

Fil-Am Community Church

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21 Sept 2014

Key Verse: Rom 10:9-10

“Why Believe, I believe”

Today, we begin a new series called “Back to Basics”. In this series, we’re going to look at a confession of faith that is accepted and recited in the three branches of Christianity – Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. And I would add a fourth branch, the Unorthodox. That’s just my term for the non-denominational Christian churches. Among Protestants, those who make this a part of their worship are the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Anglicans, Lutherans, and several more. How about Baptists? We are Southern Baptists. In general, Baptists don’t recite it. It’s not just part of our tradition. But, of course, we affirm The Apostle’s Creed. Actually, some reformed Baptist churches do recite it. And the President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary even did a series on this creed a few years back.

So, we’re in good company. This should help you to see that the Creed is accepted and affirmed by the Christian church as a whole, not only by the Catholic church. Because, in fact, it was already known by the early Christians although in a different form than it is now long before all these branches of Christianity came about. Now, in the video for the series, perhaps, some of you may have felt a bit uncomfortable of hearing three words that may have confused you. Let me explain that a little bit.

First, there is mention of the word “catholic”. The word catholic doesn’t refer to the Roman Catholic Church. It comes from the Latin and Greek word that

simply means “universal”. That’s why it is not capitalized. As we’ve talked about here many times, the church of Jesus Christ is invisible and universal.

It is not confined to a single organization or denomination. The church is composed of followers of Jesus across space and time.

Then, there’s “communion”. “Communion” doesn’t refer to the communion which Catholics call the Lord’s Supper. Communion just means community or fellowship or gathering. Meanwhile, “saints” doesn’t refer to dead people who have been canonized by the Catholic church like St. Patrick or St. Francis de Assisi or St. Anne or San Lorenzo de Ruiz. The word refers to the followers of Jesus, whether alive or not. So, you are a saint if you’re a believer in Jesus.

Is that clear? So, why don’t we say The Apostle’s Creed together. By the way, what we’re reciting is the modern version of this creed.

"I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father and he will come again 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, Amen."

By the way, the word “creed” comes from the Latin word “credo”, which literally means “I believe,” and is the first word used in Latin of the Apostles’ Creed. So a creed is simply a statement of what I believe.

For the next 12 weeks, we’re going to study the Apostles’ Creed in some depth in order to learn more about the persons and work of the Godhead. Pastor Dave and Bro. Barry are going to help me in this regard. This schedule should

bring us up to the first Sunday of December. So, brace yourself. But it will be worth your while.

Here are seven fast facts about the Creed: First, it is very old. Scholars believe that its earliest form can be traced back to A.D. 140. That's only about a hundred years after the death and resurrection of Christ. It was, in fact, even used during their baptism rites. The pastor would ask a question like "Do you believe in God the Father Almighty?" "Do you believe in Jesus Christ his Son?" "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?" And the baptismal candidate would respond by reciting the Creed. So, something like that took place. Second, it was not written by the Apostles. It is called the Apostles' Creed because it reflects what the apostles taught. It summarizes apostolic doctrine. Third, it is brief. Our version contains 112 words. Compare that to the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message, which contains ten times as many words. Fourth, it is God-centered. In fact, it is Trinitarian. The first sentence deals with God the Father, the second with God the Son, the third with God the Holy Spirit. Fifth, it is selective. The Creed touches on the central issues of the Christian faith, but there is much it passes over.

It says nothing about baptism, church government, Satan, angels, demons, predestination, or the details of the Second Coming. Sixth, it is easy to memorize. Some of you, perhaps, already know this by heart, right?

Now, since we're going to be preaching on the Creed for a number of weeks, it's important to know that we don't base our faith on any creed or statement of faith. Our ultimate source of authority is the written Word of God. Amen? Because it is inspired by God as II Timothy 3:16 tells us. The Bible is true in all its parts and entirely trustworthy. No creed can make that claim for itself.

So now, why is there a need for any Creed? Mind you, aside from the Apostles' Creed, passed on to us also are some early Christian creeds like the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, The Chalcedon Creed, etc. The question now

is, why is there a need for these Creeds? Why do we even have to formulate creeds? Why do we need to believe as these Creeds urge us to?

That is the subject of the message this morning, “Why Believe?” I’m going to tackle the first two words in the Creed, “I believe”. First, why don’t we read this passage from Romans 10:9-10,

“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”

So now, why believe? First, it is

I. To Assure Myself of God’s Help.

The Apostles’ Creed espouses good theology. Good theology can actually save your life. We always say, “God is good, all the time”. That’s good theology. It reminds us that whatever our circumstances are, God will never leave us nor forsake us. He promises in Romans 8:28, *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* Whether you’re sick, in financial trouble, in a tough relationship, the Creed can assure you that God is real, and he exists in three persons who together will work out things for you. And also, though we may stray or we commit a sin, he leads us back to himself and he forgives us. He is always faithful. The Bible says. *“If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is.”* (2 Tim. 2:13 NLT)

We’ve all heard of the phrase, “To see is to believe”. Meaning, “I will believe only if I can see it with my own eyes, or feel it when I touch it, or if there’s tangible proof. If you don’t show me anything, then tough luck. I cannot believe it”. That’s the attitude of many people in our society, especially those in the

scientific establishment. There must be physical evidence or it must withstand scientific tests before anything is accepted.

We know, of course, that this is not true. No one has seen the atom, or the neutron, but people believe they exist. No one has proven that the missing link in evolution exists, but some people believe it does. It doesn't. Evolution is not a fact, it's just a theory. But many people believe it, although they don't see the evidence. That takes a lot of faith. And to think that this is the same argument that people hurl against those who trust in the God of the Bible who no one has seen. They say that what we have is blind faith. That is not true. Because our faith rests on the tangible, physical, tested and proven Word of God, the Bible. Amen?

Perhaps, it's better if we turn this phrase around and we say, "To believe is to see". You see, it is when someone exercises faith in God and in his son Jesus Christ that we begin to have a better understanding of who we are and the world around us. Our eyes of faith are opened and we see what many people cannot see. We can see that there is hope in the midst of despair. We can see that there is comfort and healing in the midst of pain and suffering.

We can see that there is peace and order in the midst of chaos and confusion. We can see that there is love and joy in the midst of bitterness and anger.

The Creeds help to solidify our faith. In one sweeping document, they help you to know and understand our core Christian beliefs. Any creed is not perfect, of course, because it is formulated by man. But what it contains are the truths that come from the perfect Word of God.

The Apostles' Creed starts with the first two words, "I believe". It is personal. It is strong. It is full of faith. It helps one to realize that faith in God is a personal matter. It helps one to see that by believing in what the Bible says about God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit and what each of them and as a whole can do

and accomplish, it raises their hope to a level that can help them to wait and rely on God's help.

So, I believe to assure myself of God's help. Also, I believe

II. To avoid all forms of falsehood

A lot of people cannot differentiate truth from falsehood. They don't know what is true and what is false. It is because they are being constantly fed a steady diet of lies, lies, and more lies. It all began in the Garden of Eden when the old serpent deceived Eve and twisted the Word of God. And it continues unabated today. Throughout the centuries, the devil has twisted the Word of God and has successfully used a lot of sweet-talking individuals to establish churches that pretend to be Christian. You know what I'm talking about. These are the churches or pseudo-Christian organizations that teach a different Christ, a different Holy Spirit, a different theology altogether although cloaked in Christian lingo. And many people are being deceived.

Then, there are those who are deceived into thinking that there is no absolute truth at all. Everything depends on your feelings. It's all relative. What is true to you may not be true to me and that's ok.

Consider this quote from a 20-something backpacker in Boston when asked what he believed: "I don't know what I believe in. And if I believe—I believe there's some Higher Power, I think. But I don't know. Like right now I'm at a point where I don't know what to believe, but I'm open to everything. So I like to believe in everything, because I don't know what it is I truly believe in." This guy speaks for a whole generation that is ready to believe in everything. A saying goes, "If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything".

Then, I also read about this guy who was an active churchgoer and was interviewed about his views on Christianity. He replied that he was a Christian and believed that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. He went on to say that he agreed

with all the findings of the “Jesus Seminar.” Among other things, he said he believed that Christ was not born of a virgin, he did not physically rise from the dead, and that there was nothing wrong with gay pastors. Then he was asked what he based his beliefs on and he explained that they were based on his own understanding of who God is.

That strikes me as a fairly convenient religion. You keep the parts of the Bible you like, and you get to throw away the rest. This is one reason why we desperately need the Apostles’ Creed. It stands as an important corrective to the “me-centered” theology of the present day. The Creed reminds us that truth is not optional. There are boundaries to the Christian faith. Not everything is negotiable. Some things must be believed if you are to call yourself a Christian. You can choose to live outside those boundaries, but if you do, you aren’t a Christian and you shouldn’t call yourself one.

This leads us to a vital truth point: Christianity is a doctrinal faith. It is not an “X” that you can fill in with whatever content you desire. Christianity is a life based on the doctrines of the Bible. We must never say, “As long as you believe in Jesus, it doesn’t matter what else you believe.”

Unless the Jesus we believe in is the Christ of the Bible, he’s not the real Jesus at all. Amen? This means that Christianity is more than a conversion experience. To be a Christian means learning the doctrines of the Bible. This does not come naturally to any of us. There are things to learn and there are doctrines we are required to believe. That’s why the Apostles’ Creed is so important in the history of the church. In fact, the Apostles’ Creed was formulated early on in the life of the church to defend itself against the attacks of heresy like Jesus is not God, Jesus is not real, he was just an apparition, that he really did not resurrect and all that stuffy.

You see, truth is not up for grabs. And it is not decided by what we feel or by a majority vote or the latest opinion poll. The Creed reminds us that truth comes from God, and that is where we must start in our spiritual journey.

So, to believe is to assure myself of God's help, to avoid all falsehood, and thirdly,

III. To acknowledge that "Jesus is Lord".

Let's pause for a moment to consider the word "believe." In Greek the word is "pisteuo," which means to "believe into" something or someone. In English the word "believe" has different meanings. If I say, "I believe it's going to rain tomorrow," that's nothing more than a hunch. If I say, "I believe George Washington was the first President of the United States," that refers to a settled historical fact. But if I say, "I believe in Jesus with all my heart," I have made a different sort of statement altogether.

Let me illustrate. Suppose I go to the doctor and he says, "I'm sorry but you've got cancer that is life-threatening. I have chemotherapy that can cure the cancer, but it is very difficult to take and is likely to make you sick. If you're willing to take it, you can be cured of cancer." In that case, to say, "I believe in my doctor," means something very specific.

It doesn't mean "I believe he really is a doctor" or "I believe he's right when he says I have cancer" or even "I believe the chemotherapy can cure me." You don't truly believe in your doctor until you roll up your sleeve and let that life-saving medicine enter your veins. Until then it's all just talk. To believe in your doctor means to trust yourself completely to his care, to accept his diagnosis, and to put your life in his hands. That's true faith. Believing in Jesus means to trust him completely with your eternal destiny. It means to trust Christ so completely that if he can't take you to heaven, you aren't going to go there.

In the 19th century, the greatest tightrope walker in the world was a man named Charles Blondin. On June 30, 1859 he became the first man in history to walk on a tightrope across Niagara Falls. Over 25,000 people gathered to watch him walk 1,100 feet suspended on a tiny rope 160 feet above the raging waters. He worked without a net or safety harness of any kind. The slightest slip would prove fatal. When he safely reached the Canadian side of the Falls, the crowd burst into a mighty roar.

In the days that followed he would walk across the Falls many times. Once he walked across on stilts, another time he took a chair and a stove with him and sat down midway across, cooked an omelet and ate it. Once he carried his manager across riding piggyback. And once he pushed a wheelbarrow across loaded with 350 pounds of cement. On one occasion he asked the cheering spectators if they thought he could push a man across sitting in a wheelbarrow. A mighty roar of approval rose from the crowd. Spying a man cheering loudly, he asked, “Sir, do you think I could safely carry you across in this wheelbarrow?” “Yes, of course.” “Get in,” the Great Blondin replied with a smile. The man refused.

That makes it clear, doesn't it? It's one thing to believe a man can walk across by himself. It's another thing to believe he could safely carry you across. But it's something else entirely to get into the wheelbarrow yourself.

Believing in Jesus is like getting into the wheelbarrow. It's entrusting all that you are to all that he is.

It's not the amount of faith that matters; it's the object of faith that makes all the difference. Faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains. Weak faith in a strong object matters more than strong faith in a weak object. It's not a matter of “how much” you believe, it's whether or not you are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ to save you. In II Timothy 1:12, Paul says, “I know whom I have believed.” He doesn't say, “I know what I have believed,” though that would be true. And he

doesn't say, "I know how much I have believed," even though that is also true. And he doesn't say, "I know when I believed," which he could well have said. And he doesn't say, "I know why I have believed," even though that would be true as well. He doesn't even say, "I know in whom I have believed," which would be perfectly appropriate. As Spurgeon puts it, it is as if he says, "I know the person into whose hand I have committed my present condition, and my eternal destiny. I know who he is, and I therefore, without any hesitation, leave myself in his hands. It is the beginning of spiritual life to believe Jesus Christ."

If you are trying to keep your own soul, you are in serious trouble and will be rudely surprised one day. You cannot keep yourself safe. Your only hope is to entrust all that you are and have to Jesus. Lay it all at his feet and you will be safe.

One final word. The Apostles' Creed begins with the words "I believe." Why doesn't it say, "We believe?" The answer is simple. True belief is always personal. I can't believe for you and you can't believe for me. No wife can believe for her husband and parents can't believe for their children. You must make up your own mind. You can't live on the faith of those around you. The church is more than a gathering of people or a collection of Christians.

At its heart, the church is a community of believers who are joined together by their common faith in Jesus Christ. That's why the church for over 2,000 years has affirmed the Apostles' Creed. It expresses our common faith in Christ.

True belief is utterly personal. The Creed begins with two simple words: "I believe." Do you? No one can sit on the fence forever. I end with this thought: A Christian is a person who truly believes in Jesus who died on the cross for your sins, was buried and rose again from the dead. Do you believe that? Eternity hangs on your answer.