

Sunday, July 20, 2025 Colossians 1:15-23 "He is the Image of the Invisible God"

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created..." This passage from Colossians seems like a creed, a summary or statement of what we do or should believe about God and Christ (15-10) and how to live in Christ (21-23). Why do we have eleven creeds instead of just using the words of the Bible? My oldest sister was a Baptist, and she did not approve of creeds.

The Bible is a book that is interpreted. We try to take the whole and understand what is key to understanding the parts. For example, in this morning's text, Christ as "firstborn of all creation" sounds like Christ is created by God and then all created through him. A creed interprets it from other passages to show that Christ is God, eternal, and what the Trinity is.

The Christian church is an historical religion. It develops within human history. These creeds were written by church councils or appointed study groups, except one (2nd Helvetic, Bullinger) to express the teaching of the Bible as understood by the church at that moment. You will see that the questions people thought were important change, as well as Christian understanding building on the previous generations' faith. The first two were developed in Palestine and what is now Turkey, then in Western Europe and England, and the last two in North America. Historical, because the Protestant church and Reformed faith developed in Europe. A creed written by Christians in, say, a Dutch colony in Africa such as parts of what is now Ghana or Senegal, or in Asia such as what is now Indonesia would search the Bible to as to how a Reformed Christian could enslave and violently subdue a people while reciting the Heidelberg Catechism and even justify that as legitimate business.

Creed, Confession of Faith, Affirmation of Faith, Statement of Faith. There may be subtle differences in certain contexts, but this morning we will use the terms interchangeably.

This morning, let's look at the creeds in order to stimulate our faith in God's work in our lives today, and to stimulate clarity in our minds and the mind of the church about what is important for us to struggle to understand and to live out today. (link in manuscript, also google)

(325, 381) **Nicene Creed**

The only creed that represents the whole church and is used ecumenically. Relationship between the God of Israel and Jesus Christ, meaning of monotheism in light of Jesus Christ. PC(USA) gives two versions.

(Roots in 2nd century, first known written in 8th century) **Apostles' Creed**

Jesus as Lord Acts 11:17, 16:31; 1 Cor 15:3-5; Phil 2:11; Col 2:6

God and Jesus Christ 1 Cor 8:6; Gal 1:1; 1 Tim 2:5-6, 6:13-15

Trinitarian Matt 28:19; Rom 1:1-4; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pet 1:2

Struggle to articulate the Trinity; Three articles, one for each Person of Trinity

(mid-1500's) **Scots Confession**

Originally written in Scottish Dialect, translated into Latin for use internationally.

Protestant and Roman Catholic martyrs burned at the stake, struggle between English Protestant King and Catholic King.

The True Church, role of councils, sacraments, civil authority, Last Things.

Document promises to nourish and defend the "whole congregation of Christ."

Meant to be a unifying confession, but did not solve political and religious warfare.

Not the only Protestant creed used, cf. Calvin's Geneva Catechism, 1545.

(1563) **Heidelberg Catechism** Holland, Germany, Hungary

First Reformed creed in New World, brought to Manhattan by Dutch explorers in 1609.

Personal, devotional, "I belong to God body and soul" as well as institutional, how the Lord was present in the Lord's Supper, which was a political issue.

(1566) **Second Helvetic Confession** (Helvetic means Swiss)

unusually, written by one person, Bullinger (1504-1575), student of Zwingli

attempt to reconcile Lutheran and Reformed Christians

Sovereignty of God, God's election of persons, as well as most comprehensive sections on marriage and the family of all of the Creeds.

(1647) **Westminster Standards**

Westminster Confession of Faith, The Shorter Catechism, The Larger Catechism

VIII, who proceeded to make himself the head of the national church.

The son of James, of the King James Bible, Charles, rejected the Reformed church.

Presbyterian church in England notable for declared willingness to continue to be reformed.

(1934) **Declaration of Barmen** Martin Niemoller and the Confessing Church of Germany

Would not agree with the National Socialist Agenda and the exclusion of members with Jewish ancestry so was declared treasonous.

(1967) **Confession of 1967**

Challenge to the Westminster Confession, return to the creeds before that, and include a wider range of thought. Meant for 1967, not for all time.

With going out into the world, having a greater focus on God's love rather than the world being appointed to God's wrath. Scripture invites us into life with God.

Relationship between Scripture and Confessions

(1983) **A Brief Statement of Faith**

Occasion of the reunification of the Northern and Southern Presbyterian Churches after Civil War. Two denominations went into two rooms to convene and voted to disband and unify, created a statement of faith for the new denomination expressing the core of our faith.

Used 2 Cor 13:14 as the outline, not the Apostles' Creed.

What to do with these creeds.

Your thoughts this morning are important for your life and the life of the congregation.

Also important would be the call on one or more of the congregation to study what previous generations have written and write about what we believe in a way that would be helpful for our generation.

What is the purpose of these creeds?

What process is followed to write, edit, and be reviewed and approved by the denomination?

Who acknowledges the authority of the creed?

What is the relationship between the creed and the Scripture?

Necessity of interpreting Scripture

No matter what your position you must decide the central stories and statements.

Always a matter of living and not just thinking.

For the whole church and for a personal statement.

Whatever you are thinking about, generations of people and Christians have thought about.

We can find their conversations in the creeds, and join the dialogue. We can also have questions that come up because of the specific circumstances of our lives, that may not have been directly addressed by previous generations. For example, plagues have decimated populations throughout history but our generation met virtually during COVID confinement and it changed our personal and social lives. What does meeting over the screen mean for mind, body, spirit, and soul? People are trying to think about and write about this. Or a child seeking to understand their identity born from artificial insemination. We will find statements related to these matters, but directly addressed in previous generations.

Core of Christian faith is to live in the presence of God and learn to love God and love our neighbor. Blessed is the one who trusts God and lives out God's will for them in the community of faith.

Resources

A Postcolonial African American Re-Reading of Colossians: Identity, Reception, and Interpretation under the Gaze of Empire, by Annie Tinsley. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Book of Confessions: Study Edition, Part 1 of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Geneva Press, 1999.

The Companion to the Book of Common Worship, Peter C. Bower, ed. Geneva Press, 2003.

[The Book of Confessions | Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#)