

**SERMON TITLE-** "Our Confession Of Faith- The Introduction"

**TEXT-** 1 Peter 3:15-16

**PREACHED AT-** Neighbourhood Church

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We are beginning a new series for the fall. As we told you last week this series will be on our MB Confession of Faith.

Now I expect that you are wondering what a CoF is and then why we should take a whole series to talk about it.

Now like any good teacher, even if you aren't asking those questions I am going to answer them. I hope that at the end of this you will agree that they are important questions.

### **What Is A Confession Of Faith?**

The answer is very simple- it is statement of what we believe. And from the beginning of time the statements were very simple. When God gave the Law to Israel, through Moses, there was clear statement of their belief. This statement is repeated numerous times in the OT but its most famous form is the Shema which orthodox Jews repeat at least twice a day-

**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Deuteronomy 6:4**

This was it. It effectively said, "God is God." This was a statement that a Jewish person was taught to repeat from earliest childhood. The proof of the statement was also very simple- those who believed this to be true would do what God told them to do- those who didn't do what God said, obviously didn't believe.

This never really changes throughout the Scriptures. In the NT the part that was added was Jesus as God's Son and so the NT version was this-

**Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:16**

That too was repeated again and again in the NT. For example-

**Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" John 20:28**

That confession was the NT version of the Shema. Jesus came to earth and came as God's Son.

What happened next however was very important to the NT story. Jesus was not accepted as God's Son or the Messiah.

Jesus was killed but to as a proof that He was God's Son, Jesus rose from the dead.

This then was also part of the NT CoF and there are several version of this in the NT.

For example-

**For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,  
that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,  
that he was buried,  
that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures . . . 1  
Corinthians 15:3-4**

For the first couple of centuries nothing very much changed but things did and

longer versions appeared. More about that later.

So what is a CoF? It is a statement of what we believe.

### **Why Should We Work At This?**

There are 2 answers to this question.

**#1 we need to know what we believe.** This is obviously important since it defines what a Christian is and is not.

A Christian is not just anything we chose to attribute to the label.

Actually a lot of people approach the question of being a Christian that way. If someone they like and admire is a Christian, then they want to claim that title.

On the other hand if there is someone who does crazy and embarrassing things- and does so while claiming to be a Christian [such as the Florida pastor who was on the news this week for threatening to have a Koran burning on 9/11 this year] then people say things like, "I'm not a Christian if he's one."

It doesn't work that way. We aren't Christians or not because someone else is or isn't.

A Christian is someone who is something. At its core level a Christian is someone who believes that Jesus is Lord and then lives accordingly.

Once we sit down and begin this preparation process we need to think about what we are going to say. We can quickly learn to recite things. This is part of an education. We teach children to spell words and recite the times tables. Those things simply need to be drilled into our minds.

But if they never go from being things that we recite we are nothing more than parrots. What we are able to say need to mean something. Explaining this pushes us to actually understand what we are saying.

Another simple expression of this is Romans 10:9

**That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9**

So knowing what we believe is obviously very important. A person is not a Christian because they live in a certain country, are part of a certain family, or hang out with certain people- a Christian is someone who believes something and lives accordingly. Just as in the OT, just saying a phrase proves very little unless saying it is also reflected in how we actually live.

**Second**, there is another side to this. Not only do we need to know what we believe, we need to be able to explain what we believe.

### **#2. We Need To Tell Others**

This challenge is described in these words-

**But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 1 Peter 3:15-16**

We do we need to explain our faith? Because being a Christian means you are on a mission. You have heard the Good News and if you believe it you will pass it on. The Good News is not like drinking for the mythical fountain of Youth and living forever no matter what happens to anyone else.

If you believe the Good News passing that Good News on is just part of the deal. It isn't optional.

By the way, it is one of the reasons we did our church expansion. We didn't do it because we could no longer fit into the old building. We did it because we need to invite others to join us on this challenge.

Notice, first of all, that how we live is critically important to this equation. Being a Christian is never about being able to recite certain phrases- but as Peter explains here we also need to be able to "be prepared to give and answer to everyone."

I have included a second verse here, because Peter is very aware that people who think they know something important, that other people don't know, have a way of being very annoying and it is better if we aren't among those of whom people say, "If he's a Christian, I'm out."

To do this, however, is added the necessity of preparing ourselves to give answers.

But before we do this I want to break down "everyone" just a bit. To prepare we need to think about who everyone looks like.

Let me suggest 2 ways to see everyone.

### **#1. For our children**

As God's people an assignment of primary importance is teaching our children. We of course need to teach them to say the right words but we also need them to understand what they are saying. For us to talk about those words, we will need to prepare ourselves to answer the questions that they will and should have.

There are very few things as enlightening as trying to explain what we believe to our children.

So as we go through this, think about looking into a child's eyes and explaining what you believe.

But there is another category-

### **#2. For our neighbours**

In the Bible, there are 3 categories, I, we, and they.

Our neighbours are the "they" of the world. It is easy to not want to think about "them." But from the very beginning God's people are never allowed to stop at "we." From the very beginning there were 2 primary commandments.

#1. Love God with all your heart

#2. Love your neighbour as yourself

One of Jesus' first clarifications was our neighbour was a very big category- in fact it is everyone beyond the "we."

So the challenge we are given is- we are to be prepared to explain the reasons for our belief, to our neighbours.

That is a big challenge.

That is what a CoF is all about. It is a way to talk about what we believe for

ourselves, our families and our neighbours.

What kind of questions are your neighbours asking about the hope that you have?

Now if that makes sense to you, there is another very important question that follows-

### **How Do We Do This?**

One way to do this is simply to say, "I believe the Bible" and to pull out statements that seem to be right for the moment. We could, for example, simply take one of the Biblical statements we listed above and say, "That's it!"

That would be good but to some degree it means we don't have to think about it- and thinking about it is a good idea.

What makes a CoF special is when we first, put it into our own words and second, use words that address the situation we are in. After all the Biblical statements were given in a context and as good as these statements are, they also show that each situation has unique needs and challenges.

As the years went by different challenges emerged and over the years the church took the Biblical CoFs and put them together to make fuller packages.

One of the earliest CoFs is the Apostle's Creed-

### **Apostles Creed [early version 215 AD]**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's 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.**

Now just a quick factoid is probably important. This version was from some time after 600AD and there is no indication that it even existed before 200AD, but it does represent an early basic CoF and is one that Western [as opposed to Greek Orthodox] churches still use today.

What is important to note however is, that as the years rolled by and the Gospel was preached in different places there was a need to emphasize different things.

This was particularly the case as various heresies rose up with the church.

The issue that the Apostle's Creed notably tackles is the question of the Church. This might have been added later but it is also the reason that the Greek Orthodox Church

does not use this. The Apostle's Creed was an argument against rival sections of the church that had arisen. The creed was used to let people know that it was not OK to try different churches.

As various other heresies rose the Creeds added more and more sections and before long they became exceedingly long. The Creeds with their explanations become huge books rivaling the Bible itself in size, at times.

It is in that spirit that our own denomination, at its inception, wrote out its CoF and from that beginning we have ours. It is not one of the long ones and in fact on the back of our bulletin is a short version.

But this all began with the question- if we are going to write up a CoF, where do we start and what form does it take?

I hope that as we go on this journey through our CoF it will be a journey of articulation for you- it will be a time when you think through for yourself what it is you believe and also that you will be finding ways of putting what you believe into words that make sense coming from your own mouth when you are speaking to your own family and neighbours.

At the end of the day that is what a CoF is supposed to do.

Now if I gave each of you a pen and paper this morning and asked you to write down what you believed, in your own words- how would you do it?

Let me suggest 2 approaches

1. Make a list of the facts. That is probably where people who have been exposed to creeds would go. That is, after all, how the creeds are constructed. They have lists of articles describing various topics.

But if you have not been exposed to various creeds you probably won't start there. Your creed will probably be much more like the simple statements of Peter and Thomas that we looked at earlier.

Or you might-

2. Tell the story about how you came to faith. In fact in the NT this is the way that it happened. Over and over again, what Christians believed was explained in a narration of events.

It began with the first sermon of the new church that Peter preached in Acts 2. The sermon was not a list of facts that people needed to get- the sermon was the narration of God's work on earth.

In short, in the NT the preachers told long stories and gave short lists of facts.

In the course of history that has been reversed and we now have long lists of facts and fewer stories.

Of course this is not about choosing one over the other but using each to its advantage.

Those trained in the Western Church tradition are most familiar with the lists of facts and will see its advantages. Those who are not, however, will probably struggle with this as a way of explaining what we believe.

In our MB tradition, we followed the way that the church has been doing things for the last 1700 years and we wrote out our CoFs in the pattern that had been set.

In the MB legacy both ways have been used but like most Westerns we gravitate to the lists of facts but as we are an international body as well, just listing the facts has shown its weakness and so when ICOMB took on the challenge of a CoF that was more than Western, not surprisingly it took a different form.

As we go through our CoF we will be using both

### **Creeds and Confessions**

**Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:  
He appeared in a body,  
was vindicated by the Spirit,  
was seen by angels,  
was preached among the nations,  
was believed on in the world,  
was taken up in glory. 1 Timothy 3:16**

### **The "Rule of Faith" as recorded by Irenaeus, ca 190**

**. . . this faith: in one God, the Father Almighty, who made the heaven and the earth and the seas and all the things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was made flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who made known through the prophets the plan of salvation, and the coming, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily ascension into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his future appearing from heaven in the glory of the Father to sum up all things and to raise anew all flesh of the whole human race . . .**

### **Nicene Creed [325 AD]**

**We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.  
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father.  
Through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,**

and was made man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.  
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.  
He has spoken through the Prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

And

**Athanasian Creed [500 AD]**

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled; without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinities, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion; to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Essence of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Essence of his Mother, born in the world. Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of Essence; but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the God the Father Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies; And shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the Catholic Faith; which except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved.