

The Spectrum of Christian Faith

What does it mean to be a Christian?

*What does it mean to be a
Christian?*

*What are the essential beliefs
for a Christian?*



THE
BIOLOGOS
FOUNDATION

Humility and Mystery

“Whatever you do, anyway, remember that these things are mysteries and that if they were such that we could understand them, they wouldn’t be worth understanding. A God you understood would be less than yourself.”

Flannery O’Connor

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3

See also Philippians 2:1-11

Dogma, Doctrine and Opinions

Dogma – The essentials of the Christian faith that Christians across the spectrum believe.

Doctrines – The issues that divide denominations. (What we will be exploring in this class.)

Opinions – Differences that can be held within a congregation or denomination.

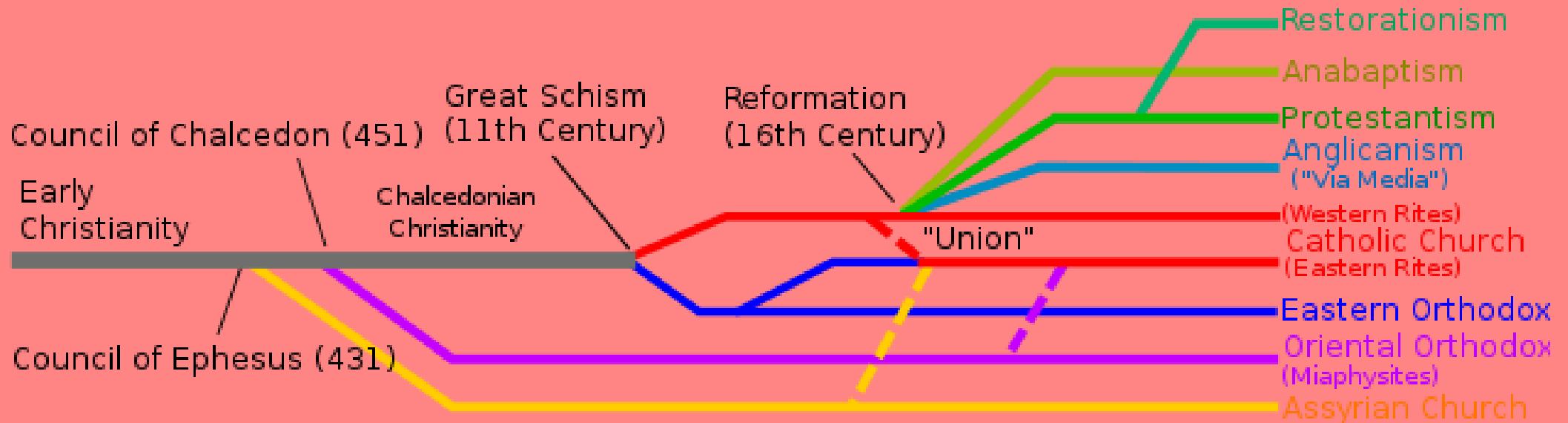
What are some examples of dogmas, doctrines or opinions?

Meet the Church



Meet the Church

Major branches within Christianity



Dogma – The Apostles' Creed

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

Dogma – The Apostles’ Creed

He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic (universal) church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Apostles’ creed and Lord’s prayer were the two “essentials” new converts were taught in the early church before baptism.

Dogma – The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,

Dogma – The Nicene Creed

begotten, not made;

of the same essence as the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation

he came down from heaven;

he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;

he suffered and was buried.

Dogma – The Nicene Creed

The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.

He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again with glory

to judge the living and the dead.

His kingdom will never end.

Dogma – The Nicene Creed

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.

He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.



Dogma – The Nicene Creed

- God created everything. God is not created.
- **God is three in one.** Each person of the trinity is God and is coequal and consubstantial with the other persons of the trinity.
- **Jesus is fully human and fully God.**
- Jesus died and rose from the dead.
- Jesus will return as judge of all humans.
- God forgives sins.
- **There is one church.**
- Christians will be resurrected to life everlasting in the age to come.

What about Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc?

“Latter-day Saints reject the doctrines of the Trinity as taught by most Christian churches today. These creeds were canonized in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. and do not reflect the thinking or beliefs of the New Testament church.”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1988/03/comparing-lds-beliefs-with-first-century-christianity?lang=eng>

For one thing, the Bible does not mention the word “Trinity.” For another, Jesus never claimed to be equal to God. Instead, Jesus worshipped God.

<https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/g201308/trinity/>

What about Wabash?

1. We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever!
2. Jesus Christ, the living Word, became flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He now is our High Priest and Mediator.
3. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ and to apply the saving work of Christ to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior. Indwelling our hearts, He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth, and seals us for the day of redemption.

What about Wabash?

4. Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God's free grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, thereby justifies them in His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life.

5. The true Church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are united together in the body of Christ. The Church finds her visible, yet imperfect, expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity; where scriptural discipline is practiced, and where loving fellowship is maintained. For her perfecting, she awaits the return of her Lord.

What about Wabash?

6. Jesus Christ will come again to the earth—personally, visibly, and bodily—to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate history and the eternal plan of God. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

7. The Lord Jesus Christ commands all believers to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations. Obedience to the Great Commission requires total commitment to “Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.” He calls us to a life of self-denying love and service. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

These Essentials are set forth in greater detail in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

Further Reading

- *The 11 Beliefs You Should Know about Jehovah's Witnesses When They Knock at the Door* by Justin Taylor (blog post)

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/the-11-beliefs-you-should-know-about-jehovahs-witnesses-when-they-knock-at-the-door/>

- *Mormonism Explained: What Latter-day Saints Teach and Practice* by Andrew Jackson, Crossway Books, 2008

Further Reading

- *"I Believe": Exploring the Apostles' Creed* by Alister McGrath, IVP, 1998
- *The Landscape of Faith: An Explorer's Guide to the Christian Creeds* by Alister McGrath, SPCK, 2018
- *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why it Matters* by Luke Timothy Johnson, Image, 2004
- *The Apostle's Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* by Ben Myers, Lexham Press Christian Essentials Series, 2018
- *The Apostles' Creed: For All God's Children (A FatCat Book)* by Ben Myers and Illustrated by Natasha Kennedy, Lexham Press, 2022

Further Reading

- *Church History in Plain Language*, Fifth Edition by Bruce L. Shelley, Zondervan Academic, 2021
- *The Story of Christian Theology* by Roger Olson, IVP Academic, 1999
- *The Story of Christianity* by Justo L. Gonzalez (2 Volumes), HarperOne, 2010
- *Teach Us to Pray: The Lord's Prayer in the Early Church and Today* by Justo L. Gonzalez, Eerdmans, 2020