

IV. The Apostles' Creed in Biblical Perspective

"I Believe..."

"Maker of Heaven and Earth"

Acts 17:16–34; Genesis 1:1

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

June 7, 2020 • Sunday Sermon

As we finish out this first affirmation of faith in the Apostles' Creed we will be looking at Acts 17 and Genesis 1. This is God's Word it's the truth. Acts 17:16–34 says [16] *Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. [17] So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. [18] Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babblers wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. [19] And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? [20] For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." [21] Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.*

[22] So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. [23] For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. [24] The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, [25] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. [26] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [27] that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, [28] for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring."

[29] Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. [30] The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

[32] Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." [33] So Paul went out from their midst. [34] But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

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.

We are in our first affirmation of the Apostles' Creed. This is not a creed from the Apostles due to the fact the apostrophe is after the 's' and not in front of it. On the contrary, it came to us in about the second century and was edited over the next couple of hundred years but

it is faithful to the apostolic teaching. A creed is a confession to proclaim truth to protect against false doctrine. It is also an instrument for discipleship as it takes Biblical truths around the subject to teach people. It's only as good as it is faithful to the Word of God. There are creeds in the Bible and then there are creeds in the early church to help us understand certain areas of the Bible many of which were under attack like the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Christ. Then a creed is there to help us serve the Lord together—how can two walk together unless they are agreed.

The Apostles' Creed was a creed developed from the New Testament Apostolic teaching on the essentials of Christianity. The creed contains the essentials but not all the essentials. Every Christian I know believes more than what is in this creed, but no one believes less. In these times, you can't build a superstructure without the foundation and these essentials are crucial. The very first affirmation is 'I believe in God the Father Almighty.' It is that I believe in God the Father and later it will say that I believe in God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. God is one Being in three Persons. You are one being in one person. God the Father is almighty. In other words, any power we know of like military power, economic power, political power etc., is always derivative and the only reason someone has power and authority is because God has assigned it to them. He is El Shaddai, Almighty.

This brings us to where we are in this study. I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, all that it contains. So as we go to the text in Acts 17 we see an Apostle who is using what was developed in the Apostles' Creed which is where part of this creed comes from. The Apostles' Creed draws from many texts in the New Testament but this is one of those text from the Apostle Paul. Here, when Paul goes to Athens, interestingly he goes right to power of intellect. In Jerusalem he goes to the power of religion. In Ephesus he goes to the power of commerce. In Rome he goes to the power of military and political power.

In Athens, Paul is there by himself and he is waiting for his team to catch up to him. He sees the idols there and it provokes him, but not to the anger of man and his unrighteousness. It provokes him to do what Peter says, to be ready to give an account of the hope that is within you in reasonableness and gentleness. That's exactly what he does for he begins to reason with them. He has two fishing pools—to get to the Jew he goes to the synagogue and to the Gentiles he goes to the marketplace. In Athens, this is the Agora which is where they not only exchange goods but ideas. He enters into debate with many of the common people but also with the philosophers. Even though there were multiple man-made religions and multiple philosophies in that day only two are mentioned and these two particular groups take an interest in him—the epicureans and the stoics. These groups want to hear more about what Paul is saying.

Paul is at the Areopagus which is the mountain of Ares. It is the name of the Greek god called Mars in which it's also called Mars Hill—the god of war. This is why Paul goes up on that mountain of war and ideas. There is where they go to exchange ideas and to hear something new. That immediately tells you something is wrong. Everybody is religious and I note that you're religious. You can also count on the fact that everybody worships—it maybe gold, power, prestige, a football team. We were made to worship. Will we worship the one true and living God and the way that is pleasing to Him or will we worship these false gods and idolatry? When they want to hear something new it immediately tells you that what they have is not working and Paul recognizes this.

Are you reading this today because you want to hear something new? No, you are reading this because you want to hear the old, old story. Now you have come to get a new refreshment in what you are reading but we don't need a new message, why? It is because the

message we have is the truth. It's not one of human imagination as Paul refers to in the Acts 17 text. Paul tells them that this God is not served by human hands as if He needed us. We serve Him worship but He doesn't need us because He could get it from stone if He wants to. We are serving Him with stewardship but He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. We're not motivated because He needs us, we're motivated because we needed Him and He has loved us and therefore we love Him. We need to serve Him who came for us.

