

The Creeds of the Faith - Part 2

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[0 : 00] All right, folks, thanks for joining us today. I think I know most of all of you, but I'm Tom Schmidt. I'm one of the elders here. I also teach at Fairfield University on the history of Christianity in the Bible. We're going to be talking about creeds today. It'll be the second in our series. And today we'll be looking at what's called Anton Nicene creeds. That's just a fancy way of saying creeds before the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.

And I have a handout. So if you don't have the handout and you'd like one, Natalie is handing them out back there. I thought that we could begin with a brief word of prayer and then we'll jump in. So, Father, we ask you in the name of your Son, by your Holy Spirit, to be with us this hour while we look at the professions of faith whom our brothers and sisters have written down centuries ago. We pray that you would nourish us through their words, that we would grow in understanding and in our faith and our confidence in you. And we ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Amen. So I want to ask a question to begin. If you were, let's say, a missionary today and you were off in a very far off place, totally disconnected from the modern world, perhaps a people group that's illiterate, they don't have reading and writing, their culture is totally separated from the modern culture, Western culture, or any other culture.

[1 : 36] What would you tell them to believe about Jesus? If you were to shrink it down, condense it into just a brief message, what would you say?

Okay. This question, that decision is what a lot of Christians in the ancient world faced when they were communicating the gospel message.

They were communicating the gospel message to early believers or non-believers and they needed to decide what are we going to emphasize? What do we talk about?

And when you get down to it, it's actually kind of hard to figure out what to emphasize.

And so today we're going to look at how early Christians articulated their faith. We're going to look at the earliest creeds in roughly chronological order that we can find.

[2 : 36] But even already we're encountering a problem because we have to define what a creed is. And when I was assembling this little packet, that was one of the problems I faced because depending on how you define a creed is going to depend on what I select to be here.

So I thought what we could do is just jump in. We can read the first creed listed together. We'll talk about it.

We can read the first thing about how we can find this statement of faith or this creed in this manner. Because we'll discover that actually some of them seem to have different purposes. Some of them are responding to different questions.

Some of them have different points of emphasis. And I think that that will help illuminate our faith today and help us think about creeds today. So let's begin. We'll start with right off the bat Ignatius of Antioch.

He wrote around 107 AD. And the thing to know about Ignatius of Antioch, I'll just give the highlights, is he was a disciple of the apostles, probably the apostles Peter and Paul, or at least he almost certainly knew them.

[4 : 08] And he was the bishop of Antioch, probably one of the most famous Christians of his day. And this is an extract. It's a quote from a letter that he was writing to a church as he was being carried away by Roman soldiers to be executed for his faith in Christ.

It's a dramatic letter. It's very poignant. This is his kind of last piece of advice to this church. So it's pretty intense. Let's see what he has to say.

And could I, this is like when I'm in the classroom, could I have a volunteer to read? Who would like to read? Richard, go for it. Ignatius of Antioch, up at the top. Be deaf, therefore, when anyone asks

you to speak apart from Jesus Christ, who was of the family of David, who was the son of Mary, who really was born, who both ate and drank, who was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate, who really was crucified and died while those in heaven and on earth and under the earth looked down. Who, moreover, really was raised from the dead when his father raised him up, who his father, that is, in the same way will likewise also raise us up in Christ Jesus, who believe in him, apart from whom we have no true life.

All right. Amen. I mean, it's a beautiful confession of faith. It is. Very beautiful. Especially when you consider that he's writing this as he's condemned to die.

[5 : 49] He knows he's going to die in probably a few weeks. And he's talking about that promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus, that he will raise him up. It's very powerful. My question for you is, wow, what is the focus here?

What is he trying to emphasize again and again? It seems like he's trying to emphasize Jesus' incarnation, that he was really human. Yeah, like, okay.

Notice the word really, that he says, I think he says it four times. Really born, really persecuted, really crucified and died, really raised from the dead.

That this was fact. Yes. And that these things happened in history. And they happened in history. You're not just by a real person. Precisely.

Precisely. And if you think that these are the two same things, they're actually not. Because it seems like part of the reason Ignatius is emphasizing this is because he's dealing with various heretical Christian sects that are claiming that, yes, this happened in history.

[6 : 58] But Jesus really wasn't human. He only looked human. God would never actually become human. He just kind of looked that way. God would never be human. And it looked like he suffered, but he didn't actually suffer.

And so you can technically hold these separately if you want to. It's kind of a weird belief. But that was actually very common in the ancient world where Jesus was thought of as not actually human. Is there anything missing from this creed? Like, do you think that if we view it as a creed, I mean, it feels creedal. It's a final parting piece of advice. You could, if you wanted a strict definition of a creed, say, well, this probably isn't.

It's just important advice. But for our purposes, let's consider it a creed. But is there stuff missing that you think is really important that he doesn't?

