

“LIVING WHAT YOU BELIEVE” (Creed – Part 1)
By Rom A. Pegram (9/13/20)

Today, we begin a new worship series called ‘CREED.’ And the main question is: What do you believe? This entire series is about living life with passion. So, when we ask, ‘what do you believe?’, *it matters!* The whole idea of the series is to solidify your beliefs. We want you to be able to both know and state what you believe ... just in case someone would need to know...

Tom Mercer writes, “Years ago, I heard an incredible story about a guy who, while walking through an intersection in a large city, noticed a police officer directing traffic in the middle of the street. As he walked by, the man sensed the Holy Spirit prompting him to go up to the officer and tell him that God loved him. The man dismissed the impulse and kept walking. Haunted by the continued sense that he had been disobedient to the Spirit, he finally walked back to that intersection, up to the officer, and said, “Excuse me, Officer, but God just told me to tell you that He loves you.” Tears began to trickle down from under the cop’s mirrored sunglasses. Traffic stopped. With a broken voice, the officer said, “I prayed to God for the first time in a long time last night and told Him that, if He was real, the least He could do was to send someone to tell me that He was there for me.” Within a matter of minutes, the officer called for backup, then prayed to receive Christ right there on that street corner.”

Jeremiah 1:4 states: “The LORD gave me this message....” And, occasionally God does. How are you going to know what to do when God nudges you ... if you don’t know what you believe? It’s so important that we know what we believe, so we don’t miss out on any kingdom opportunities right here, right now!

If you’re a Christian, this series is going to challenge you to go deeper in your faith. *If you’re not a Christian*, but one who’s exploring Christianity, this series is going to show you ‘full-frontal Christianity,’ leaving very little to the imagination. The main resource we’re going to be using for this series, other than the Bible, is that ancient document we call ‘The Apostles’ Creed.’ Let’s read that together now...

THE APOSTLE’S CREED (*Ecumenical Version*)

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,
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,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and 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.

*Traditional use of this creed includes these words: "He descended into hell."

** *universal*

Let's begin here with a little historical background: First, the word 'apostle' simply means 'one who has been sent out.' Jesus' use of this word is talking about his earliest followers, specifically the 12 disciples and the Apostle Paul—those who'd had a personal encounter with Jesus. So, when you hear people say, 'the apostles,' this is who they're generally talking about.

So, who wrote 'The Apostles' Creed?' Did the Apostles write it? Well, no! They didn't write it, but it was named so because it's a good summary of the basic teachings of the Apostles. Now, the Apostles' Creed is not scripture! But it is firmly rooted in scripture—supported by every word of our New Testament. And when was it written? Historically, we think about 150 A.D., probably in the city of Rome...

Now, think about this. It's just over 100 years after Jesus' death—probably less than 50 years after the last Apostle's death. So, why did they need this creed? Well, after the death of all the Apostles, the Church continued to grow, spreading like wildfire. And, in the midst of that growth, there also sprung up some bad teaching (heresy). People were saying things like, "Jesus is not the Son of God." Or some were saying, "Jesus was not human at all; he was totally divine—completely God." There were others who were saying, 'There are two Gods—one of the Old Testament and one of the New Testament.' These false teachings needed to be corrected ... and the Apostles' Creed was the answer. So, the Apostles' Creed was used to distinguish orthodoxy (historic, right teaching) from heresy (heretical, false teaching). The Apostles' Creed summarizes most fundamental Christian beliefs about God, taught by Jesus, taught by the Apostles, and eventually recorded in the Bible.

One more word of interest, before I move on: 'catholic.' Have you seen that word in the Apostles' Creed? Did you notice it has a small 'c' in it? That's because, it's not part of a proper name (i.e. Roman Catholic Church). It means 'universal' (worldwide). It's describing the 'universal Church', of which we're a part of right here at Trinity...

So, how do we get into such a heavy topic as 'What do we believe?' *It's a question that deserves ... well, some more questions!* Let's get right to it. Here are...

4 QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT OUR BELIEFS:

WHAT DO I BELIEVE? This, folks, is the most fundamental question of your life... What do you believe about God, what do you believe about life, etc.? You'd be surprised at how many people don't stop to ask themselves that very fundamental question...

For Christians, the Bible instructs us to be asking ourselves this question constantly. 2 Corinthians 13:5 says: “Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith.” Basically, this verse is saying ‘don’t just drift through life taking everything for granted’; continually examine yourself to see what it is you believe...

Folks, let’s consider these next few weeks in this series as your spiritual check-up. You need to know what you believe! Especially in the area of faith, because *it’s dangerous to go through life not knowing what you believe*. If you’re not grounded in what you believe, you’ll have no basis for making the most important decisions of your life, or distinguishing between what is right and what is wrong...

Think about going to the grocery store for just a moment—down to ‘the Pig’ (or the store of your choice). You go to the grocery store, most of the time, with a list. Right? You make a list before you go so you know what you’re going to get. You go to the grocery store and get what’s on your list because you know that’s the best thing to do—what’s on the list being good for you. BUT ... have you ever gone to the grocery store *without* a list? What happens? You come home with a couple dozen donuts!! Or, something else that’s NOT good for you...

Think about your beliefs as that ‘grocery list.’ They set your course for life; they keep you on track every day. What’s on that list (what you believe) is good for you. Other things, maybe not so much: If you believe money’s the most important thing, that’s going to direct your life. If you believe success is the key to happiness, that’s going to direct your life. If God’s on top of your priority list, you’ll set the course of your life and make your decisions based on a whole different set of assumptions. *It’s important to know what you believe!* Maybe you’ve heard the old saying, “You’ve got to stand for something, or you’ll fall for anything!” It’s true, so know what you believe! Next:

ON WHAT ARE MY BELIEFS BASED? In other words, what are the ‘foundations’ of my beliefs? What’s holding them up? How strong is the foundation that supports my beliefs? Look at our next verse with me, from Proverbs (15:14, MSG)...

“An intelligent person is always eager to take in more truth; fools feed on fast-food fads and fancies.”

Are the things you believe based on eternal truths ... or passing fads?

There was a beautiful church in the lower Manhattan area of New York. It was magnificent to look at. And people would comment about it being ‘a real spiritual experience’ as they went to see this church. It was beautiful! But one day, much to everyone’s amazement, that church was condemned—not because of anything to do with the main structure, but because the church was literally sinking into the ground. ... It turns out the church was too heavy for its foundation; it was built on a former swamp and it sank and was condemned...

Listen, I don't care what you do for a living, how many degrees you have, how much money you make, how successful you've been, or even how your life looks to those on the outside. The fact is ... if the foundation of your life—your beliefs—are not built on something solid (eternal) ... it'll begin to sink! Proverbs 12:19 (NCV) reminds us, "Truth will continue forever, but lies are only for a moment." You've got to pay attention to what your life is built on. Does your life stand on the Solid Rock of Jesus—on his truths? We need to examine our lives regularly. Next...

DOES MY BEHAVIOR MATCH MY BELIEFS? As we go through a scripture-inspired process of self-examination, and we ask ourselves 'What do we believe?', we then have to also ask: "Does my behavior match my beliefs?" The truth is, there are many calling themselves Christian who don't really act like it, so we have to ask this question...

This is an issue of what one might call 'past integrity.' Up until this point, have you had integrity in your life? Integrity comes when ... *your beliefs match your behavior...* Rick Warren, in his book 'The Purpose Driven Life,' says that the Christian life is *far more than creeds and convictions; it's also conduct and character.* And he remarks in his book, "Your creeds must be backed up by your deeds!"

So, are you living what you say you believe? As you look back over your life, can you say your life has been consistent in that way? Beliefs are *not* simply what you *state* you believe; it's also how you live those beliefs out. *Show me your behavior and I'll show you your beliefs!* Someone once said, "Your behavior speaks so loud, I can't hear what you're saying!" Real integrity lines your behavior up with what you believe...

Paul reminds us of the integrity of our beliefs in Romans 14:23c (NLT): "...If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning." A belief (conviction) is something you don't violate; if you do, it's sin. Then Paul reminds the early Church of the relationship between their beliefs and behavior (Rom. 7:20, MSG): "My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time." How do your actions line up with what you believe? This kind of integrity is what Christianity is all about... Finally:

HOW WILL I LIVE OUT WHAT I BELIEVE? This question rightfully follows the other three; once you determine what you believe, what your beliefs are based on, and make sure your beliefs and behavior are lined up, you have to ask yourself '*Am I willing to live out these beliefs ... no matter what?*' (How committed are you?)

I don't know if you've ever thought about this or not, but *it is possible to live your beliefs out 'wrong'.* There are many whose beliefs are correct, but the expression of those beliefs are not correct—biblically. I used to work for a guy whose favorite expression was, "Do as I say, not as I do!" 'Anyone ever heard that?

If you look to our own Christian history, all you have to do is look to the period of 'The Crusades'. From our perspective—a biblical perspective, we look back and ask ourselves, "How can these Christians really believe that going on a holy war to murder Muslims would be right behavior?" Right beliefs ... maybe. Perhaps those Christians even professed the same creeds we're going to believe, but ... *terribly wrong actions!*

I'm most sure God's responses to those actions were ... anger ... or sadness... Unfortunately, that's our history...

So, how will we live out our beliefs? There's a myth out there that's got a foothold on way too many people—about the Christian faith. The myth is this: *Christianity is a private religion*. It's all about me and Jesus ... and that's it. And that's the way some choose to live out their faith. But *nothing could be further from the truth*. Jesus consistently taught that *the Christian faith was to be lived out ... in community!* That's just one example. And then, in that community, we must DO what God leads us to DO. What does the Apostle James say? James 2:20 (NCV) says, "You foolish person! Must you be shown that faith that does nothing is worth nothing?" That's what living out your faith is all about; it's about making a difference in this world—in *your* world, for Christ!

Folks, *why in the world does what we believe matter so much?* Well, here it is... Our beliefs are important because they determine:

- OUR BEHAVIOR. (James 4:17, Psalm 119:59) – behind all right behavior you'll find right beliefs...
 - If you want right behavior in your work, you must have right beliefs about your work. If you want right behavior in relationships, you have to have right beliefs about relationships. If you want to have right behavior in your relationship with God, you must have right beliefs about God, etc.
- OUR SIGNIFICANCE (Gen. 1:27, John 10:10, John 8:31-32, Mark 6:34) – Folks, what you believe will either motivate you or de-motivate you; they'll either raise you up, or keep you down. There are, in our culture, some beliefs that are de-motivating or deflating; they question your very existence, what your worth, and so on. But know today ... your beliefs will determine your significance ... and looking to scripture, you'll see just how much you matter to God!
- OUR ETERNITY (John 5:24, 3:16-17, Romans 10:9) – Christianity unashamedly says you were not just created for the here and now, but you were created to last forever. Actually, this life is just preparation (choir practice) for the next life. And Christianity teaches that your beliefs determine your eternity—not only your place of eternity, but how you prepare for eternity...

So, your beliefs determine *your behavior*, *your significance*, and the reality of *your eternal life*. So, beliefs are incredibly important, aren't they? And the Apostle's Creed—a summary of what the Apostle's taught, is the ancient document that'll call us back to right belief. Next week, we dive into the Apostle's Creed, starting with 'Living with God as Father'... What's that all about? We'll learn together ... and I'm looking forward to these weeks with you...