

## Doctrine of Letters

### The Importance of a Single Letter

1. Four times in the history of the church, a single letter has helped to shape her doctrine, and destiny.
2. There was controversy over the letter “s”, spoken about in Galatians 3.
  - *Galatians 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.*
3. In context, Paul is reminding the Galatians that there are not many ways to be saved. There is only one way to be saved, and that is through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, apart from the works of the Law.
4. Individuals cannot be saved by the works of the Law, but only by faith in Jesus Christ.
5. To prevail in his position of the superiority of faith, Paul reminds the Judaizers that before the giving of the Law, there was the patriarch Abraham to whom the promise of a seed was given.
6. Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.
  - *Romans 4:3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*
7. Ultimately, the promised seed is Jesus Christ. To believe in Christ, is to have the faith of Abraham, who believed God when He promised the seed.
8. There was controversy over the letter “c” in the word “Catholic” in the Apostle’s Creed.

### A Brief History

9. The Apostles’ Creed is a statement of Christian belief that is widely used by many Western churches, both Catholic, and Protestant.
10. Although its roots are much earlier, in its present form it dates to about the eighth century.

### The Old Roman Creed

11. An early version of what later became the Apostles’ Creed, called the “Old Roman Creed,” was in use as early as the second century.
12. The earliest written form of this creed is found in a letter that Marcellus of Ancyra wrote in Greek to Julius, the bishop of Rome, about AD 341.

13. About 50 years later, Tyrannius Rufinus wrote a commentary on this creed in Latin (Commentarius in symbolum apostolorum).
14. In it, he recounted the viewpoint that the apostles wrote the creed together after Pentecost, before leaving Jerusalem to preach.
15. The title, Apostles' Creed, is also mentioned about 390 AD by Ambrose, where he refers to "the creed of the Apostles which the Church of Rome keeps and guards in its entirety" (Ep. 42, trans. in Saint Ambrose: Letters).
16. The Trinitarian text of the Old Roman Creed is as follows:

#### **God the Father**

I believe in God the Father almighty;

#### **God the Son**

and in Christ Jesus His only Son, our Lord,  
 Who was born from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
 Who under Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried,  
 on the third day rose again from the dead,  
 ascended into heaven,  
 sits at the right hand of the Father,  
 whence he will come to judge the living and the dead;

#### **God the Holy Spirit**

and in the Holy Spirit,  
 the holy Church,  
 the remission of sins,  
 the resurrection of the flesh,  
 life everlasting.

#### **The Later Creed**

17. What we now know as the Apostles' Creed, is an enlargement of the Old Roman Creed.
18. The first known occurrence of the Apostles' Creed, in a form that is nearly equivalent to its final form, is in the Latin tract, *De singulis libris canonicis scarapsus*, by the monk Priminus from the early eighth century.
19. The process by which the Old Roman Creed became the Apostles' Creed cannot be exhaustively known.
20. Over the next few centuries, the Apostles' Creed, in its final form, gained acceptance throughout France and Germany.

21. It was officially recognized by Charlemagne throughout the Frankish Empire in the early ninth century, and was eventually incorporated into the liturgy of the Church of Rome.
22. The Apostle's Creed, as it exists today, consists of three main articles, like the Old Roman Creed divided according to a Trinitarian arrangement. The text is as follows:

### **God the Father**

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

### **God the Son**

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,  
 Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born from the Virgin Mary,  
 suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, descended into hell,  
 on the third day rose again from the dead,  
 ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty,  
 thence He will come to judge the living and the dead;

### **God the Holy Spirit**

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
 the holy Catholic Church,  
 the communion of saints,  
 the remission of sins,  
 the resurrection of the flesh,  
 and eternal life.  
 Amen.

23. Notice that from the time the Old Roman Apostle's Creed was written, to the Later Creed, the word "Catholic" was added, with a capital "C", referring to the visible Church of Rome.
24. In the sixteenth century, the Protestants argued that the capital letter "C" should be changed to a lower letter "c" in order to affirm faith in the "catholic", or universal church, which was invisible.
25. The debate was on, and continues to this day.
26. There was controversy over the letter "i", or the letter "iota", in the Greek.
27. Before this controversy was settled, a special church council had to be called, which produced a new confession of faith.

### **A Developing Concern**

28. As Christianity developed, one of the main questions the Church Fathers had to address concerned the nature of God and the nature of his relationship with his Son, Jesus Christ.

29. This controversy was called the "Trinitarian controversy" because it involved solving the riddle of how it was possible that God could be three, God the Father, His Son Jesus the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and yet One at the same time.
30. The dominant position among Christian theologians at this point in history was the doctrine of **homoousianism**, according to which Father and Son were identical in substance, and in attributes.
31. Any deviations from this orthodoxy were to be considered heresy.
32. A heretic did arise in the person of Arius of Alexander.
33. Arius said that Jesus Christ was not the same as God the Father. In fact, there was a time when the Son did not exist. Jesus is a created being.
34. Arius said that Jesus was similar, **homoiousian**, but not the same as, **homoousian**, the Father.
35. The difference in the two words is one letter, the "i", the Greek iota.
36. There is tremendous difference between Jesus being like the Father, and Jesus being the same as the Father.
37. To resolve the controversy, the Council of Nicea convened in AD 325 by the Roman emperor, Constantine I. This was the first ecumenical council of the Christian church. It met in Turkey.
38. The council condemned Arius, and, incorporated the word, **homoousios** ("of one substance"), into the Nicene Creed to signify the absolute equality of the Son with the Father.
39. The emperor then exiled Arius, an act that manifested solidarity of church and state.

#### **Controversy over the letter "r"**

40. There was controversy over the letter "r", referring to the rapture of the church which occurs at the Second Coming of Christ when the Church goes forth to greet her returning King.
  - *1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*
41. In the 1830's, the letter "r" was changed from a small letter to a capital "R", because an expanded Dispensational theological meaning was given to the word.
42. The English word, "rapture", comes from a Latin verb meaning, "to drag", "to snatch", "to take by force." It can be translated, "to be caught up", or, "to be translated."

43. The Greek word for being “caught up” is “harpazo”, and is equivalent to the word rapture, with a small r.
44. When the word rapture is capitalized, then the word, Rapture, takes on a new concept. Not only does it convey the idea of being “caught up”, but it conveys being caught up to be with Christ by leaving earth for seven years, and then returning after a tribulation period, to rule with Him for a thousand years on earth.