

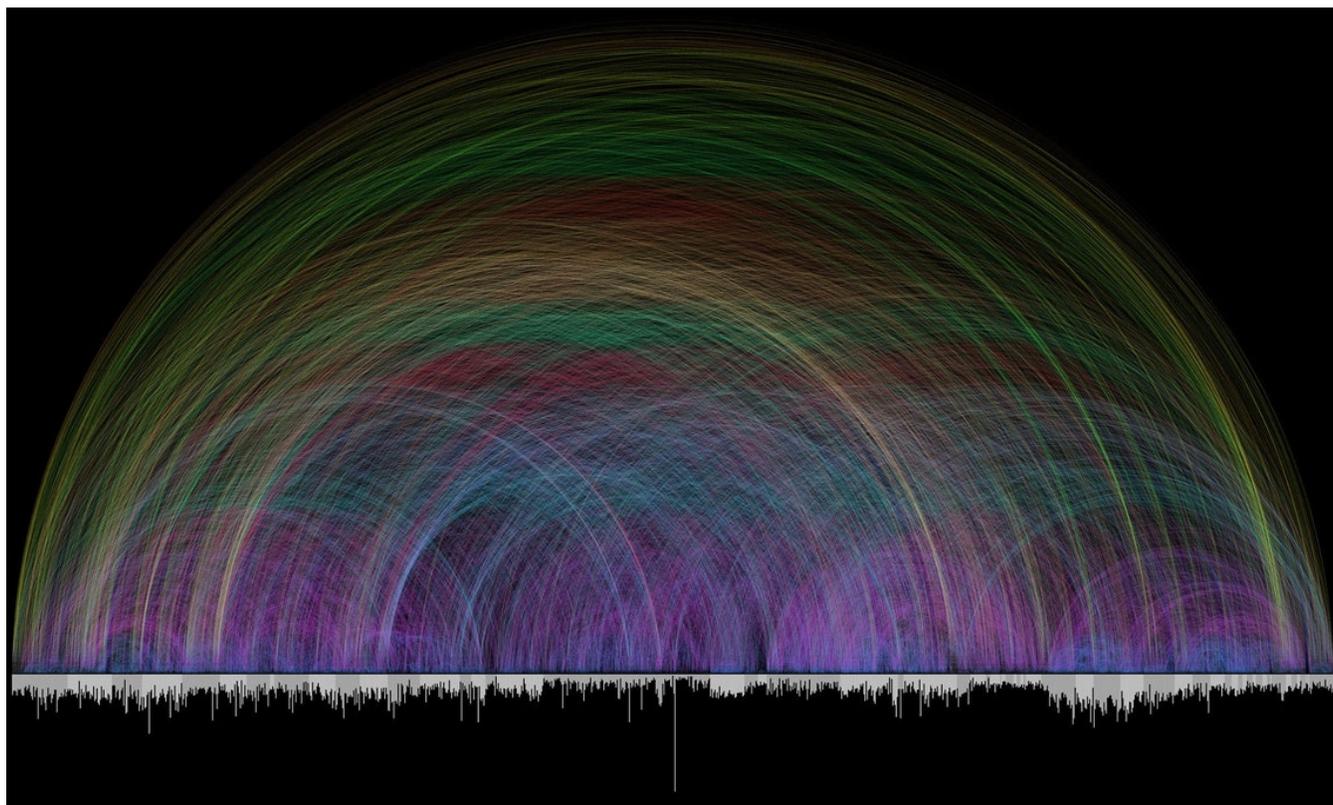
# The Creeds

## Part 1: Introduction

Old Roman Symbol (2 <sup>nd</sup> Century)	Apostle's Creed (3 <sup>rd</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> Centuries)	First Council of Nicaea (325)	First Council of Constantinople (381)
I believe in God the Father almighty;	I believe in God the Father almighty, <b>Creator of heaven and earth</b>	We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.	We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker <i>of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.</i>
and in Christ Jesus His only Son, our Lord,	And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord	And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God,] Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;	And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the <i>only-begotten</i> Son of God, begotten of the Father <i>before all worlds (æons)</i> , Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
		By whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]	by whom all things were made;
Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,	Who was <b>conceived</b> by the Holy Spirit and <b>born of</b> the Virgin Mary	Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man;	who for us men, and for our salvation, came down <i>from heaven</i> , and was incarnate <i>by the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary</i> , and was made man;
Who under Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried,	<b>Suffered</b> under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, <b>died</b> , and was buried	He <b>suffered</b> ,	<i>he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried,</i>
on the third day rose again from the dead,	He <b>descended into hell</b> ; on the third day he rose again from the dead	and the third day he rose again,	and the third day he rose again, <i>according to the Scriptures,</i>
ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father,	He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of <b>God the Father almighty</b>	ascended into heaven;	and ascended into heaven, and <i>sitteth on the right hand of the Father;</i>
whence He will come to judge the living and the dead;	From there he will come to judge the living and the dead	From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.	from thence he shall come <i>again, with glory</i> , to judge the quick and the dead; <i>whose kingdom shall have no end.</i>
and in the Holy Spirit,	I <b>believe</b> in the Holy Spirit	And in the Holy Ghost.	And in the Holy Ghost, <i>the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.</i>
the holy Church,	The holy <b>universal church</b> , the <b>communion of saints</b>		<i>In one holy catholic and apostolic Church;</i>
the remission of sins,	The forgiveness of sins		<i>we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins;</i>
the resurrection of the flesh	The <b>resurrection of the body</b>		<i>we look for the resurrection of the dead,</i>
(the life everlasting).	And life everlasting. Amen		<i>and the life of the world to come. Amen.</i>
		[But those who say: 'There was a time when he was not;' and 'He was not before he was made;' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable'— they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.]	
Blue: Old Roman Symbol	Red: Apostle's Creed Addition	Green: First Nicaea Addition	Orange: Second Nicaea Addition

# The Central Message of the Bible

Is there a [central message of the Bible](#)? If so, what is it? There is, quite literally, a [central text](#) of the Bible—at least the way our Protestant canon is arranged. This text is Psalm 119.<sup>1</sup> This Psalm is by far the longest of all the Psalms, and is in fact the longest chapter in the Bible (see chart below).<sup>2</sup>



CHRIS HARRISON, BIBLE CROSS-REFERENCES, 2007.

[HTTP://WWW.CHRISHARRISON.NET/INDEX.PHP/VISUALIZATIONS/BIBLEVIZ](http://www.chrisharrison.net/index.php/visualizations/bibleviz)

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 117 or 118 are sometimes said to be the literal center. In terms of chapters, 118 would be the center, but of course, only of the Protestant Bible and the way it is arranged. In terms of verses, this is not something that can be known with certainty, nor does it matter, given that the verses were added after the fact.

<sup>2</sup> This chart can be divided into two halves. There is a rainbow of semicircles above the horizontal line and 1,189 vertical white-grey lines below the horizontal line. The semicircles are a visual representation of all the passages that quote, allude to, or echo something else in the Bible. The vertical lines are the chapters of the Bible with their corresponding length. As you can easily visualize, Psalm 119 is the longest line and is in the dead center of the image.

The content of Psalm 119 is fascinating. It is a giant poem, consisting of **176 total lines**. These lines are subdivided into **22 sections** consisting of **8 lines apiece**. In each of the 22 sections, all eight lines begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The next section then changes to the next letter, going through all 22 letters. This makes Psalm 119 an *acrostic* poem.

**What is the point of an acrostic poem?** Besides making it easier to memorize, because it goes through the entire alphabet, it is a **literary way** of teaching you *totality*, just like when John says, “**Jesus is the alpha and the omega**” (**Rev 21:6**). Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, omega is the last. So, it is like saying that Jesus is the “A” and the “Z.” Thus, that verse continues that he is “... *the beginning and the end.*” **Jesus is the totality**. But Psalm 119 is remarkable among acrostic poems in the Bible, because it has *eight lines* rather than just one that each begin with a new letter. Thus, the number “**eight**” becomes incredibly important in interpreting its meaning. And this will have bearing on one of its two main messages.

First, **the explicit message** of the Psalm is impossible to miss. Using **eight different synonyms** repeated over and over again throughout the poem, this is a song about loving

God's law.<sup>3</sup> In fact, he says four different times, "I love your law" (Ps 119:97; 113; 163; 165). So the *explicit* message of God's word in its central chapter is about the *Law of God*.

But who is the "he" in the Psalm? This question cannot be more important. He tells us that he is a king (46), who is afflicted (67, 71, 75), while he is living in great tension with those in authority who want him dead (called the proud, wicked, and evil-doers). Into this setting, the psalm gives several references to time. Curiously, these "times" go in order—from midnight to the cockcrow to dawn to noon. Now, the Jews divided the day, coincidentally, into eight blocks of three hours each, beginning with "evening" and going through the ninth hour (ninth – eleventh) of what we would call the next day. At some point, perhaps even at the very beginning, a tradition arose among them on Pentecost to recite 1/8 of the poem at the beginning of each of these eight blocks of day. Pentecost was the day that they celebrated, through a festival, the giving of the Law on Sinai. Our Lord Himself may have had this very thing in mind on that very day when he gave his last words, "Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:20).

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<sup>3</sup> [1] *torah* (law), [2] *edah* (testimonies), [3] *mitzvah* (commandments), [4] *piqqud* (precepts), [5] *choq* (statutes), [6] *mishpat* (rules), [7] *debar*" (word), [8] *imrah* (word/Promise).

But something else began to happen in the early church. This is rooted in the **number eight** which predominates the song. Eight was called by the Fathers, “**The Octave**,” following after musical notes that repeat, just like the days of the week, on the eighth (*do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do*). The Octave, they said, that is the themes involving “eight” throughout this and other places, **foreshadowed the resurrection of Jesus** in the OT. Curiously, there are themes in each of the eight sections of this Psalm that correspond to **the eight stages of the last day of Jesus’ life**, beginning on the night he was betrayed, and going through to the ninth hour in which he died. As such, this song’s message is more than just about the Law.

## **The Eight Divisions of Psalm 119 and the Life of Jesus**

Psalm 119:1-8 – Evening (3:00 pm ... Reclining with Friends)

Psalm 119:25-48 – Late (And the Garden of Gethsemane)

Psalm 119:49-72 – Midnight (Still in the Garden of Grief)

Psalm 119:73-96 – Cockcrow (And Peter Wept Bitterly)

Psalm 119:97-120 – Dawn

Psalm 119:121-144 – The Third Hour (Mark 15:25; They Crucified Him)

Psalm 119:145-168 – The Sixth Hour (Noon and Inexplicable Darkness)

Psalm 119:169-176 – The Ninth Hour (Forsaken and Forgiven)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For much more on all this see **Douglas Van Dorn**, “Psalm 119 and the Last Night of our Lord: Resurrection Meditations on Psalm 119,” *RBCNC.com* (April 1, 2018), <https://uploads.documents.cimpress.io/v1/uploads/7afea96c-fa1e-4216-9d35-1f7e649b0b7c~110/original?tenant=vbu-digital>.

To put this all another way, the literary structure, the number eight, the time frames of a singular day, and the context of the psalmist's situation in which this song is sung, and the last day of Jesus, all point to **an implicit prophetic message** in Psalm 119. That message is *the Gospel* that focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, you have two central messages in the central chapter, one of the greatest masterpieces of the whole Bible: *The law* and *the gospel*.

## The Reformation's Recovery Rooted in History

Given that we are in that time of the season where we remember the Reformation, I thought it would be interesting for a moment to think about **what they considered the central message of the Bible**. The Reformation was a mighty movement of God, wherein he used many men from all over Europe to recover truths long obscured in the Roman Church through suppression, intimidation, and superstition. Or, stating it a little less harshly, the medieval church had subverted true religion by appealing to man's fascinations with **moralism**, **mysticism**, and the **miraculous**—three ladders, Martin Luther said, that people climb to glimpse of

God “in the nude,” or God as he is in his bare essence, not clothed with the word.<sup>5</sup>

As the Reformers sought to recover the ground of our faith, what they called *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone), in unison they taught the central message of the Bible as *the law* and *the gospel*. This perfectly fits the central text of the Bible—Psalm 119. In fact, Luther said this very thing. “We must hear what [God] promises [gospel] us and what He threatens [law]. This is done with profit, as the first and the 119th psalms teach.”<sup>6</sup>

Theodore Beza, the protégé of John Calvin, said, “We divide this Word into two principle parts or kinds: the one is called the ‘Law,’ the other the ‘Gospel.’ For all the rest can be gathered under the one or the other of these two headings.”<sup>7</sup> Calvin explained, “The Gospel is the message, the salvation-bringing proclamation concerning Christ that he was sent by God the Father ... to procure eternal life. The Law is contained in precepts, it threatens, it burdens, it promises no goodwill. The Gospel acts without threats, it does not drive one on by precepts, but rather teaches us

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, I:11–14; III:138, 276; XII:312–13.

<sup>6</sup> Luther, *Works*, Vol. 3: *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 15-20*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 3 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 138.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Beza, *The Christian Faith*, trans. James Clark (East Sussex, Eng.: Focus Christian Ministries Trust, 1992), 40-41.

about the supreme goodwill of God toward us.”<sup>8</sup> Luther said, “The Law is, and teaches, what we should do; but the Gospel is what God will give to us. The first we cannot fulfill; the second we take hold of by faith.”<sup>9</sup>

This distinction was crucial to all of them. Beza said, “Ignorance of this distinction between Law and Gospel is one of the principle sources of the abuses which corrupted and still corrupt Christianity.”<sup>10</sup> Spurgeon said, “Some men put the law instead of the gospel; others put gospel instead of the law. A certain class maintains that the law and the gospel are mixed... These men understand not the truth and are false teachers.”<sup>11</sup> And Ursinus, the author of the *Heidelberg Catechism* said that to confuse them is to corrupt the faith at its core.<sup>12</sup>

As exemplified in Psalm 119, the Reformers came to this position because they were deeply committed to *Sola Scriptura*. They wanted to return to the biblical message rather

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<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536 Edition*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; The H. H. Meeter Center for Calvin Studies, 1995), 365.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Table Talk: Or, Some Choice Fragments from the Familiar Discourse of the Godly, Learned Man, and Famous Champion of God's Truth* (London; Dublin; Edinburgh; Newcastle upon Tyne: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green; Hatchard; Seeley; Rivingtons; W. Whyte and Co.; Finlay and Charlton, 1832), 191–192.

<sup>10</sup> Beza, *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *New Park Street Pulpit*, vol. 1 (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1975), 285.

<sup>12</sup> Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 2.

than a message **invented or corrupted or eclipsed by the teachings of men.**

However, they were equally committed to **recovering the historical Christian message as taught by the church** throughout her long history. Sound like a contradiction? Not at all. This was not merely a great awakening, nor a great revival, much less some kind of cultish movement infiltrated with unknown doctrines until the cult leaders came along. Rather, this was a *reformation*, and to reform, by definition, means to take something that is already existent and make it better without destroying the core of the thing. The Reformers insisted that the message of the Bible had always been with and in the church, but needed to be revisited in their day because so many other things were overshadowing and covering it.

## The Creeds and Anti-credalism

It is into this that I want to turn to the substance of this series. It will focus on **one half of this central message** of the Bible: **The Gospel**. The Law is vitally important too, but as you have that writing on your heart at birth, that can be for another time. The gospel is this glorious “other” thing that comes from a place far outside of yourself. It is something

that God did not put in your conscience by nature like he did the law, and yet he did put in each man a [longing](#) that deep down in our hearts we know that we want to be made right with God and be at peace with him. The Gospel is our salvation ([Rom 1:16](#)); it is how God brings us to peace and reconciles us to himself.

To do this, I'll be looking at [four main creeds](#) of the early church (with perhaps a fifth thrown in at some places), comparing and contrasting them and asking ourselves why they have been so important to Christ's Bride for nearly 2,000 years.

But just here, I want to address [a problem](#). I just said that the Reformers were not fond of man-made traditions and the inventions of men. There is an entire swath of Christians that believe creeds are man-made inventions of men. This makes them, in the words of one recent online discussion I was coincidentally reading, "[Satanic](#)."<sup>13</sup> That's quite a claim that even most anti-credal Christians would not say. But it does reflect a softer, similar kind of sentiment. That sentiment involves [a deep-seated belief that creeds are divisive](#)

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<sup>13</sup> Specifically, he said "[Nicaea was Satanic](#)." His main point was canonical—to justify having 1 Enoch in the canon. He clearly did not know his history nor how the canon came to be. But when people think of "Nicaea," the first thing that comes to mind is not the approval of a canon, but [the creed](#) that came out of it. Therefore, to say that Nicaea was satanic is to say that the creed is satanic.

and tear apart the unity of Christians. In the words of one sectarian who begat an entire denomination of this thinking, “Our opposition to creeds arose from a conviction that, whether the opinion in them were true or false, they were hostile to the union, peace, harmony, purity, and joy of Christians, and adverse to the conversion of the world to Jesus Christ.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, nothing man-made can be unifying. Only the Bible can be unifying.<sup>15</sup>

The anti-credal mentality of our present time has so overtaken our culture that it seems to me if you asked a Baby Boomer and their children what “creed” was, they might think of the famous boxer who fought Rocky Balboa (Apollo Creed, 1976-84). A Gen-Xer and their children might think of a the post-grunge metal band from Tallahassee (Creed, 1994-2012). A Millennial and their children Generation Z, it might refer to a video game (Assassins Creed, 2007-). If I’m right, this is a terribly sad commentary

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<sup>14</sup> Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), *The Christian System in Reference to the Union of Christians and A Restoration of Primitive Christianity as Pleaded in the Current Reformation, fourth edition* (Cincinnati: H. S. Bosworth 1863), 9. Campbell begat the Campbellites, aka The Church of Christ or The Disciples of Christ.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Baxter was clearly aware of this kind of thinking, as he spent a good portion of time defending the creed as “the word of God.” “The Creed is the *Word of God*, as to all the *Doctrine* or *Matter* of it, whatever it be as to the *order* and *composition* of words ... That is oft by the Ancients called the *Apostles*, which contains the *matter* derived by the Apostles, though not in a form of words compiled by them” [spelling modernized]. Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, Early English Books Online (London: Robert White, 1673), 896.

on our society. Frankly, Americans used to know full well what the creeds were, but not anymore.

In the church, it isn't a whole lot better. In this case, each of these four generations, starting with the Boomers and their systematic dismantling of institutions and traditions in the 1960s, there's a mentality that predominates. It is the saying, "No creed but Christ."<sup>16</sup> What ironic is that this is

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<sup>16</sup> Going Deeper: This history of this phrase ("No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible").

