



Essential Christian Doctrine



Outline

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1. The standard
 - a. General revelation (nature)
 - Psalm 19
 - Romans 1:20
 - b. Special revelation (Scripture)
 - 2 Peter 1:21
 - 2 Timothy 3:16
2. Heresy and orthodoxy
 - a. Heresy
 - b. Orthodoxy
3. Four universal creeds
 - a. Apostles' Creed
 - b. Nicene Creed
 - c. Athanasian Creed
 - d. Definition of Chalcedon
4. A dozen essential doctrines
 - a. God's unity
 - Deuteronomy 6:4
 - 1 Corinthians 8:5–6
 - b. The Trinity
 - 2 Thessalonians 1:2
 - John 1:1
 - Matthew 28:19

- c. Human depravity
 - Romans 3:9–20
 - John 3:3
- d. The virgin birth
 - Luke 1:34–35, Matthew 1:18
- e. The sinlessness of Christ
 - Hebrews 4:15
 - 1 Peter 2:22
 - 2 Corinthians 5:21
- f. Christ's deity...
- g. ...and Christ's humanity
 - John 1:14
 - Hebrews 1:1–8
 - Galatians 4:4–5
 - 1 John 4:2–3
- h. God's grace
 - Romans 5:10
 - Titus 3:5
- i. Faith
 - Ephesians 2:8–9
- j. Christ's atoning death
 - Romans 3:25–26
- k. Jesus' bodily resurrection
 - 1 Corinthians 15:1–6
- l. Christ's second coming
 - Acts 1:11
 - Revelation 1:7

Key Terms

Confession (from Latin *confiteri*, “acknowledge”) Like creeds, confessions are an active acknowledgement of the church’s faith and teachings. “Confessions of faith” often include both creedal declarations and statements summarizing the distinctive teachings of a particular denomination or group of believers.

Creed (from Latin *credo*, “I believe”) A simple summary of beliefs. Creeds are easy to memorize and flexible to teach.

Doctrine (from Latin *doctrina*, “teaching,” “learning”) A belief that a group holds as true. Christian doctrines organize and explain the beliefs the church learns from the Bible.

Heresy (from Greek *hairesis*, “choice,” “faction”) A teaching that contradicts another teaching that has been accepted as the norm; the opposite of orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy (from Greek *ortho*, “straight,” and *doxa*, “belief, opinion”) The opposite of heresy. Irenaeus (AD 130–200) used the word orthodox to characterize his own teachings, with which most other Church Fathers agreed, and the word heresy to define those of his adversaries. When Orthodox is capitalized (as in Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox) it refers to the church bodies of Eastern Europe and the Middle East that divided from the churches aligned with Rome in the Great Schism of AD 1054.

Before the Session

☞ *Prepare:*

- Ask God for guidance and pray for each participant.
- Watch DVD Session 2 on your own.
- Review *Where Did the Creeds Come From?* and *The Apostles' Creed* on the following pages.
- See *Additional Resources* for further study.

☞ *Materials needed for this session:*

- DVD Session 2
- Bible
- A copy of *The Apostles' Creed* for each participant (optional)
- “Christianity” section of *Christianity, Cults & Religions PowerPoint*[®] presentation (optional)

Opening the Session (5 minutes)

As participants enter, display this quote on a whiteboard or projector screen: “In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. And in all things, charity.”— Peter Meiderlin, 17th-century Christian theologian

When everyone gathers, welcome participants and open the session in prayer. If your group has new participants, you may want to briefly cover the purposes of this study (see Session 1).

Watch the DVD SESSION 2 (25 minutes)

- Refer class members to the session outline in their Participant Guides for note taking.

Group Discussion (25 minutes)

If the class is large, divide participants into small groups. If time allows, have a spokesperson from each small group share with the rest of the class some of the insights discussed in their group. (These questions are also located in the Participant Guide.)

1. Which essential doctrines do you think are easiest for people to accept? Which ones are most difficult? Why?
2. Which essential doctrines do you notice cults denying or distorting most often?
3. How does understanding the “bad news” of human depravity help us appreciate the “good news” of Jesus Christ?
4. What is the significance of Jesus’ bodily resurrection?
5. If someone were to ask you, “What is grace?” what would you say?

Expand the Teaching (Optional – 30 minutes)

To expand the session to 90 minutes use one or more of the following activities. (Activity sheets for participants are located in the Participant Guide.)

- **KEY BIBLE VERSES** This study in Scripture can be completed individually or in small groups.
- **QUICK QUIZ** The quiz is based on the content in the DVD session, so you will want to have participants complete it only after watching the DVD.
- **READ A CREED** Read The Apostles' Creed together as a class. (Note: The word *catholic* in the Creed means “universal”.) Discuss its background and the importance of Creeds for believers.
- **PRESENTATION** Teach through the “Christianity” section in *Christianity, Cults & Religions* PowerPoint® presentation. Also see the sections on “Seventh-day Adventism,” “Unification,” “Christian Science,” and “Unity.”

