

## The Creed

Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic faith. Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally.

Now this is the catholic faith:

That we worship one God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity,  
neither confounding their persons nor dividing their essence.  
For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another,  
and that of the Holy Spirit still another.  
But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.  
Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit.

The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated, the Holy Spirit is uncreated.  
The Father is immeasurable, the Son is immeasurable, the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.  
The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal.  
And yet there are not three eternal beings; there is but one eternal being.  
So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings;  
there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.  
Similarly, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty.  
Yet there are not three almighty beings; there is but one almighty being.  
Thus, the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God.  
Yet there are not three gods; there is but one God.  
Thus, the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord.  
Yet there are not three lords; there is but one Lord.  
Just as Christian truth compels us to confess each person individually as both God and Lord,  
so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords.

The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone.  
The Son was neither made nor created; he was begotten from the Father alone.  
The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten; he proceeds from the Father and the Son.  
Accordingly there is one Father, not three fathers; there is one Son, not three sons;  
there is one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits.  
Nothing in this trinity is before or after, nothing is greater or smaller;  
in their entirety the three persons are coeternal and coequal with each other.

So in everything, as was said earlier, the unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in unity, is to be worshipped.  
Anyone then who desires to be saved should think thus about the trinity.

## The Creed (continued)

But it is necessary for eternal salvation that one also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully.

Now this is the true faith:

That we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and human, equally. He is God from the essence of the Father, begotten before time; and he is human from the essence of his mother, born in time; completely God, completely human, with a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father as regards divinity, less than the Father as regards humanity. Although he is God and human, yet Christ is not two, but one. He is one, however, not by his divinity being turned into flesh, but by God's taking humanity to himself. He is one, certainly not by the blending of his essence, but by the unity of his person. For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh, so too the one Christ is both God and human.

He suffered for our salvation; he descended to hell; he arose from the dead; he ascended to heaven; he is seated at the Father's right hand; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. At his coming all people will arise bodily and give an accounting of their own deeds. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, and those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith: one cannot be saved without believing it firmly and faithfully.

## History and Background of the Creed

The creed historically has been attributed to Athanasius, which is the reason for its name. However, the creed is not found in any of his writings and its language reflects the debates that surrounded and followed the Council of Chalcedon, which happened after the life of Athanasius. The creed also bears the markings of Augustinian language and seems to reflect the theology of the Western church, rather than the Eastern church. Though sections of the creed have been found in the writings of other authors, we do not know who distilled it into the form that we now have or when exactly it was done. The common belief is that it was written in the late 400's or early 500's. Unlike most creedal formulas, this creed is not known to come from any official church council or meeting, even though it bears language that tries to convey the authority of such a body.

## Emphases and Theology of the Creed

### I. *The Simplicity of God*

- A. **Unity of the persons.** The doctrine of simplicity speaks to the unity of God. God does not have parts; He can in no way be divided. The creed makes this point wonderfully in speaking about the Trinity when saying that although Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all almighty, etc. there are not three almighties but one. There is no division in God; all that He is, He is wholly. The persons of the Godhead are not parts or divisions of God, they are all wholly God. We can and must make distinctions between the persons, but we cannot divide them. God is wholly Father, wholly Son, and wholly Holy Spirit.
- B. **Unity of attributes**
1. **God's essence and attributes are identical.** Simplicity also speaks to unity in identifying God's attributes with God Himself. For example, God is not merely a being who is loving, His being is love itself (**1 John 4:8, 16**). God is not merely a being who is holy, His being is holiness itself (**Lev. 11:44-45; Isa. 6:3**). As creatures, we can possess attributes that are not necessary to our being. We can be righteous or wicked, wise or foolish, strong or weak. These attributes are independent of us and we can at sometimes possess them or not and not be changed in our essence. For God, however, these attributes are essential and identical to His being. There is not an external standard or existence of goodness which God comes into possession of or to which He conforms. He is goodness itself and goodness has its being from Him. The same is true of wisdom, infinity, eternality, righteousness, etc. (**Ex. 3:14; John 14:6; 1 John 1:5**).
  2. **God's attributes are identical.** Simplicity also helps us to understand that although we can make distinctions between God's attributes, because of His essential unity, these attributes are not actually different but are one. God's love is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, holy, righteous, etc. We cannot isolate any of God's attributes from any of the others, for they are all essentially, necessarily, and wholly what God is. God's righteousness is His holiness, is His love, is His eternity, is His wisdom, is His being, etc.

## Applying the Creed

- I. **Importance of Simplicity.** Simplicity is a difficult doctrine in many ways and one whose importance may not immediately be apparent; but it is a vital and comforting doctrine to believe. Simplicity should give us ultimate trust in God. His truthfulness, righteousness, and goodness are not things that He could possess or not possess, they are essential and identical to who He is. He can no more cease to be any of those things than He can cease to be God or cease to be at all. It also safeguards God as the ultimate source and sovereign of all. There are not principles or attributes that are more basic or independent of God, but He is the very definition of them.
- II. **Theological Comparisons Between the Trinity and the Incarnation.** The theological language utilized in the discussions concerning the Trinity and the Incarnation of Christ are helpful in relating the two doctrines to one another. In both discussions, there is a key distinction made between the idea of person and the idea of essence or nature. In the Trinity, there are three persons and one essence or nature; in the incarnation there is one person and two essences or natures. In the Trinity, the unity of the persons is found in the one essence or nature they all fully share. In the Incarnation, the unity of the essences or natures is in the one person they both fully share. These distinctions should help us in thinking and talking about God and Christ in ways that are consistent with the testimony of Scripture.