My rudimentary investigation yielded the following history. The phrase has most likely come into popular culture though the Campbellites (see n. 14), a sectarian group that swept through the frontier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Campbell depicted creeds as "commandments of men," "human inventions," "philosophical speculations," and viewed them as weapons that were wielded by philosophers and preachers to treat good Christians like heathens. In the words of one historian, "They spawned ignorance and superstition; they set friend against friend and relative against relative. Unification and purification of the faith ... were achieved by embracing the scriptures, not creeds." D. Duane Cummins, *The Disciples: A Struggle for Reformation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2009), 61.

Curiously, one of the earliest uses of "no creed but Christ" in Google Books is found in a Mormon publication, which sites it as coming from the lips of a "Baptist" who is talking to the Mormon! . "I would like to hear your religious position [says the Mormon] if you have no objections to state the same.' The young clergyman proceeded to state his position on theology. 'I hold to *no creed but Christ*. He is the true creed, hence my creed is no a doctrine but a person. The confession of faith that saves the soul is not in a doctrine, but in a person. He that believeth in Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life. He that confesseth Christ before men, he will confess before his father and the holy angels. I take the Bible alone as the rule of faith—not to prove doctrine by, but as containing the doctrine itself. I consider that the religious world, both Catholic and Protestant, have departed from the ancient apostolic faith and practice to a greater or lesser extent." "A Preacher's Experience. No. 4." *The True Latter Day Saints' Herald, A Semi-Monthly Magazine, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* Vol. XXII (Plano, Ill: 1875). 332. How interesting that it is the Baptist rather than the Mormon who is saying everyone but himself has apostatized.

Prior to this, the statement was slightly different. In the early part of the century, it seems to have been "No creed but *the Bible*." For example, "As General Baptist we disclaim all human authority in matters purely religious. We have no Master in religion but Christ, and no creed but the Bible." David Eaton, *A Lecture on the Practical Uses of Christian Baptism* (London: George Smallfield and Hackney, March 26, 1826), 25. The Socinians "profess to have no guide or master but Christ, and no creed but *the Bible*." "Dialogue on Unitarianism," *The Christian Reformer, Or, New Evangelical Miscellany*, vol. 10 (London: Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1824), 166.

itself a creed. What's even more ironic is that it is totally man-made.

I was listening to a *YouTube* video of a pastor in the above denomination that takes great pride on having no creeds. “*Sola Scriptura*,” he demanded (not realizing that this isn't taken from the Bible either and is itself a man-made creed, and one that I agree with, by the way), abusing the phrase. Then, in what I viewed as a hopelessly naïve, contradictory, and impossible to live out worldview, he gave an illustration. “A man saying ‘I believe in the Bible alone’ but also having a creed is like having a Bible ...” *He pulls out his Bible and holds it in his hand, “... that is weighed down and impossible to open because another book is on top of it.” He then throws a book even bigger than the Bible on top of the Bible so that it makes a loud thud. “If you have your Bible and then read it any other way than the creed says,” he continues, “You’re wrong.”* Sounds great, right? Scripture alone must mean that. The problem is, it doesn't.

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Prior to this, they said things like. “Will you not summon to your aid that Christian fortitude which will allow you to call no man master but Christ, and to subscribe to *no creed which has not the sanction of his authority*?” James Freeman, William Wells, *American Unitarianism* (Boston: Nathaniel Willis, 1815, 1812), 69. And before this, it was wholly different. “The Church for the first Three hundred Years after Christ, had *no other Creed but the Apostles, which our most biggotted opposers have never dared to deny*” Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715), “Considerations of the Explications of the Doctrine of the Trinity,” *A Third Collection of Tracts* (1695), 31. And this is the view we are looking at today, as it is the view of the Apostle's themselves (1Cor 11:2; 12:28; Eph 2:20; 2Th 2:15).

First of all, **no creed that I've ever seen is longer than the Bible** itself. The creeds that we will be looking at range from around 60 words to 170 or so. That doesn't even take you 1/3 of the way through the first chapter of Matthew's Gospel! So, if he is talking about creeds, he should have put a piece of paper on the Bible rather than a book that was bigger than the Bible.

**Second**, even if you take a **Confession of Faith**, which is a much longer document, even that **pales in comparison** to the Bible. For example, the London Baptist 1689 Confession is about 16,000 words, including signators and introductions. Matthew's Gospel by itself is longer than that. So even the most expansive of "creeds" still pale in comparison. He should have thrown a booklet on the Bible, not *War and Peace*.

**Third**, it doesn't seem to dawn on people that if they won't use something like a creed to interpret the Bible, they must still use *something*. Most often, that "something" is either **their own sectarian leader's interpretation** or **their own!** So I would suggest that what people are doing in throwing creeds into the dumpster fire is, instead of throwing a piece of paper on the Bible, they are throwing themselves on top of the Bible. And a man is exponentially heavier and bulkier than even *War and Peace*. If you thought it was hard to open

the Bible with that book on top, try it with a man is laying on top of it.

When it comes to interpretation, every single thought we have about the Bible is, by definition, not the Bible. This makes our own thoughts about it identical to the very thing that is supposedly evil—creeds. For the authors of the creeds are no less human than I am. I’m not saying it is bad to have your thoughts about the Bible. I’m saying it is bad to damn the thoughts of others, especially those thoughts are the combined views of all the churches coming together to craft those thoughts, all while saying that your own thoughts are superior to everyone else’s.

Fourth, whether they have a stated creed or not, every church has doctrine. And their doctrine is just as exclusionary as the creeds, even if they are not written down. These are the “unwritten” creeds found in every church. Someone asks us to consider the following hypothetical situation.

If a Baptist and a Presbyterian were to come to an [anti-credal church] and say, “We’re going to teach on the meaning of baptism today, first from the *Baptist Faith and Message* and then from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Since the [anti-credal] has no creed but Christ, and we all affirm the Bible, we can teach here, right?” The duo would quickly be

told otherwise. Why? Because everyone has a creed, even—and especially—those who say they don't.

Thus, as Ligon Duncan says, “No creed but Christ is a lousy creed.”<sup>17</sup>

Before moving on, I would like to get **specific about a friend** of mine and his podcast which has become very popular in recent days as it pertains to this. I do this because it is a good example of how people misread others. His podcast is called “**The Naked Bible Podcast.**” Its self-description is the following. “**Biblical theology, stripped bare of denominational confessions and theological systems by exposing context.**” Some people have taken my friend to mean that creeds are evil. It is easy to see why they would think that based on this description, and I'm not particularly fond of the way he has branded this, mostly because of what he himself has said about this.

**There is a pervasive tendency in the believing Church to filter the Bible through creeds, confessions, and denominational preferences. *That's not a bad thing. It's a human thing.***

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<sup>17</sup> The quote and Duncan comment are in **Jeff Robinson**, “Ligon Duncan on Why ‘No Creed But the Bible’ Is a Lousy Creed,” *TGC* (Sept 28, 2016), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/ligon-duncan-on-why-no-creed-but-bible-is-lousy-creed/>.

*Creeds are useful for distilling important points of theology. But they are far from the whole counsel of God, and even farther from the biblical world. This is something to be aware of at all times [emphasis mine].*<sup>18</sup>

My friend admits that no one is an island of pristine neutrality. He admits that we all read the Bible through filtered lenses. What he is concerned about is a good concern. **Creeds and confessions don't say everything.** But then again, they aren't meant to. But what they do say is something every Christian really should heed, for their focus is on **the most important things.** That takes me to the heart of what I want to say about why we are going to look at the Creeds in this series.

## The Creeds and the Gospel

Putting Confessions of Faith aside since we are not dealing with those, the **Creeds have a very specific focus.** By Creeds, I'm talking about those earliest of church documents that hit specifically on **the nature of God and the person and work of the Son of God made flesh.** Specifically, we

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<sup>18</sup> **Michael S. Heiser**, *The Bible Unfiltered: Approaching Scripture on Its Own Terms* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 13.

are going to look at [The Apostle's Creed](#) (3<sup>rd</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> century), its precursor—[The Old Roman Symbol](#) (2<sup>nd</sup> century), and two forms of the [Nicene Creed](#) (325 and 381 AD). Each of these are built upon the others, save the first, which is built upon [even earlier teachings](#) that seem to go back to the very earliest church.

These creeds are short statements about the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and their collective work in bringing us salvation. As I said, they generally take between 60-200 words to do this. What we call this is [the Gospel](#). They are nothing short of the Gospel.

As it regards the gospel, they are all [divisible in two parts](#). A [very brief](#) first part, and a much [longer](#) second part. These two parts are what I call the [subjective](#) and the [objective gospel](#). [The objective is the content](#), the meat, the doctrine, the thing that is believed. The Gospel is a message, and this message comes to us through the Holy Scripture. The Creeds take the Scripture's teaching and put them in the form of simple declarations, statements of doctrine. Those doctrines are the objective good news of God and what he has done to bring us salvation through Christ ([Solus Christus—Christ Alone](#)). That's all they are.

The **subjective** is extremely important and very short and often goes unnoticed. It comes at **the very beginning** of each of the creeds. It is usually just two words. “**I believe**” (or in some forms, “we believe”). In fact, the word “creed” comes from the latin *credo*, which literally means “I believe!”

This is subjective, because this is *your part*. This is **faith**. This is what *you yourself* confess to believe—the doctrines and person of the Gospel. You believe who this God is and what he has done for you, and through this belief, God saves you. In a word, this is ***Sola Fide*—Faith Alone**. The great **Rich Mullins**, who ironically came out of a Quaker anti-creedal background put it this way in his song “Creed” wherein he literally sings through the entire Apostles’ Creed:

*And I believe what I believe  
is what makes me what I am.  
I did not make it. No, it is making me.  
It is the very truth of God and not  
the invention of any man.  
I believe it, I believe.<sup>19</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> **Rich Mullins**, “Creed,” *A Liturgy, A Legacy, & a Ragamuffin Band*, Reunion (1993).

Nothing could be more central to hear, to ponder, to learn, to discuss, or to believe, enjoy, and love. They are so important that our church says one of them nearly every week, and those weeks we do not, we are usually confessing the actual statements in them that come from the Bible itself.

In fact, **the Bible has creeds**. The most famous in **the OT** is this. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (**Deut 6:4-5**). This is the Jewish Credo, **the Shema**, which Jews recite twice a day. It teaches you who God is and what he requires of you. It is Gospel and Law.

**The NT** has creeds too, many of them. **Peter** gave us a short one, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (**Matt 16:16**). **Paul** tells us one said regularly by the early church. “God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached to the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received upon in glory” (**1Ti 3:16**). **Philippians 2** gives us one of the most famous biblical creeds, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming

obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:6-11).

Perhaps the creed that most closely resembles the largest portions of our creeds is found in 1 Corinthians 15. “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me” (1Co 15:3-8). This is the Gospel—*Sola Gratia*, *Grace Alone*, the work of God outside of you, done through Christ that exalts and glorifies God (*Soli Deo Gloria*—*To God Alone the Glory*) even while saving sinners from eternal hell by giving them new life when they look to Christ by faith. What could be more important to hear?

# The Creeds as Ecumenical Documents

I want to return to this idea that **creeds divide**. In a sense, this is true. But the question is, what do they divide over? There is a famous saying that over the years I have come to like more and more (I originally didn't like it at all, because of how I saw people abuse it to say we should believe hardly anything), because it shows **a kind of wisdom** that many do not seem to appreciate. The saying goes something like this, **“In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity [or love].”**

This saying is often **attributed to Augustine**. But this is a Christian **tall tale**. Its origins go back to a Lutheran theologian in 1626,<sup>20</sup> and 1617 with a Catholic Archbishop who turned on the papacy.<sup>21</sup> Though this saying can, like

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<sup>20</sup> “*Verbo dicam: Si nos servaremus in necessariis Unitatem, in non-necessariis Libertatem, in utrisque Charitatem, optimo certe loco essent res nostrae*” or, “In a word, let me say: If we might keep in necessary things Unity, in unnecessary things Freedom, and in both Charity, our affairs would certainly be in the best condition.” **Peter Meiderlin** (Rupertus Meldenus or Petrus Meiderlinus), *Paraenesis votive pro pace ecclesiae ad theologos Augustanae* (1626).

