

January 2009

To Homegroup Leaders,

Homegroup Plans

Since I started writing the homegroup notes, we've almost always worked sequentially through books of the Bible. This term we're going to try something different. We'll have Bible studies which use the clauses of the Apostles' Creed as a launching off point. In some ways that might make things more challenging for us as leaders, but I hope we'll find it a refreshing change and enjoy getting to grips again with some of the ever-relevant foundations of our faith.

Of course we need to make sure that our homegroups include Bible study and not just discussion of the Apostles' Creed!

We'll also need to work particularly hard at application. We don't just want interesting theoretical discussions of the great truths of the Christian faith. We want to see how they should change the way we think and live and fuel our prayers and praises. We need to live in the light of the truths of the Apostles' Creed not just to recite it or even understand it.

Resources

In addition to my notes, the following might be helpful:

Tim Chester, *I Believe: The Apostle's Creed* 10 Bible studies for individuals or groups Good Book Guide (2007)

Michael Horton, *We Believe: Rediscovering the Essentials of the Apostles' Creed* (Nashville, Word Publishing, 1998)

Alistair McGrath, *I Believe: Exploring the Apostles' Creed* (Downers Grove, IVP, 1991, 1997)

J. I. Packer, *Affirming the Apostles' Creed* (Wheaton, Crossways, 2008) - formerly part of *Growing In Christ* originally published as *I Want To Be A Christian*

George M. Philip, *The Apostles' Creed: What Christians Should Always Believe* (Fearn, Christian Focus, 1990, 1994)

Albert Mohler's MP3 audio sermons on the Apostles' Creed available at:
http://www.albertmohler.com/audio_list.php

I guess it would also be helpful for leaders to look up the relevant doctrines in something like Bruce Milne's *Know The Truth* or an evangelical Systematic Theology such as those by Wayne Grudem, Robert Reymond or Louis Berkhof.

I'm planning to speak in the midweek meeting on "I believe in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: The Apostles' Creed and the Trinity". Please would you invite your group to come along and ask questions.

As ever, I hope my notes will be a helpful resource that you'll use selectively. The great doctrines of the Apostles' Creed are taught in many places in the Bible. Think carefully about how many texts you want your group members to look up. I would suggest you avoid too many cross-references. There is no need to try to be exhaustive: it might be exhausting! There might be times when you want people to get into twos or threes and look up different references and then feedback to the whole group.

Please feel free to be in touch with me if I might be any further help.

Introduction to the Apostles' Creed

A creed is a summary of belief. The word "creed" comes from the Latin, "credo", which means "I believe".

The Apostles' creed is one of the oldest and most widely acknowledged creeds.

The Apostles' Creed had reached an almost fixed form by the 4th Century but there were minor variations until the 7th or 8th Century.

The creed was not actually written by the Apostles, although according to legend, each of the 12 Apostles was responsible for a different clause of the creed. Nevertheless, we will see that it teaches apostolic doctrine, the doctrine of the Bible.

This creed, as with other creeds, does not, of course, have the unique authority of the Scriptures, which are God's words written. Creeds are more or less helpful human summaries of Bible-truth and as such they are fallible and always subject to correction from the Word of God. We believe the Apostles' Creed not just because it is old or approved of by the Church but because it faithfully summarises some of the key teaching of the Bible.

Good creeds can be a useful teaching aid. They can promote Christian unity on the basis of the truth and help to pick out what the most essential core beliefs are, whilst on other things we may agree to differ. Using a creed like this reminds us of our fellowship with Christians down the centuries and around the world who have professed the same faith often using these very words (or translations of them). Creeds also help to combat false teaching since heretics will often claim to believe the Bible but then deny what it teaches. Creeds can crystallise and clarify the issues at stake. Heretics will often reject creeds that teach what the Bible teaches while continuing to insist that they believe the Bible.

The Apostles' Creed

Here is the *Common Worship* (2000) text of the Apostles' Creed. The numbers in brackets indicate the study in which we might tackle that clause.

- (1) I believe in God, the **Father** almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
- (2) I believe in Jesus Christ, his only **Son**, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
- (3) suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead*.
- (4) On the third day he rose again;
- (5) he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
- (6) and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
- (7) I believe in the **Holy Spirit**,
- (8) the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
- (9) the forgiveness of sins,
- (10) the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

* More traditional versions of the creed say "he descended into hell". As we will see when we come to that study, in my view the newer version is theologically preferable and historically defensible.

A more traditional language version of the Apostles' Creed, which some of your group members may know, can be found in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Study 1: “I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.” Homegroup Leaders Notes

Introduce the new series of studies and the Apostles’ Creed to your group using the previous notes. I suggest you read the creed aloud together.

You could begin with a discussion about the creed. **How do people feel about saying a creed? Is there anything in the creed you find strange or difficult? (Is there anything you’d expect to be included that isn’t?) Why might a creed like this be valuable?**

Point out the Trinitarian structure of the creed: “I believe in God the Father..., Son... and ... Holy Spirit”. Invite group members to the midweek meeting when we’ll think further together about the Trinity.

Focus the group’s attention on the clause we are studying in this session.

“**I**” believe – This personal form (“I” rather than “we”) may be because the creed was first used as a confession of faith by adult converts being baptised. It reminds us that faith must be personal and individual. We each need to believe for ourselves. But we also say this creed together. We are united in and by this faith. Faith is not private.

“**believe**” - Biblical faith involves believing certain truths, but it is also trusting God himself and being committed to him. The creed is meant to express trust and confidence in God not merely acceptance of the fact that he exists. Real faith will change the way we live (James 2:19).

“God the Father”

Notice how specific the creed is. This is not just belief in some kind of god or higher force but in the true and living God of the Bible, God the Father (Son and Holy Spirit).

It is clear that God must be personal, not just some higher being or impersonal force since he is Father, Son and Spirit. In his essence God is these inter-personal Trinitarian relationships. This helps to explain why relationships are so important to us since we are made in God’s image.

You might find my first sermon on the Lord’s Prayer “Our Father in heaven” preached on 17/8/08 am helpful. It is available from our audio-co-ordinator or on the church website at: <http://www.holytrinityeastbourne.org.uk/sermons.php>

Who is God the Father of? (Of whom is God the Father?!)

God the Father is basically defined by his relationship with the Son. God the Father is (eternally) the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ before he is our Father.

In a weak sense God is the Father of all by creation (perhaps Malachi 2:10). We are his offspring (Acts 17:28). But the characteristic Biblical way of speaking is only to call God the Father of believers. We are God’s children in a special sense by redemption and adoption. Believers have the rights and privileges of sons (John 1:12-13).

What might it mean to call God Father?

What would you expect a good (or perfect!) Father to be like and do?

E.g., we would expect him to love and care for, protect and provide for his children. Fathers exercise loving authority and discipline over their children.

Be aware that some members of your group might not have known their father or might have had bad experiences of human fatherhood.

Ultimately we need to allow the Bible to teach us what God the Father is like and what human fatherhood should be like. God is not like a human father in every respect: he is not human, for example. God is the true ultimate Father, human fathers are little images of him. (Ephesians 3:14-15).

What does the Bible say about God as Father?

Matthew 5:43-48; 6-8; 7:9-11; Hebrews 12:5-10

What does it mean that God is “almighty”?

God is all powerful, omnipotent. God can do whatever he wants (Psalm 135:6). No one can rival or limit him (Luke 1:37).

(Can God do anything? He can do whatever he wants. God is not just raw power. His power is governed by his wisdom – it is a loving, holy power etc. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2) or sin, which would be untrue to Himself. He cannot do what is logically impossible, like make a square circle or create a stone so heavy he couldn't lift it.)

All power and authority in the world derives from God (Romans 13:1-2).

“creator of heaven and earth” (Genesis 1:1)

The Bible makes it clear that creation is not just the work of God the Father but of the Triune God. God created by his Word, the Lord Jesus Christ (see Genesis 1:1-2 and John 1:1-3). The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters at creation.

“heaven and earth” = all things, nothing is left over – cf. “land and sea” = the whole lot.

What does our belief in God the creator suggest about creation and our attitudes to it?

Creation is good (though now fallen). (Genesis 1:31; 1 Timothy 4:4)

We have a responsibility of stewardship over creation. We are to rule the world under God. (Genesis 1:26-28).

All creation is subject to God's power and will. God owns and rightly rules the world he has made. All people are accountable to God as their Maker.

Creation reflects its creator (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:20).

We must not forget the Creator-creation distinction. God is the uncreated maker of all things. Creation is not somehow part of God. Creation is not to be worshipped.

The fact that God is the creator is a reason to praise him (Revelation 4:11).

Psalm 33 speaks of God as the creator and the Almighty Sovereign ruler. What applications and implications does the Psalm suggest these truths have? What responses does it call for?

Joy and praise (vv1-2). Fear and reverence (v9). Consciousness of his judgement, accountability to Him (vv14-16). Trust, hope and confidence in God alone in the face of enemies (vv16-22)

How do these truths from this part of the creed encourage us and give us confidence?

God is our Almighty Father. He made us and knows us. He is able to take care of us.

Homegroup Leaders' Notes - The Apostles' Creed

Study 2: "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary"

Reading: Matthew 1:18-2:12

The long central section of the creed is all about Jesus. He is at the heart of Biblical faith. Accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour is what defines a Christian believer.

Look at Matthew 1:21. What is the significance of the name "Jesus"?

"Jesus" is the Greek for Joshua and means "God is Saviour". Jesus was given this name because he would save (rescue, deliver) his people from their sins.

What response does Jesus' role of saviour call for from us?

We should trust him, looking to him to rescue us from our sin.

Jesus is called "the Christ" in 1:18 and 2:4. What does "Christ" mean?

"Christ", not a surname but a title or job-description, is the Greek for Messiah and means "anointed one". Anointing with oil was a way of marking someone out as special and chosen, set apart for a particular task. In the Old Testament prophets (messengers from God), priests (who mediated between people and God by sacrifice) and kings (who ruled) were anointed (1 Samuel 24:6). Jesus fulfils all these roles: he reveals God to us (prophet), he reconciles us to God (priest) and he rules over us (king). Above all, he is God's promised, chosen rescuer-king.

How is Jesus' Messiahship understood in 2:2 and 2:6?

Jesus is the King of the Jews, a ruler who will shepherd his people Israel.

"his only Son" - Jesus is the only begotten Son of God the Father. Jesus exists in this eternal relationship with his Father. Jesus is uniquely the Son of God by nature, sharing the same being or essence as God the Father. (Both the Father and the Son are equally God – v23). Christians are sons of God by adoption.

What does it mean for Jesus to be "our Lord"?

What are the implications of that for our lives?

Jesus is our king and ruler. He has the right to our obedience and loyalty. We need to do what he says, to submit to him in every area of our lives.

"born of the Virgin Mary" – the virgin birth is prophesied in Isaiah 7:14 and taught in Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:34-35.

What does it suggest about Jesus identity that he was born of a woman?

He was fully and truly a man.

What might the fact that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin suggest about who Jesus is? Look at 1:23.

Jesus is God (as well as man).

What significance is seen in the virgin birth in 1:22?

It took place in the fulfilment of Scripture.

Jesus had a sinless humanity (Hebrews 4:15; Romans 8:3). It may be that by his virgin birth he avoided inheriting Adam's guilt and sinful nature.

Why is it important for our salvation that Jesus should be truly God and truly man?

As the God-man he is able to be the mediator between God and man, representing both (1 Timothy 2:5).

Why does Jesus need to be God?

So that he can reveal God to us (John 1:18).

Since salvation must be God's doing (Isaiah 45:21-22).

When Jesus died, God himself was taking the penalty of sin on himself. God was not punishing an innocent third party.

Jesus' divinity gives his death infinite value.

If Jesus were just a sinful human like the rest of us, he would be part of the problem and would need saving himself.

Why does Jesus have to be a human?

Jesus is the True Man, the Second Adam, who undoes the Fall (Romans 5:12-20; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45-49). Jesus is humanity as it was meant to be. In Jesus, God's plan of a man ruling creation is fulfilled (Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8; Hebrews 2:5-9).

Only as a man could he die and be a suitable substitute for men (Hebrews 2:14).

As a man he is able to sympathise with us in our weakness (Hebrews 2:17-18, 4:15).

It seems that Mary and Joseph had other children (Mark 3:31; 6:3) and there is no Biblical basis for the idea that Mary remained a virgin after Jesus' birth. Matthew 1:25 suggests they had sexual union after Jesus was born.

Mary was a saved sinner (Luke 1:47) and the idea of the immaculate conception, that Mary was born without sin, is also unbiblical.

Some people might have trouble in believing in the virgin birth, but it is really no more difficult to believe in that some of the other miracles or the resurrection.

What is the Magi / Wise Men's response to Jesus? 2:2, 10

They worshipped him. Again, this is an indication that Jesus is God since only God is to be worshipped.

The Apostles' Creed Homegroup Leaders Notes Part 3
*"I believe in Jesus ... who ... suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead."*

You may want to begin by reading one of the gospel accounts of the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus such as **Mt 27:11-61** or part of it. An alternative way of doing this session would be a more conventional study of this passage. In which case, you might ask questions like:

Who is innocent and who is guilty (vv11-26)? Who gets punished and who goes free?

How does this picture what happened at the cross? The guilty Barabbas goes free because the innocent Jesus is punished in his place just as we are set free as Jesus bears our penalty

What is the significance of the darkness (v45 cf. Ps 105:28; Ex 10:21-22)? It is a sign of God's judgement against sin (which is falling on Jesus)

Why was the temple curtain torn in two (v51 cf. Ex 26:31-35)? Jesus has opened up the way for sinners to come into the presence of a holy God

Why was Jesus forsaken (v46)? He is facing the punishment of God

Why is it fitting that many who have died are raised to life (v52-53)? Jesus has defeated death

"suffered" – it is worth remembering that Jesus' suffering was real. Jesus was fully human, after all. Jesus' divinity did not diminish his suffering.

What did Jesus suffer (under Pontius Pilate)?

(Rejection and misunderstanding throughout his life; betrayal by Judas; denial from Peter)

Jesus was a victim of a terrible miscarriage of justice (Mt 27:11-26).

He was flogged and mocked (Mt 27:26-31).

The physical agony of crucifixion was deliberately terrible so as to act as a deterrent. It was a humiliating public spectacle. Jesus also faced the spiritual agony of bearing the wrath of God for the sins of all his people, whereas previously he had always enjoyed his Father's smile.

Jesus was forsaken by his Father as he bore God's judgement against our sin (Mt 27:46).

Why is the fact that Jesus suffered encouraging to us (when we suffer)?

Since Jesus suffered he is able to sympathise with us in our suffering (Heb 2:18). God knows what it is like from the inside to suffer as a man.

(Why do you think the creed bothers to mention Pilate?)

"Pontius Pilate" – Governor / procurator of Judea AD 26-36. It is appropriate that the creed mentions a recorded figure of history since the events of the gospel and of Jesus' life are specific concrete facts of history. The Christian faith is about God acting in history, not just some set of principles or a philosophy.

"crucified". The Bible links Jesus being hung on a wooden cross to Dt 21:23: "anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse", quoted in Gal 3:13. Jesus bore God's curse for us.

What did the cross achieve? How does the Bible describe the significance of Jesus' death? What words and images does the Bible use to explain the meaning of the cross?

Big questions! You could pick out some of the following verses for people to look at if they don't come up with the answers without them. You could also ask what the technical terms (redemption, propitiation etc.) mean. Or what Scriptures spring to mind for explaining the significance of the cross.

Punishment for sin. Penal substitution. Jesus is the atoning sacrifice, better the propitiation, for our sins (Rm 3:25; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10; Heb 2:17): his death turns aside the wrath of God as he takes the penalty for sin in our place.

The cross reconciles us to God, makes us his friends whereas our sin had made us his enemies (Rm 5:9-11).

Jesus death redeems us, buys us back from slavery by the payment of a price (Eph 1:7; Rm 3:24; Rev 5:9; Mk 10:45 – ransom).

A demonstration of love (Jn 15:13; Rm 5:8).

Victory over Satan (Col 2:13-15)

Example (1 Pt 2:21ff). Make sure you mention this since it gives an application of Jesus' death. Jesus' death cannot simply be an example or a demonstration of love since then it would be an example / demonstration of an empty futile gesture. It is an example of self-sacrificial love when its purpose is understood (as outlined in the points above).

How should we respond to the cross?

Trust / dependence. Gratitude / thankfulness. Follow Jesus' example of self-sacrificial love.

Why is it important that Jesus really died?

“dead” – it is theologically important that Jesus actually died since “the wages of sin is death” (Rm 6:23). Of course it is also important for the resurrection that Jesus was really dead before he came back to life. Jesus certainly was really dead (Mk 15:44-45; Jn 19:31-35). More on that next time, perhaps.

“buried” – In fulfilment of Is 53:9 Jesus occupied a rich man's grave (Mt 27:57-60).

“he descended to hell / the dead”

The phrase “he descended into hell” is not found in the earliest known versions of the Apostles' creed. It first appeared in AD 390 when it was understood to mean simply that Christ really died and was buried. The Greek form of the creed has the word “hades” which can mean the grave / place of the dead not just hell. The phrase reappeared referring to hell in AD 650.

We may say that Christ suffered hell on the cross as he bore the punishment for sin, though that does not seem to be the meaning in the Apostles' creed (because of the word “descended” and because it is placed after Jesus' burial).

Even if Jesus did go to hell after his death (which I don't think he did!) we'd certainly want to say that he was just visiting! He finished his saving work on the cross (Jn 19:30). Hell could have no claim on the sinless Son of God. It is best to think that when Jesus died his Spirit went directly to be with his Father in Paradise (Lk 23:43, 46). Heb 9:24-26 speaks of Jesus entering heaven on our behalf, rather than hell. After his death Jesus' body remained in the grave while his spirit was in heaven and then on Easter Sunday his body and soul were reunited at his resurrection (as ours will be on the great final day).

Some people have found support for the idea that Jesus descended into hell in Acts 2:27 (KJV/AV has “hell” for the Greek hades, OT sheol, grave / death), Rm 10:6-7 (abyss, depths or grave is a better translation here, though Paul is saying we should not ask that question!), Eph 4:8-9 (though this verse is probably speaking of Jesus coming to earth not going to hell) and 1 Pt 4:6 (though the dead here seems to mean those who were alive but are now dead, as the NIV takes it). It is probably best to think that 1 Pt 3:18-20 refers to Christ speaking (by the Spirit) through the preaching of Noah to the people of Noah's day when they were alive, who are now spirits in prison in hell (see also 1 Pt 1:11; 2 Pt 2:5) though some think that Christ did go to hell and proclaim his victory to the fallen angels / demons (cf. ? the sons of God of Gen 6:1-4).

When we say the Apostles' Creed, it is preferable to say that Jesus descended to the dead rather than to hell.

Homegroup Leaders Notes
The Apostles' Creed study (4) "On the third day he rose again;"

Suggested reading: 1 Cor 15 – though it's long and tricky in places

You may prefer to read part of the gospel accounts of the resurrection e.g. Jn 20 or Mt 27:57-28:20.

I would encourage you to spend some time on the significance of Jesus' resurrection this time. Don't spend all your time on the evidence for it, valuable though that might be. Given that it happened, so what?

There may be some opportunity to come back to some of this material in the following sessions when we consider Jesus' ascension, his reign in heaven now, his coming return and our belief in "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting" so if you are short of time you could leave out things that you might most conveniently come back to then.

The evidence for the resurrection is often used to defend the Christian faith.

How would you seek to persuade someone that Jesus really did indeed rise from the dead?

What evidence is there for the resurrection?

(The reports of) the empty tomb (Jn 20:1-9)

(The reports of) the appearances of Christ (see the gospels and esp. 1 Cor 15:3-8. In v6 Paul is saying more than 500 people saw the risen Christ and most of them are still living – his readers could have gone and asked them, to check out that what Paul was saying was true).

The changed lives of the disciples (and the consequent impact of their message)

(The experience of Christians down the years and across the world, claiming to know a living Saviour)

What alternative explanations of the empty tomb and the resurrection appearances might be given? Are they persuasive? Why not?

The disciples went to the wrong tomb. They had seen where Jesus was laid (Mk 15:47).

Wouldn't Joseph of Arimathia have spoken up to put them right? Wouldn't the authorities have produced the body to quash the rumor if they could? The authorities had carefully sealed Jesus' tomb.

Someone stole Jesus' body. Why would they? His burial clothes (which may have had some value) were left behind (Jn 20:5-7). Remember the tomb was well guarded (Mt 27:62-66).

The disciples made up the whole thing. The disciples suffered persecution for their faith and some of them were martyred. People will sometimes die for things that are wrong, but why should they choose to die for what they knew to be wrong? Remember that the disciples seem not really to have been expecting the resurrection and had largely given up on Jesus (Lk 24:11, 20-24).

Jesus was not really dead and revived in the cool of the tomb. The Roman soldiers were expert professional executioners. They would have been severely punished for failing to kill their victims. The gospels emphasise that Jesus really was dead (Mk 15:44-45; Jn 19:30-35). How could a weakened Jesus roll the stone away from the tomb, defeat the guards, and persuade his disciples that he is the Lord of Life when he is really half dead?!

If you covered this last time, you may not want to bother with it this time:

What happened to Jesus when he died? (To his body? To his soul?)

His body was buried and remained in the grave. His soul went to be with his Father in heaven.

And on Easter Sunday morning?

He rose bodily / physically from the grave. His body and soul were reunited. (He had a transformed glorified “spiritual” physical body.)

How is that a pattern for our own resurrection? (What will happen to us (when we die / on judgement day)? How is it similar to what happened to Jesus?)

When we die our souls will go to heaven to be with the Lord while our bodies lie in the grave. The ultimate Christian hope is not a disembodied “spiritual” life in heaven but a gloriously renewed creation. At the final judgement our bodies will be raised, transformed and glorified and reunited with our souls. (More on that in our final study).

What does the Bible tell us about the nature Jesus’ resurrection?

(You may have covered this in the above questions)

It is important to emphasise that the resurrection was physical and bodily (not just somehow “spiritual”). It was a real historical event. It is more than Jesus somehow living on in the hearts and lives of his disciples or through his continued influence.

There seems to have been both continuity and discontinuity between Jesus’ pre- and post-resurrection bodies. It was the same body – Jesus’ – but it was transformed and glorified.

What was the significance of Jesus’ resurrection?

A big question – but perhaps one we sometimes neglect as we are busy defending the fact that Jesus really rose from the dead and rightly want to keep the cross central. (Some of the answers here may be overlapping. Don’t feel you have to be exhaustive).

You could draw out answers by supplementary questions:

What does the resurrection suggest about who Jesus was / is? (Why?)

What does the resurrection say about God the Father’s attitude to the Lord Jesus?

What is the significance of Jesus’ resurrection for us (now) / for our future hope?

Get people to look up some of the texts if they are stuck. What does this passage suggest about the significance of Jesus’ resurrection?

The resurrection is evidence that Jesus was who he claimed to be. God would not raise up a fraud!

The resurrection shows there is life beyond the grave (1 Cor 15:12).

The resurrection shows that Jesus’ God is the living and true God with power over death.

The resurrection shows God accepted Jesus’ sacrifice – his death was effective. Sin is dealt with.

The resurrection shows that death is defeated (Rom 6:9; 1 Cor 15:54-57; Acts 2:24).

Jesus’ resurrection is his vindication / justification and ours (Rom 4:25). By his resurrection Jesus is publicly declared in the right with God, as are we, since we are united to Christ by faith in the Spirit.

We are made alive and raised with Christ (Eph 2:5-6; Col 2:12-13; 3:1-3; Rom 6:4-5; 8:11).

Jesus is enthroned as Lord of all (Acts 2:32,36).

Jesus is the Son of God in power (Rom 1:4) whereas during his earthly ministry in a sense he was the Son of God in weakness (according to his human nature).

There is now a man on the throne of the universe. Jesus is the New Adam (Ps 8; 1 Cor 15:44b-49), ruling the world as man was meant to (Gen 1:26-28), but in which the first Adam failed.

With the resurrection of Jesus the New Creation / New Age has begun. Jesus is the firstborn from among the dead (Col 1:18). He is the first-fruits of the resurrection, patterning and guaranteeing the rest of the harvest (1 Cor 15:20, 23).

Jesus is alive – we can know him personally, pray to him etc. We have a living Lord not a dead hero.

Jesus can be with us always (by his Spirit) (Mt 28:20).

Jesus lives as our permanent High Priest to intercede for us (Heb 7:24-25; Rom 8:34).

We have new birth into a living hope through the resurrection (1 Pet 1:3).

The power of the resurrection is at work in us (Eph 1:19-20; Phil 3:10-11).
 Our labour in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58).
 The resurrection guarantees that we will be raised (1 Cor 6:14; 1 Thess 4:14).
 The resurrection shows that Jesus will judge all people (Acts 17:31; 10:40-42).
 We will receive transformed physical bodies like Jesus did (Phil 3:21; 1 Cor 15:42-54).
 The resurrection gives us hope for all creation since it is Jesus' real physical body that is raised (Rom 8:18-22). The Christian faith is physical matter-affirming not just somehow "spiritual". God made and redeemed stuff!

And just as a free space-filler: (!)

Evidence for the resurrection reading

Daniel Clark, *Dead or Alive? The truth and relevance of Jesus' resurrection* (IVP, 2007)
 Josh McDowell, *The Resurrection Factor* (Paternoster, 1993)
 Frank Morison, *Who Moved The Stone?* (Faber & Faber, 1930)
 Peter Walker, *The Weekend That Changed The World* (Marshall Pickering, 1999)
 John Wenham, *Easter Enigma* (Paternoster Press, 1992)

And some quotes about the resurrection:

Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby school and Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford University, wrote: "I have been used for many years to study the history of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them; and I know of no fact in the history of people which is proved by better and fuller evidence... to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign that God has given us, that Christ died and rose from the dead." (quoted in Michael Green, *The Day Death Died*, IVP, Leicester, 1987, p.15)

In the 1930s a journalist, Frank Morison, was convinced that miracles did not happen though he admired the character of Jesus, and he set out to write a book disproving the resurrection. When he studied the evidence, he wrote his book: "Who Moved the Stone?" and with great honesty entitled the first chapter: "The Book that Refused to be Written." (Michael Green, *Man Alive*, IVF, London, 1967, pp.54-55)

Lord Darling, formerly Lord Chief Justice of England, wrote: "The crux of the problem of whether Jesus was or was not what he proclaimed Himself to be, must surely depend on the truth or otherwise of the resurrection. On that greatest point we are not merely asked to have faith. In its favour as a living truth there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in the verdict that the resurrection story is true." (quoted in Michael Green, *The Day Death Died*, IVP, Leicester, 1987, p.15)

Sir Edward Clarke, a High Court Judge, said: "As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidence for the events of Easter Day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. As a lawyer I accept the Gospel evidence unreservedly as the testimony of truthful people to facts that they were able to substantiate."

Bishop Westcott, one of England's greatest New Testament scholars, said: "It is not too much to say that there is no single historical incident better or more variously attested than the

resurrection of Christ." (quoted in Michael Green, *The Day Death Died*, IVP, Leicester, 1987, p37)

The Apostles' Creed Study 5

“he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father”

For the narrative of the ascension see Acts 1:1-11

The Bible sometimes seems to think of the resurrection and ascension together. There may be some scope this time for covering material on the significance of Jesus' resurrection as his enthronement if you didn't cover it last time.

Jesus' ascension took place 40 days after the resurrection (Acts 1:3).

To “ascend” simply means to move upwards or rise (Jn 20:17). Metaphorically it implies exaltation (Phil 2:9) or promotion. We say a monarch ascends the throne: although Jesus was always King of Kings, his ascension is his (public) enthronement. The new element of the ascension is that there is now a man on the throne of heaven.

Where is Jesus?

Physically, Jesus is in heaven. Remember he has a real human (glorified) body.

Yet as God, Jesus is everywhere. He is present with us (Mt 28:20) by his Spirit.

Eph 4:10 – Jesus “ascended higher than all the heavens [in the sense of skies?], in order to fill the whole universe [all things]” - Jesus power and presence are active everywhere. Jesus is not somehow confined to heaven. His ascension implies his bodily absence but not his absence as such.

What do people (sometimes) imagine heaven is like?

Perhaps a load of angels sitting round on clouds playing harps and singing hymns?!

What does the Bible say about heaven?

Heaven is God's space, realm or dwelling place (Ps 33:13-14; Mt 6:9; Ps 2:4).

In Hebrew and Greek the Bible uses the same word for heaven and for the sky (something we can do in English too, “the heavens”). Jim Packer suggests that “the sky, which, being above us and more like infinity than anything else we know, is an emblem in space and time of God's eternal life.”

Heaven is not the ultimate hope of the Christian. When we die our disembodied souls go to be with Jesus in heaven / paradise (Lk 23:43; Jn 14:1-4; Phil 1:23) but on the great final day there will be a resurrection of the body when our souls and bodies will be reunited to enjoy life in the New Creation.

Jim Packer argues: “To think of heaven as a place is more right than wrong, though the word could mislead. Heaven appears in Scripture as a spatial reality that touches and interpenetrates all created space.” Since Jesus' physical-spiritual glorified resurrection body is in heaven, that would suggest it is a place. We need not think of heaven as “up there”. We can't say where heaven is, even if that's a sensible question.

What do you think is the significance of the fact that Jesus is said to be seated?

