

Why study the Apostle's Creed?

Many churches recite the Apostles' Creed each week. The phrases are familiar, not only to committed Christians, but also among the wider population who grew up attending church with family or at school. Yet for many it is a dull routine, and for others it is spoken with confusion or doubt, rather than with confidence and joy.

The Apostles' Creed is one of the oldest and most widely acknowledged creeds. Tradition divides the Creed into twelve phrases—one for each of the apostles—but there is no historical evidence for this. It probably started life as a summary of Christian faith for people who wanted to be baptised. When asked: 'Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?' and so on, a Christian would reply: 'I believe'. This is why the Creed says '*I believe*', whereas most creeds say '*We believe*' to express the common faith of the Christian community.

As the Apostles' Creed developed, several variations existed, both in Latin and Greek, until the Creed took its final form in the eighth century. By the twelfth century it was accepted by all branches of the church as a binding statement of Christian belief. Many modern versions have 'he descended to the dead' instead of 'he descended into hell', including the version used in the Anglican prayer book, *Common Worship*, and this is the wording used in this course.

Do we really need creeds? Some people do not like the idea of pinning truth down. Others want to stick to the Bible alone. Certainly it is true that only the Bible is God's inspired Word—creeds cannot have the same authority. But most churches have found it helpful to have a summary of Christian belief. Creeds summarise who we are, they teach us what is important, and they help us avoid error. In modern business language, they are our 'identity documents'. The New Testament clearly suggests there are certain truths that people deny at their peril. We should have the humility to learn from the great summaries of Christian faith put together by previous generations.

This Good Book Guide aims to fill out the content of the short statements of this creed, packed with so much momentous truth and understanding. In these ten sessions, you will discover how the Creed's statements are derived from the Bible—the teaching of the apostles—and its life-changing significance for our daily lives. Saying the creed need never be dull, confused or joyless again!

THE APOSTLES' CREED

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 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.*



Romans 1 v 18-25 and John 14 v 1-11

BELIEVING IN GOD

'I believe in God.'

talkabout

1. What reasons do people give about why they don't believe in God?
What do *you* think makes it hard for people to believe in God?

- What reasons lead you to believe that God is real?

investigate

Read Romans 1 v 18-25

In this passage from a letter written to Christians in Rome, the apostle Paul begins by explaining the mess into which the human race had fallen, which would result in God sending Jesus Christ to rescue humanity.

2. According to Paul, how has God made Himself known?

3. What does Paul say we can know about God from creation?



4. According to Paul, why don't people believe in God?

➔ **apply**

5. Look at verse 21. If we want to get to know God or understand Him better, where must we start?

🔍 **explore more**

We have seen that the fundamental reason people don't believe in God is because of their hearts (their desire to enjoy wickedness instead of God), rather than their heads (responding to the evidence of God in creation) or their conscience (knowing there is right and wrong).

- *What are the implications for us as Christians, when we try to convince people of the truth of Christianity?*

Read **Deuteronomy 4 v 5-8** and **1 Peter 2 v 11-12**.

- *How were God's people, in both the Old and New Testaments, to bring unbelieving people to believe in the one true God?*

- *How might this help us convince people who suppress the truth because they will not obey God?*

📄 investigate

▶ Read John 14 v 1-14

This passage comes from an account of Jesus' life and teaching, written by the apostle John. In these verses Jesus refers to God as 'the Father'. The reason why Christians turn to the words of Jesus to find out about God, rather than listening to anyone else, should become clearer as we see what Jesus had to say.

6. According to Jesus, how *can* we know God?

7. What does Jesus mean when He describes Himself as 'the way and the truth and the life' (v 6)?

8. Jesus tells His disciples that anyone who has seen Him has seen the Father (v 9). But how can people who have *not* seen Jesus (like us!) know the Father? (See verse 10 and compare John 20 v 29-31.)

9. What does Jesus say about His words in verse 10?

- What does He say about the Father's work?

- 10.** Look at **John 5 v 19-24**. What does the work of God, through the words of Jesus, actually do in this world?

- 11.** In John 14 v 12 Jesus says that those who have faith in Him will do greater works than the miracles He did. How do Christians do the 'greater works' that Jesus promises?

➔ **apply**

- 12.** What do your friends and colleagues think about how God can be known, and how he works in the world?

- 13.** How could you use Romans 1 and John 14 to respond to these beliefs?



getting personal

If you are unsure about whether you truly know God, what have you learned in this session that can help you?

- *What do you need to do in the days ahead?*

If you have come to know God, through listening to the words of Jesus and putting your faith in Him, to what extent are you involved in doing the 'greater works' that Jesus promised?

- *What do you need to do in the days ahead?*



pray

You may, first of all, want to pray for yourself, that you would be someone who listens to the words of Jesus, and does not suppress the truth about God. Pray also that, through Jesus, you will be someone who truly knows God and has eternal life.

Pray for your unbelieving friends by name. Ask God to give you opportunities to speak to them about the living God, who is revealed through Jesus. And ask God to bring light to their darkened hearts.