Yeah, the Holy Spirit not mentioned. Holy Spirit not mentioned here. Yeah, that's a big one. Sin? Could you say that again? Sin? Sin. Yes. Yes. He doesn't talk about forgiveness.

[7 : 57] Ignatius here. Maybe the divinity of Jesus. Yeah, he actually doesn't explicitly say that Jesus was divine.

He talks about how he's human. He's human. He's human. Now, we want to be careful. Scholars sometimes go off the rails here, and they'll take something like this and say, Ignatius didn't believe in the divinity of Jesus.

If you read his letters, he explicitly calls Jesus divine repeatedly, like again and again and again. He talks about the Holy Spirit. So that's something we want to be careful of, is that sometimes there's other creeds or there's other writers that we don't have the other letters they wrote or the other books.

And so we want to be careful not to say Ignatius thought the deity of Jesus was unimportant because he clearly thought it was very important. And that brings up a point, is that the creeds are conditioned by the circumstances.

I want to go back to my question when I said if you were, you know, a missionary today in a far-off tribe. I mean, chances are, if you were going to communicate the gospel message to the people, you probably wouldn't feel like you have to emphasize the humanity of Jesus again and again and again like Ignatius did.

[9 : 21] You'd probably just assume, oh, when I say he was born and died and was raised again, that they'll just know he was human, that he suffered, he had flesh and blood. They'll assume that.

But not all cultures do. And the Greek culture especially that was so obsessed with mind, noose, and things beyond the physical world, they didn't assume that.

And so Ignatius thought he really had to emphasize this. So we're going to encounter these kinds of issues several times as we go through these creeds where what they choose to emphasize is often conditioned by the circumstances they are addressing.

Before we go on, though, any other questions about Ignatius? I want to make sure we have time to get through some other stuff. But let's read the next one.

Irenaeus, I said Irenaeus Leons, it should be Irenaeus of Lyons. He wrote around 180. I'll introduce him very briefly. He wrote the first systematic theological work that we have in existence by a Christian.

[10:26] There, of course, were many earlier theological works, but these weren't what we call systematic. It wasn't laying out the whole structure of Christian belief like Irenaeus did. Irenaeus was a missionary in France, and he was from Asia Minor.

And he's famous because his teacher was Polycarp, whose teacher was the Apostle John. So he has this lineage, and he talks about that. He talks about remembering Polycarp, who would talk about the Apostle John.

Fascinating apostolic lineage. Irenaeus gives this formal creed. So this, I think everyone agrees, is a formal statement of faith.

And he says this. I'll read this one. He says, The Church. And as I read, look for points of emphasis. Look for interesting things. The Church, though dispersed through the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the Apostles and their disciples this faith.

She believes in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and the sea, and all things that are in them. And in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaims through the prophets the dispensations of God and the Advents and the birth from a virgin and the passion, that's the suffering of Jesus, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his future manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father, to gather all things in one and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord and God and Savior and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess to him, and that he should execute just judgment towards all, that he may send spiritual wickednesses and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly and unrighteous and the wicked, and profane among men into everlasting fire, but may, in the exercise of his grace, confer immortality on the righteous and holy and those who kept his commandments and have persevered in his love, some from the beginning of their Christian course and others from the date of their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory.

[12:51] Every time I read this, I always want to say, Amen! Amen to that! And it's so wonderful. I mean, this was written 1,840 years ago, and we believe the same things.

We believe the same things. It's so beautiful to see that. Well, let's talk about some points of emphasis for Irenaeus. So what are some points that he emphasizes and highlights in this particular creed, Richard?

I'm known for saying the obvious. So the first word he uses is church. Okay, the church. Yes. He emphasizes that this is the church that's like everywhere.

This is what the church believes. Not just his little congregation sitting there in France, but this is what the churches throughout the whole world believe. So he emphasizes kind of the unity of this belief and the geopolitical, the widespreadness, for lack of a better term, of this belief.

What else? Is that a hand? I mean, it could be a hand. I'd say it's talking about redemption, redemptive history. Hmm. So it's, yeah, it's like a, it's like a little narrative.

[14:04] Yeah. Yeah. So he gives a history, I guess I'll say redemption history, of the incarnation, all those points.

And there's lots of sub points we can add that perhaps we can add to this because it brings up the greater question of like, well, what does he think is redemption history? Is he in, yes? The creator. God is the creator, the father almighty, maker of heaven and earth. Yeah. In the sea. Yes. Yeah. And that was important in Greco-Roman society, in Greco-Roman polytheism.

They often believe the opposite, that the heaven and earth created the gods, that those were like the arch gods and they gave birth. That's the story of Uranos, heaven and Gaia. So this is the reverse.

No, no, no, no, no. There's not multiple gods. There's only one God and he wasn't begotten by heaven and earth. He made, he made heaven and earth. So very, very important. Helen. This has a little here about the consummation.

[15:08] Of the age, you mean? Yeah. Yes. It says, and the ascension into heaven and the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, or in his future manifestation from heaven and the glory of the father, to gather all things in one, to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race.

Well, that hasn't happened yet. Yes. Yes. So the consummation, the reconciling of all things, the consummation, the recapitulation. The beginning of, it's the end of the, it's the beginning. The beginning. Yeah. Yes. And what's interesting about this is that we often will talk about judgment. Jesus comes back and there's the judgment, which Irenaeus does talk about. He also really mentions the judgment as well. He dwells on that quite explicitly. But for him, with the judgment is also this kind of completing or this new beginning, this fulfillment of all things that is happening, which gives it a little different spin of emphasis than what you often will hear in Christian circles today, where they'll just talk about, well, Jesus comes back and there's the judgment. And Irenaeus says, yes, but he kind of explains more what he envisions that as being. And there's also the Trinity. Ah, yes. So this is a more Trinitarian creed than the one we saw with Ignatius.

[16:38] Now, it's a little unfair. We don't want to pick on Ignatius because we're just extracting something from a letter. In fact, maybe even that own letter. We're on chapter nine of the letter with Ignatius. He probably does mention the deity of Christ and the Trinity elsewhere in that letter.

If not, he does in other letters. But it's Trinitarian. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He mentions. And that is a point of emphasis for him.

So I would say he's proto-Trinitarian. Okay. Explain a little bit. Because he says one God, the Father. But he doesn't say anything about Jesus or the Holy Spirit being God.

Oh, does he though? It's interesting. He doesn't at first. But if you keep reading. Christ Jesus, our Lord and God. Yeah. In the middle, when he circles back, he then clarifies.

It's very interesting. So initially, he just talks about him being the Son of God. Yes. So he, and this is, we will find out in this creeds course, this becomes an issue. Because, and we'll find out actually in just a moment.

[17:46] But notice that it is Trinitarian. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He does define the Father as God. He does define the Son as God. He doesn't define the Holy Spirit. It's not that he defines the Holy Spirit as something else.

He just doesn't define exactly what he means by that. So scholars have all sorts of different categories.

One of them is proto-Trinitarian. Others, you could come up with other terms too. You could just say it's Trinitarian. It's just a non-specific kind of Trinitarian.

Yeah, yeah. It's not as specific as what these three persons are referring to here. All right. Other things that we notice.

Composes on the resurrection again. Big time. Yes. Resurrection is very important. And this is, I think, illuminating for us and helps us because we often think, in Christian culture in the West, we often think of eternal life.

[18:51] And they will think of that a bit differently than resurrection. As in, like, we will have bodies. Like, we are going to be raised to life and stand before the judgment seat of Christ. It's not that we die and go to heaven and float around on a cloud for all eternity.

That's not really the Christian view of things. And Irenaeus is quite clear. No, there's going to be a resurrection. Well, I'm sorry.

Go to him. It just strikes me that these points of emphasis sometimes aren't our points of emphasis. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yes. When we hear a previous generation of Christians, here's what they emphasized to a world that didn't understand the Judeo-Christian worldview.

Mm-hmm. Well, this is like the pagan Greeks and the... Yeah. Here's what they decided to emphasize. Mm-hmm. But often we don't think it's important to emphasize the judgment or the consummation of all things.

Right. Yep. And I love... I mean, he begins the whole thing by saying, hey, we all believe this. And I... Having read early Christian writings, he's correct.

[20:03] I mean, this is a very universal belief throughout the early church of these points. Some other things that he emphasizes or that he mentions.

He talks about the grace of God. He says in the exercise of his grace, he will confer immortality. And so for him, he wants this to be part of the discussion in this creedal statement that we don't earn...

We don't earn our salvation. We are given it via the exercise of his grace in us. Another aspect is repentance. He talks about the necessity or he at least mentions repentance where he speaks of those who have repented, that he's going to surround them with everlasting glory.

I should add that this text has a bit of a difficult manuscript history. So we're reading this in a Latin version.

Irenaeus wrote in Greek, but the Greek text is largely lost. And so we have an ancient Latin translation of the Greek text. And we do have some Greek quotations. I can't remember if this was a quotation.

[21 : 18] But anyway, sometimes Irenaeus' words will get a little bit garbled. And at the very end here, you'll notice that the translator has inserted some brackets of their Christian...

And that's because it's just a little... Something feels like it got messed up a little bit. And then the last thing I want to point out is he points out love. He says...

He talks about those who persevere in God's love. And the love of God is also something that is emphasized. So really encouraging. I mean, this feels encouraging.

There's nothing, I think, surprising here for us. It's like a belief that we've never... You know, that seems heretical to us or bizarre or strange. It all seems very encouraging.

