

## Creeds of the Kehillah ~ Part 12

### The Apostles' Creed ~ Part 12

This post will continue our closer look at the third article of faith contained in the **Apostles' Creed** to learn more about what we affirm that we believe.

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT,  
the holy catholic Church,  
**the communion of saints,**  
**the forgiveness of sins**  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

#### THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

**Yeshua** wrote no books. He established no institutions. He did not lay down the correct answers to moral questions. He did not seem particularly interested in founding a new religion. He was the author not of ideas but of a way of life. Everything **Yeshua** believed to be important was entrusted to His small circle of followers. What He handed on to them was simply life. He showed them His unique way of being alive - His way of living, loving, feasting, forgiving, teaching, and dying - and He invited them to live the same way.

Becoming a **Believer** is not really about institutional membership or about adopting a system of ideas. To become a **Believer** is to be included in the circle of **Yeshua's** followers. We are washed with the same bath that **Yeshua** and all His followers have had. We get to share the same meal that **Yeshua** shared with His followers. Four of **Yeshua's** followers left written records of what he said and what He was like, and we get to spend our lives continually pondering those four accounts. We read them not because we are studying ideas about **Yeshua** but because we are studying *Him*. We want everything in our lives, right down to the most minor and most disappointing details, to enter somehow into communion with the life of **Yeshua**.

We share the holy bath and the holy meal, and we read the holy stories because we are seeking **Yeshua**. But when we do these things, we are also seeking ourselves. We want to find ourselves among the circle of **Yeshua's** followers. We want to be wherever **Yeshua** is, and He is in the company of His friends. We want our whole lives to be ***hidden with the Messiah in God.*** ~ Col. 3:3 (CJB)

When this happens, our lives acquire a meaning beyond themselves. We begin to see ourselves as part of a great company, an ever-widening circle of people who have handed their lives over to the pattern of **Yeshua's** life. This remarkable company of **talmidim** seems to speak with one voice, breathe with one Spirit, cry ***Abba, Father!*** with one unceasing prayer (Rom 8:15–16).

The Fourth Gospel ends by telling us that it has offered only a glimpse of **Yeshua**. If everything **Yeshua** did was written down, ***the whole world could contain the books that would have to be written!*** (John 21:25).

Perhaps, at the end of the age, the Total Gospel will be read out and will be found to contain everything - every life, every story, every human grief and joy, all included as episodes in the one great, infinitely rich story of **Yeshua** and His friends. The world itself is too small for such a book. Life and death are too small for the Communion of Saints.

#### THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

The confession of the forgiveness of sins was a relatively late addition to the creed. The earliest baptismal confessions spoke simply of *"the Holy Spirit, the holy church, and the resurrection of the flesh."*

But a dramatic debate arose among fourth-century **Believers** about the nature of sin and forgiveness. **Believers** in those days were still subjected to periods of persecution under the Roman emperors. In 303 CE, the emperor Diocletian ordered that the property of **Believers** was to be seized, their books burned, and their places of worship

destroyed. All believing leaders were to be imprisoned. Only those who sacrificed to the Roman gods would be released. Some **Believers** were martyred. But martyrdom was always the exception. Countless frightened **Believers** - including, of course, many clergies - came out to make the sacrifices. The emperor even permitted the **Believers** to sacrifice as a group, making it as easy as possible to renounce their faith.

By offering public sacrifice to the Roman gods, such **Believers** had effectively renounced their baptism. But before long, things returned to normal, and **Believers** were again tolerated as part of Rome's pluralistic empire. Predictably, the apostate **Believers**, known as "traitors," soon returned to the community as if nothing much had happened.

This situation created a pastoral crisis for many congregations. What is to be done with **Believers** who have renounced their baptism? Can they be accepted back into the faith? Is there a public way of marking their reentry into the community? Should they be baptized a second time? Or should they be permanently excluded from participation in the **Believer** community?

Even more awkward was the question about clergy who had made the pagan sacrifices. When ministers of **Yeshua** invalidate their faith, does it mean that their ministry has been invalid all along? What if you had been baptized by a minister who later renounced his faith? Would you need to get baptized again by someone else?

These were difficult questions. It was a time of intense soul-searching for many **Believers**. Through this struggle over the "traitors," the most profound questions of **Messianic** identity came sharply into focus. What is it that makes you a follower of **Yeshua**? And what can you do if you have strayed from **Yeshua's** path? Is the **Messianic** community strictly of the pure (as some called it), or can struggling, weak, uncertain souls also find a place within that community?

The fourth-century crisis eventually led to clear answers to these questions. **Messianic** teachers argued that the community includes everyone who confesses **Yeshua** and receives baptism. It is not only for the pure and the spiritually successful. Failures in discipleship - even dramatic public failures - do not exclude a person from the grace of God. As Augustine insisted in one of his many sermons against spiritual elitism: "*We must never despair of anyone at all.*" When backslidden **Believers** return to the faith, they do not need to be rebaptized. Through a changed way of life, they need to show that they are taking their baptism seriously. There is no need to be baptized more than once since that would imply that we need to be forgiven more than once. The forgiveness of sins has taken place once for all in the death and resurrection of **Yeshua**.

These conclusions were so important that the ancient community began to include "*the forgiveness of sins*" as part of the baptismal confession. In 381 CE, the Nicene Creed was expanded to include the statement "*we acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.*" (We will be looking at the entirety of the Nicene Creed shortly.)

We believe that we stand not by our achievements but by the achievement of **Yeshua's** death and resurrection. We believe that the spiritually strong and the spiritually weak are both sustained by the same forgiving grace. We believe that we rely solely on grace, not only in our worst failures but also in our best successes.<sup>1</sup>

In my next post, we continue to unpack the third article of our faith in the **Ruach HaKodesh** (Holy Spirit) in the **Apostle's Creed**.

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<sup>1</sup> The Apostles' Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism