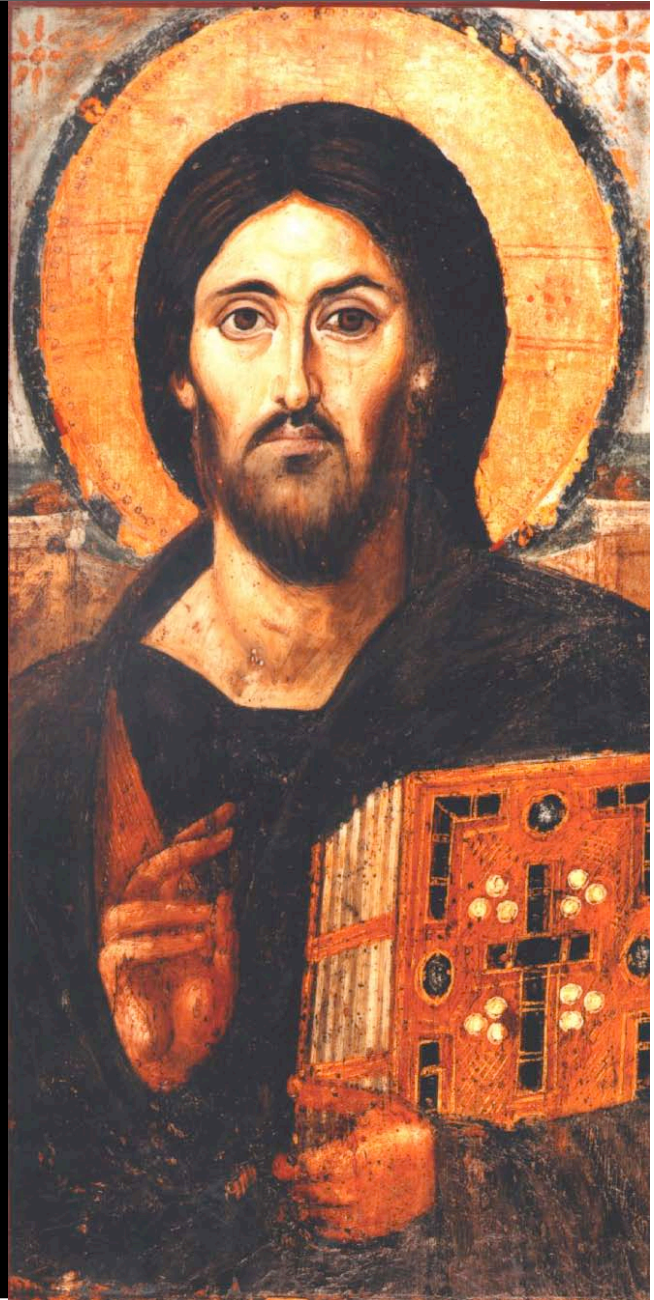


Experiencing The Apostles' Creed



“...the Christian word for faith or belief was ... a statement about God and a statement about how I trust Him.”
~ excerpt from “*Experiencing The Apostles’ Creed.*”

Companion Guide for Abridged Version

Prepared by
Christian History Institute with
Pastor Langdon Palmer

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Experiencing The Apostles' Creed, an Introduction

A Global Project

As part of its 25th anniversary celebration, Christian History Institute teamed up with filmmaker T. N. Mohan to co-produce a comprehensive seventeen part series on the Apostles' Creed, a living link to our shared history. T. N. visited several Biblical, theological, and historical scholars and invited them to share their insights on the Creed. The Apostles' Creed is a Universal Creed for the Universal Church, so scholars from several different Christian traditions are included. Phrase by phrase and word by word, the scholars dig into the Creed's rich meaning, illuminating this ancient storehouse of Christian conviction. What they reveal is a living declaration of living faith that speaks to today's issues and is as relevant for modern believers as it was for the first Christians.

Abridged version

As some groups and classes may prefer a more compact introduction to the Creed, we have prepared an abridged version. The two-hour abridged DVD contains four half hour sessions, carefully edited from the more extensive seventeen part series. This study guide has been prepared to help individuals and study groups make the most of these four sessions. The video is divided into four programs of approximately a half hour. Each program covers a portion of the creed. The layout of the four programs may be found on page 4.

An Amazing Document and a Living Link

Those who explore this series will never again see the Creed as some dry statement of tired theology, but rather as a vibrant, living expression of the heart of faith, linking them to the church of the ages and the church around the world. Groups that have used this abridged series express appreciation for the useful, overall summary of the basics of historic Christian doctrine. Many go on to add that they had no idea of the depth of the familiar phrases of the Creed, with their use of this confession being wonderfully enriched. Theology and history come to life as every session includes an application section that shows how the teachings of the Creed apply to everyday life and faith.

Apostles' Creed Abridged Program Layout

(each program is approximately thirty minutes)

Program I

1. I believe (Introduction: Why the Creed?)
2. In God (A Trinitarian formula)
3. The Father
4. Almighty
5. Creator of heaven and earth

Program II

6. And in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord
7. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary
8. Suffered under Pontius Pilate

Program III

9. Was crucified
10. Died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead.
11. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
12. Whence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

Program IV

13. I believe in the Holy Spirit
14. The Holy Catholic Church
15. The communion of saints
16. The forgiveness of sins
17. The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting

Meet the Scholars Included in the Program

Rev. Richard Bewes – Former Rector, all Souls Church, London

Dr. Peter Contrell – Former Principal, London School of
Theology

Dr. Timothy Dudley-Smith – Bishop of Salisbury

Mark Galli – Managing Editor, Christianity Today

Dr. William Johnson – Former Professor of New Testament,
Andrews University

Dr. Tony Lane – Professor of Theology, London School of
Theology

Dr. Martin Marty – Professor Emeritus, University of Chicago

Dr. Alistair McGrath – Principal, Wycliffe College, Oxford

Dr. Robert Mulholland – Professor of New Testament, Asbury
Theological Seminary

Dr. Derek Tidball – Principal, London School of Theology

Dr. Kallistos Ware – Bishop of Diokleia, Oxford

Dr. N.T. Wright – Bishop of Durham

REDISCOVERING THE APOSTLES' CREED

By Pastor Langdon Palmer

It has often been easy to ignore the Apostles' Creed – treating it much as one might treat an old piece of furniture sitting in the corner of the worship service.