Let's continue because Irenaeus actually gives another creed. And he says something fascinating that relates to how creeds have authority.

[22 : 18] He says something that I think is very interesting. So this is from the same book. It's a very, very long book where he kind of gives another creed here. I'm realizing because this is being recorded.

I should probably read these things because... So that the folks listening at home can listen in. So I'll read this one. If the apostles had not left to us the scriptures, would it not be necessary to follow the order of tradition, which those to whom they committed the churches handed down?

To this order, order of tradition, many nations of barbarians give assent. Those who believe in Christ having salvation written in their hearts by the Spirit, without paper and ink, and guarding diligently the ancient tradition, believing in one God, maker of heaven and earth, and all that is in them, through Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who for his astounding love towards his creatures, sustained the birth of the Virgin, himself uniting his manhood to God, and suffered under Pontius Pilate, and rose again, and was received in glory, who shall come in glory, the Savior of those who are saved, and the Judge of those who are judged, and sending them into eternal fire, the perverters of the truth, and the despisers of his Father and his Advent.

So some similar things expressed differently in shorter form, but his preface is different, how he prefaces this, and he offers a question about tradition, and about apostolic writings, otherwise scripture.

And he says, if the apostles had not left to us the scriptures, would it not be necessary to follow the order of tradition? What does he mean by this?

[24 : 12] And then we can talk about whether we agree with it or not, but what is he trying to say here? I think, I think, so it's tricky, because it's one of those conditional rhetorical questions.

Oh yeah. Right? But, at first I thought, wait, wait, wait, wait, he's saying the tradition is more important or as important, but he's not. He's saying, the scriptures have in fact been given to us.

If we didn't have them, the only thing we would have to rely on would be the tradition. Yes. He stands, he is admitting that the apostles did commit to pay for being paid.

But I think he's saying that the, if I'm reading this right, that the tradition is supporting everything that the scriptures are saying. And then he goes on to affirm several things that the tradition confirms, which we can confirm in scripture.

Right. Right. I think you're precisely, precisely correct. where he, we'll talk more about this in a moment, but he brings up this idea of tradition. And he says, Hey, if we didn't have the scriptures, we'd have to rely on, on this.

[25 : 21] And he says, but this also is pretty good because it says the same thing as the scriptures. So, and then he gives as an example, as a proof text, he gives, what about, he calls them barbarians.

This is probably not the best translation because for us, the word barbarian is usually very negative for him. What he just means is uneducated foreigners, which in his day meant they didn't read or write.

They didn't have their language written down. And he says, well, what about them? They can't read the scriptures. They don't have them in their language, but there's still churches there. They still believe the same things because missionaries went and taught them.

And this brings back to that original question I began the class with. And it's not simply a hypothetical. We have today, I have met people in this church who were raised in a place where their parents did not read or write.

They didn't have the scriptures in their native language. They had no access. They didn't have internet. They didn't have TV or things like that. And that like, we know there's thousands, even millions of Christians like that today in the world where they can't open up a Bible and read something because it's not in their language.

[26 : 34] Or they can't read or write or both. And what Irenaeus says is, they believe the same thing. And he gives this creed that they're taught.

And that, again, harkens back to that question I asked. If you're a missionary in a culture like this, of course, you want to translate the Bible into their language. But you're talking about probably a multi-decade endeavor to put their language, make characters for their language, written characters, put it into the scriptures, learn the language well enough.

The last thing you want to do is whip off a sloppy translation that has something wrong in it. That they then begin misbelieving. And so you are forced to say, all right, I'm going to, I'm going to tell you what to believe.

And, and this, and you're going to give some statement of faith that they should adhere to. You'll probably start with the basics, but Irenaeus goes to tradition to illustrate this.

But I think there's also something, there's something a little more going on too, in this, that his tradition is not simply what, what a missionary happened to articulate to a foreign people.

[27 : 45] I think for him, this does go back to the apostles. There is this, this tradition, that's handed down from the apostles.

However, for Irenaeus, the scriptures are where we have recourse to, and they kind of confirm this tradition. There's this sort of symbiotic relationship. In fact, if you read, if you read 2 Thessalonians 2.15, Paul says something about this, that's, that's, that's very interesting.

And I should have, I should have brought my Bible with me. So I'm just going to, I'm just going to look it up online here. He says, 2.15, did I say 3.15?

2.15, 2.15, 2.15, 2.15, he says, so then brothers, stand firm, and hold to the traditions, that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word, or by our letter.

So for him, the, for Paul, the, the apostolic tradition, is what the apostles taught, either by letter, by written form, or by word of mouth.

[29 : 08] And I think, Irenaeus, has that same idea, that yes, the apostles, when they were teaching, of course, they're going to be saying all sorts of things, at church on Sunday morning.

