

Christians Standing Together

The Non-Negotiable Truths of the Gospel Proclaimed by Christians of all Traditions

Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be able to **stand firm**. (2 Chron 20:20)

I have taken a **stand**, and I will publicly praise the Lord. (Psalm 26:12)

Be on guard. **Stand** true to what you believe. Be courageous. Be strong. (1 Cor 16:13)

We want to work together with you so you will be full of joy as you **stand firm** in your faith. (2 Cor 1:24)

Our responsibility is never to oppose the truth, but to **stand** for the truth at all times. (2 Cor 13:8)

The prayers of Jesus

Jesus invites us to ask and pray in his name. **The Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.** (John 15:16 NLT)

Yet we discover that one of the most impassioned prayers of Jesus appears to be unanswered. At the Last Supper, in the intensity of the moment, **Jesus prayed for unity among us**, three times – and the prayer seems to have been unanswered.

John 17:11: *Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.*

John 17:21: *...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

John 17:22: *I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.*

Unanswered Prayer?

Rather than rejoice in the unity of the Christian family, we find ourselves praying, *Heavenly Father, Look mercifully upon the broken body of your Church. Draw its members to you and to one another by the bands of your love, that in its restored unity the nations might be healed and all mankind will come to glorify your holy name. Amen.* (From New Every Morning)

So is the prayer unanswered? If so, why? Is it our fault? Have we thwarted God's purposes?

Or could it be that the time for the prayer to be fully answered is just arriving? One member of Maranatha has undertaken over four years' scholarly research into this question and has discovered recent significant progress.

Today this prayer of Jesus is closer to being answered than at any other time since the Day of Pentecost.

The history of God's people is a story with some sad elements. Tragically, we reached a low point when it was thought worthy to put each other to death because of our different traditions. But we have moved on from **conflict**, then to **competition**, on to **co-existence** and **co-operation**, and now to **fellowship and sharing**. **But what next?**

The Holy Spirit seems to be moving believers in all traditions to discover their unity in Christ and their common faith in him. This is not a matter of compromise and giving ground. **This is a unity based in truth and love.**

Our Christian Faith – Prime Truths

More and more Christians of every tradition are finding that we hold the same prime truths.

The prime truths held in common by the three Christian traditions (Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant), are:

- **Personal faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord.**
- **Submission to the Scriptures as the supreme authority for faith and conduct.**
- **Confession of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 AD.**

These beliefs are what unite us as Christians, and what distinguish us from other non-orthodox groups and other faiths. **They also distinguish us from those who wish to compromise or deny the truths of the historic faith – once given (Jude 1:3).** More and more Christians are saying – “hold to what you find a blessing, but **recognise the essentials** which we all hold and don't use **secondary** issues to judge or divide the body of Christ.”

Creeds

Creeds have been used from the earliest days of the Christian community. They are **memorable summaries of the Basics of the Faith.** (*Deut 6:4-5; Mark 12:29-3; Romans 10:9*)

The Constantinople-Nicene Creed
encapsulates the Basic Biblical Beliefs and is a Christian statement of faith that is the only ecumenical creed because it is accepted by the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and major Protestant churches.

Encyclopaedia Britannica

The Constantinople-Nicene Creed

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, one in Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered, died, and was buried. On the third day he rose again in fulfilment of the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated on 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 worshipped 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.*

**The words "and the Son" are not used in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition.*

THE TWELVE PRIME TRUTHS

This Creed summarises the twelve prime truths of the Christian Community.

1. God is Trinity

The Nicene Creed, did not invent the idea of the Trinity, but was written to clarify and assert the doctrine. The word "trinity" is not found in the Bible, but the doctrine is clearly taught. (*Matt 28:19*)

The Bible describes God as one. **Christians believe just as strongly as Jews and Muslims that God is one.** The word 'one' does not mean a stark singularity, but **oneness in unity**, rather as we describe an egg as one – but it has three distinct parts, yolk, white and shell, without any of which we would no longer have an egg.

The Trinity is defined as–

- There is one God.
- The Father is God.
- The Holy Spirit is God
- Jesus is God.
- The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are equal and separate persons.

So God is **ONE** unity in fellowship and love. Yet within this fellowship which is God are the persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Three PERSONS:

A person is someone who has a mind, a will and emotions. That is, they are able to think, remember and reason. They are able to make decisions and commitments and they are able to experience feelings - pain, pleasure etc. **When we apply this description to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit we find each is a person.**

The Father is God (*Gal 1:1; 1 Peter 1:3*).

Jesus is God (*Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1; John 1:1; John 1:14; John 8:23-24, 58–59; John 10:30*). He was put to death because he claimed to be God (*John 5:16-8*). Isaiah says that the Messiah that will be born will be the MIGHTY GOD (*Isa 9:6*).

The Holy Spirit is God

(*Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor 3:16; Heb 9:14*).

Each member of the Trinity is identified by Jesus (*John 14:16-26; 15:26*).

St Paul writes (2 Cor 13:14): **The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, The Love of God the Father and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us evermore.** This is one of the earliest Christian writings and it shows the doctrine of the Trinity was clearly established.

2. God is Creator

Western society asserts that there is no God and that everything has a natural cause. The creed says the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were each involved in creation (*Gen 1:1-2; John 1:1-3; Col 1:15-17*). The evidence is in creation (*Rom 1: 18-20, 25*).

3. The Bible is the Word of God

The Bible is **inspired** and **reliable** and has the **Authority of God**. The Creed stands on the Bible and refers to the Bible as its authority.

The Bible possesses–

- **Inspiration** (*2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21*).
- **Reliability** (*Prov 30:5-6; John 17:17; 10:35*).
- **Authority** (*Prov 3:5-7; Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23*).

4. God made People for Relationship

Men and women are created for fellowship or communion with God. Unlike any of the other creatures, we have a fundamental likeness to God, and are created in the "image of God" (*Gen 1:26-27*).

Man meets and talks with God in the Garden of Eden (*Gen 2:15-17*).

5. The Virgin Birth

Matthew records the details of the virgin birth in a form which is factual narrative and not clothed in symbolism (*Matt. 1:18-25*). The testimony of Mary is that she is the virgin (*Luke 1:34-35*).

Nowhere does the Bible say that belief in the virgin birth is essential for salvation. However those who reject this doctrine usually go on to reject other foundational salvation doctrines.

6. Christ is both God and Man

Christ, the Word, was made flesh and blood, and lived on earth (*John 1:14; Heb.2.14; Phil 2.7; Rom 8: 3; 1 John 4:2*). He was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead (*Rom 1:4*). He has the qualities of God. He is omnipresent – present where two or three are gathered in his name (*Matt 18:20*). He is with us always (*Matt 28:20*). He is omniscient – he knows all things (*John 2:24-25, 21:17; Rev 2:23*). He is Omnipotent – the All-powerful God (*Is 9:6; Phil 3:20; Rev 1:18; Heb 1:3; Col 1:7*). He is Immutable – unchanging. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (*Heb1:10-12, 13:8*). He forgives sins (*Mark 2:5; John 8:11*). He raises the dead (*John 5:21*).

7. The Meaning of Christ's Death

Atonement means to be made one again. It refers to the intimate relationship of God the Father with his human children. That relationship was lost and broken. Through the death of Christ the relationship is restored and we can be at one with the Father. Jesus achieved our salvation by taking our place and offering himself as a sacrifice.

1 Peter 2:24: He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

1 Peter 3:18: For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

God's justice and holiness are satisfied. Sin has not been put under the carpet – but under the blood of Christ. Believers are saved and forgiven. God's love was demonstrated. The Father sent the Son who laid down his life – not for friends, but for sinners.

8. Salvation by Grace

All are sinners (*Rom 3:23*). Sin results in death (*Rom 6:23*). God is the God of love as well as the God of Justice (*Titus 3:4-6; John 3:16-17*). We cannot save ourselves (*Mark 10:26-27*). Salvation is a gift of Grace (*Rom 6:23; Eph 2:8-9*). God has revealed his way of salvation (*John 3:16*). Jesus has

won salvation for us by his death (*2 Cor 5: 14-21*). We must trust in Jesus alone for salvation, there is no other name that we can trust (*Acts 4:12*). Jesus deals with the penalty and the power of sin (*Rom 5:9-10*).

9. The Bodily Resurrection of Christ

The Resurrection of Jesus is an absolute necessity for faith. If it is not true then there is no basis to our faith (*1 Cor 15:14-17, 56-57*). **Jesus said his resurrection would be the key proof of his authority** – no other sign would be as great or final as this. He is virtually saying, "If you want a sign, kill me, and after three days I will rise to life" (*Matt 12:38-40*).

This sign distinguishes Christ from all other religious leaders or people who have made claims about their powers or identity, as something special. No one else is in this category.

It was an historic event, not just a spiritual experience as if he came alive in the hearts of the first disciples. CS Lewis said even before he became a Christian he was aware that the New Testament was not written like mythology. It was written in the style and tone of eyewitnesses of historical events (*Matt 28:1-9*). **The Resurrection of Christ is fundamental to salvation** (*Rom 10:9*).

10. The Bodily Return of Christ

St Peter prophesies that a feature of the last days will be that the return of Christ will be denied (*2 Peter 3:2-10*). But the teaching of the New Testament concerning the return of Christ is clear and fundamental to the gospel. It mentions this on average every 15 verses. **It is the first petition of the Lord's Prayer: 'Thy Kingdom Come.'**

His return will be of a different nature and purpose to his first coming. He will not come to die for sinners, but to gather his redeemed and rule as King. His coming will be open and recognised – with every eye able to see his visible return. It will be personal and in majesty. It will be distinct from his coming at Pentecost, Communion, Conversion or at the death of a Christian (*Acts 1:11; John 14:1-5; 1 Thes 4:14-18*).

WHEN? No-one knows the hour or day (*Matt 25:13*).

All orthodox Christians believe that he will come visibly and bodily. But believers do differ over details and interpretation of the prophecies.

11. The Person and His Holy Spirit

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit, who lives within every Christian, is a Person and that He is God. He was involved in creation (*Gen 1:2*). He is the source of life (*Gen 2:7*). He will be with us for

ever (*John 14:16*). He lives with us and in us (*John 14:17*). He teaches us (*John 14:26, 15:26*). He convicts us of what is wrong (*John 16:8*). He brings glory to Christ (*John 16:14*). He guides the church (*Acts 13:2-4; 1 Cor 12:4-11*). He security-marks every believer (*Eph 4:30*).

12. The Church - its Nature and Ministry

The Church is Christ's body and agency for bringing in the Kingdom of God (*Matt 28:18-20; Eph 1.22, 23*). People do not join the Church, but are added to it by God as they come to faith (*Acts 2.41, 47*). It is the company of all believers (*1 Cor 12:13*). There are many expressions of the Church and different traditions – but what unites is greater than what separates (*Gal 3:28*).

Christ provided leadership for the Church (*Eph 4:11-12*). Christ also gave sacraments – means of experiencing his grace – as in Communion and Baptism (*Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:23-26; Matt 28:19*).

BELIEF AND BEHAVIOUR– Creed and Conduct

The Apostles never give teaching on what we are to believe without also giving instruction about how we are to behave. The implications of the creeds are to be lived out in everyday life in the world. The Church is meant to reflect the harmony of the Trinity, complete in unity, rich in diversity.

In the past people have tried to express the unity of Christians by forming new “Confessions of faith” for members to believe, or by trying to form “pure” churches made up of those thought to be in right relationship with God. Both of these approaches have utterly failed.

Unity is not uniformity - which would mean the loss of many insights and blessings. What is desirable is unity in diversity as we recognise Christians in other traditions. We should accept and love one another deeply – as Christ commanded. **And STAND TOGETHER in his name.**

Rom 12:10: Love each other with genuine affection, take delight in honouring each other

MAKING SENSE OF THE WORLD

Each person has their own unique thoughts about the meaning of life, about how to behave toward

others and what is morally acceptable. These values tend to be matters of personal preference, shaped by one's culture, upbringing, education, experience and propaganda.

Society lives with this confusion of opinions by being cynical about any that claim to be absolute truth. In rejecting the possibility of a personal God, there is no one to whom we are accountable, nor authority to determine right from wrong. ***In a Godless society, life is without purpose, hope or shared values.***

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

1. God is separate from the world, but He is not absent. He is present and involved as Sovereign, loving and holy. He is the Prime Truth.
2. The universe is orderly but open to intervention by God. It is his creation.
3. Humans are created with intelligence and personality; able to know and relate to others. They are made in the image of God and each person has purpose, meaning, dignity and great worth. Human life belongs to God. *Gen 9.6*
4. Sin and Salvation are a key part of the Christian worldview. We were created good but sinned, now through the work of Christ we can be redeemed and forgiven. But we are also free to reject the offer of grace. After death there is a judgment and those who have their trust in Christ will be raised to eternal life.
5. We are moral beings with social capacity and responsibilities. We are spiritual beings and able to know and relate to God BECAUSE God is not impersonal or silent. He speaks today and reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
6. What is right and wrong is not determined by each individual or by each society. Morality transcends all societies and doesn't change with time. God is the standard for right and wrong.
7. For Christianity, history has a goal. It is meaningful and God has determined its end.

A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

Secular society rejects the “Christian worldview” – accusing us of *imposing* our beliefs on others and condemning us as *intolerant*. However, our worldview is based in truth, which should be affirmed with grace and courtesy. Though this will not prevent strong reactions. **Just by holding our truths, we challenge the validity of other claims to truth.**