

III. The Apostles' Creed in Biblical Perspective

"I Believe..."

"In God the Father, Almighty"

Romans 1; Genesis 17; Matthew 6:25–34

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There are three texts that give us foundational Biblical context for the first study on the first affirmation of the article of faith in the Apostles' Creed – I believe in God the Father Almighty. The text I'm going to start with is Romans 1:16–23 which says *[16] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

[18] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Let's say someone comes up to you and it's obvious that they're curious, seeking and have a question for you. They say 'Something is missing from my life, I'm seeking religion and I want to know if you believe in God?' What would be your answer to this question? I hope it would be 'yes.' Then they say "I went to this guy who was a Jehovah's Witness and I asked him if he believed in God and he said 'yes' as did you so I guess the same God you believe in is the same God he believes in, would that be right?" I hope your answer would be 'no.' Then they said "I talked with someone with the Church of Latter Day Saints and they said they were a Christian and believed in God so do you believe in the same God they do?" Again, I hope your answer is 'no.' Then they said 'I was talking with someone about Islam and they said in Farsi that Allah just means God so do you believe in the same God?' Then they go another step and say "you say your God is different than their god so would you explain to me your God? Now what would you say? Would you be ready to give an answer?"

The early church was concerned that you would be ready. So their first article of affirmation in the second century developed an instrument called the Apostles' Creed and it's not because the Apostles wrote it for that is the reason the apostrophe is at the end of the 's' but it is a creed declaring the faith once and for all delivered through the Apostles. There are creeds in the Bible and then there are creeds developed in the church from the Bible with most being developed to answer a heresy or theological error, like the doctrine of God or the doctrine of Christ or the doctrine of salvation.

A creed does three things. One it is an instrument of discipleship as it gathers Biblical truth around a particular issue. Two it is a confession that works two ways – it proclaims what you believe in worship and through the world in witness, and it protects what you believe to the

doctrines of demons that would adulterate the teaching of God's Word so it's an instrument used to protect against false teaching. Almost all of the early creeds were developed for that but not the Apostles' Creed. The third use of a creed is to promote Biblical unity but not unity for unity sake, for how do two walk together unless they are agreed? When we are agreed we are to walk together in so far as we are agreed that we can function together.

The Apostles' Creed was not written to answer an error although it can and has been used that way, but the prevailing use of it was once a person made a profession of faith the pastor would use the creed for discipleship. Now it is pretty close to its original form from the second century but it was edited from time to time over the next two to three centuries as it was being fleshed out as a discipleship instrument for new believers over the essentials.

I first met R.C. Sproul as my professor and then he became my mentor, then we became friends in many ways. One of the first books I bought was his series of sermons on the Apostles' Creed and the book was entitled *Basic Training*. I remember in March of 1969 when I had only been married a couple of months and I had come home after I had my test and physical, telling my wife that I should be getting my orders to Paris Island in South Carolina for boot camp. This is when they do basic training to teach you the essentials of what it means to be a Marine. A couple of years later I'm working for UPS and before you could be a UPS package car driver I had to go to their basic training school and learn by the book.

That is basically what they did with the Apostles' Creed for it contains the essentials but not the essentials are in the creed so all Christians believe more than what is found in the Apostles' Creed, but they don't believe less. So the Apostles' Creed was primarily used for new believers to help them begin to learn the essentials, the basics of the faith and then bring them to baptism. In other words, they would disciple them from the profession of faith to their baptism using the Apostles' Creed. Its primary purpose was to teach the essentials.

The first article of affirmation in the Apostles' Creed of what we believe is 'I believe in God the Father Almighty.' In those few words the distinctive of the God of glory and grace, the One true and living God are affirmed, declared upon which the rest of the creed is built and upon which our life is built. Do I believe the doctrine of God is important? Yes I do because of what Jesus said in John 17:3 which says [3] *And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.* I can never know God exhaustively, in fact throughout all of eternity I will be learning about Him but I can know Him accurately, personally, intimately and what are the distinctives of the God of glory and grace, the One true God that are marked out in that first affirmation? There are five of them so when a person says 'tell me about your God' then you can answer them.

The first distinctive is that this God is known by Divine revelation and not by human imagination. Everything we believe about God we only know it because God has revealed it. Let me put it this way; a Christian would never say, certainly after some discipleship, 'I think God is...' because who God is, is not based upon what we think in our imagination. It is based upon what God says – Divine revelation. We know who God is because of the Word of God. You can know the Word of God and not know the God of the Word but you can't know the God of the Word without the Word of God. Praise God His attribute is light and God reveals Himself, accurately and inerrantly.

So how does God reveal Himself? God reveals Himself in two ways to you. Divine revelation comes in general revelation and special revelation. So you don't know who God is by imagination but you know who God is by revelation. In the Ten Commandments the first commandment affirms the worship of God – you shall have no other gods before Me. The

second commandment affirms how you know the God you worship with a negative – do not make for yourself any graven *images* (see the word here for imagination). You do not create the God to worship from imagination and fabrication, you go to the Word of God, Divine revelation.

God does this first in general revelation which means it's available to everybody. When you are born into this world you have general revelation. General revelation comes by way of two means. Mean number one is creation. We see this in Romans 1:19–20 when it says *[19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.* This is so that His Divine nature, His eternal power, His everlasting attributes are seen through what has been made. Psalm 19:1 says *[1] The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.* The creation pours forth day after day the speech of God's glory. Psalm 150:6 says *[6] Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!* The creation reveals the God of glory.

Mean number two of general revelation is your conscience. You're made in God's image. Hasn't your conscience been wrestling through the things you've seen on television this past week – on a death of a man (George Floyd), the response it provoked. We have issues of justice on our minds. Yet that dog you have at home who watches the same program you do, are not working through that in their mind, but you are because you are made in the image of God, on purpose, with purpose and God's stamp is on you. He has placed His law and the sanctities of His law in your heart. Therefore you begin to process those things.

We can't fully know God savingly, why? When general revelation comes – creation and conscience – we have a problem. We because of our sin nature suppress the truth in unrighteousness for what is plain we complicate and obscure because of our sinful heart, but God is gracious for He doesn't stop with general revelation that holds us accountable He sends special revelation and just like general revelation, special revelation comes in two means as well. Mean number one is that special revelation is the Incarnate Christ, the Savior, the Son of God. According to Hebrews 1 the Incarnate Christ is the exact representation of the Father. John 14:9 says *[9] Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? **Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.** How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"* The Father has revealed Himself in His Son. As the hymn 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing' says, 'Veiled in flesh (Jesus) the Godhead see, hail the Incarnate Deity.'

Mean number two in special revelation is that He reveals Himself in the inscripturated Word – the Word of God itself. God's Word is that which begins to open our eyes, hearts and minds. The Word of God not only reveals Him but reveals to us Him. The Apostles' Creed starts 'I believe in...' Where did your faith come from? It came from God, why? It came by grace. John 6:29 says *[29] Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."* Ephesians 2:8–9 says *[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Faith gets to you by grace through the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Romans 10:17 says *[17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.* So I can know God and I can believe what I know about God by Divine revelation – the Word of God and the Spirit of God opens my eyes so that I believe and embrace what has been revealed to me in creation, conscience infallibly and inerrantly in His Word that declares the majesty of the Incarnate Christ.

One more thing, God reveals Himself in His Word progressively. So you open up the Bible and read ‘In the beginning God’ meaning El, then Elohi, then Elohim then plurality in the Godhead is accomplished and then comes Yahweh (I Am that I Am). Then comes Jehovah Jireh meaning I will provide, etc. God gives names to tell us who He is and He is progressively unfolding Himself so that He reveals Himself to us exactly who He is so that we would know who He is. Then He comes to the glorious distillation and comprehensive revelation of who He is in His Son Jesus and the revelation of the New Covenant in the New Testament to us. Your knowledge of God must be rooted in the knowledge of God. It’s not a God we imagine or feel about but it’s a God who reveals Himself that we know. We feel deeply Him who loves us deeply.

Here is a second distinctive is that when you go to the Bible this is One God who dwells in three Persons. That is the way He reveals Himself. Even when He reveals Himself as one God, in the Old Testament He begins to anticipate, accommodate, and initiate the doctrine of the Trinity for our understanding. Mark 12:29–30 says [29] *Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one (God). [30] And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’* This is a God, single with plurality. It doesn’t say what plurality but it is with plurality and that’s why you use it to speak of a grape, a cluster, but a grape singular.

Go to the creation account. Genesis 1:1 says [1] *In the beginning God* (singular)... and then in Genesis 1:26 it says [26] *Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”* Now the doctrine of the Trinity is not articulate here but it is anticipated and accommodated as it begins to unfold in the Old Testament step by step through the names of God, the acts of God, shadows, types, promises and precepts until you get to the full declaration of it in the New Testament. As it comes forth in the New Testament we find out that in abundant clarity in its articulation and declaration that there is one God in three Persons. That is His Being for God is God who exists in His singular Being in three Persons.

You are made in His image and you are a being with one person yet have multiple dynamics in our life however God is a Being in three Persons. For instance, I am a husband, father, parent, pastor, citizen, etc. These are things I am in my roles, responsibilities and acts of life as one being made in the image of God with personhood. God exists as one Being in three Persons and multiple acts of Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, Judge, Completer. As the Trinity creates the Father authored creation. All things were created through the Son and for the Son and the Holy Spirit hovered over creation as He ordered creation. In redemption, the Father authored our salvation, the Son accomplished our salvation, and the Holy Spirit applies our salvation. God’s work in providence – the Father loves us, the Son intercedes for us and the Holy Spirit indwells us. We also have a Trinitarian Gospel – Father, Son and Holy Spirit through the preeminent Christ by whom we fix our hearts and minds to the glory of the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are taught to pray this way; Our Father who art in heaven, so we taught to pray Trinitarian. The Father seeks true worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. We worship the Father through the Son and in the Spirit. So in our confessions, our hymns, our worships, our witness – it is clear, one God three Persons.

The third distinctive is that He is our Father. As the Bible unfolds the doctrine of God progressively from the Old Testament to the New Testament, who is the first Teacher of Israel, the first Rabbi to inform us that God is our Father? It is Jesus and when did He first say it? He said it in Luke 2 after His parents had left Him behind and He was at the Temple. Luke 2:48–50

records, [48] *And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress."* [49] *And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? **Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?**"* [50] *And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. God is our Father.*

We are mothered because God the Father sent His Son who purchased His bride and set up His bride to nurture His people but God reveals Himself in the focus of the first Person of the Trinity as our Father. Jesus fills the New Testament with it. Matthew 6:25–34 says [25] *"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"* [26] *Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. **Are you not of more value than they?*** [27] *And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?* [28] *And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,* [29] *yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.* [30] *But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?* [31] *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'* [32] *For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and **your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.*** [33] *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* [34] *"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

Matthew 16:17 says [17] *And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."* Matthew 6:7–9a says [7] *"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. [8] Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. [9a] Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven..."* This is unheard of, for go find this kind of prayer in the Old Covenant. But now only because of Christ and not because Christ has been diminished, this great God who is so glorious, I now can say He is my Father. We have this glorious relationship with Him.

We see this Trinitarian work at the baptism of Jesus also in Matthew 3:16–17 which says [16] *And when **Jesus** was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the **Spirit of God** descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; [17] and behold, **a voice from heaven** said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* The Trinity is not one God with three uniforms, but He is one God in three Persons. He is not three Gods, but one God and He is not one God with three appearances. If you are in Christ and Christ is in you then God is your Father and through Christ He is well pleased with you. You have now been adopted into the family of God through the work of an elder Brother, Jesus, your Redeemer and you can call God your Father.

These Charleston examples just came flooding to my mind this week. I not only bore my dad's name but I had a special relationship with my dad and one which I wish was only even more special in many ways, but I'll never forget when we moved to Charleston, South Carolina. There was a street called Park Circle which was a circle and it had eight roads running off of it. Down one of those eight roads was my second grade elementary school which was named Park Circle Elementary and now North Charleston Elementary School. When it came time for school to soon start my parents walked me through how to walk from my house to my elementary

school. So Monday morning came and there were two things we forgot – it was on the coast and it was where the largest paper mill was in the US, therefore every morning marsh mist and paper mill smoke together produces a layer of cloud that one smelled really bad and two you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. That first morning of school I made it to Park Circle and I was looking for that road I was supposed to go off of to school but kept going around and around that circle and then I picked one which was the wrong road. The clouds got thick and the odor more intense, everything got worse and I was convinced I had just walked into oblivion.

Then I thought 'No, my daddy will miss me and come find me.' I think my dad realized when he looked out the window and saw the conditions that he better go check on me. Right at the moment I thought 'my dad will find me' I looked up and beside me was a 54 Chevy. The door opened and my dad looked out and said 'Son, are you lost?' I said 'Yes, daddy, I'm sorry.' He said 'Don't worry, get in the car, I'll take you to school.' I love that moment for so many reasons but one reason is because it was a precursor for 13 years later I had taken the wrong road and I was lost in the depths of my sin. I was headed to a Christless eternity to a place called hell and the heavenly Father sought me by the Spirit of God. He said to me in a Gospel message 'Are you lost?' and I said 'yes, I'm sorry' with the response being 'get in I'll take you to school' and He brought me by grace to the school of grace and through that He has taken me home. I believe in God the Father, but can He pull it off?