And that, that carries authority, and weight, and they would have, the same message, they would preach to various churches, when they're planting these churches, but they also have these letters. And I think that, that, Irenaeus has that, that same idea. But for him, the tradition doesn't have, like, extra stuff. There's not, there's not, like, additional things.

It's, it's all in the written documents, that we have. It's just, they also, at that time in the early church, had this apostolic deposit, that he articulates right here.

I mean, he just says it's this basic, statement of faith, about that. Any, any thoughts, Lewis? It sounds, like a lot of these, sound pretty similar, to sort of later creeds.

[30 : 06] Is that an accident? Or is that? Oh, totally on purpose. Yes, later creeds. Like, you notice, at the beginning of Irenaeus, this creed, it sounds like, like other later creeds.

And, and that's because, the, these folks are not just, coming up with this on their own. This is something that, was known, widespread, throughout the early church. We're going to find this, in the creed of Nicaea.

The Nicene creed, wasn't just, fabricated whole cloth. They're taking, from earlier creeds, they're also borrowing language, from the scriptures, in, in these creeds.

Um, so, I, I want to, emphasize with this tradition, that sometimes Protestants, get, uh, this idea, that tradition is always bad.

and I think we need to be, and I think we need to be, a little more careful, with that. I think what we mean to say, is, tradition that contradicts, the scriptures, is bad.

[31 : 03] But, if, if it's, apostolic tradition, uh, we should adhere to that. I mean, if it's actually, from the apostles, that is authoritative.

But, what Ironias is making clear here, is that like, but everything the apostles taught, is in their writings. We don't, if we couldn't read or write, sure, we would, we would have recourse to this. But, but we can read and write, and so we're going to, we're going to stick with the scriptures.

Um, this is what Jesus says, when he, talks to, the, the Pharisees, in the gospel of Matthew, chapter 15.

So, if we take a moment, to open that up, what he says, in chapter 3, uh, I mean, chapter 15, in the first three verses, the Pharisees come to Jesus, and they say, why do your disciples, break, the tradition of the elders?

Why are you breaking, in our tradition? And, Jesus responds, and he says, why do you break, the commandment of God, for the sake of your tradition? So, he says, well, it's because it's your tradition.

[32 : 11] It's yours. It's not God's tradition. And then he goes on, in, verse, nine, where he quotes, uh, scripture, and he says, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine, the commandments, the commandments of men. So, I think we should have this same view that, um, it's not that tradition is inherently bad, or wrong, or anything.

It's that, uh, we want to adhere to apostolic tradition, which is found in the scriptures, um, and these other traditions that we hear about, that contradict the scriptures, are by definition, not from God.

They are not given through the apostles. These are traditions that Jesus would call the traditions of men, that are just that, and they shouldn't, they shouldn't overstep what, what God has given.

Yeah, so, one, one, there's a quick question. When Paul uses that term tradition, is, is he using it in the same way that he uses, like, the faithful deposit? Yes.

[33 : 18] Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Um, I think so, yeah. And second thing, I, I think that's super interesting, because I, I know that Irenaeus is used a lot by Roman Catholics.

Yeah. As a justification for why the, the oral tradition that they, they claim justifies a lot of particular Roman Catholic beliefs, should be also authoritative on top of, next to scripture.

And I think what you're saying here, is I think the more nuanced way of saying is that, there's a summation of what the Bible says in this, this oral tradition, and the scripture should confirm that, not, and they shouldn't be intentionally.

Yes. Yes. I think so, precisely. Um, yeah, not to, I guess, I guess I'll, I'll say one more thing about this kind of tradition versus scripture, and how that, that actually shouldn't be intention at all.

They, that, that if, if a tradition contradicts scripture, then it's not apostolic tradition, full stop. But this is, uh, with our Roman Catholic friends, we just, who just elected a new Pope, uh, they have this belief, belief of papal infallibility when the Pope speaks from the chair of Peter, and it's this authoritative thing, but hidden within that, I think is, I think, I think is, kind of an admission, that they, go beyond the scriptures, because, they wouldn't need, an authoritative source, to articulate new doctrines, if their doctrines could be found in the scriptures, because you would just, point to the scriptures, to say, this is what we believe, based on the scriptures, but because, I, I believe that, they can't do that with some other doctrines, they have to have this other source of authority, that is articulating these, these statements, and that source needs to be as authoritative as the scriptures, and so it all lends to this papal infallibility, their argument is, in part, that the apostolic tradition, is continuing now, in the form of the, the churches, yes, yes, but, but, they still have to go beyond, the scriptures, in the New Testament, are, there are, are still there, that they have to, go beyond those, it's what they're, and they will claim, we're continuing apostolic tradition, but, the fact is, if, if it was found, if what their particular beliefs were, were found in the scriptures, they wouldn't need, all of these other apparatuses, they could just point to, to that.

