

What Is Confession?: Before reading this section, ask students what comes to mind when they hear the word *confession*. No doubt

6 Confessing the Truth



Standing Firm

"Hey, Jimmy, have you shoplifted?" asked William, one of coolest guys in class.

"No," replied Jimmy. "Shoplifting is illegal—you could get arrested for doing it. Besides, it's just not right."

"I've done it; it's great. You get something without paying for it—and it's such a rush!" argued William.

"But it's wrong. The Seventh Commandment says, 'You shall not steal'—that's from God's Word, the Bible," replied Jimmy.

"But that just means the big stuff," William argued again. "Shoplifting is just little stuff. And that Bible stuff was just written for people a long time ago. Come on, try shoplifting with me. You'll have a good time."

"No," answered Jimmy. "It's against God's Law. And if God said that it was wrong to steal back then, He still means it today."

Two things helped Jimmy resist this temptation. One was his knowledge of God's will in the Ten Commandments. The second was his belief that what God said once, He meant for all time. Now, how does that relate to the topic of creeds and confessions?

What Is Confession?

When we hear the word *confession*, we usually think of confessing or telling about our sins. But to confess also means "to make known together" or "to speak with one another." To confess in this sense is to speak together with other Christians what we believe.

The church has always confessed together its "creeds"—statements that individuals and the church speak to make known what they believe. The word *creed* comes from the Latin language and means "I believe." The word *creed* stresses that the speaker is not only intellectually aware of what is being said, but also believes and accepts what is said and acts accordingly.

The Origin of Creeds

Over time, the church wrote creeds to address certain of its needs and problems. When these creeds were written, they were not intended to be equal with Scripture. But, because what they taught was based on Scripture, the doctrines they taught were believed as true and necessary for all Christians to confess.

Several creeds became popular. At first, there were creeds for specific worship settings. For example, what we now call the Apostles' Creed was originally used for instruction and public confession in preparation for those who wanted to be baptized. This creed, which began to develop as early as the first century, summarizes the Bible's teachings about God. It is divided into three articles that talk about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The center of the creed is the Second Article, which confesses Jesus Christ as true God and true man, who died, rose from the dead, and will come again.

The Creeds and Their Controversies

Creeds also serve another purpose in the church. Not only do they teach us what to believe; but also they teach us what not to believe. In the early 300s, a theologian by the name of Arius taught that Jesus was not truly God—that He was God's first creation and not as good as God the Father. His teaching threw the church into confusion. Finally, under the leadership of the emperor Constantine, a meeting was held in the town of Nicaea. This meeting produced the Nicene Creed, which we confess in the church today.

Like the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed is divided into three articles and emphasizes the second, which teaches about Jesus Christ. He is "God of God, Light of Light, very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father." The creed goes on to confess that Christ came into the world "for us," and that He will "come again" and that His "kingdom will have no end." The creed concludes by professing the Holy Spirit as true God too.

The Athanasian Creed sums up the doctrine of the Trinity in brief and strong statements. It also focuses on the person of Christ, stressing again that He is true God and true man in one person. It is the longest of the three general creeds and was written in the late 400s.

The Ecumenical Creeds

The Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian creeds are called the "Ecumenical Creeds." That means churches throughout the world generally use them. As we confess these creeds today, we confess not only with other Christians around the world, we also confess with "angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven" (as the pastor says in the communion liturgy). As we confess our faith together, the barriers of time and space are overcome, and we join our voices together with the whole church of all time!

Confessing the Faith

1. What is the purpose of the creeds?

2. How do creeds help us live the Christian life?

3. What are the three ecumenical creeds, and why do we call them that?

4. What is the most important article in both the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds? Why?

5. Why is it so important that we confess one of the three historic, ecumenical creeds when we gather together for worship?

To Review and Remember

If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Romans 10:9-10