Interestingly, when Paul goes to the synagogue to reach the Jews he starts with Jesus but when he goes to the Gentile, like Areopagus, he starts with God the Creator/Maker. This God doesn't need a temple built by human hands but this God builds you as His temple for this is the God of glory, not the one of gold, silver and images. Then Paul tells them that God made them and everything they see in creation. He is the Maker of heaven and earth. The Apostles' Creed people picked up on the apostolic teaching and put it right up front. That should be of great interest to you. They not only have a Biblical truth here but they are also following the pattern of Scripture. Where does the Scripture start? It starts at Genesis 1.

I want to look at Genesis 1 and as we do think of Paul being at Mars Hill and those he is talking to. We have this worldview and every man-made religion/philosopher is focused on answering four questions—who am I (identity), where did I come from (origin), why am I here (purpose) and where am I going (meaning)? The problem is you can't answer those four questions without taking a deep dive on origin. The first question that has to be answered before those four is why is there something instead of nothing or better yet how is there something instead of nothing? You can go on to say why is the something working together and we have a uni-verse instead of a multi-verse.

The pagan philosophies and man-made religions answer that questions in one of two ways and I want to share it with you in opposition to what the creedal affirmation says. Both of the answers are interdependent of each other. Answer number one is space, time and matter has created itself—self created. So there was actually something and it created itself and then evolved into what we have now. There are gigantic problems with that. One is that it is nonsense because we know scientifically that there is no such thing as spontaneous generation. Life doesn't just start for life comes from life. For instance, if you find a dead branch, plant it in the ground and let me know when you get fruit from it. The other answer/option is that it is not self-creating but space, time and matter are just self-existent and if you give matter enough space and time you get what you see—a universe with all of its intricacies as you put a microscope and telescope to it. This stands in direct opposition to the second law of thermodynamics which is when you leave things alone they don't run up, they run down. For instance, go on a month's vacation but don't have anything done to your house while you're gone. Will your lawn be cut when you return? Things don't run up they run down. Another example is closing a rat into a piano keyboard and then tell me how long you would have to sit there before you would hear the 9th Symphony being played on that piano.

Here is what many believe. The self-creating and the self-existent both sell you the same thing—if you give enough space and enough time then it can happen. Mutations instead of degrading can upgrade and that with no intelligent life giving, life can be created and sustained—this is what many believe. Paul is debating with those at the Areopagus and says to them 'Let me just quote your own philosophers—in Him we live, and move and have our being.' As the hymn line goes; "While all that borrows life from thee is ever in thy care." Hymn: "I Sing the Mighty Power of God"—Isaac Watts (1674–1748). Our being exists because He gave us life and

we continue in that life because He sustains that life that is what Paul is establishing with this people. This is my Father's world.

The philosophers and man-made religions of the day start with the creation and then with their imagination try to come up with an answer to its existence. We don't have two possibilities that are actually foolishness. What do we do? We go to the Bible and the only witness of origin tells us how and why. It is that God the Maker of heaven and earth, the One who gives life, the One who sustains life, the One who upholds life and all that exists, in Him we live—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—move, and have our being.

The book that everyone rejoiced over when it was written was by Carl Sagan titled Cosmos. When I read that book I wanted to ask Mr. Sagan where did the cosmos come from and how come it's a cosmos and not chaos. How come it's ordered and not disordered? Here is his answer. He has a faith commitment with his own creed. His creed is, the cosmos—that's all there is, that's all there was and that's all there ever will be. His trinity—space, time, matter—is, was, and is to be. We say 'no' for there was a time when there was no space, time or matter, but there was a self-existing God who is eternal and creates. Our Trinity is the Father who authored it, the Son who accomplished it and the Holy Spirit who ordered it. This God who was, and is, and is to come, has told us not only how it's here but why it's here.

The four acts of God are there in the Acts 17 text—creation, redemption, providence and consummation. They are all Trinitarian. The Father authored creation. Everything was created in, through and by the Son and then the Holy Spirit hovered over the creation. In redemption, the Father authored our salvation, the Son accomplished our salvation and the Holy Spirit applies that salvation. In providence, the Father cares for us, the Son intercedes for us and the Holy Spirit indwells us. In consummation, the Father has ordained the day where His Son will judge the world and the Spirit of God will bring forth those who belong to Him, to Him those who are written in the Book of Life. It is all Trinitarian and the opening text gives it to us.

Genesis 1:1–2 says [1] *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. [2] The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. Another great hymn that shows this is *This is My Father's World* and the lyrics are;

*1. This is my Father's world,
And to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas—
His hand the wonders wrought.*

*2. This is my Father's world:
The birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world:
He shines in all that's fair;*

*In the rustling grass I hear Him pass,
He speaks to me everywhere.*

*3. This is my Father's world:
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:
Why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King: let the heavens ring!
God reigns; let earth be glad!*

All that is in this world is made by His power and for His glory. He is not in need of it and in fact He is listed before it. Then from nothing He made everything by speaking it into existence. He ordered its existence as He would say ‘Let there be...’ Interestingly as the creation is established it says in Genesis 1:2 that before He spoke it into existence everything was *without form and void*. Another translation of this is that it was unformed and unfilled. It is not ordered and it exists when He orders it into existence, but then He orders what He ordered. When He speaks it, it is unformed and unfilled. Then the first three days of creation is forming it. The next three days of creation is filling it. Now the One who ordered it into existences now orders it—the Father Almighty, through the Son and the Holy Spirit is superintending of what God has ordered into existence.

How did the Father order it? The Father brought everything into existence by the Son, for the Son and through the Son. The Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, through whom everything was made, for whom everything was made then spoke it into existence. I want to take you back to Jesus in Bethany where there He has three friends—Mary, Martha and Lazarus. In John 11 there is the account of the death of Lazarus and Jesus rises up against the enemy of death. John 11:43 says [43] *When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”* And at His order the dead come forth. It’s a good thing He said ‘Lazarus’ first because then everyone would have come out. John 11:44 says [44] *The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”* Now the One who has ordered him from death unto life, now orders him in his life he now has given to him.

So it is that God has ordered everything into existence—space, time and matter. In the beginning...time. God created the heavens...space, and the earth...matter. Then God orders it and that’s what Divine revelation gives us in place of human imagination. Everything I have said to you is shouted out in the creation. In this example I’m about to give think about a time you may have cut yourself, the blood flowed and then stopped as the blood clot. There are 29 different things that have to happen in about three seconds for you not to bleed to death and they have to happen in perfect sequence.

This is not the intricacies, majesty and glories of the expanse or minuteness of creation for it is the hand of God. Why don’t we recognize that? I have my great great grandfather’s pocket watch. If I took that all apart and then put it in my pocket, how long would I have to shake my pocket until I hear something tick? So why is it that we look at the glory of creation and exchange the glory of Creator for the creation itself and worship the creature instead of the Creator? The problem is not information. The heavens declare the glory of God. The heart of the problem is the heart. We suppress the truth in unrighteousness. The more intelligent we are

the further the problem is manifested as we sophisticate ourselves into imbecility. The fool has said in his heart there is no God (Psalm 14:1). It is a self-delusion to look at the creation and deny the Creator and to declare the creation self-existent or self-creating, instead of the Creator who is eternal. The Creator's fingerprints are all over it.

There are three things you are going to see. One, this is my Father's world and that means God is distinct from His creation. We're not pantheists. Is God in His creation? Yes, but the creation is not God. He is over it and engaged in it. There was a time there was God and there was no creation. The reason there is time, space and matter is because the God who is distinct from it ordered it into existence and then ordered its very existence. So this God is distinct, above, and beyond all of His creation. Paganism and all the man-made religions start with creation and fabricate a doctrine of origin but we start with the Creator, understand His creation, why and how He made it for His glory and our joy in Him.

Secondly, this is my Father's world and there are distinctions. We have a universe not a multi-verse. Just like there is one Being, in three Persons, God has made one creation and put distinctions in it—male, female, animal, man, etc—He has made all the distinctions within in the creation. What does man do if he doesn't want to acknowledge that God is distinct from the creation and I will worship and serve myself instead of the God who made me? What is it that we in Adam decided when Satan said you could be like God instead of answering to Satan, 'we already are because we're made in His image'? What we really heard was, we can be God, with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life.

That sin nature is working in our lives and the way we strike out against the distinct God is to strike out at the distinctions God has made. So instead of male and female, we decide to be whatever we want to be. I'm not talking about the adolescent issue of gender dysphoria, I'm talking about the rebellion of 'I will not be what You made me to be—male and female.' We strike out at marriage—one man, one woman, one life. We strike out at sexuality by saying 'if you get permission you can do anything you want to.' Those are efforts of cosmic treason out of a sin nature against the distinct God who made the creation for His glory by taking the creation and using it for our glory and attacking all the distinctions that the God who made it has put within it for His glory. We are in rebellion against Him.

Thirdly, this is my Father's world and God has made us as distinctive. When you get this right, then you can answer the four questions right. You were made by the hand of God to reflect the image of God. Why am I here? It is to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. How did I get here? It was by the presence and power of the Almighty God. Where am I headed? That is a crucial question. There are two destinations. In continued rebellion against Him there is a place called hell for all eternity or in coming to Him who came to save you there is a new heavens and a new earth.