[35 : 49] There's often a question, like, if we found another letter from Paul, we could authenticate it, would that be part of the scriptures, a part of the Bible? Yeah. And, I think we would say, yes, but, the way God relates to us, is through his word, and, because we're his children, he's going to give us, everything that we need, because he loves us.

So, he's not going to withhold, any, any revelation, that we need, in order to, for every good work, to relate to him, as our father. So, I think it comes back to, the scriptures are sufficient, because he loves us, and he's given us.

That's great, yeah. We don't need anything else. Yes. He wouldn't have withheld from us. Yeah. But, and the scripture is complete, because the Bible says, that it's complete. Yeah. So, we're not going to find, a letter from Paul, because God tells us, in his word, that this book here, is complete. Right. Nothing else is going to, there ain't going to be, no letters out there, from Paul, Peter.

Yeah. I mean, he wrote a third letter, to the church, or one of the letters, from the church, of Corinth, that we don't have. But, to your point, like, we don't need that letter, in order for us, to be complete, in our relationship, with the father, and the son of the church.

[37 : 04] Yeah. I mean, I think maybe, to, to, to, to Ravel's point, it's like, maybe there's a reason, the third letter, didn't survive. Right. Because maybe the people, at the time, were like, well, you know.

He had an off day. This is true. Or he's just like, this is true, but, you know, he says it all, in the second letter, so we don't need to, circular, a third letter to repeat. You know what I'm saying? It's like, I do think that, when we think about, what is in scriptures, that we have to remember, that like, the apostles, not everything, like, you know, their tax receipts, are not going to be, part of scripture. And so, not everything they wrote, is intended to be, this authoritative thing. Like, Peter's letter to his wife, or something like that, is, is a private matter. And we know that, so, so, there's a difference, between what they wrote, and what they wrote as scripture.

You know, Jeremiah the prophet, he wrote scripture. Not everything he wrote, is scripture. It's what is in the book, of Jeremiah, that are his words, and prophecies. that's another factor. And they had a conversation, that they were writing the scripture.

Yeah. Right? They were like, if you, they disagree with this letter, they're not actually. Well, Paul says that in 2 Thessalonians. He also says, I think in 1 Thessalonians, make sure that this letter, is read out in the churches.

[38 : 13] And in the, to Ephesians, he says something very similar. There's a letter coming from me. Make sure that you, you take heed to, to read this. And so, I agree. Like, when we look at how, how the canon was constructed, it was just, the consensus of churches, who were holding to, just, Apostolic tradition, saying, okay, what are you guys reading?

Okay, this is what we're reading. Yeah, yeah, all of, we're all reading the same things. Yeah, check. Check. Check. And there is, this is a larger conversation, but there's the, self-authentication, self-authentication aspect of the scriptures that they speak to us.

It's just like, you know, when, how do you apprehend truth? How do you know, if Jesus appears to you, that it's Jesus? We have this, this truth sense. Truth expresses itself.

I mean, if the truth needs something else to attest to it, it's not going to work. And so, the scriptures also press themselves on, on you. They don't need another source of truth beyond the Holy Spirit. This is all operating through the Holy Spirit who leads us into truth. I'd like to keep going, and we'll just do a cursory overview of some of the other creeds. Tertullian of Carthage in 200 AD, he's our first Latin writer in this list.

[39 : 35] He's from North Africa. He gives a very, very short creed in one of his works. And I gave you this because I wanted you to just take care not to assume that a shorter creed means more primitive or lower belief.

A lot of scholars will make this mistake where they think this person articulated a brief, you know, primitive creed, therefore, they hadn't had this exalted view of Jesus or anything.

That is not true. Because Tertullian gives other creeds where he is very, very explicit with what he believes. And you can see in the second creed of Tertullian, it's more explicit.

Things are more laid out. He explicitly talks about Jesus being divine in that creed, where in the other creed, he doesn't happen to mention that.

Sometimes, if you, for instance, given your historical context, you may find something that is omitted in one of these creeds to be a little troubling.

[40 : 41] So, for instance, if you're always doing ministry amongst Jehovah's Witnesses where the deity of Christ is paramount, that's like the number one dividing factor, if you were going to make a creed, you'd probably always be emphasizing the deity of Jesus again and again.

But, you know, if you were in 107 AD where everybody actually thinks Jesus is divine, they just have trouble with him being human, you'd have a different reaction. You'd think, well, why aren't you again and again emphasizing that he's human, that he's human, that he's human?

And so, keep that in mind, that the context in which they're writing may be different and that may affect the points they happen to land upon.

I wanted to go to Cyprian on page three, another Latin writer. He died a martyr's death. I really admire him a lot. I got to warn you about this one.

This is a fragmentary reconstructed creed. What happens is Cyprian wrote a number of epistles, letters that we have and in these letters he will say, oh, this is what people say at baptism and they'll say, I believe in God the Father and his Son Christ and the Holy Ghost.

[41 : 46] I believe the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the Holy Church. But this is two statements that Cyprian kind of makes in an argument that people have put together to try and reconstruct what Christians would confess at baptism.

So, it's incomplete. It's probably not everything they would say. But, I include this because it's early, it's interesting, but also to show that a creed, one of the purposes of a creed, is your profession of faith at baptism.

When you stand before the church, it's a way of saying, I believe these things, I confess them publicly, I belong to you, to Christ, to Christ's church.

So, one of the purposes of creeds is not just articulating Christian belief, it's a way to affirm that you are part of a Christian community, that you belong to that community.

To summarize, I'm going to erase some of this here, that the purposes of the creeds are diverse. So, some of them were given at baptism as kind of an affirmation of communal belief to be part of that communion of saints.

[43 : 03] But, some of it gives just sort of a brief story of redemption history. It explains Christian belief. So, instead of affirming your belonging to a community, you're explaining Christian belief to someone.

Another aspect of it is to protect against trouble spots, you know, to protect against heresies. As we're going to find out, there are some heresies that are very difficult to pin down.

And this happened throughout many times in church history where you would have a church and all of a sudden you discover that a significant percentage of the people in the church believed something that is terrible.

But, what you had, your current teaching, wasn't able to detect that. And it slipped through. So, you could imagine, for instance, if we had never gone through the whole Gnostic conflict in the first few centuries, that a lot of the creeds and preaching in our church would not cover Jesus being, like, actually having a human body, having a human mind, having all of this.

And you could imagine that one day you find out that like half the people think that he was just a phantom that looked human. And you'd all of a sudden realize, oh my goodness, no, look at the scriptures, he's really human, look at all these passages, and you'd have to come up with some kind of set of teaching.

[44 : 28] The last thing, for the purposes of the creeds, is it promotes unity. Unity of churches throughout the world.

they're unifiers, or they should be. We will find out later on that they don't always unify, sometimes they separate needlessly, but they should. If we move on to Novation of Rome, Novation is the first Roman writer to write in Latin, and he has a very interesting creed.

Novation started his own church called the Novationists, and there's some good things to say about him, there's some not good things to say about him. In some ways, if you wanted to view him positively, he would be like an early proto-Protestant.

Is that a like a mechanistic way of looking back at it? Because I thought some of the Novationists were present in Nicaea until they signed. I believe they agreed with the Nicene Creed, but declined to sign because they didn't want to be associated with the imperial church.

That was my understanding. So that they, so in other words, they, doctrinally, they were orthodox. They didn't believe all sorts of crazy stuff, but they thought that the Roman church, as in the imperial church of the Roman empire, had been morally corrupted, and they didn't want to be part of that, and they didn't like the interference of the state in the church.

[45 : 59] So in some ways, you know, I'm kind of sympathetic to the Novationists. there are, you know, we do have the writings of Novation, but we have some detractors who say things about him that we wouldn't probably agree with.

We can talk more about him later. I think the question is, is it an acronymism to say that they were forming a separate organization rather than that sort of, you know, bishops manage local affairs in different regions or among their congregations, and so it's not actually obvious that these people are actually forming a distinctly separate organization.

I think that was their intent, though. I think that was the whole purpose of it was, we do not want to be part of this other church, so we're going to separate out and have our own network of churches that are explicitly disassociated from you guys, even though we believe the same stuff doctrinally. It's like you can see Second Baptist Church in any town. Yes, yes. Welcome to Second Baptist Church. We hate First Baptist Church. We hate First Baptist Church. Yes, is that song?

Anyway, we can talk more, but one thing that Novation mentions that I wanted to highlight is he says, he talks about the rule of truce.

[47 : 19] We believe in God the Father Almighty. We believe in the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord God. And moreover, look what he says here, the order of reason and the authority of faith in due consideration of the words of Scripture.

So look what he says there. Remember that Irenaeus emphasized Scripture and that the tradition, this creed is not different from Scripture. We should go to the Scriptures.

Novation says that this creed is derived from the Scriptures, but he also says it comes from our reason. And that, so he is not arguing for some separate source of information.

He's arguing, like a separate source of inspiration where God reveals new truths to a particular bishop. What he's arguing is that our beliefs come from the Scriptures, but also our own reason.

And I think what he means is as we look at the Scriptures and examine them. So for instance, when there's no place in the Scriptures that says Jesus is 100% God and 100% human.

[48 : 33] That's just a summary of them. Instead, according to Novation, we look at the Scriptures and use our reason. So when Hebrews says he became like us in all things, in every way, and logically that must mean he's human in every way, not just a little bit, not just partially, he's human in every way.

And so this is another factor of the creeds that they are these, it's a method of treating the scriptures and distilling them down through the logical process of just deducing what they actually say.