Heb 1:3; 10:11-14; 12:2. Look especially at Heb 10:11-14. **How does Jesus' posture compare with that of the priest in the temple? What is the significance of that?**

The priest stands continually ministering (working), repeating sacrifices. Jesus offered one perfect sacrifice and then sat down. His sitting suggests that his sacrificial work is done, the job is completed (cf. John 19:30). Jesus sits down when he gets to heaven, perhaps a bit like someone might sit down when they get in from work. The job is finished. No further sacrifices for sin are needed.

What do you think he is seated on? What is the significance of that?

On a throne (e.g. Rev 3:21). Jesus' ascension is his enthronement as king. Judges would also sit to judge. Jesus will be the judge of the world (Mt 19:28; 25:31-33).

God the Father doesn't have a physical body, so he doesn't have a physical right hand. So **what do you think is meant by saying that Jesus is seated "at the right hand of the Father"?**

The Father's right hand is a position of supreme honour (Heb 1:13) and authority. We might say that Jesus is the Father's right hand man.

Look at Eph 2:4-6 and Col 3:1-15. Where do these verses say the Christian believer is?

We are raised with Christ and seated with him in heaven. Because we are united to Christ by faith in the Spirit what is true of Jesus is true of us (we died, rose and are seated with / in him). We are physically here on earth, of course, but spiritually we are in heaven with Christ: we belong with Jesus. Heaven is our sure destiny if we die before Christ returns.

How does Colossians 3 (esp. vv1-2, 5) apply the fact that we are seated with Christ in heaven? What are we to do in consequence?

We are to set our hearts and minds on things above not on earthly things and put to death the things that belong to our earthly sinful nature.

What did Jesus do when / after he took up his throne in heaven? What was on God's timetable between the ascension and the second coming? – thinking of the Christian year may help you: what comes after the Ascension in the Christian calendar?

The exalted Jesus received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and poured it out on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33).

What does the Bible say Jesus is doing now in heaven?

Rom 8:34 – Jesus is at the right hand of God interceding for us. See also Heb 7:23-26 (since Jesus perfectly meets our need, this encourages us to stick with him and not to look elsewhere) and 9:24. Perhaps Jesus prays to the Father for us, on the basis of his saving work for us, pleading his blood (1 Jn 2:1-2). Jesus is the perfect mediator between God and man, the ultimate go-between. This should give us great confidence that God will not condemn us (see the context in Romans 8).

What is God doing in the world between Jesus' ascension and his second coming?

Jesus sent his Holy Spirit to empower his disciples as witnesses to him (Acts 1:8; cf. Mt 28:18-20, Jesus' ascension is a sign that he has been given all authority).

God is putting all Jesus' enemies under his feet (Psalm 110:1; 1 Cor 15:25).

Sum up. What is the significance of the ascension? What difference should it make to us?

Jesus is enthroned as king of the universe. He lives to intercede for us. He rules our world. This should give us great confidence. He is worthy of all honour and praise. We should live every area and moment of our lives under his Lordship. We should get on with the work of telling the world that Jesus is Lord in the power of the Spirit he has sent.

Home Group Leaders' Notes: The Apostles' Creed Study 6
“and he will come to judge the living and the dead.” (cf. 2 Tim 4:1)

Suggested readings: 1 Thess 4:13-5:11; Rev 20:11-15

This clause of the creed concludes the narrative of Jesus' work (which began: “I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord...”), which is at the heart of the creed. The creed has described Jesus' past and present work: this clause focuses on his future work – The Second Coming of Christ and the Final Judgement.

Again, it may be possible to come back to some of this material when we look at the final clauses of the creed in studies 9 and 10: “the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting”.

How will Jesus' first and second comings compare?

Jesus' first coming was in great humility to be our Saviour (Jn 3:17). His second coming will be in great glory to be our judge. Jesus' first coming was in an obscure stable in Bethlehem. When he comes again, every eye will see him (Rev 1:7).

When will Jesus return?

No one knows the day of Christ's return (Mk 13:32); we should not be preoccupied with speculating about it (Acts 1:7). Though we should plan for a life-time (and indeed for future generations) we should always live in such a way that we would be ready if Jesus returned today (Lk 12:35ff; Mt 24:44).

According to the creed, who will Jesus judge? (Who is included in “the living and the dead”?)

“The living and the dead” includes everyone who has ever been. It will be a universal judgement. Jesus will not just judge Christians, or those who believe in him. Everyone without exception must face the Lord Jesus Christ as their judge (Heb 9:27; Acts 17:30-31).

In the Bible, what are the possible outcomes of the judgement, the destinations of those judged?

The New Creation with God's blessing or hell with God's judgement. The Bible does not allow for purgatory or any second chance after death. Hell in the Bible is eternal conscious torment (e.g. Lk 16:24; Mt 18:8; Mk 9:47f; Rev 20:10, 15). The Bible language used to describe hell may be metaphorical at points: for example, it is not clear how fire (e.g. Mt 5:22) and darkness (Mt 8:12) would go together.

(Remember “heaven” is a temporary intermediate state, not the final hope of the Christian. We believe in the resurrection of the body, as we will consider further in our final study.)

What will the basis of Jesus' judgement be? How will Jesus judge? How will we be judged?

See e.g. Rev 20:12-15; John 3:36.

Our eternal destiny is decided by our response to Jesus: have we put our faith in him?

Although we are all guilty sinners, as believers we can be sure of our acquittal on the great judgement day. Indeed, we are already justified by faith (Rm 5:1). Justification is a legal term which means to be declared in the right, vindicated. If we are believers in Jesus we are justified already, now, and we will be justified in the future on judgement day. God has

already announced us “not guilty” ahead of time. We already know what the outcome will be on judgement day.

We must be crystal clear that salvation is in Christ alone by grace alone (God’s underserved love) through faith alone and not by good works (Eph 2:8-10). We can never merit or earn our salvation. We all deserve God’s wrath.

Our lives are expected to show evidence of our commitment to Christ (Mt 25:34-40). Our good works, done by faith, will demonstrate that God’s Spirit has been at work in us, that we are spiritually alive. Despite all our ongoing sin, our remaining sinful natures, and our lack of perfection this side of heaven, it should be possible to tell from our lives that we are God’s transformed people. Our good works will be evidence of our salvation, not the meritorious grounds of it.

The Bible teaches that Christians will be rewarded for their good works (2 Tim 4:8; 1 Cor 3:10-15).

The Bible teaches that Jesus will be the judge (Jn 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42). **What difference does it make that Jesus is the judge?**

Jesus knows us completely (e.g. Jn 1:47-50; 2:23-25; 4:18; cf. Ps 139:1-4). The judge will be in full possession of all the facts. Jesus knows what its like to be human being from the inside. Our judge can sympathise with us: he was tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15) – and that should give us confidence (Heb 4:16).

We can be sure that Jesus will judge justly (Jn 5:30; 2 Tim 4:8). He will be a perfect judge. Jesus is also loving and merciful and completely committed to his people. Our Saviour is our judge.

(Remember that Jesus is God. It is true to say that God is the judge although the Bible speaks of judgement as entrusted to the Son).

One way of exploring the significance of the coming judgement might be to talk about what it would be like if there were no judgement coming. See e.g. 1 Cor 15:32.

It can be tempting to tone down the Bible’s teaching about judgement and leave out talk of hell to make our message seem more appealing. Why would that be a bad idea?

The coming judgement is one reason why our response to Jesus now matters so much. It is surely loving to warn people of the disaster that awaits those who die unprepared. We are not at liberty to tamper with God’s word (cf. 2 Tim 4:1-5).