<sup>21</sup> “*Omnesque mutuam amplecteremur unitatem in necessariis, in non necessariis libertatem, in omnibus caritatem*” or, “*Let us all embrace one another, unity in what is necessary, liberty in what is not necessary, charity in all things.*” **Marco Antonio de Dominis** (1560-1624), *De Republica Ecclesiastica Libri X* (London, 1617), book 4, chap. 8 (p. 676, first vol). For a short biography of de Dominis from a Catholic who concludes the irony of this statement from the pen of man who fought bitterly against both Rome and the Church of England saying it, “is a quote from one of the most untrustworthy theologians in Church history: a twice-declared heretic who could not seem to unify with anybody!” see, **Douglas Beaumont**, “The Origin of ‘In Essentials Unity...’” *DouglasBeaumont* (June 18, 2013), <https://douglasbeaumont.com/2013/06/18/the-origin-of-in-essentials-unity/>. On the discovery of de Dominis as a source see **H. J. M. Nellen**, “Necessariis Unitas, In Non Necessariis Libertas, In Utrisque

anything else, be abused, and I've seen that happen personally, at its best, it teaches us that certain kinds of doctrine should not divide brothers while **certain doctrine must divide**. Those which must divide are called "essentials."

Unfortunately, I have been unable to determine what the original speakers of this saying meant by "essentials," and so that leaves us up to each person. And that isn't a great thing. Frankly, **every person is going to have slightly to hugely different ideas** about what essentials are that must divide people. As I've thought about this question for nearly 25 years, **I've come to a conclusion**.

Splitting churches over **the color the nursery walls** should fall into neither of the two doctrinal categories, but only the third, "**In all things, love**." Having a **robust Confession of Faith** is a good thing, I believe, especially if we keep that third idea in mind. However, Confessions are not dividing lines between what makes someone Christian vs. non-Christian (save at the essentials upon which they build). That was never their intent, and anyone who uses them that way is turning a force for good into a weapon for evil, and woe be upon them. Those who espouse the **Augsburg Confession**

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Caritas," *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis (Dutch Review of Church History)* 79.1 (1999): 99-106. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/24011056?read-now=1&seq=8#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/24011056?read-now=1&seq=8#page_scan_tab_contents).

(Lutherans), the [Westminster Confession](#) (Presbyterians), the [Belgic Confession](#) (Reformed), and the [London Baptist Confession](#) (Reformed Baptists) are all Christians. And there are many more besides these, including Confessions that do not hail from the Magisterial Reformation.<sup>22</sup> In these, there should be a certain kind of liberty to disagree on minor details that do not pertain to the law and gospel.

I think the only objective way of determining what an essential is, is by going back [to the early church](#) to see what they, together, sent their best ordained ministers who travelled great distances at great cost to discuss, spent many weeks and untold hours debating, and finally ended up crafting as [unifying documents](#) for the whole church to be the most distilled, refined, purified, extracted, essential of doctrine that bind all Christians together through time and space. And the fact is, we have precious few of these, which makes getting the “[essentials](#)” [right a relatively easy thing](#).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> A great series that contains nearly all of the Protestant (non-Lutheran) Confessions of the first two centuries is [James T. Dennison Jr.](#), *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: 1523–1693*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008–2014). For one that contains the most fundamental of the Confessions, including Lutheran, see [Chad Van Dixhoorn](#) (ed.), *Creeks, Confessions, & Catechisms: A Reader’s Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022).

<sup>23</sup> [Someone may object](#) that there are doctrines that come after the creeds such as *sola fide* that are essential that the creeds do not touch. While it is true that they do not touch them in the same way, we’ve already seen how *sola fide* is presupposed in the creeds themselves through “I believe.” The creeds add nothing more than faith to what we need, and in this way, I would argue that the fight over justification by faith alone and other such “essentials” are latently

There have been many, many creeds penned over the centuries, but there are **a select few** that we can count on one hand that fit this bill. These are what we typically call the Ecumenical Creeds. *Ecumenical* is a word that means “**representing the whole**,” and includes the worldwide church. Sadly, like creeds and confessions, **this word has also been badly abused** in our day, especially by those who want “no creed but Christ” and some of them even then want to import whatever they feel like into the definition of “Christ.” I’m not talking about a heretical ecumenicism.

I’m talking about the councils and creeds that have been **accepted by the entire church**, all branches, going back to the beginning. It is easy here to become upset because some of these branches were and are today in need of great Reformation (this certainly has to include many Protestants!). Some do not even want to consider them as churches, and today, some of them aren’t. But to import more modern heresies into the early church is **anachronistic**. In the early church, there was no Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist ... those are all labels that came upon each group after two or more sides splintered and split away.

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present already in the creeds. The Reformers were simply fleshing out what was already present, stating the old truths according to the new circumstances of the day.

It is perhaps closer to the history of it to talk about how all the known churches of the world came together to craft and/or adopt a creed. It is better to think of it as the church at Corinth was represented, the churches of Galatia, the church of Rome, the church of Antioch, the church of Jerusalem, the churches of Asia Minor such as Ephesus and Philadelphia, the church at Lyons, the church in Hippo, and so on and so forth.

What did they come together to do? They weren't trying to say everything. They were crafting creeds that they saw as *unifying documents*, documents that would show people that the entire church agreed that this has always been the apostolic teaching on the nature of God and the person and work of Christ. They weren't making up new things. They were putting old things into a simple form, so that a person might know what the most essential truths of the Gospel are and that the whole church agreed upon this. They had to do this, of course, because heresies attacking these most fundamental of doctrines were spreading like wildfire and poisoning like gangrene. And heresies are what destroys unity. As the old song teaches, "by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed." The church, just like the Apostles in the NT, viewed heresies of the first order of

magnitude as essential to fight. The creeds gave us these few statements as marks of what are essential, so that the unity of true Christians might be preserved, rather than destroyed. The job of the church was to **watch and fight the good fight of faith**. That's what the creeds do at their best.

## The Historical Ecumenical Creeds

So **what are these select few creeds?** They are **historical documents of the second through fourth centuries**. The Lutherans have identified three of them: **The Apostle's Creed**, **the Nicene Creed**, and **the Athanasian Creed**. I will be looking at two of these, and will throw the third into the mix only from time to time. This is because the **Athanasian Creed** is most likely much later (5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> cent.), was not written by Athanasius, and is never mentioned in any records of the ecumenical councils.<sup>24</sup>

If that leaves only two, then **how do I get four?** Besides the Apostle's Creed, I will be looking at the **Old Roman Symbol**, which predates it, and which stands as the basis for all four. Then, besides the Nicene Creed of 325, I will also

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<sup>24</sup> Of which there are **seven** (accepted by East and West): The First Council of Nicaea (325), The First Council of Constantinople (381), The Council of Ephesus (431), The Council of Chalcedon (451), The Second Council of Constantinople (553), The Third Council of Constantinople (680-81), The Second Council of Nicaea (784); but only the first **three** are accepted by the Oriental (Armenia, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, India) churches.

add the later additions that came in 381, making it significantly longer. All churches everywhere that are orthodox accept the Nicene Creed 325, all Western churches accept the other three, though the Roman Symbol is the least heard of and least recited. Here is a short history of the four.

### *The Old Roman Symbol*

The Old Roman Symbol, sometimes called the Old Roman Creed in its final form is not mentioned until 340. However, Rufinus (344-411), believed it was the rule of faith composed by the Apostles themselves at Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup> Whether or not that is true, it was clearly based on the 2<sup>nd</sup> century *Rule of Faith*, which is stated by Irenaeus (130-202).

This then is the order of the rule of our faith...:

God, the Father, not made, not material, invisible; one God, the creator of all things: this is the first point of our faith.

*The second point is:* The Word of God, Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was manifested to the prophets according to the form of their prophesying and according to the method of the dispensation of the Father through whom all things were made; who also at the end of the times, to complete and gather

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<sup>25</sup> Henry Bettenson, Chris Maunder (eds.), *Documents of the Christian Church*, third ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 25-26.

up all things, was made man among men, visible and tangible, in order to abolish death and show forth life and produce a community of union between God and man.

*And the third point is: The Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied, and the fathers learned the things of God, and the righteous were led forth into the way of righteousness; and who in the end of the times was poured out in a new way a upon mankind in all the earth, renewing man unto God.*

*(Irenaeus, Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching 6).*

Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1.10	Irenaeus, The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching 6
...this faith:	This then is the order of the rule of our faith...:
in one God, the Father Almighty, who made the heaven and the earth and the seas and all the things that are in them;	God, the Father, not made, not material, invisible; one God, the creator of all things: this is the first point of our faith.
and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was made flesh for our salvation;	The second point is: The Word of God, Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was manifested to the prophets according to the form of their prophesying and according to the method of the dispensation of the Father through whom all things were made; who also at the end of the times, to complete and gather up all things, was made man among men, visible and tangible, in order to abolish death and show forth life and produce a community of union between God and man.
and in the Holy Spirit, who made known through the prophets the plan of salvation, and the coming, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his future appearing from heaven in the glory of the Father to sum up all things and to raise anew all flesh of the whole human race...	And the third point is: The Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied, and the fathers learned the things of God, and the righteous were led forth into the way of righteousness; and who in the end of the times was poured out in a new way a upon mankind in all the earth, renewing man unto God.

You can hear the **tripart structure** of the Rule. And because it was already in his and Tertullian's (*The Prescription Against Heretics* 12) time a "rule" (standard, ultimate authority), **it had to have been around for a long time already**. I have no doubt that the Apostles themselves had the original hand in what became of all these creeds.

The Old Roman Symbol is very similar, and you will hear that it sounds quite familiar, and I hope it is **sweet music in your ears**:

*I believe in God the Father almighty;  
and in Christ Jesus His only Son, our Lord,  
Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
Who under Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried,  
on the third day rose again from the dead,  
ascended to heaven,  
sits at the right hand of the Father,  
whence He will come to judge the living and the dead;  
and in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Church,  
the remission of sins,  
the resurrection of the flesh  
(the life everlasting).*

## *The Apostle's Creed*

It sounds so familiar because **the Apostle's Creed** clearly reflects its language. In fact, the Apostle's creed is 76% identical to it,<sup>26</sup> adding only one line (“**He descended into hell**”) and a word or statement here and there for clarification. In its present form, our earliest account of the Apostle's Creed is 750 AD.<sup>27</sup> However, a similar tradition to the Old Roman Symbol is found very early on, which is that, “**After Pentecost the Apostles composed the Creed which goes by their name, each contributing a clause. Peter begins: *Credo in deum Patrem*, and Matthias ends: *Et vitam aeternam Amen*. Paul is, of course, excluded from this series: he was not yet a Christian.**”<sup>28</sup>

## *The Nicene Creed (325)*

**The Nicene Creed** of 325 came out of the **First Council of Nicaea** that same year. The council was called primarily to deal with the Arian heresy which had been so sweeping though the church. The creed that came out of it was **the**

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<sup>26</sup> As we are looking at it, the Old Roman Creed has 86 words and the Apostle's Creed has 113.

<sup>27</sup> In the *Dicta Abbatis Pirminii de singulis libris canonicis scarapsus* (i.q. *excarpsus*, excerpt). So Bettenson, 26.

<sup>28</sup> **Montague Rhodes James**, Suffolk and Norfolk (London: Dent, 1930), 218-19. Quoted in **Curt F. Bühler**, “The Apostles and the Creed,” *Speculum* 28.2 (Apr, 1953): 335. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/2849691?read-now=1&seq=2#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2849691?read-now=1&seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents). The tradition is implied in Rufinus and repeated in Augustine (*Sermo de symbolo*), both in the fourth century.

first to be accepted by all churches—because all the churches participated in its adoption. It was truly ecumenical in the best sense of the word, though, of course, Arians would have disagreed. But they were the one's attacking the deity of Christ after all.

It was [Eusebius of Caesarea](#), the great church historian, who first suggested the council adopt the creed that had long been said in his own church.<sup>29</sup> It was a fine and orthodox creed, but it did not address the Arian controversy. Instead, Nicaea continued with [the same basic tripartite division](#) of all the creeds, but [expanded the section on Jesus to reflect his deity and oneness with the Father](#). They also added a bit about how Jesus came to save us at the point of confessing his incarnation, and [an anathema](#) at the end for those who deny the deity of Christ. This part is rarely recited in churches. In total, the creed (that we will use in English) is 171 words, 115 if you don't include the anathema. That makes it just two words longer than the Apostle's Creed.

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<sup>29</sup> “We believe in one God, the Father All-sovereign, the maker of things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God of God, Light of Light, Life of Life, Son only-begotten, Firstborn of all creation, begotten of the Father before all the ages, through whom also all things were made; who was made flesh for our salvation and lived among men, and suffered, and rose again on the third day, and ascended to the Father, and shall come again in glory to judge the living and dead; We believe also in one Holy Spirit” ([The Creed of Caesarea](#)).

## *The Nicene Creed (381)*

If it added so much to the person of Christ, how come it is **so close in word-count** to the Apostle's creed? Because, like Eusebius' creed, it basically stops at confessing belief in the Holy Spirit. All that which comes after in the Old Roman Symbol and the Apostle's Creed is left off the Nicene Creed of 325.

This is where we meet our fourth and final creed—the **Nicene Creed of 381**. It was adopted at the **Second Ecumenical Council** held in **Constantinople** that same year. It is significantly different from the original Nicene Creed, though it retains enough of the language about Christ being “Light of Light” for instance, that it is still called the Nicene Creed (or sometimes, the **Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed**).

This creed contains **212 words** (as we will use it), making it by far the longest of the four. And it does this even as it eliminates the entire anathema at the end of the first Nicene Creed. So what is it doing?

While **retaining much of the anti-Arian language** of the first Nicene Creed, it also **adds back in** a bunch of the language we find from the other two creeds, which was dropped. It then fleshes this out a bit more in several

sections, including a lengthy addition to what we believe about [the Holy Spirit and baptism](#). This creed adds a phrase found in none of the others, “... [according to the Scriptures](#),” and this is language lifted right out of the creed in [1 Corinthians 15](#). Also, it is so close to the Catechetical Lectures (circa 350) of Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386), that many scholars believe this creed is simply [a revision of the creed Cyril was using in Jerusalem](#). All the churches were already using creeds! I find this one fascinating, because it takes us back to the place where the Old Roman Symbol and Apostle’s Creed were both said to have originated with the Apostle’s. As such, it comes as no surprise that it adopts much of the language from those creeds that were left out of the original Nicene Creed.

## The Gospel of the Creeds

In [the weeks to come](#), we will be looking at these creeds, reading them together and apart. Rather than look at one creed per week, I’m going to divide this study precisely [the way Calvin does in his \*Institutes\*](#), which follows the four-part organization of the Apostles’ Creed.<sup>30</sup> Thus, we will spend

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<sup>30</sup> The Institutes are organized into four books. Calvin himself explains, “[In the former Books an exposition has been given of the three parts of the Apostles’ Creed concerning God the](#)

the first week considering God the Father, the second thinking about God the Son, the third God the Holy Spirit, and the fourth, the remaining truths about the church and the Second Coming. We will take deep dives into these doctrines and will go to great pains to see that every word of these creeds is rooted in the biblical teaching.<sup>31</sup> They are not man-made doctrines,<sup>32</sup> even if they do reflect later situations and circumstances that that caused them to be written down for us.

I'm doing this not merely so you can now what it is the church has always believed and confessed, not merely so that you can gain some new information, but because these creeds give us the gospel-half of the central message of the Bible. And I'm hardly alone in desiring that you see these things. These are documents that have been written about by many fine teachers for nearly 2,000 years, preached by many fine preachers, and are worth our finest thoughts and time considering still in our own day and church. There can be nothing more important than thinking about the only

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Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier. It now remains to treat, in this last Book, of the Church and the Communion of Saints, or of the external means or helps by which God invites us to fellowship with Christ, and keeps us in it" (*Institutes*, Book IV: Preface).

<sup>31</sup> Martin Luther is extremely helpful here, as he put together in his catechism proof-texts for every line of the Apostles' Creed. See *Martin Luther, Luther's Small Catechism, with Proof-Texts, Additions and Appendices: For the Use of Church, School and Family* (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Bookstore, 1882), 12-15.

<sup>32</sup> See n. 15.

message on earth that can save a person from damnation, sin, death, and the Satan, especially in an anti-credal culture that is hell-bent on overthrowing orthodox Christianity. Thus, Augustine begins his work on the creeds by saying,

Receive, my sons, the rule of faith which is called the Creed. When you have received it, write it on your hearts; recite it daily to yourselves. Before you go to sleep, before you go forth, fortify yourselves with your Creed. No one writes the Creed so that it can be read; let your memory be your codex that you may be able to review it if it should happen that forgetfulness effaces what diligence has given you. You will believe what you hear yourself saying, and your lips will repeat what you believe. The Apostle says truly: *‘For with the heart a man believes unto justice, and with the mouth profession of faith is made unto salvation’*; this is the Creed that you will be going over in your thoughts and repeating from memory. These words that you have heard are scattered throughout the divine Scriptures. They have been assembled and unified to facilitate the memory of dull mankind in order that everyone will be able to say the Creed and adhere to what he believes.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Augustine of Hippo, “The Creed,” in *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, trans. Marie Liguori, vol. 27, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 289.

The impulse to rebel against creeds can be rooted in a kernel of truth. All lies are. We do not want to misuse them. However, let me put such rebellion bluntly, by using our friend who earlier called Nicaea “satanic.” If creeds are Satanic, this this means it is satanic to say, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” How can this be Satanic? If they are satanic, then it is Satanic to confess that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh, born of a virgin, suffered under an historic governor who put him to death so that we might be saved, but was raised to new life and ascended to heaven where he sits enthroned as King of kings. If creeds are satanic, then it is satanic to confess that we believe in the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, whom God sent to create his church and forgive us of our sins. Talk about division, not unity.

If this is what you think, then you are not a Christian, and you need to repent and turn to God in Christ for forgiveness of this most serious of all sins. If you do not think this but have never confessed Christ by saying “I believe” these things, then stop wasting time and confess the God of Scripture, the God of the creeds. For these creeds give you the Gospel of the triune God through whom and by which you are saved. If you have, then come with me on this

journey into **the central message of the Gospel** as found throughout Scripture and put so beautifully by the creeds. Creeds were never meant to force you to believe everything, but only the most basic things. They were meant as things that bring us together, not that draw us apart. They were meant to show you the way to God through Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Blessed be the Most High for preserving them for his church. And may he give us a blessing as we dive into them that we might know him better.

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Now that you are done, go back and read the sermon according to the outline I had in my mind when I wrote it:

### **An Outline of This Sermon:**

- A. **Central message of Bible:** The law and the Gospel—it is what saves us
- B. **The Reformation was a recovery rooted in history of Christianity, which is historical**
- C. **Anti Creedal Today—think believing nothing “man-made” is unifying**
- D. **Center:** “I believe” AND What I believe (rest of creeds)
- C'. **Confessions // Creeds were ecumenical, meant to show our unity**
- B'. **The history of the creeds**
- A'. **Central message of Sermon:** The Gospel of the Trinity is what saves us

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