That is why the next one is so dear – I believe in God the Father, *Almighty*. Our Father being Almighty is the fourth distinctive. Don't you love the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 17:6–8, 15–17 which says [6] *"I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. [7] And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. [8] And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."*

[15] *And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. [16] I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."* [17] *Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"* And at the very beginning of Genesis 17:1 it says [1] *When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty"* (El Shaddai). Nothing is impossible for God. There is only one thing God can't do and that is He can't quit being God. That God in all of His glory and His attributes declares I Am God Almighty.

Using another dad illustration I bear my dad's name – Harry Lloyd Reeder III and almost all holidays our families would get together. Before my three sisters came along my dad would put me on top of a Frigidaire, stand me up, he would back up and then he'd say 'Son, jump!' All the family was around watching me. I have had to count bases in baseball games but I was never more nervous than in that moment when my dad told me to jump. I'm not the sharpest knife in the shed but I knew to process that so I knew that meant one, is he going to catch me or is he going to move and two, if he is going to catch me is he able to catch me. I became convinced I could trust him and he was able so I jumped.

God has revealed Himself to you and He has given you His promises and says 'cast yourself Me, I won't move and I am able.' He is able to create and He didn't need six days to create the world but He did it for a reason. He could have just spoken it into being in a moment.

He is able to save. He is able to sustain you for in Me you live and move and have your being (Acts 17:28). I am Able.

The fifth distinctive is that God is holy. The word holy means unique, one of a kind. There is not another one like Him. He is wholly other. He is righteous, pure, no sin, no ability to sin, sovereign for He alone can create. We can't create. Anything that someone creates they work with something that He made from nothing. Because we are in His image we can be created but we can't create – bring from nothing, something. We can't save. You can't save yourself. You can't save others. You cannot sustain humanity but the God who creates, redeems and sustains is wholly other, the Father Almighty and He alone is worthy to be praised which is why when you know the sign that you know Him is that you're unstoppable in your desire to worship Him alone, in a way that He alone is pleased. That begins to fill your soul.

If I was to ask you to give me one word for God but you can't use any of His names what would you say? Most people would say God is love and He is love but that is not the one you would look for. The one we look for are what we would see the angels doing in Isaiah and Revelation for they are crying out '*Holy, holy, holy* is the Lord God Almighty!' When He sends the Spirit to you who knows the intentions and thoughts of the living God, who is God, He's not called the love of God – He produces love, joy, peace, kindness, etc. – but He's a *Holy* Spirit. God is holy and His name is not to be taken in vain but only used to His praise and worship as He reveals Himself in His Word. God is to be glorified in all that He is, all that He has and all that He does. He is all in all to be praised.

Here is the takeaway from this first article of faith. Who and what we worship will determine how we live and how we live will ultimately reveal who and what we worship. You will set your calendar, make your budget, do the things you do based on who and what you worship. If you sit with, watch and listen to people long enough they will ultimately reveal to you who and what they worship.

One of my daughters said to me the other day 'Dad, do you know of this particular personality test that businesses use?' I said 'No, I don't, explain it to me.' She said 'It's really interesting. I won't go through all the details but basically they give you questions which are designed to get the person talking for at least a couple of hours and eventually you will find out who or what is important to them.' Eventually how we live and what we say will reveal who and what we worship.

My friend Dr. Sinclair Ferguson read the book *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins. The book debunks Christianity's God. After reading it Dr. Ferguson said "There's a lot to talk about here but here's the giveaway. *The God Delusion* to tell us that the God revealed in the Word of God is a delusion, when you read it, it soon is informative. By and far, no comparison, nothing is in second place, what one word is used the most in *The God Delusion*? It is the word "I", "me" and that's his delusion." Dawkins is his god of his vain imagination but he is not almighty and he is no everlasting father.

We boast in the Lord. I have all kinds of issues in a broken world but my first article of affirmation, my fixed point is I believe in God the Father Almighty. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God has a Holy Spirit compelled curiosity and if you want to know this God you are asking the question of eternal life – John 17:3 says [3] *And this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.* God the Father has given His Son that you might become the sons and daughters of God through Christ. I invite you to Him today. He is

the Father with a deep, deep love, who has given His Son with a deep love by atoning for your sins on the cross. Would you come to Him today? Brothers and sisters we can rejoice for those who come to Him and that this first article of faith is one we can sing, praise and confess, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty,' in Jesus' Name, I pray, Amen.

Power Points

I Believe...

- Divine Revelation not Human Imagination
- One God in Three Persons
- Father
- Almighty
- Holy

LIFE TAKEAWAY

Who and What we worship will determine how we live, and how we live will ultimately reveal who and what we worship.