

March 1, 2009 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND
TITLE: I BELIEVE (Apostles' Creed #1)

One of the popular misconceptions when talking about beliefs is that we should affirm a person's beliefs, regardless of what those beliefs are. Certainly we must be willing to listen to and affirm others, but not necessarily all beliefs. **Beliefs**, are important, because they **dictate how we live**. We do not all believe the same things and in our listening we must carefully examine the source of our beliefs.

In the next several weeks I invite you to join me as we consider some core statements of those who are followers of Jesus Christ. Specifically, we will be using the Apostles' Creed as our reference.

Now to some this may sound very strange, coming from the mouth of a Baptist pastor. **Baptists** are historically and notoriously **noncreedal**. Early Baptists **disliked the controversies between various groups** often associated with the creeds. They also believed that **creeds could limit new revelation by the Holy Spirit** into the scriptures. Baptists have been criticized, persecuted and even martyred for their desire to follow the New Testament as they believe the Holy Spirit guides. Baptist resistance to creeds also stems from their conviction that the **words from peoples' mouths must not be separate from a living faith**. Right words do not necessarily indicate a personal relationship with God.

Creeds were used for three chief purposes: 1) as a **guide for preaching and teaching**, for example, with a baptismal candidate, 2) as an affirmation as to **what one understands and believes about scripture** and 3) as a **standard to define true teaching from false teaching** about God. To some extent creeds are still used for these purposes.

Most Baptists would affirm the basic creeds like the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. **Baptists prefer, however, to define their beliefs as a *statement or confession of faith***, to make the distinction from a creed and how they were often used. You can find such a statement adopted by our own North American Baptist Conference, copies in the literature rack or online at the nabconference.org website.

So why am I using the Apostles' Creed as a basis for teaching? First, it is a basic, although certainly not complete, **statement of faith that has been accepted by Christians** throughout the centuries and across denominational lines. Second, many seem to have lost the basic moorings which tie them to the foundations of the Christian faith and are adrift on a sea of *spirituality*, blowing wherever the winds may take them. They **haven't really thought about what they believe**.

My first remembrance of the Apostles' Creed dates from worship services in the Presbyterian church in my home community. Our family was active in the Baptist church, but occasionally we would join my grandmother for worship. They did things differently. One of those different things was reciting the Apostles' Creed.

In our hymn book you will find it listed as #137. (Read together.) How many remember reciting this statement when you were growing up or attending another church? How many never remember hearing or seeing this before today?

The Apostles' Creed is a simple statement. The form we know likely dates from the early sixth century, but the various phrases can be found in theological formulas dating back to 100 A.D. Although the creed does not come from the hands of the apostles who spent three plus years with Jesus, it does reflect the words they taught in the Bible.

The word *creed* means *belief*. Let's consider three questions in light of the opening words, *I believe*.

- What do I believe?

If someone were to ask you what you believe, how would you respond? No doubt you would ask that person to be a little more specific.

The Bible says, *Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.* Hebrews 11:6 When the word *believe* or *belief* is used in the Bible, it is related to the word *faith*, and often has the meaning of *trust*. This verse talks about pleasing God, coming to Him, believing He exists and rewards those who earnestly seek Him. This verse indicates God as personal, active and One who notices and cares about us. We also learn that God has some kind of standard by which He is pleased or, we presume, not pleased.

What do you believe about God, about the Bible, about Jesus, about the Holy Spirit, about what happens after one dies, about how one can have a relationship with God? What do you believe?

- What is the source of my belief?

Jesus was repeatedly asked His source of authority for what He did and taught. What is behind what you believe?

The Bible says in the book of John, *These (things) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* John 20:31 John, the one who wrote this gospel writes about the reason for his book, so that people will believe Jesus is the Christ (Anointed One, i.e. Messiah). Christ alludes to the Jewish hope and the Old

Testament. John identifies the Christ as the Son of God. Jesus has a connection with God. John says that belief leads to life. What is this life?

In another book of the Bible we read, *This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.* 1 John 5:11-12 This life is called *eternal life*. We also learn that somehow this life is *in* the Son. Those who have Him, have life and those who do not have Him, do not have this life.

The apostle Paul wrote these words to the followers of Jesus in Corinth, a mere twenty years after Jesus walked this earth. *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.* 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 Paul says that what he is sharing with them he *received*, a technical term for an accepted set of statements widely circulated and known among other followers of this Jesus. Paul identifies Jesus as Christ (Messiah) and that He died for sins, was buried and raised the third day according to what is written in the Old Testament (the Scriptures). He points out that many people saw Him, including many who are still alive.

Near the end of his life Paul reminds his friend Timothy that the source of belief is God and His work through His Son Jesus. The Scriptures (what we call the Bible) are the written record of what God has done. *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* 2 Timothy 3:17

The source of what we believe about God is this book. What is the source of what you believe? Is it CNN or Rush Limbaugh?

- What does my life say about what I believe?

There is a **difference in believing something or someone exists and letting that belief direct my life.** For example how many of you believe there is a football team called the Minnesota Vikings? Now, how many of you would say that the Minnesota Vikings are your team? Do you see the difference?

A lot of people say they believe in God, but do not, nor do they have any desire to, follow Him. The writer James challenges us about the connection of faith and works/deeds, using this example. *You believe that there is one God? Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.* James 2:19 (cf. vss. 14-26)

Demons are followers of the devil, not of God. They believe God exists. They even believe in one God, not a whole bunch of gods. In fact they KNOW He exists, but they do not follow Him. They follow another.

One of the reasons Baptists have been hesitant or resistant to formally adopt the various creeds is that too many times people say the right words, but do not live by them. There is a **difference between *believing that* and *believing in***. Often when people say they believe in something, what they really mean is they **believe that** something exists or happened. *Believing in* something or Someone, means that I place my trust in that One.

Right words are important, but a life that reflects those words is even more vital. That is what James is getting at in the context of that verse in chapter 2. In essence he says that **you can tell what a person believes by looking at his/her life.**

When you say, *I believe*, do your actions back it up? Jesus said that we recognize whether people are false or true based on the fruit of their lives (cf. Matthew 7:15-23).

How many of us believe in Santa Claus? Then why do you buy so many presents or think we must? Why do we put up decorations of Santas and sleights and reindeer? Maybe we really do believe. I'm having some fun so that we will think about the question. **We live what we believe. Take a look at how a person lives and you will find out what he/she believes.**

The Bible says, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* John 3:16

Conclusion. This week I ask that you wrestle with the three questions: What do I believe? What is the source of my belief? What does my life say about what I believe? Invite a friend to our series on the Apostles' Creed. (Pray.)