Creeds and Beliefs

Teacher Background

A creed is a statement of belief, usually religious belief. It is derived from the Latin credere - to believe. Thus, in its simplest terms, a creed is a statement or profession of beliefs. A creed may cover the whole of doctrinal teaching or it may clarify certain points of dispute. Creeds contain the faith of historic Christianity and the results of controversy. They are useful to the church in helping to regulate its theological thinking and keep the church from straying into heresy, as well as for general use in catechetical instruction and as professions of faith.

A traditional belief is that after Christ’s ascension, many of the apostles prepared to follow the great commission by leaving Jerusalem and teach the gospel throughout the world. In order to make certain that each apostle taught the same message, they jointly composed the Apostles’ Creed before their departure. In reality, this is a most unlikely scenario. Most scholars agree that there was little uniformity of belief in the early Christian church. Even in the same geographical area and sometimes in the same cities, different Christian teachers taught quite different gospels and had quite different views of who Jesus was and what he did. It was only in the 4th century C.E. that the Christian church became the official religion of the Roman Empire. This created a need for doctrinal consistency. The date and writers of the Apostles’ Creed are therefore unknown.

Throughout church history, a number of important creeds have been formulated as statements of orthodoxy. These include the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed.