

February 15, 2026

Creed Series #1

“Hear O Israel!”

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Intro:

If someone were to ask you, “What do you believe?”, how would you answer? Perhaps the question is problematic – what does it refer to? You might want them to clarify the question. After all, they might want to know which you believe is better: Coke or Pepsi (Coke, obviously). But probably, the question would become: “As a Christian, what do you believe? What are the primary items of your faith?”

You might be sitting here this morning thinking that that is a pretty easy question to answer, and you might even have some ready points available. But this is also the question at the heart of so many of the divisions and splits within churches and denominations throughout Christianity historically, and especially today.

What we believe, and how we know, are important things for Christians to be able to articulate. They are also important in understanding how we are connected to other Christians as the universal Church. Unfortunately, there is not always agreement on those points of belief, and this causes problems.

If you were to do a quick search of the websites of various churches and parachurch or faith-based organizations, you would find that each of them has some form of a Statement of Faith document to identify their key beliefs. As you looked from statement to statement, you would find similarities and differences. If they are listing the core elements of Christian belief, and if these really are honest Christian organizations, then there shouldn't be any differences. But there still are.

Over the next seven weeks (counting today), I want to explore what it is that all Christians should agree on and hold to as the primary points of faith – the things

that unite us, not divide us. In my mind, the easiest way to do this is by using the Apostle's Creed as the framework for what those key points of belief are.

Baptists and the Creed:

Before we get into the details of the creed, though, I need to point out that Baptists have historically had a rocky relationship with the Creeds (Apostles' and Nicene specifically). Early Baptist thought the Creeds risked adding to Scripture, or more accurately, risked giving themselves the same authority as Scripture. For the early Baptists, Scripture alone was authoritative and should be the sole point of reference for how Christians should live. Baptists also struggled with the wording of "The Holy Catholic Church" within the creed, feeling that the term forces all Christians under the umbrella of Catholicism, which of course, Protestants as a whole rejected. This second concern reflects a wrong understanding of that terminology, and we will explore that in a few weeks. Finally, there was in Baptist circles the view that the Creed did not speak enough to the importance of the social justice work that the church, and believers, should be engaging in.

In more recent years – the last century, there has been a shift, and more Baptist churches welcome the reading of the Apostles' creed and use it as a valid and useful framework for expressing the key points of faith. True to the autonomous nature of Baptist churches, the level of engagement with the creeds varies from church to church.

When I was preparing for ordination, one of the main requirements was to write a statement-of-faith position paper. I thought that using the Apostles' Creed as the outline for that paper made good sense, and so I used it as a guide. After I handed in the first draft for review, I was informed that I should find a different way to structure the paper because "Baptists, and specifically the CBWC, are not creedal people." So, even 10 years ago, there was still some resistance to elevating the creed within our own Baptist family. By the way, the Apostles' Creed is read regularly now in many of our CBWC churches and appears as one of the documents around statements of faith on our denomination's web page, so we should be safe to find value in it for our church.

This morning, however, I am not going to dive into the points of the Apostles' Creed. Instead, I want to move us to break down what we believe even further than that document. I want us to locate a true foundation for what we believe, and for what those creeds themselves rest on. Broadly speaking, the Apostles' Creed is an effort to explain faith to those who are new to it. Practically speaking, it was developed as a teaching and learning tool for those who were new to Christianity and who were anticipating baptism. For a lack of better phrase, this was the first baptism class outline. It also wasn't written by the Apostles (the 12 plus Paul), but that is an issue with the naming of the creed.

The First Creed:

What then is the foundation that we should build everything on? What things as Christians can and should we all agree upon, even if there are other areas of doctrine or faith that we might differ on?

The gospel writers recount a moment with Jesus where people, concerned about their track record of following God's law, asked Jesus what was the most important commandment, or law, to follow. There is some variation between the accounts – we read Mark's version earlier, but the key thing is Jesus' affirmation that loving God and loving people is the most important thing. This is the foundation of faith. In Matthew's account, Jesus goes on to add "The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." (Matt 22:40)

This was not a new idea that Jesus came up with. He was simply affirming instructions given much earlier in the history of the Israelites. This is the word and heart of the *Shema* that Moses had given as instructions to the Israelites as they ventured forth as the people of God.

We read the Shema from Deuteronomy 6, and the word essentially comes from the first word of those verses – "hear" or "listen" (depending on your English translation). That is what the Shema is, an instruction to the community of faith to

listen to what is the most important thing. To listen to how they were to understand their faith and what they were to use as the foundation for it.

The words that we read from Deuteronomy are, essentially, the first creed. Those words give us the anchor of our faith and our faith trajectory as we live it out day to day.

“Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” This is the first point of our foundation. In a world where plurality was the name of the game, the Israelites were to understand and believe that there is only one God, and He is Yahweh. In our world, so many things – work, money, power, influence, entertainment, New Age ideologies, cults, and so on, vie for our attention and our allegiance, stoke our pride, and reinforce our natural human desire to feel like we are the authors of our own destiny. These words of Deuteronomy 6 pull us out of those enticements to remind us that there should be and is only one who is worthy to be God in our lives and in this world, and He is Yahweh.

Our response to this is to be to love Him with our whole being – heart, soul, and mind. He will accept nothing less, and we have nothing that is more precious or valuable to offer. Everything else – all that Jesus taught, all that Paul and the rest wrote about in their letters, all that the Apostles’ Creed and the confessions outline, build upon the foundation of the Shema, upon the foundation that Yahweh alone is God and we are to love Him. We cannot know how to truly love others if we do not know how to love God (or know His love for us).

The Shema speaks to all areas of our lives. It is communal – meaning that all believers are held to the same standard and the same expectation. In a post-resurrection context, these words are for the whole Church, every Christian. “Listen, O Israel” – the nation, the people. We could just as easily substitute “Listen, O Christians” or “Listen, O Church”. But the instructions are also more personal. As you read a little further, Moses gives instructions on how the people are to keep these words, and their identity as God’s people, in the forefront of their minds each day.

We see in verse 6 that these instructions are for individuals. Each of us must be committed wholeheartedly to following God and loving Him first.

Following God is also a family affair. Baptists, and most Protestants, tend to see faith as an individual thing only. We hope for the best for our family members, but ultimately it is their decision, their course to follow. Verse 7 tells a different story. The things of faith should be central to family life. God's word is to be regularly shared with children and spoken around the daily household rhythms. Teaching about God, about Scripture, and about loving Him is everyone's responsibility, not just for those who have that role in the church.

Finally, our faith has a public dimension. It should be visible to anyone we come into contact with. For the ancient Israelite, this was put into practice through having phylacteries (little boxes containing scripture verses) hanging on the foreheads, and verses sewn into the sleeves of their robes and written on strips of cloth that were wrapped around their wrists. Anyone looking at a Jew would know it because of those identifiers. When people look at you, do they see Jesus? We may not have scripture verses written all over us, but do our bearing, our manner, our language, our judgement, and our mercy demonstrate a belief that we are to love the Lord our God with our whole being, and love our neighbour as ourselves?

The final piece of public expression in our scripture passage was the writing of words of Scripture on the doorposts. This served a visible reminder to the people of what they believed and who they represented every time they came or went from their houses. We don't typically write Bible verses on the door frames of our homes, but do our homes tell a story of our faith? When people come to visit, are they met with grace, welcome, and hospitality? Do they feel at ease and safe? It isn't a question of having a home that is spotless and pristine (although for some that is part of the expression), it is a question of a home where Jesus is Lord, and love for others is expressed.

Conclusion:

We will spend the next several weeks, until Palm Sunday, looking at the Apostles' creed and what it is that Christians believe, and why it matters. I hope that you will keep in your minds, the Shema – the first creed, as foundational to understanding the things of faith that all Christians should agree upon and that should unite the Church, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

I also hope that it will help to reinforce, redirect, or recall your own journey of faith and what it is that you believe.

Let's pray.