And this is what humans do. I mean, we're given rationality by God. Raul. understanding is necessary for man's full commitment. Hence, faith must be spoken and made intelligible.

This is not to say that faith must be enclosed within the limits of reason, but it does mean that faith must require neither the closing of the mind nor the sacrifice of the integrity of the mind.

Yeah, oh, very good. Yes, yeah. So, I haven't fully, interestingly, thought out the implications of how reason affects the faith and stuff. So, I'm pointing out Novation's position here on how the creed was articulated, although I find myself agreeing with him, but I'm a little hesitant to articulate it definitively.

[50 : 09] It's interesting talking about Luther forums, where he says, unless you show me by scripture and plain reason, he was not establishing a separate source, the ministerial way to actually draw implications from.

Yeah, yes, yes. And what Van Til would say, thinking God's thoughts after him. Very good, yeah, thinking God, that's really good. And in some ways, how could it be any other way?

If we can't use our reason, we can't even understand the scriptures. That's inherent in it. So, I think Novation here is just making explicit what must be there.

If we move on to Origen of Alexandria, Origen, very controversial figure, some people said he was a heretic, and you were about to read a passage where you might think he's heretical, I think it's a bit unfair to call him a heretic.

He died, he was tortured at a very old age after teaching for like 40 years, and died of his wounds. Faithful to Christ, never denied Christ, at least if, and I think the accusations of him doctrinally are a bit overplayed, but what Origen does is he wrote a book called On First Principles, where he describes the first principles of the Christian faith, and he gets into all sorts of speculative theology, which did get him in trouble down the road, but at the beginning of the book, he says this is apostolic teaching, and he runs through it, and I'm only giving you an excerpt here, because he talks about the doctrine of the Father, and the doctrine of the Son, and then he comes to the Holy Spirit, and remember that we have mentioned how the Holy Spirit was not, you know, articulated as clearly in the earlier creeds.

[52 : 03] Listen to what Origen says, he says, then again, the apostles delivered this doctrine, that the Holy Spirit is united in honor and dignity with the Father and the Son. Well, that makes sense, that's Trinitarian, but then he says, in regard to him, it is not yet clearly known whether he is to be thought of as begotten or unbegotten, or is being himself also a son of God or not.

That's kind of weird for us, we would never call the Holy Spirit another son of God, that's odd, but these are matters which we must investigate to the best of our power from Holy Scripture, inquiring with wisdom and diligence.

So note that he is saying, we've got to go to the Scriptures to figure this out, and we need to use our wisdom, our reason, to try and figure this out. You can see how a statement like this could make later Christians very uncomfortable, the idea of even suggesting that the Holy Spirit might be a begotten Son of God, might really upset some people.

This is classic origin because he doesn't actually say it, he just suggests it, but then affirms we have to follow the Scriptures as we're applying our reason.

This does highlight the fact that for whatever reason, the nature of the Holy Spirit, while part of the Trinity and you have all these triune expressions in early Christianity is unclear.

[53 : 31] It's not as clearly articulated as the divinity of Jesus is or the divinity of the Father is. And we will find out that eventually they're going to have some major creeds that address these points and we'll find out that these creeds are, this one creed in particular is derived from the Scriptures, is looking at the Scriptures and applying them.

And the question of why the Holy Spirit wasn't emphasized, we just have to kind of guess on this. My thought is probably because it just wasn't disputed.

The deity of Christ was disputed. The humanity of Christ was disputed. You know, the final judgment was disputed. These are things that they're emphasizing, but the Holy Spirit, there wasn't really big debates about that in the early church, and so it was kind of left unaddressed.

That, again, it might feel a little weird to us, but there are points of emphasis. For instance, if you read the Creed of Afrahat of Persia, he's writing in this environment in Persia where there's this heavily Jewish audience, and his creed is clearly directed at Christians coming out of Judaism.

And he says all sorts of stuff that you probably wouldn't dream of saying in a creed, but he's saying it because of the context he's in. I think that's probably what's happening. I'm here to, I can stick around and talk for a few more minutes, but I want to make sure we can get down to church.

[54 : 57] So let me just wrap up. Next week, we're going to look at the Nicene Creed, which is the big one. It's the big one. And then we will, I think, John, are you doing the Apostles Creed after that?

if I'm doing the Apostles Creed next, whatever that is. Okay. Yes. But I think probably. Okay. Okay. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we thank you for this opportunity to study the creeds and to be reminded of the authority of your word in the scriptures.

Lord, I pray that these creeds, like Tyler said, would be hearing aids for us, highlighting important parts of the faith that perhaps we have underemphasized or misemphasized. Lord, I pray that you would encourage us, you would bless our worship with you downstairs with the congregation.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit, we pray. In the name of Jesus, amen. Amen. Oh, yes.