Why doesn’t God get on with it (!) and judge the world now? See Rm 2:4-5; 2 Pt 3:9

God is delaying judgement to give more people a chance to repent. We should get on with evangelism!

(How often do you think of the coming judgement? Does it affect the way you live?)

What attitude(s) do you think Christians should have to the coming judgement?

Jim Packer comments: “The hope of Christ’s return thrilled the New Testament Christians, as witness over three hundred references to it in the documents – on average, one every thirteen verses.”

In a sense we should long for Jesus’ return (Rev 22:20) when he will be universally acknowledged as king (Phil 2:10-11) and the world will be put to rights.

It should remind us of our accountability and responsibility and the seriousness of sin. We should seek to live in a way that pleases God.

We can have confidence in the face of judgement that Jesus has fully paid the price for all our sins. We need fear no condemnation (Rm 8:1).

So what? What are the implications and practical applications of these doctrines? How should we live in the light of Christ's coming return and the judgement?

See 2 Pt 3:10-18; 1 Thess 5:6, 8, 11 – be alert and self controlled, encourage one another etc. The coming judgement emphasises the importance of evangelism. People must be warned to flee from dreadful the wrath to come.

There is comfort here for Christians who suffer injustice or persecution. God will put the world to right. No evil will go unpunished.

The coming judgement may also help us to avoid taking sinful revenge against those who wrong us. Judgement belongs to the Lord and can safely be left to him (Rm 12:19).

Homegroup Leaders Notes: The Apostles' Creed Study 7 "I believe in the Holy Spirit"

Suggested readings: John 14:15-31 and 16:5-16. I suggest you make a Bible study of what these passages say about the Spirit the basis of this session.

What does the structure of the Apostles' Creed suggest about the Holy Spirit?

With this study we come to the third and final main section of the creed. Remember that the structure of the creed is Trinitarian, focusing on Father, Son and Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28:19) as the objects of our belief / faith / trust. Like Father and Son, the Spirit is a divine person, God the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit should always be called "He" not "it" since He is personal. The Spirit is not some impersonal force, like electricity.

The word "holy" means special or separate / set apart. The Holy Spirit is unique and as God is set apart from all evil and sin.

How does the Holy Spirit connect to the work of Jesus we have been thinking about so far in the creed? See also John 14:16-18, 25-26, 16:7 etc. and the talk of Jesus' going away. In a sense this clause links with the account of Jesus' work we have been studying so far in the creed and continues the story since when Jesus ascended into heaven he sent his Spirit (Jn 14:15).

A big question to focus on (that some of the following questions unpack further): **What do these passages from John's Gospel tell us about the work of the Holy Spirit?**

The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin (John 16:7-11). We should pray for the Spirit's work in evangelism.

Why do you think Jesus calls the Spirit *another* Counsellor in John 14:16? Who was their first Counsellor?

Jesus calls the Spirit another counselor / advocate / comforter / helper (lit. one who is called alongside, like a defense lawyer) to the disciples (John 14:16, 26; 15:26). It is as if Jesus was their counselor in his earthly ministry and in his bodily absence, the Spirit takes his place as another counselor (although of course Jesus is with his disciples always Mt 28:20 – by the Spirit). The Spirit "replaces" Jesus.

What is the relationship between Christ and the Spirit?

The Spirit's primary work is to draw us to Christ and to glorify Him (Jn 16:14).

We are united to Christ in the Spirit.

Jesus is with us by his Spirit.

Christ sends his Spirit to the church.

It is worth emphasizing the close connection between Christ and the Spirit. You could ask your group to look up the following verses. How do they contribute to the theme?

The Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ (Rm 8:9; 1 Pt 1:11). Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:20), was filled with and empowered by the Spirit (Lk 4:1, 14, 18) and offered himself to God on the cross through the Spirit (Heb 9:14).

All Christians are indwelt by the Spirit (Rom 8:9). Though we should go on being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18) we should not expect a second stage “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” as if there are two grades of Christians, Spirit-filled Christians and Spirit-less Christians. Jesus and the Spirit always go together.

What does Jesus promise in John 14:26? To whom is the promise in John 14:26 being made?

Jesus is speaking to the Apostles. The promise that Jesus will remind them of everything that he has said to them makes it clear that Jesus is addressing those who heard his teaching during his earthly ministry.

How do we take advantage of this work of the Spirit?

Through the Apostles’ writings, preserved for us in the New Testament.

What is the relationship between the Bible (the written Word of God) and the Spirit?

Notice how these passages in John emphasise both the Spirit and Jesus’ words / teaching (e.g. Jn 14:24)

The Spirit is the Spirit of Truth (Jn 14:17); God’s Word is truth (Jn 17:17)

The Spirit is the author of Scripture. The Bible is God-breathed or God-Spirited (2 Tim 3:16). The word for “breath” or wind is the same word for “Spirit” in both the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. In creation the Spirit / breath of God and his Word work together (Gen 2:3-4; similarly Ezekiel 37:4-6, 9-10). The Word of God is the Sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17).

We should pray for the Spirit’s help when reading the Word he has caused to be written.

Whatever we say about the Holy Spirit, he wouldn’t want us to distract from the fullness and finality of the revelation in Christ (Heb 1:1-2) or the sufficiency of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Additional notes:

Believers are given new life by the Spirit (cf. Ez 37:1-14).

The Holy Spirit is a deposit or down payment (a kind of first installment) guaranteeing our salvation (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14).

The Spirit assures us that we are children of God (Rm 8:16).

Christ gives **gifts of the Spirit** to the church (1 Cor 12:1-11; Eph 4:11-16). It is good for us to consider what our gifts might be and try to use them for the common good (1 Cor 12:7). But the key is serving others, not focusing on being fulfilled by using our gifts. If there are needs and opportunities we might sometimes serve in areas where we don’t feel particularly gifted. Perhaps having a go at something will show us that we might have gifts we didn’t think we had. Sometimes others might see gifts in us we didn’t recognize ourselves.

The gifts of the Spirit are of course controversial. You may not want to open up this can of worms in homegroup! Bible-believing Christians disagree about them and there will not be time to solve every problem in homegroup, even if you think you have all the answers!

It seems in the Bible that the gift of “tongues”, or “languages”, is the supernatural ability to speak in foreign human languages that one has not learnt (Acts 2:4-12; 1 Cor 14:10-11, 21, quoting Is 28:11; with the “tongues of angels” in 1 Cor 13:1 not referring to the gift of tongues but seen as a rhetorical flourish describing eloquence). The Bible is clear that tongues should not be used in church unless there is an interpretation / translation and then only in an orderly manner, one speaker at a time (1 Cor 14:27-28).

Some have argued that there are two levels of prophecy in the Bible: Old Testament infallible “thus says the LORD” prophecy and a less authoritative New Testament prophecy along “I think the Lord might be saying to us...” lines. But it is hard to find this distinction in the Bible. The Bible warns against the terrible sin of false prophecy, where someone claims to say something that God does not say.

Many Bible-believing Christians would argue that tongues and prophecy were foundational gifts for the church and that since the completion of the New Testament canon of Scriptures and the end of the apostolic period (2 Cor 12:12) these gifts are no longer needed and have ceased. See further O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word: A Biblical Response to the Case for Tongues and Prophecy Today* (Banner of Truth, 1993).

The Scriptures warn us of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders (2 Thess 2:9).

The Spirit works in us to produce in us **the fruit of the Spirit** (Gal 5:22), which we might sum up as Christ-likeness.

Homegroup Leaders Notes - The Apostles' Creed – Study 8
“the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints”

Suggested reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Getting started: **Have you ever heard people say something like, “Jesus is okay, it’s the church I can’t stand?” What might that mean? How would you respond?**

(What do you think and feel about the church?)

