would be confusing babble (Matthew 6:7). The gospel is a great mystery because it is that which we believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths so that we may be saved. It is the perfect amount of theological truth balanced with easy to understand language.

May all glory and honor and praise be unto Him, who is above all and in all and through all, for our confession of saving faith in Christ alone! AMEN

Pastor Matt

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Dr. Matthew Long

Senior Pastor

[FBC of Havelock](#)

*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us **RUN** with endurance the race that is set before us -- Hebrews 12:1*

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