In some churches, it is recited mechanically out of habit; in others, it is completely dismissed as an unhelpful religious relic. But recently, many have been rediscovering within the sparse, compact words of the Apostles' Creed a gateway that connects the great story of Scripture to the practical concerns of Christians living in today's complex, multicultural world.

Why a creed?

Some Christians ask, “Why do we need creeds when we have the Bible?” If the Word of God comes down to us through the Bible, why do we need anything else? The answer is found in Scripture itself. In I Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul writes:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you . . .

This quote is from one of the earliest epistles, written about AD 57, before many other New Testament books had been written and long before the New Testament Canon was finally settled. If the New Testament as a whole did not exist when Paul wrote his letter, what “gospel” is he talking about? Apparently he had preached to them some standard summary of the Christian message, a message he had “received” just as they, in turn, “received it.” Later in Romans 6:17 he says,

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them.

The word “teaching” can also be translated “doctrine.” These first Christians had doctrine or teaching prior to having a complete New Testament. What was this teaching or doctrine? It was a summary of the basics of the Christian message—of the good news of Jesus Christ. And, already at the time of Paul's writing there were some who were distorting the words of the Old Testament Scriptures and the words of the apostles, leading people astray. The purpose of a creed or doctrine is to summarize the meaning of the many words of Scripture and apostolic teaching. Whenever we try to explain Christianity to someone else, we partake in this same summarizing action. As we will see below, this summary of faith was used by the early church to: 1) evangelize; 2) teach new

converts; and 3) protect the church from distorted teaching. Christians today have the same three needs for a concise statement of the Christian faith.

How did the Creed arise?

According to “the great commission” found in Matthew 28:18-20, an important part of being a Christian in the early church was teaching others and baptizing them in the name of the Triune God. A concise summary of the Christian faith would help in both these tasks. In the table below, compare the version of the Apostles’ Creed we have from AD 336 with the baptismal formula Hippolytus of Rome used with new converts by the year AD 215.

Baptismal Formula Of Hippolytus of Rome AD 215	Apostles’ Creed Ad 140 – Ad 390
<p>I believe in God the Father Almighty,</p> <p>And in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried, and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father and will come to judge the living and the dead.</p>	<p>I believe in God, the Father Almighty,</p> <p>And in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord, who was born by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was buried. The third day He rose from the dead, He ascended into heaven; and now sits on the right hand of the Father from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.</p>
<p>I believe in the Holy Spirit, in the holy church, and in the resurrection of the body.</p>	<p>I believe in the Holy spirit, the holy church, the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body.</p>

The word “creed” comes from the Latin “credo” which means “I believe.” As new converts were being baptized, Hippolytus would ask them, “Do you believe in God?” and they would answer “I believe in God, the Father Almighty...” “Do you believe in Jesus Christ?” and they would answer “I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God...” working their way through the entire formula. Thus the roots of the Apostles’ Creed are found in the declarations of faith made by converts at the time of their baptism. Although the actual copies of the Apostles’ Creed that we have date from the 300s, it is clear from this example that some version of this statement of faith was being used early in the church.

For example, we find Irenaeus of Lyons (AD 120 – AD 202) saying that the church “preserves this creed of ours,” and he summarized “this creed” in a way that sounds just like the Apostles’ Creed.

The key point is that Christians were doing this BEFORE the New Testament was finalized. So rather than the first creeds being tacked on AFTER the Bible was written, the evidence we have points toward basic creeds, similar to the Apostles' Creed, existing in the earliest churches. The earliest local creeds we find from dispersed writers and churches use their own words to make the same basic theological points we find in the Apostles' Creed today. We call it the Apostles' Creed not because the apostles themselves wrote it, but rather because the early churches viewed it as an accurate summary of the apostles' teaching.

By the year AD 64, Christians were often being persecuted for their faith. Converting from paganism to Christianity could cost a person his or her life. Thus, it really mattered whether you were in or you were out, whether you called yourself a Christian or not. What set of beliefs made one a Christian? Which beliefs were worth dying for? What was the heart of the Christian message they refused to deny? One clue is found in what new converts said at their baptism. That was the time when they publicly declared their faith in and loyalty to Jesus. And as we see from the chart, what they declared was basically the Apostles' Creed. Tertullian (AD 200) says that the memorized creed or "Rule of Faith" acted as a symbol or password that allowed Christians to recognize each other in a dangerous world.

What does it teach?

The Creed's short length made it easy to memorize. Its sparse wording sets out clear boundaries for the Christian faith while creating space for different interpretations within those boundaries. Every phrase can be supported by multiple references to Scripture. However, the creed only includes those aspects of faith that the early Christians viewed as the bare essentials—the aspects that set Christianity apart from other belief systems at the time. As can be seen above, its very shape reveals these priorities. It focuses on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with the majority of its words spent on Jesus. Like the tip of an iceberg, Jesus is the person of the Trinity above the water line—God entering their physical world and human history in a way that He could be seen and touched. It was the new revelation that Jesus was God that set the Christians apart from all other religious movements, and therefore many of the words of the creed are spent driving this point home. "Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary" declares that Christ is both God and Human. "Crucified under Pontius Pilate" anchors the crucifixion of Jesus to the history of the world—an actual historical event. "Dead and buried" declares that Jesus actually died. "On the third day he rose again" declares that the resurrection was also an actual historical event. The Creed ends by turning its attention to us. Just as Jesus had a bodily resurrection from the dead, so shall all of us at His second coming at the end of days. It also declares that

while we are those who need to have our sins forgiven, we are also the saints—members of His universal church across the ages. The creed is thus a declaration of hope.

In some sense, the Apostles' Creed is a "primitive creed" in that its first forms precede the creeds generated by church councils (such as the Nicene Creed of 325). For example, the role of the Holy Spirit is much less defined in the Apostles' Creed than in later creeds. Thus it takes us that much closer to the first days of the early church where ordinary men and women struggled to understand the full implications of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It forms the broad, universal foundation upon which many different denominations and creeds have been built.

What can we conclude?

First, saying the Apostles' Creed was never meant to be some boring religious ritual! The first believers said the creed with tears in their eyes as they went down into the baptismal waters. It was personal, heartfelt, and precious. It was said at the moment they threw their hat in with the Christian community—at the moment they were saying "Yes" to the maker of heaven and earth and "No" to all the other powers that tried to lay claim on their lives.