Reaching Out (5 minutes)

Encourage participants to do one or both of the following activities during the coming week.

1. Choose one (or two or more!) of the key Bible verses or any of the Scripture references mentioned in this session to memorize. Memorizing Bible verses will not only be personally edifying, but will be useful to recall on-the-spot when you are in conversation with someone in a cult or another religion.
2. Read the creeds. You can find the texts of the four ecumenical (universal) creeds, as well as various denominational statements of belief, at www.creeds.net. Ask yourself, What does the creed explain about God? How can I use this teaching to discern the truth?

Close the session in prayer.

Key Bible Verses

JOHN 1:1–14

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been

made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” *NIV*

Q Jesus Christ is referred to in this passage as “the Word.” What does this passage reveal about who Jesus Christ was and is?

A **He was God since the beginning (v. 1–2). He is our savior (v. 12). He became human (v. 14). He is the only Son of God (v. 14).**

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–6

“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 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.” *NIV*

Q In your own words, what is the “gospel” that the apostle Paul is reminding his readers of in this passage?

A **Jesus Christ died for our sins; he was buried and then resurrected from the dead; he was seen by many eyewitnesses.**

Quick Quiz ANSWER KEY (Answers in Bold)

- The creeds help believers to:
 - Recognize heresy.
 - Distinguish essentials from nonessentials.
 - Express the faith clearly.
 - (a) and (b)
 - All of the above.**
- True or False? Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, taught that sin, sickness, and death are unreal. **TRUE** (*Christian Science denies the doctrine of human depravity and our need for God's redeeming grace.*)
- The Bible is:
 - Divinely inspired.
 - Preserved by God.
 - A collection of opinions.
 - (a) and (b)**
 - All of the above
- True or False? Mormonism teaches that God has always been God. **FALSE** (*Mormonism affirms that our God was once a man on another world who lived, died, was resurrected, and progressed to Godhood.*)
- The Bible teaches in Ephesians 2:8–9 that it is by grace through faith that we are saved—and that is not from ourselves.

The Apostles' Creed

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.

Where Did the Creeds Come From?

THE APOSTLES' CREED

The apostles did not write the Apostles' Creed. No one knows for certain when this creed was written. References to and quotation of similar statements—known as the “Rule of Faith”—can be found in writings as early as the second century AD. The name “Apostles' Creed” means that the creed contains the Apostolic tradition. The Apostles' Creed is the most universal of all the creeds. Most Christian denominations continue to recite and teach it.

THE NICENE CREED

The greatest doctrinal challenge to the church arose internally. Arius, a priest in Alexandria, suggested that if God begat Jesus, then Jesus had an origin. As such, Jesus did not share in the same divine essence with the Father—making him a lesser god. This teaching became known as Arianism. In AD 325, Constantine called the leaders of the church to participate in a council—that is, an assembly of bishops. They met in the city of Nicaea, in present-day Turkey. The Council of Nicaea, made up of about 300 participants, overwhelmingly voted against the Arian teachings—ancient documents suggest that only three bishops refused to sign their agreement. The council expressed its views about God, Jesus, and the church in the Nicene Creed.

ATHANASIAN CREED

Athanasius was one of the most active opponents of Arius' teachings. His persistence and clear mind helped the church to clarify its positions and write it in a creed, the Nicene Creed. Athanasius' teachings are summarized in the Athanasian Creed. While it is likely that Athanasius did not write it, the creed contains his teachings and main ideas. The Athanasian Creed begins by affirming, “This is what the catholic [or universal] faith teaches: we worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity. We distinguish among the persons, but we do not divide the substance [or essence].” After unpacking these ideas, the creed concludes, “So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.”

DEFINITION OF CHALCEDON

Understanding the incarnation of Jesus—the embodiment of God the Son in human flesh—was one of the greatest challenges for the early church. In AD 451 the Council of Chalcedon (located in today's Turkey) provided a clear statement of the Apostolic teachings concerning Jesus. The Definition of Chalcedon made it clear that Jesus is fully God and fully human, two natures existing in perfect harmony in one person.

(Adapted from *Creeds & Heresies: Then & Now* Rose Publishing www.rose-publishing.com)

Additional Resources

🔪 Books

Know What You Believe by Paul E. Little (Victor, 2003)

Basic Christianity by John R.W. Stott (IVP, 2007)

Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief by Bruce Milne (IVP, 2010)

Conviction Without Compromise: Standing Strong in the Core Beliefs of the Christian Faith by Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes (Harvest House, 2008)

Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith by Wayne Grudem (Zondervan, 1999)

Creeks, Councils and Christ: Did the Early Christians Misrepresent Jesus? by Gerald Bray (Mentor, 2009)

🔪 Internet

Creeks of Christendom www.creeks.net

Early Church www.earlychurch.org.uk

The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration
www.apologeticsindex.org/e02.html

🔪 More from Rose Publishing

Essential Doctrine Made Easy pamphlet (ISBN 9781596361430)