In this affirmation, to confess God the Father Almighty as Maker of heaven and earth, is to confess man as created in the image of God, male and female—not man as a cosmic accident of unexplained eruptions and mutations, but man exists as the crown of creation to be fruitful and multiply, to have dominion and to subdue the earth as you glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Do you see why this is not incidental? We not only attack distinctions by God we start to make our own distinctions. So we get our racism, our violence, our chaos because we deny Him and that's what John tells us.

I John 4:20–21 says [20] *If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. [21] And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

How can we say we love God and then hate someone made in the image of God? There is one race from Adam and Eve with multiple ethnicities, but this one race is made in the image of God. How can you bring acts of violence against those whom you oppose to oppress or those who have oppressed you, in order to affirm who you think you are?

When you see yourself made by God and in the image of God, along with others whom God has made, now we begin to see ourselves rightly and we start to answer those four questions properly. The problem is we don't do it because of something we call a sin nature. When God spoke it in creation there was chaos and then with the law of creation for six days He ordered it so the chaos became cosmos. Then man embraced the lie that we could be God and now because of our sin the creation is groaning. We have brought chaos, a fracture, a division, war, famine, nakedness and all of those acts, but praise God, the same God who brought the original chaos into cosmos, has also provided a way for the chaos of our sin in His creation to be brought to order and cosmos, in a new heavens and a new earth. It's by the same One by whom everything was created that you can be a new creation. II Corinthians 5:17 says *[17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

Here's the takeaway. God the Father Almighty is the Maker of the heavens and the earth and all who dwell in it, and He of His own love is the Redeemer of His creation with a new humanity. Those who are in Christ and Christ is in them, they now have a new heavens and a new earth. This is astounding! God made us, we rebelled in our sin, yet God has looked at His creation which includes those who are made in His image, and now God out of an unmerited love, an undeserved love, has sent the same One who made us, to save us from our sins at a cross where He has paid the ransom for we who are captive to our sins so that we are redeemed. Redeemed means to buy back. God's creation rightfully belongs to Him but it has been absconded by our sin so a ransom has to be paid to buy us back.

If you talk to a law enforcement officer who works with kidnapped situations they will tell you that one of their most difficult problems when a child has been kidnapped, is the parents will say just tell me how much I have to pay so that you will go get them but if they want their child back alive it's not just pay the ransom, but there is a drive by the parent to get their kidnapped child back. Here is God's creation and those made in His image and just as He could come and bring His wrath but in grace and mercy He sends His Son to buy us back. The One who ordered our existence is ordered to come and He freely comes. And while we are enemies He dies for us.

The illustration breaks down because you and I were not kidnapped by Satan, but by our own sin in Adam. God, while we were still enemies sent His Son to pay for the ransom and then said 'It is finished!' Again, if any man is in Christ he is a new creation and that is where our next study will take us—I believe in Jesus His Son. I want to tell you that the Father Almighty who through Christ made everything and ordered it by His Spirit, has ordered our redemption through His Son who went to the cross to pay it and then the One who bought us back sent the Holy Spirit to bring us back. That is Good News! Let's pray.

Prayer:

If you're reading this today I have prayed so hard that you may not only know the doctrine of creation but the glory of God as Creator and to be somewhat equipped to answer the foolishness of those who would suppress the truth in unrighteousness. There is no lack of information for it's a moral problem that we suppress the truth in unrighteousness and worship and serve the creation rather than the Creator. I also want you to know that the One who is Almighty in

making you in His image, is Almighty in saving you. The One through whom you were made, Jesus, and for whom you were made is the One who now saves you—that you are His and He is yours. The Spirit of God who orders the creation also orders our lives by grace. I hope and pray your heart has been encouraged and assured and a new affection will arise to your God, Maker of heaven and earth. Take a few moments in silent prayer. Perhaps you are reading this today and you're seeking, you're curious—asking why am I here, how did I get here, why is everything here. I labor to introduce to you, not only God, so that by faith you can walk in the light instead of leap in the darkness, but that the same God who made you gave His Son to save you and in Him your search is over. Come to Him who came for you. If you want to pray with someone please call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200. O God, our God, Maker of heaven and earth, Savior of sinners, we give You praise for in You we live, move and have our being, Amen.

Power Point

THIS IS MY FATHER'S WORLD

- I. Distinct
- II. Distinction
- III. Distinctive

Chaos – Cosmos – Chaos – Cosmos

LIFE TAKEAWAY

God the Father Almighty is the Maker of the Heavens and Earth and all who dwell in it, and He of His own love is the Redeemer of His Creation with a New Humanity for a New Heavens and a New Earth.

THAT IS GOOD NEWS!