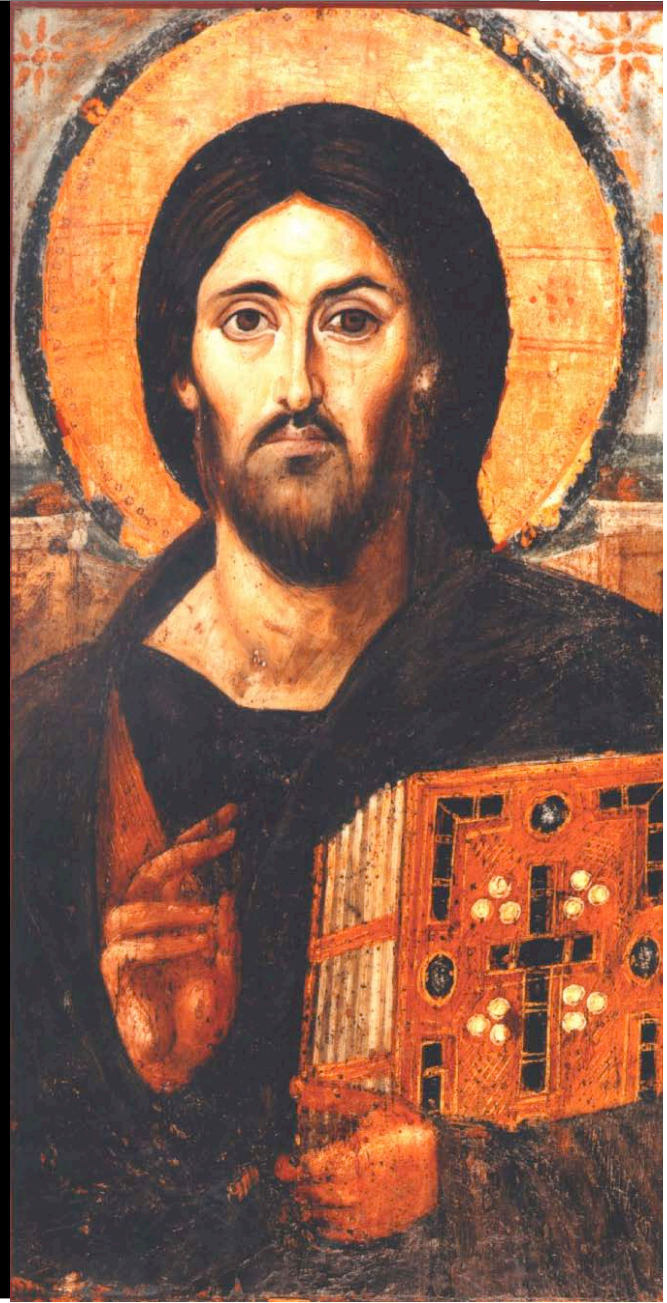
Second, considering how much Christians argue and disagree with each other, it is nothing short of stunning that Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches around the world all embrace the teachings found in the Apostles' Creed. In the midst of a multicultural, shifting world, here is a solid core that defines Christians (regardless of our labels and our differences) while unapologetically declaring the unique claims of the Christian faith. It is a starting place for common ground.

Finally, the creed remains an excellent teaching tool. Each phrase opens up profound theological vistas that impact how we think and act as Christians.

Tips for making the most of *Experiencing the Apostles' Creed* Companion Guide

- ~ Read *Rediscovering the Apostles' Creed* on p. 6 as a good introduction to the Creed.
- ~ Preview each thirty-minute video session twice and take notes, if possible. Encourage class members to take notes during the sessions, using the Participants' Hand Outs, beginning on p. 37.
- ~ Review the study materials carefully. Each session includes the following main sections: Opening, Reaction, Application and Closing. Most classes will not have enough time to cover all of this material. Select the questions and activities that will best suit your group, with an attempt to spend at least a little time in each of the four distinct sections. Lesson planning sheets are included for your convenience.
- ~ If time permits, consider covering the videos in shorter portions, thereby allowing more discussion time on each concept. Select appropriate teaching activities and questions accordingly.
- ~ Each session includes a "Priming the Pump" exercise. Because so much of this study is necessarily oriented towards teaching, it is important to give participants a chance to share and get to know each other. In addition, this exercise will help you get a sense of where each participant is in his or her faith journey.
- ~ The first "Reaction Question" in each session is intentionally the same. This question is designed to help the leader discover what topics are of particular interest and need further discussion, allowing you to tailor your lesson, even as you teach.
- ~ By ending each session with a declaration of the Creed you give participants a chance to anchor what is learned in the session to the act of confessing the Creed.

Experiencing The Apostles' Creed



“...the Christian word for faith or belief was ... a statement about God and a statement about how I trust Him.”
~Excerpt from Session I.

Abridged Version Session I:
I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Creator of Heaven and Earth

SESSION I: "I Believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of
Heaven & Earth"

Lesson Plan Worksheet

(Use this table to plan your teaching session)

Opener	
Video & Reaction Questions	
Application Questions	
Closing	

Materials Needed: DVD, video equipment, whiteboard or pad to write down responses, copies of "I believe" worksheet from p. 14, copies of participant notes from pp. 37-38, index cards prepared as described in closing, name tags, markers.

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today's topic

- 1 **Do:** As participants arrive, have them fill in the "I believe" worksheet found on p. 14. Then have each person introduce themselves and share what they wrote. **Discuss:** We have just shared two kinds of "beliefs." First, facts that we believe to be true and second, the names of people we trust or believe in.
- 2 **Ask:** How would you describe the difference between believing in a set of facts and believing in a person?
- 3 **Ask:** Imagine that a news crew was interviewing people on the street about what they thought about Christianity. They approach you and ask you to state one of your own beliefs about God or Christianity. They tell you to give one sentence about one thing you believe and the sentence has to start with "*I believe that ...*" What would you say?
- 4 **Ask:** Did you memorize the Apostles' Creed at some point in life? What was the context of this? What memories or feelings does the Creed hold for you?
- 5 **Say:** *In today's 30 minute video presentation, we will see various scholars exploring the first line of the Apostles' Creed: **I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.** The scholars will discuss the purpose of the creed, what it means to believe, and what type of God is portrayed in the Scriptures.*

VIDEO – Play Session I (programs 1-5) from the video resource.

SAMPLE QUOTE FROM VIDEO:

"... the Christian word for faith or belief was born both as a statement about God and a statement about how I trust Him."

REACTION QUESTIONS

- 6 **Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 7 **Ask:** Why was the Apostles' Creed developed and how was it used in the early church? Why do you think this ancient statement of faith has not only survived but has thrived to this day?
- 8 **Ask:** What distinctions did the speakers make about the words faith, belief, and trust? What is the difference between "believing God" and "believing in God?"
- 9 **Ask:** Consider the traits of God discussed in this phrase of the Creed: *Father, Almighty, Creator*. Which of God's traits do you find most comforting? Are there characteristics of God that you find hard to understand or accept? Why?
- 10 **Ask:** Consider God as the loving, almighty maker of all things seen and unseen. Does this raise any difficult questions for you?
- 11 **Ask:** How did the speakers present human beings as both similar to and different from other created things like animals and even angels? The video describes a "love relationship" between God and us as the created beings. How do we know it is a love relationship, as opposed to a "master-slave" relationship or a disinterested "anything goes" relationship?

APPLICATION

- 1 2 Teach:** There are many views in the world about what God is like. Starting with our vague notions of what God might be like, each word in this phrase of the Creed sculpts our view of God to create a particular portrait. ***It is important to note that the Creed intentionally places the relational term "Father" first, before the words "Almighty" and "Creator," to describe God.*** When we say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," we should imagine ourselves placing God above all other things that vie for our loyalty. When we speak of, "Creator of Heaven and Earth," we must recognize that all that is was made by God. Let's examine how our understanding of God might impact our lives:
- 1 3 Ask:** What are the most common things in which people place their trust, hope and loyalty over God? What allegiances do you personally struggle with as you consider keeping God as the most important thing in your life?
- 1 4 Ask:** If it is God who made Heaven and Earth, and called them "good," and if we are part of that creation and are called to be stewards of it, what is an appropriate Christian stance towards the environment?
- 1 5 Ask:** God has made us both spirit and body. Some Christians have over-emphasized the body aspect, focusing only on this temporal world and the things in it. Other Christians have over-emphasized the spirit aspect as if the physical body was evil or didn't matter – and yet it was God's idea to give us physical bodies. Apparently it was very important to Him. How do we keep a balanced view? What would be a sign that you are leaning too far in one direction or another?
- 1 6 Ask:** What difference does it make in daily life to know that:
- There is a God
 - This God is the ruler of all things
 - This God's stance towards you is as a loving father?

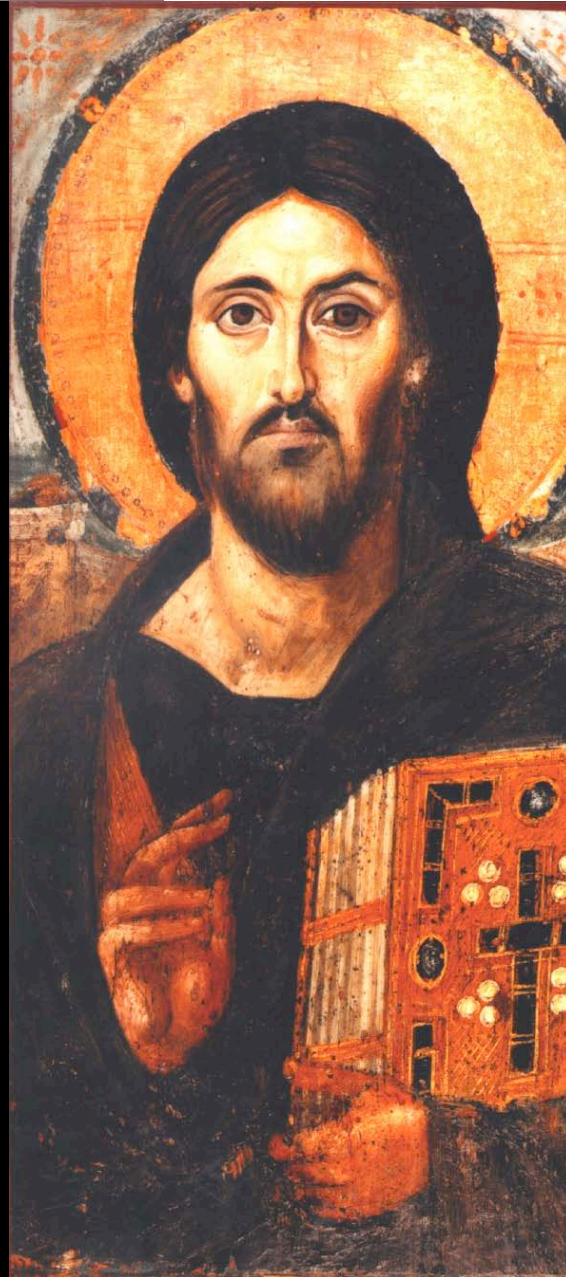
CLOSING

17 In closing, invite your class to stand and form a circle. Create seven index cards each with a word or so from the first line of the Apostles' Creed as follows: "I Believe," "in God," "The Father," "Almighty," "Maker," "of Heaven," "and Earth." Hand out the cards to seven participants in order. Have the class close their eyes, and intentionally ponder and meditate on each word of this phrase as the readers speak the words in order. Instruct the readers to leave about a 10-second pause after each card is read.

CLOSING PRAYER

18 **Precious Father, we come to You with new understanding and appreciation of You, the living God. Be among us in the coming weeks as we seek to know You better, so we can follow You more closely. Amen**

Experiencing The Apostles Creed



“The God who has spoken throughout the Old Testament now speaks not through prophets, not through visions and dreams ... He comes as a human being.”

~Excerpt from Session II

Condensed Session II:

Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin

Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate

SESSION II: “Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate”

Lesson Plan Worksheet

(Use this table to plan your teaching session)

Opener	
Video & Reaction Questions	
Application Questions	
Closing	

Materials Needed: DVD, video equipment, whiteboard or pad to write down responses, copies of participant notes from pp. 39-40, index cards prepared as described in closing, name tags, markers.

OPENER

PRIMING THE PUMP for today's topic

- 1 **Ask:** Describe a time when your first impression of someone was completely wrong. For example, it could be a case where someone seemed nice enough at first, but really wasn't, or a case where someone left a negative first impression, but turned out to be a great person.

- 2 **Say:** In each example, we judged incorrectly by our first impressions. As time went by, we came to see what the person was really like. His or her true nature was revealed. The Creed claims that Jesus reveals what God is really like; He shows us God's true nature.

- 3 **Ask:** Many people are much more comfortable talking about God than about Jesus. Why do you think that is?

- 4 **Teach:** Today's portion of the Creed mentions a historical Roman official, Pontius Pilate, whose name is now known around the world. Yet, in his own time Pilate was only a mid-level bureaucrat and was not well known. Why do you suppose the writers of the Creed included his name?