Creeks & Heresies: Then & Now pamphlet (ISBN 9781596363489)

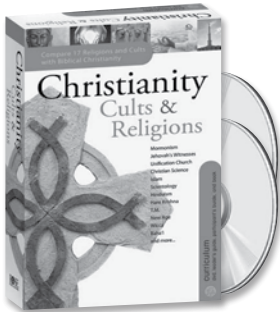
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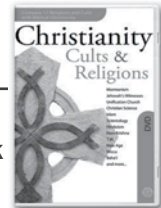
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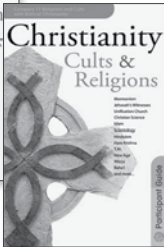
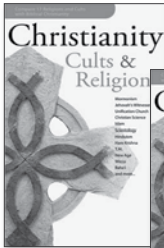
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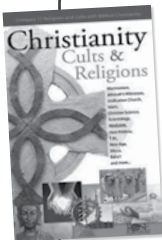


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Participant Guide

- Each participant will need a guide
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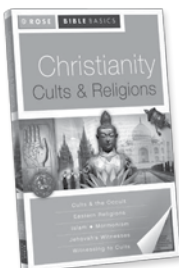
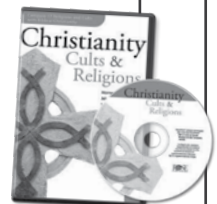
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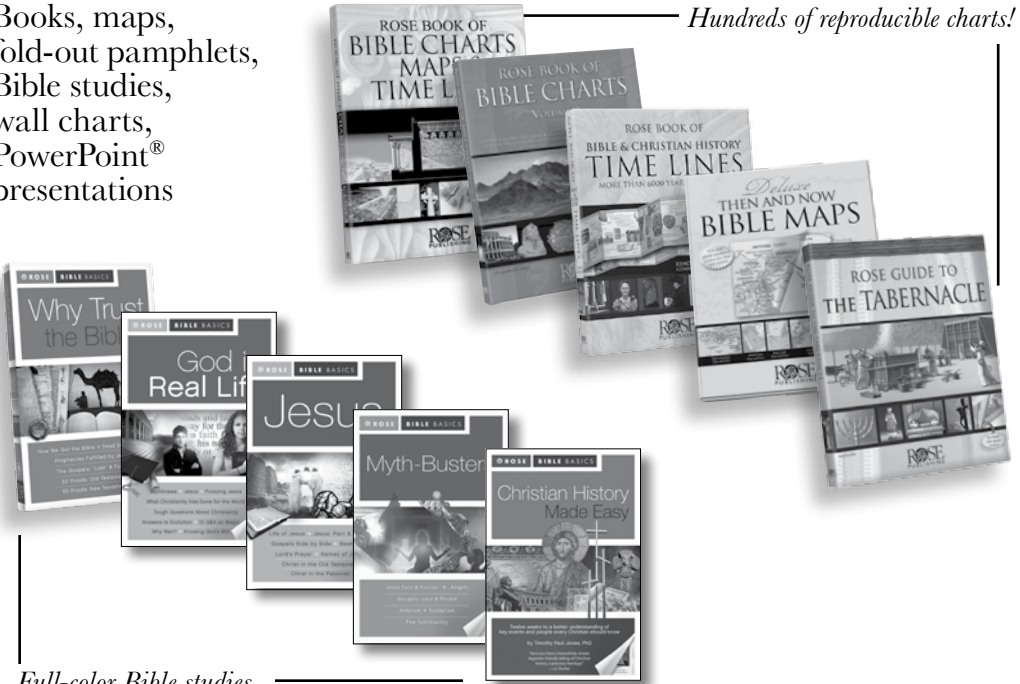
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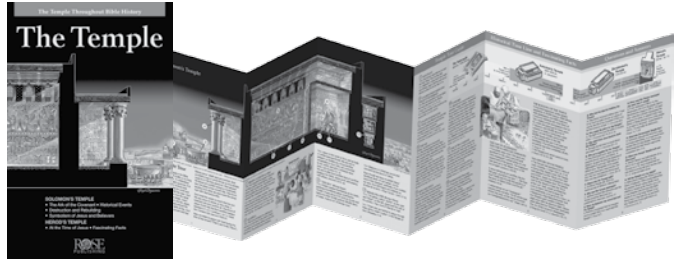
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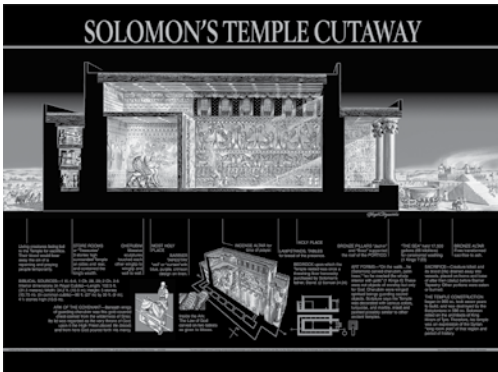


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