How might the doctrine of the church relate to the rest of the creed?

The doctrine of the church fits into the overall Trinitarian structure of the creed. In Jim Packer’s words: the church is “the family of God the Father, the body of Christ the Son and the temple (dwelling-place) of the Holy Spirit...” (cf. Eph 1:4-5, 23; 2:22). The church depends on the saving work of Christ which has already been studied. More specifically, the church is given life, sustained and governed by the Spirit, hence the placing of the church in this third section of the creed. The church is the community of the Spirit (2 Cor 13:14).

This study may be approached by thinking about what each of the main words (“holy”, “catholic”, “church”, “communion”, “saints”) means.

What is meant by the word “holy”?

Holy means separate or set apart, special, consecrated or dedicated to a special purpose (e.g. bathroom / dining room etc. set apart for special purposes)

In what sense is the church “holy”? What is the church set apart from? (In what sense is it unholy?!)

The church can be contrasted with the non-Christian world, from which God has set her apart for himself. The church should be set apart from all sin but of course she falls into all kinds of sins and errors.

(How can we be unholy and holy?)

We are perfect in Christ, our sins are forgiven, though we go on sinning.

Does the theory match up with the reality? What is the church like in practice?

How could we be more what we really are / more what we are meant to be?

What should our attitude be to sin or compromise with the world in the church? How can it be dealt with / limited?

Remember that the church is holy. It belongs to God as is set apart for his purposes, not ours or anyone else’s. It would be tragic if any misplaced loyalty to the institutional church, to a church leader or to a church building conflicted with our loyalty to God, whose church it is.

What is meant by the word “catholic”?

“Catholic” means universal or general therefore worldwide.

In what sense is the church “catholic”?

We are thinking of the universal catholic church throughout the world. This is not the same as the Roman Catholic church! The church’s message is for every age, situation and culture. The church is made up of men and women of all races, backgrounds etc.

We may distinguish between the universal and the local church (e.g. the church in Galatia – Gal 1:2 – or Corinth – 1 Cor 1:2, or in Eastbourne). The Bible does not speak of denominations such as the Church of England as churches.

(What do we have in common in the church according to Eph 4:4-6?)

What links do we have with the worldwide church?

We are one in Christ. We should seek to express and live in the light of that unity.

How could we make more of them?

E.g. think of our mission links with the South American Mission Society (SAMS) in Paraguay, the Church Missionary Society in India (CMS), Crosslinks in Sweden.

Modern technology makes it easy to keep in touch, e.g. with weekly emails from Peter and Sarah in the Middle East.

What is meant by the word “church”?

“Church” comes from the word meaning “called out”. It is the ordinary word for a civic assembly or a gathering. The church may be said to be called out from the world by God (cf. 1 Peter 2:9). The church is a community of people, not a building.

How does 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 describe the church? What points does the image make?

The body of Christ, of which he is the head (Col 1:18). The idea of a body implies unity in difference (one body, many parts), mutual inter-dependence (the eye needs the hand), held together and governed by Christ (the head).

What is meant by the word “communion”?

Communion means fellowship, sharing or partnership. It is all about what we share in common. (The Holy Communion is one expression of the communion). Often in the Bible this idea of sharing is to do with the practical sharing of what we have (Acts 2:44-45; Rom 12:13; Eph 4:28; 1 Tim 6:18; Heb 13:16).

In the creed, who is said to share this “communion”?

“the saints”

What is meant by the word “saints”?

The word is related to the word for “holy” discussed above and means those who are set apart, sanctified, called out of the world to belong to God, consecrated to him. Of course in ourselves we are always sinners, but God declares us holy and increasingly makes us so. We are called to be holy (1 Cor 1:2), not because we are holy.

Who are “the saints”? See Rom 1:4; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1

Saints is the New Testament word for all believers. It should not be limited to a super-class of those whom the Roman Catholic church has canonized.

So the communion of saints is the fellowship / community of believers, who are simultaneously a bunch of sinners!

What difference will it make to think of yourself as a saint – someone consecrated to God, called to be holy?

It might encourage us to try to be holy. We belong entirely to God. We are to use our bodies and our bank balances etc. in holy ways.

How could we have more of a sense of our communion with the saints? How could we make the most of it?

In other words, how could we enjoy our fellowship with Christians far and near more? E.g. in our own church, we could come to prayer meetings. Offer hospitality and enjoy meals together.

Cf. visible and invisible church / historical and eschatological church

What practical difference will our belief in (a) the local and (b) the worldwide church make?

E.g. it might mean a willingness to learn from other Christians in other times and places. Reading widely can be a great way to do that.

If you used any of the getting started questions at the beginning of the study, would you say anything different now? How has this study affected your attitude to the church?

Homegroup Leaders' Notes: The Apostles' Creed Study 9 **"the forgiveness of sins"**

Suggested Bible Reading: Matthew 6:9-15; 18:15-35

Nearly there! Last but one study!

In your preparation you could do a word study on the word "forgiveness" in the Bible. Look it up in a concordance or on www.biblegateway.com. How is the word "forgiveness" used in the Bible? Then you could move onto the word "sin".

How is "the forgiveness of sins" related to what comes before in the creed?

The question may not be that clear to your group! Answers might include: God (the Father) forgives our sin on the basis of Jesus' saving work for us. This study may provide opportunities to think again about the cross. The Spirit helps us to know we are forgiven and to forgive others.

When the creed speaks of "the forgiveness of sins" whose sins might it be thinking of?

Who might be doing the forgiving?

(1) God's forgiveness of our sins

(Which is the model for... (- this point is brought out in Matthew 6))

(2) Our forgiveness of the sins of others (who sin against us)

These could be the 2 main topics for your discussion.

Not that we earn our forgiveness by forgiving others. But because we are forgiven, we forgive others. We are depending on grace so we extend it to others. Not to forgive is a denial of our forgiveness, of the gospel.

How would our culture / most non-Christian Brits today, describe sin?

What is sin? How does the Bible describe it? (What different types of sin can you think of? Can you give examples of sin?)

Sin is rebellion against God, breaking his law, transgressing his commands, going against his Word and will, failing to trust him, falling short of his glory. Sin has "I" at the centre. Sins (specific wrongs) grow out of our sinful heart. There can be sins of omission or commission: things we fail to do and things we do. There can be sins of thought, word and deed. All sin is ultimately against God.

(How does the Bible's view challenge the world's view?)

What does it mean to forgive sin? What is forgiveness? What will it look like in practice?

Forgiveness means our sins won't be held against us. We will not suffer the penalty due to our sins if we trust in Christ, but we may still suffer some of the "natural" consequences of our sins. Where there is forgiveness there is reconciliation, restored relationship. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean we treat someone as if they had not sinned in every respect. We should forgive a repentant paedophile, but we should not give him unsupervised access to children.

Is forgiving the same as forgetting?

Strictly speaking God forgets nothing! How could he? But he does promise to remember our sins no more. To forget a sin in the Bible's sense means not to bring it up against someone for their harm. We may not be able to forget some sins in the sense of not recalling them, nor need we try, but we don't have to keep bringing them up inappropriately.

How does God forgive our sins? In what way? On what basis? Whom does God forgive? What sins does God forgive?

Graciously. Freely. Fully. Completely. Because of Jesus' sin-bearing, wrath-facing, debt-paying death. All who trust in Christ are forgiven all their sins. God forgives our sins (justification) and also works in us to make us less sinful (what theologians often call sanctification). Forgiveness should lead to change.

(The unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit presumably involves deliberate and continued rejection of the Spirit's work of bringing us to Christ who is the only means of forgiveness).

How should we forgive others sins?

As God has forgiven ours. So go back to how God has forgiven us and apply it to how we should forgive others. We should be willing to take the initiative with those who don't deserve it, as God did with us.

How often should we forgive sins? (How often does God forgive us?)

7 times may have seemed a generous suggestion! 77 times means constantly, unendingly.

Should we forgive the sins of someone who clearly stubbornly deliberately repeatedly refuses to repent of obvious serious sins?

No. God only forgives those who repent. There should be no bitterness or strife or personal vengeance. We can leave getting even to God who will judge justly and right every wrong but we are not called to forgive or be reconciled to those whom even God will not forgive. We should be godly in this not super-spiritual as if we should be more forgiving than God.

How much has God forgiven us? How much should we forgive others?

God forgives us for the infinite crime of rejecting and disobeying him although we owe him everything. Is there anything we cannot forgive in others when God has cancelled our huge debt?

Why do we sometimes find it hard to offer forgiveness to others and to forgive them as we ought? How can we find it easier to forgive?

Our culture encourages us to look after no. 1 and stand up for our rights. We need to meditate on God's undeserved forgiveness of us. Remember what it cost God to forgive us (the death of Christ); it may be costly and painful for us to forgive others too.

What should we do about the sins of others? How should we handle sin in the church?

We need to follow the process set out in Matthew 18. Personal sins are best dealt with personally if possible. Private sins between Christians are best dealt with privately if possible. We should look to the logs in our own eyes before worrying about the specs in other people's eyes. If you have a problem with another Christian and you cannot sort it out easily and happily between yourselves you would do well to ask the advice of the Elders of the church. I suggest you ask to talk to the Vicar! ☺ Obvious serious public sins of which someone repeatedly refuses to repent should be rebuked publicly and the sinner should be excommunicated (shut out from the fellowship of the church and from the Lord's Table) in the hope that they will come to their senses, repent and be restored. (This does not mean that they should be completely ignored or forbidden to come to church but they should feel a great loss of the privileges of church membership.) Someone should only be excommunicated for a sin that risks shutting them out of heaven: they are being told in their excommunication that they are behaving satanically, like a non-Christian and if they go on in that way without trusting in Christ they will go to hell. An example might be a man who leaves his godly wife

for a younger woman. The Church of England is in a mess over this and the evangelical church in the UK has generally been pretty terrible at it in our generation.

What can we give God thanks for in the light of our study?

What can we ask God's help with in the light of our study?

Homegroup Leaders' Notes for Wed 17th June: Apostles' Creed Study 10
"the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

Suggested Bible reading: 1 Cor 15:12-58 is the obvious passage, again, though some parts of it are tricky. And / or maybe Romans 8:18-39

This is our final study in the Apostles' Creed.

Introduce the topics mentioned in this clause. You could begin by getting the group to talk about some of the issues raised for us today by these clauses of the creed.

How do you feel about your body? (e.g. you might be frustrated by aches and pains, worried about your health).

What attitudes to the body might you find in our society / in the church? (Perhaps health and fitness might be an idol for some? What about the prevalence of eating disorders / obesity? The pursuit of the body beautiful... e.g. pressure on teenage girls from magazines etc.)

What different views do people have of the after life?

How might people imagine everlasting life? (Would it be an attractive prospect to them? Why?)

E.g. they might think it boring or even unbearable

Earlier on in the creed we affirmed our faith that "on the third day he [Jesus] rose again".

(You may wish to refer back to the notes on study 4 that related to that clause of the creed. (It may also be worth looking back at some of the material in study 6 on the future judgement in preparation for this session)). Here we affirm our faith in the resurrection of our bodies. You may want to explore the link.

(How does this clause relate to the rest of the creed?) – perhaps a bit of a "guess what's in my mind" question!

Our hope depends on the saving work of Christ that we have spent most of our sessions studying. It is the Holy Spirit who works this hope in us.

It is appropriate that this clause comes at the end of the creed since it looks forward to the future.

What is the connection between Jesus' resurrection and ours? (see 1 Cor 15)

What might it mean to say that Jesus is the "firstfruits" of the resurrection? 1 Cor 15:23 cf. Ex 23:16

Jesus' resurrection is a first installment guaranteeing that the full harvest of the same sort is coming. If Jesus has been raised, we will be too. We will like him (1 Jn 3:2).

What will our resurrection bodies be like? Note 1 Cor 15:36!

Jesus' resurrection is prototype of our resurrection. Our renewed bodies will be something like Jesus' body (Phil 3:20-21). Just as Jesus' tomb was empty, it will be our literal physical bodies that are somehow raised. There will be both continuity and discontinuity between our bodies now and then. Our resurrection bodies will be our bodies, but transformed and glorified. Jesus was recognizable to his disciples after his resurrection, but he was changed. Much of this remains a mystery, of course! We can trust God that it'll be wonderful and he'll take care of it. See also Mk 12:18-27 – we will be like the angels not marrying?!

How does Paul's analogy of a seed and a plant (1 Cor 15:37, 42-44) help us to think about our bodies now and our resurrection bodies?

It makes the point of continuity and amazing transformation through a kind of death and resurrection.

What is the difference between resurrection and resuscitation?

Examples of people like Lazarus being raised from the dead (John 11) are more like resuscitations than resurrections. Lazarus died again whereas we are resurrected to an endless life. Lazarus' body was not glorified, only put back to rights. Resurrection involves a more radical transformation than a resuscitation.

What does the Bible say about "life everlasting"?**What is the difference between eternal life and life that just goes on and on and on and... ?**

Eternal life is described as knowing God in John 17:3. It is a quality of life not just a quantity of life. Eternal life begins now and goes on for ever. See John 10:10; 11:25-26.

If you started by discussing some of the questions about the body / afterlife, how has this study addressed those issues?

What difference will believing in "the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting" make to the way we think and live?

e.g. it gives us hope in the faith of death / bodily frustrations

What does Paul conclude in 1 Cor 15:58? What does the resurrection imply?

Our labour in the Lord is not in vain. It's all worth it because of the resurrection.

What difference might our belief in the resurrection and a physical New (/renewed) Creation make to the way we treat our bodies / the physical world here and now?

Sometimes the church has seemed a bit uncomfortable with the body – e.g. hung up about sex, worried about enjoying food – as if all that mattered were the soul. The resurrection of the body shows that God is into bodies. Bodies are not merely shells or prisons to be cast aside. Our hope is more than the immortality of immaterial the soul. Physical matter is created by God and is basically good and is to be enjoyed (1 Timothy 4:3-4). Remember that the ultimate Christian hope is not a disembodied heaven but a New Creation (Rev 21:1ff), which will be physical and spiritual. "Heaven" when you die is a temporary intermediate state of disembodied souls awaiting the general bodily resurrection (Jn 5:28ff). Like Jesus body and our bodies, it would seem that the whole universe will be transformed and glorified (Romans 8:18ff). Creation as we know it will be changed, not abolished. God's original plans for the world will be wonderfully fulfilled. So this world matters. We should be faithful stewards of it.

I suggest that at some point in this study you all say the Apostles' Creed together (a copy was included with study 1).

You could ask some questions to review the whole series of studies.

Can you say "Amen" ("so be it, let it be, truly" etc.) to the Apostles' Creed (i.e. affirm it)?**What have you been struck by as you studied the creed as a whole?****What difference would it make to live more in the light of the truths of the creed?****How does the creed prompt you to prayer or praise?**