- 5 **Say:** Jesus is the focus of the Creed because the idea that Jesus is the revelation of God is what sets Christianity apart from all other belief systems in the ancient world. So, who is this Jesus? Who did the first Christians think He was? Let's see how our scholars understand the next few phrases of the Creed.

VIDEO –Play Session II (programs 6-8) from the video resource.

SAMPLE QUOTE FROM VIDEO:

“The God who has spoken throughout the Old Testament now speaks not through prophets, not through visions and dreams ... He comes as a human being.”

REACTION QUESTIONS

- 6 **Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?
- 7 **Ask:** What is the significance of the name "Jesus Christ?" How does this name remind you of the Savior's uniqueness?
- 8 **Ask:** Think of those who knew Jesus. What were some of their interpretations of this man's identity? (*prophet, teacher, heretic, lunatic, magician*) Read John 7:40-51. Do you feel that you have given Jesus a fair hearing?
- 9 **Ask:** As the disciples walked with him, their understanding gradually developed, culminating with various expressions of faith. Look up John 20:27-29 for Thomas' famous confession. How has your own view of Jesus deepened as you've grown to know Him? What portions of today's video challenged or strengthened your understanding of who Jesus is?
- 10 **Ask:** How does the phrase "His Only Son" connect with the idea of the Trinity? Why would the Creed writers use such an exclusionary phrase? See John 5:18.
- 11 **Ask:** Any description of Jesus' incarnation stretches the boundaries of human language. Yet the writers of the Creed chose few words to describe this monumental happening. In your own words, express how and why God came to earth as a man.
- 12 **Ask:** In the four gospels, the virgin birth is only mentioned explicitly in Matthew and Luke. How important do you think the concept of the virgin birth is? Is belief in this doctrine crucial for one to be a Christian? Why or why not?
- 13 **Ask:** Through history, Jesus has been seen as everything from an angelic being pretending to be human, to a man pretending to be divine. In our understanding of His identity, what is lost if the phrase "conceived by the Holy Spirit" is removed from the Creed? What is lost if the phrase "born of the Virgin Mary" were removed?
- 14 **Ask:** Now that you've seen the video, why do you think the writers have included the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, in this famous statement of faith?

APPLICATION

- 15 Teach:** If Jesus is the revelation of God, that means we can actually know what God is like by looking at Jesus. This is why studying the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is so important. They show us what Jesus is like and in turn He shows us what God is like in ways we humans can understand. Many religions have the idea of someone being a messenger from God. But in the case of Jesus, He is the Messenger, the Message, and the Message Maker. If Jesus is the second member of the Trinity, God the Son, then He exists now, in the present tense. **Ask:** How then is Christianity different than studying the teachings of a religious sage, long dead?
- 16** Display a copy of the Apostles' Creed. Two versions are provided on p. 45 and 46, but feel free to use the version you are most familiar with. **Teach:** Let's look at how the overall shape of the Apostles' Creed itself declares that Jesus is the revelation of God. Notice how much time is spent describing God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
- 17 Teach:** If the Creed is meant to summarize what is most important in the Christian faith, we see that the idea of the Trinity is a crucial foundation and framework for all the particular statements of our faith. Rather than an abstract theological concept, we find that the Trinity touches the deepest longings of the human heart. Religions like Judaism and Islam emphasize the holiness of the eternal God who is not part of creation. Some people turn to the reason and philosophy of human sages. Still others seek spiritual experiences within the heart. Perhaps all these longings are meant to be fulfilled in the Triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For in the Trinity we find God above us, God alongside us, and God within us. We find the Creator, the Judge, the Teacher, the Savior, the Counselor, the Comforter, the Lover of our Souls – Our God is all of these. The belief in the Trinity protects us from truncating who God is into a smaller God made in our own image.
- 18 Ask:** Following Jesus is much different than knowing Jesus. How can we work at following Him? How would you identify a modern day "disciple of Jesus?"
- 19 Ask:** If you were to begin each day with the prayer "Jesus, I want to make You the Lord of how I live this day," how might that change your day, your priorities, and your interactions with others?

20 Ask: Consider the suffering of the Savior. Describe the emotional, physical, and spiritual pain Jesus endured. How can Jesus' experience of very real and very intense pain become a source of strength and comfort for you as you go through your own trials?

21 Teach: Mary has been called the ultimate disciple. Her famous prayer "Be it unto me according to your word..." are words of one who has fully given herself to God. This submission is echoed by Jesus when He prays "not My will but Your will be done." Is there a place in your life – a challenge or an opportunity – where you need to say, "Be it unto me according to Your word ...?" In other words, is there a place in your life where Jesus needs to become Lord?

CLOSING

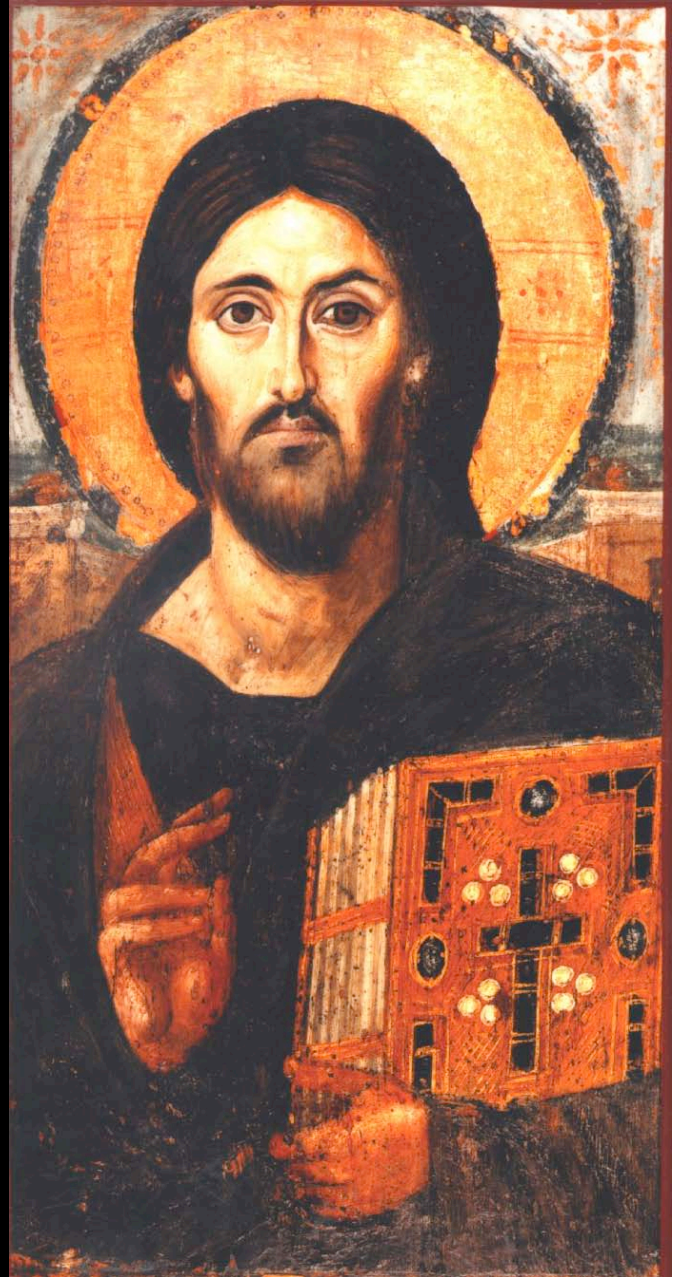
22 In closing, invite your class to stand and form a circle. Create index cards each with a word or phrase from the Apostles' Creed as follows: "I Believe," "in God," "The Father," and so on. Hand out the cards, in order, up through the words "suffered under Pontius Pilate." Have the class close their eyes, and intentionally ponder and meditate on each word of this phrase as the readers speak the words in order. Instruct the readers to leave about a ten second pause after each card is read.

CLOSING PRAYER

23 Say: As I pray, if my words match the desire of your heart, please turn them into your own personal prayer to God. (*Pause long enough after each sentence to give people time to make it their own prayer to God.*)

Lord Jesus, You are the Christ, You are the Son of God. You are the rightful King of my life. Here and now (perhaps for the first time), I ask You to come into my life, into every area of my life to be my Lord, to be my Guide, to be my Savior. Help me to follow You. Amen

Experiencing The Apostles Creed



“We are to look on the crucifixion and the resurrection as a single event. We should not think of the crucifixion as a failure that is put right by the resurrection. They go together.”

~ Excerpt from Session III

Abridged Version Session III:

“Was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into Hell. On the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, He is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.”

SESSION III: "Was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into Hell. On the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, He is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead."

Lesson Plan Worksheet

(Use this table to plan your teaching session)

Opener	
Video & Reaction Questions	
Application Questions	
Closing	

Materials Needed: DVD, video equipment, whiteboard or pad to write down responses, copies of participant notes from pp. 41-42, index cards prepared as described in closing, name tags, markers.

OPENER PRIMING THE PUMP for today's topic

- 1 **Ask:** Did your family celebrate Easter when you were growing up? If so, what do you remember about those celebrations?
- 2 **Say:** A teenage boy was considering the claims of Christianity. He said to his Youth Pastor "Look, I know God is all powerful, so He could have saved us any way He wanted. So why did Jesus have to die for us? Why couldn't He have lived for us instead?" **Ask:** How would you answer his question?
- 3 **Ask:** What images come to mind when you hear the word "judgment?" *(Write responses where all can see them.)*
- 4 **Say:** Today's portion of the Creed includes the line "He will come to judge the living and the dead." What sort of images do these words bring to mind? What questions do these words raise for you?
- 5 **Say:** In today's video presentation, we will explore Jesus' death on the cross, His resurrection, His place in heaven, and His eventual return to earth.

VIDEO –Play Session III (programs 9-12) from the video resource.

SAMPLE QUOTE FROM VIDEO:

"We are to look on the crucifixion and the resurrection as a single event. We should not think of the crucifixion as a failure that is put right by the resurrection. They go together."

REACTION QUESTIONS

6 **Ask:** Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?

7 **Ask:** Our scholars used several images and terms to describe what Jesus achieved through His life, death, and resurrection. What terms do you remember? How would you complete the following sentence: "Jesus died on the cross in order to ..."

8 **Write** or display the four words "*Victor, Rescuer, Sacrifice, Role Model.*"

Teach: Let's look at scripture to see some of what Jesus accomplished through His death and resurrection. In Hebrews chapter 2, we find Jesus as:

1. **The Victor** who conquerors sin, death and the devil (verse 14)
2. **The Rescuer** who pays the ransom with His own blood and rescues those who have been trapped and imprisoned. (verse 15)
3. **The Sacrifice** who suffers the penalty for our sins before a Holy God (verse 17)
4. **The Role Model** who sets an example for us to follow (verse 18)

Ask: Which of these roles is the one you most naturally think of when you think of Jesus? Which of these roles seems the least familiar to you?

9 **Ask:** Would a loving God force His son to bear the punishment we deserve? How does the idea of the Trinity help us understand what was happening on the cross?

10 **Say:** The resurrection of Christ is often one of the hardest things for people to accept about Christianity. Read Paul's words from 1st Corinthians 15:3-4: "*For I delivered to you as of **first** importance what I also received, that **Christ** died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...*"

Ask: Why is this doctrine the cornerstone of Christianity?

11 **Ask:** How did the scholars' descriptions of heaven compare to your own images? If Christ brought the Kingdom of God to earth, why is the world so fallen?

12 **Ask:** Let's refer back to the words we used to describe "judgment." How did the scholars' definition of judgment differ from our common understanding of the word?

APPLICATION

- 13 Ask:** Imagine stopping the story right where the Creed says, “He was crucified, dead and buried.” On that Saturday there was no sign of God, no sign of hope. The world looked cold and dead and empty. In our own lives, we always live in the middle of the story – we don’t know what is going to happen next. How might this phrase of the Creed help us when we are feeling despair and the absence of God?
- 14 Ask:** Like Christ’s birth, life, and crucifixion, His resurrection is a real event that occurred on a specific day in history. If the resurrection is the cornerstone event of our faith, do you believe you place appropriate emphasis on Easter in your own life? Can you think of traditions, rituals, or symbols of Easter that might help make it more meaningful for you?
- 15 Ask:** How do you think belief or lack of belief in the resurrection affects the way a person lives his or her life?
- 16 Ask:** How might the understanding that Jesus is right now in heaven, interceding on your behalf, pleading your cause before God’s throne impact the way you handle guilt and shame over past mistakes and sins?
- 17 Say:** The following question is one I would like you to just consider in silence, and only share with us if you feel comfortable doing so. **Ask:** The Creed declares that Jesus really is coming again and that we will stand before him and have to give account for what we have done with the gift of our lives. Do you feel ready for that? Is there an area of your life - your behaviors or thoughts - that you do not want laid bare? If so, what steps could you take to put that part of your life under the Lordship of Christ? Are you willing to take those steps?
- 18 Ask:** The disciples were motivated to great and practical deeds here on earth after the ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Is there some project or work you feel Jesus, who is the head of the church, might be calling you to do?

CLOSING

19 In closing, invite your class to stand and form a circle. Create index cards each with a word or phrase from the Apostles' Creed as follows: "I Believe," "in God," "The Father," and so on. Hand out the cards in order up through the words "He will come to judge the living and the dead." Have the class close their eyes, and intentionally ponder and meditate on each word or phrase as the readers speak the words in order. Instruct the readers to leave about a ten second pause after each card is read.

CLOSING PRAYER

20 **Say:** Our prayer time today will include times of silence. I invite you to pray silently during those times.

Jesus, You are the King of Kings and worthy of praise. *In this silence we worship You now...*

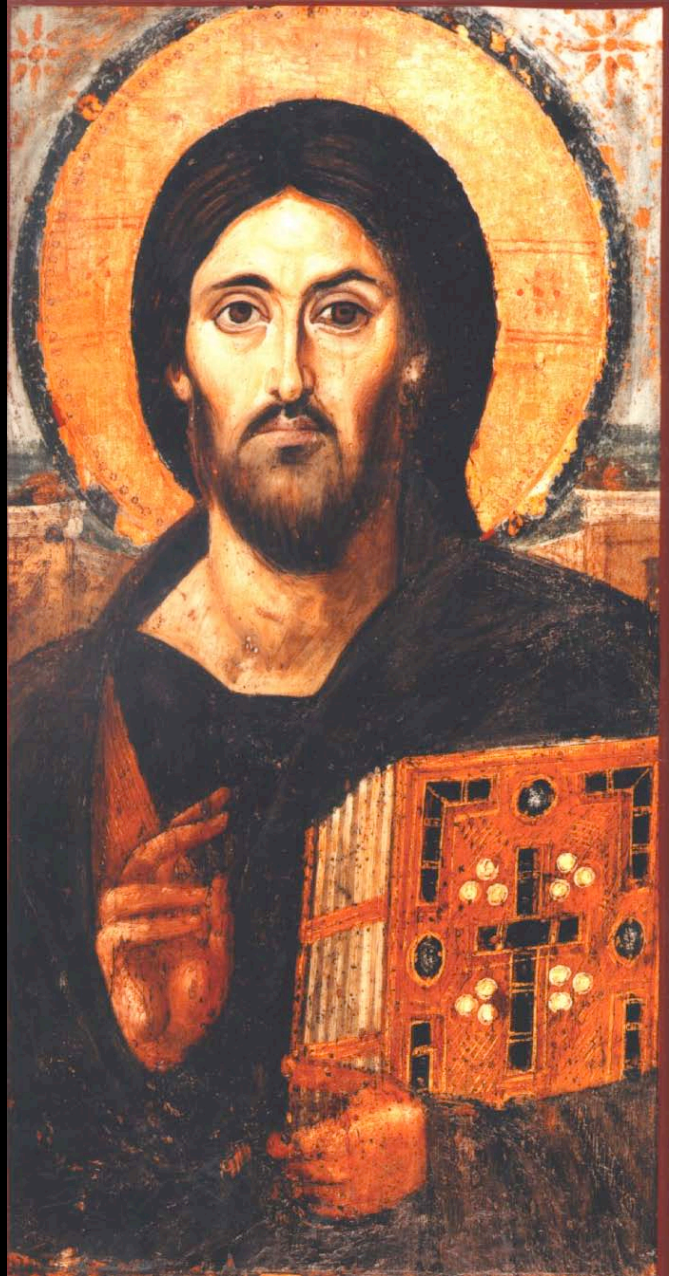
You are the suffering servant and so You know the very kinds of trials some of us are going through. *In our hearts, we name those trials to You now...*

You are the great Physician and the great High Priest, who intercedes on our behalf. *We think of those whom we are concerned about. In our hearts, we bring them before You and name them to You now....*

You are coming back to judge the living and the dead. You will one day set all things right. *Help us to trust in You and keep our eyes on You when things seem to be falling apart all around us...*

And so we say with Your whole church across the ages "Come, Lord Jesus!" Amen.

Experiencing The Apostles Creed



“Ordinary people, ordinary structures, ordinary groups, but because of the association with God, they’re called ‘holy.’ He calls them ‘special, holy.’”

~ Excerpt from Session IV

Abridged Version Session IV:

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.

SESSION IV: "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."

Lesson Plan Worksheet

(Use this table to plan your teaching session)

Opener	
Video & Reaction Questions	
Application Questions	
Closing	

Materials Needed: Large Candle with three wicks, matches or lighter, DVD, video equipment, whiteboard or pad to write down responses, copies of participant notes from pp. 43-44, copies of the creed for Application and Closing, name tags, markers.

OPENER PRIMING THE PUMP for today's topic

1 Prepare: Take three sheets of paper. At the top of one write "Holy Spirit." On the second write "Holy Church," and on the third write "Holy Person." Fold the papers, so the words are not visible. Divide your class into three groups and assign a secretary in each group to take notes. Give each group one of the papers and a pencil.

Say: Today we are going to do an exercise in smaller groups. The secretary will open your group's paper and read it quietly to your group. As you discuss your ideas, definitions, and impressions of the concept on your paper, the secretary will take notes. We'll reconvene in a few minutes.

Share: Allow about five minutes for smaller group discussion and then bring the whole group together and take a few minutes for each group to share their descriptions about their given topic.

2 Say: Today's video will take us on a whirlwind tour of some big topics including the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, and Holy People - the saints who are the very ones who are in need of forgiveness of their sins. It will conclude with the promise of everlasting life. I would like to ask that you pay particular attention to what the speakers have to say about the topic you've just explored within your small group.

VIDEO –Play Session IV (programs 13-17) from the video resource.

SAMPLE QUOTE FROM VIDEO:

"Ordinary people, ordinary structures, ordinary groups, but because of the association with God, they're called 'holy.' He calls them 'special, holy.'"

REACTION QUESTIONS

3 Ask: Was there anything that anyone said in this video that particularly struck you, that was troubling or interesting, that made you think?

4 Say: *Think back to the definitions your small group came up with at the beginning of class. Based on what we just heard, is there anything you'd like to add or change about any of the definitions? Allow a few minutes for discussion.*

5 Ask: What are some of the images that are commonly associated with the Holy Spirit? Why do you think the scholars are so adamant about describing the Holy Spirit as a person, rather than a thing or force?

6 Ask: If Jesus shows us what God is like in human form, what does the Holy Spirit add to our understanding of God?

7 Ask: How do the scholars describe the "Holy Catholic Church"? What is the church? Who established the church and what is the church's primary purpose?

8 Say: Name someone who has influenced and shaped your faith. Have you ever considered the fact that there is a chain of people telling others about Jesus that runs from the first Apostles right up to you? This is part of what is meant by "the Communion of Saints." **Ask:** How might this insight impact one's stance towards evangelism?

9 Ask: Have you ever been called a saint, perhaps after performing a good deed? How did our scholars link the words saint and sinner?

10 Ask: What is sin? What does true forgiveness require? Whose sins are forgiven according to the Creed?

11 Teach: The Creed moves into the resurrection of the body and the promise of everlasting life. What important distinction did the scholars make about the resurrection? (*That it will be a bodily resurrection.*) The bodily resurrection was a key concern of the early church. How does this fit with your own understanding of life after death? How might the phrase "the resurrection of the body" relate to the first line of the Creed that talks about the God who created the physical world and called it "good"?

APPLICATION

12 Ask: What has been your experience with the Holy Spirit in day-to-day life? Have you sensed the Spirit nudging you in a given direction? How can Christians be sure it is the Holy Spirit they are sensing, not their own desires and whims?

13 Prepare: Place a candle with three wicks in front of the class and light all three wicks. **Say:** The Creed has now covered all three persons of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is what sets Christian understanding apart from all other world views, yet we struggle to understand it. Any example we use to try to explain the Trinity breaks down for two reasons. First, no finite thing on earth could ever fully represent the infinite Triune God. Second, the Trinity is comprised of living persons not static objects, so diagrams and symbols are not sufficient. One limited symbol that conveys some aspects of the Trinity is this candle. We say there is one God, but that God is three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is one candle, but there are three wicks. Together these three living flames dance and give off one light. One candle, one light, yet three distinct flames.

14 Teach: Think back to the primary purpose of the church, as a place for communal worship of God. Out of this primary purpose flows all the other purposes to which Christians are called. It is not a “man-made” thing; it is a “God-made” thing, the body of Christ.

15 Ask: What is your own commitment level to a local church or body of believers? Does your involvement in the local church connect you in meaningful ways to the “Holy Catholic Church,” or the worldwide church? If not, how can you and your church work together to strengthen that connection?

16 Teach: Justification is the process of receiving forgiveness and being washed clean of sin. Can a Christian truly declare belief in the forgiveness of sins, yet refuse to forgive themselves of past sins? Are you holding onto shame and guilt over things God has already forgiven?

17 Teach: Sanctification means becoming more and more like Christ. This includes the willingness to forgive others. Is there someone you need to forgive?

18 Teach: Let's take a look at the structure of the Creed.
(Provide a copy for each participant. Two versions are available on pp. 45 and 46) Notice how the progression of the Creed mirrors the Christian understanding of the history of the world. It moves from the beginning of the world (I believe in God Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth), to the ancient past (and in Jesus Christ who suffered under Pontius Pilate), to the present (I believe in the Holy Catholic Church) to the future (He shall come again ... I believe in the life ever lasting). Notice also how the Creed's structure is based on the Trinity, citing their names in the same order used in Baptism – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since Jesus is the revelation of God, the majority of the Creed is spent on Him.

19 Ask: As you think about what we have covered in this course, name one important thing you want to remember the next time you say the Apostles' Creed.

CLOSING

20 In closing, invite your class to stand and form a circle. Hand out copies of the Apostles' Creed, if you haven't done so in the Application section. **Say:** The Creed is something that each of us can own and speak as individuals, as a way of describing our faith. But, when said communally, it becomes something more. It becomes a declaration of a body of believers, linked together around the world and across the ages by common faith. When we speak the Creed together, we model our belief in the One Catholic Church and the Communion of Saints. If you are ready to speak the Creed with confidence and agreement of faith, then please join me. *"I believe in God the Father Almighty ..."*

CLOSING BLESSING AND PRAYER

21 As the group concludes their statement of the Creed, move immediately into the blessing and prayer found in Jude 1:20-25:

But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Session I: Participant Notes

(Use this space to jot down anything that strikes you as you watch the video and as the group discusses the concepts)

I Believe

in God

Session I: Participant Notes, continued

the Father

Almighty

Maker of Heaven & Earth

Session II: Participant Notes

(Use this space to jot down anything that strikes you as you watch the video and as the group discusses the concepts)

And in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit

Session II: Participant Notes, continued

Born of the Virgin Mary

Suffered under Pontius Pilate

Session III: Participant Notes

(Use this space to jot down anything that strikes you as you watch the video and as the group discusses the concepts)

Was Crucified

Died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead.

Session III: Participant Notes, continued

He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

Whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

Session IV: Participant Notes

(Use this space to jot down anything that strikes you as you watch the video and as the group discusses the concepts)

I believe in the Holy Spirit

The Holy Catholic Church

Session IV: Participant Notes, continued

The Communion of Saints

The Forgiveness of Sins

The Resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

The Apostles' Creed

(Received Version)

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of Heaven and Earth,
And 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, dead, and buried.
He descended into Hell.
On the third day he rose from the dead
He ascended into heaven;
And sitteth on the right hand of
God the Father Almighty.
From thence He will come 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

The Apostles' 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.

He is seated at the right hand of the Father,
And He will come 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

In Preparation: *Experiencing the Apostles' Creed* Curriculum package

A complete curriculum resource, including in-depth video programs and all-inclusive leaders' materials for seventeen sessions on the Creed, is in preparation. These sessions are being designed to meet the needs of teachers with little experience with the Creed, as well as those who are ready to dive into deep waters. Each session includes a helpful summary, background material, in-depth teacher resources, Scriptural foundations, and creative, engaging lesson plans. Also included are student handouts, convenient Power Point tools, and Pastor Langdon Palmer's sermon series on the Apostles' Creed. This semester-length curriculum is adjustable to your particular setting and can be used in anything from a discussion-oriented home Bible study group to a teaching-oriented theology class.

Look for this resource from Christian History Institute and Vision Video in early 2008.



www.christianhistoryinstitute.org

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