

The Apostles' Creed

Part 2

God the Father Almighty: Maker of Heaven and Earth

1 John 3:1-3; Psalm 135:5-7; Proverbs 21:1; Isaiah 45:18

With Study Questions

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7/18/2010*

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Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 John 3:1-3).

For I know that the Lord *is* great, And our Lord *is* above all gods.

⁶ Whatever the Lord pleases He does, In heaven and in earth, In the seas and in all deep places. ⁷ He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures (Psalm 135:5-7).

The king's heart *is* in the hand of the Lord, *Like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes (Proverbs 21:1).

For thus says the Lord, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: "I *am* the Lord, and *there is no other* (Isaiah 45:18).

Introduction

Years ago I was playing some beach volleyball with a buddy who, though raised Roman Catholic, offered no real profession of faith. He didn't go to church, nor did he make any pretense of seeking to live a pious life. He was a nice guy but a pretty typical and likeable pagan. He began telling me about a date he had on the previous night. The girl he went out with told him she was an atheist. This freaked him out. Shaking his head he asked me, "How can anyone be an atheist?!"

This launched us into a friendly discussion regarding the nature of his own faith, but that is not my current point. What I am trying to point out is how one must search far and wide, both in history and to this very day, to find a person who wouldn't agree with the first four words (three in Latin) of the Apostles' Creed – "I believe in God."

But when belief in God is extracted from any type of objective definition – a definition provided in Scripture – that profession of faith in God ends up meaning what anybody wants it to mean and, therefore, nothing. Within the context of that undefined profession of faith, Voltaire's chide rings true, "God did not create man...man created God."

We previously discussed the inevitability of believing in something. *Credo en* (I believe in) cannot stand alone. It is an incomplete sentence. It must be followed. The Apostles' Creed fills that void – *Credo en Deum* – I believe in God. But since "I believe in God" can easily be reduced to nothing if there is no objective definition of God, the Creed continues in its affirmation of three things which we will briefly examine this morning – three things under continual attack.

These three things form the substance of true Theism and, therefore, true Christianity. If one were capable of removing any of these three things, the Christian faith would implode like an old Vegas Casino. These things are foundational to a proper understanding of God. Aptly to the Psalmist write, **"If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"** The three things are God the Father, God Almighty and God the Creator. We will approach these in reverse order:

For thus says the Lord, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the Lord, and *there is no other* (Isaiah 45:18).

Maker of Heaven and Earth

It is in the context of both earthly and eternal authority and deliverance from adversity that we read the above words. The Apostle Paul utilizes this chapter of Isaiah in his argument for the choices God makes – **"Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'what are you making'"** (Isaiah 45:9; Romans 9:20, 21).

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen a jihad against the biblical assertion of God creating the heavens and the earth. Motives are a difficult thing to ascertain, but it should be no mystery that the eradication of God, as Creator, is closely linked to the eradication of God as the one with authority over that which He created; and we must keep in mind that God's creation, unlike ours, is from nothing *ex nihilo*, thus granting Him all authority. There can be no argument that one provided the materials and another provided the labor. God provides both parts and labor.

Arguments over the basic make-up of creation have been at the heart of Greek philosophy from day one. Is the created order earth, wind, fire, water, atoms, strings, eggs, etc.? As rational or empirical as one might desire to be, pure human reason or observation can never answer the question of creation from nothing.

The seventeenth chapter of Acts records the Apostle Paul in a confrontation with those Greek philosophers in Athens. We read of how Paul's "**spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols**" (Acts 17:16) much the same way many Christians today are provoked by the anti-Christian rhetoric and world views streaming upon the land.

These sophists were sporting for a discussion with Paul for they were always interested in "**some new thing**" (Acts 17:21). Paul seized upon the doorstep of their own religious practices to launch into his proclamation of the one true God. He happened upon an altar with the inscription "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD" and explained that this is the "**God who made the world and everything in it**" (Acts 17:24).

It is this God who "**gives life, breath, and all things**" (Acts 17:25). It is this God who determines "**times and the boundaries**" (Acts 17:26) of human dwellings. All of this Paul taught for the purpose of seeking "**the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him**" (Acts 17:27). Paul, then in one phrase answered the question that philosophy could never answer – a question answered sufficiently through the acknowledgement an eternal, self-existent God – it is this God (the God who made everything) that "**we live and move and have our being**" (Acts 17:28).

The recognition of the personal God who made the heavens and the earth gives not just reasonable, but a glorious explanation of the reality we observe. It provides a righteous authority and a sure deliverance to those

who, by the grace of God, will grope for the Truth – in this respect, God is the personification of wisdom.

I love those who love me, And those who seek me diligently will find me (Proverbs 8:17).

**For I know that the Lord *is* great, And our Lord *is* above all gods.
6 Whatever the Lord pleases He does, In heaven and in earth, In the seas and in all deep places. 7 He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasuries (Psalm 135:5-7).**

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God Almighty

There might not be an attribute of God under more attack within the church itself than His omnipotence. The creed begins *Credo en Deum omnipotentem* – I believe in God the Father Almighty. Omnipotence means all powerful. Subtle attacks on the omnipotence of God begin with questions like, “Can God make a square circle?” The seminary student’s eyebrows rise at this discovery – clearly there are things God can’t do! Now that this is established, what else can’t God do? It’s insidious!

The problem of course is not God’s power but man’s question. One might as well ask, “Is God capable of nonsense?” To answer “no” to that question is not an indictment the power of God but just the opposite. When the Psalmist states “Whatever the Lord pleases He does” one should not make the assumption that there are times in which the Lord is simply inactive. He goes on to explain that even the most minute and virtually invisible things are moved into place by the invisible hand of God – wind, lightning, vapors!

Seeking to give God His due, men will assign to God power over events of nature, but I recently read and listened to many theologians (not all thankfully) who were adamant about how God “does not touch the will of man!” But friends we must realize that ninety percent of what takes place in this world is a result of human decision. If God is only sovereign

over earthquakes, weather and ocean currents, He is *de facto* handling very little in this world.

No, it is of immense comfort to the Christian that God ordains whatsoever comes to pass – and this “**according to the counsel of His will**” (Ephesians 1:11). God has ordained the day of our birth and the day of our death (Psalm 139:16; Hebrews 9:27). In our earlier passage in Isaiah 45, discussing God’s as maker of heaven and earth, we read of where God is in the high and low points of life.

I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these *things*” (Isaiah 45:7).

The very heart of the king, from which his decisions flow, is directed by God the way He might change the paths of a moving river – like a train going down a track and God continually shifting the levers to bring it where He desires. The great contentment in the heart of the Christian is knowing that God is more than capable of ordaining the evil choices of sinful men for His own glorious reasons. Heaven forbid this tempt the Christian to lethargy – who is always called to fight for truth and righteousness. It should, though, rain peace down upon our otherwise troubled hearts to know who is truly in charge – because He beckons us to call Him Father.

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 John 3:1-3).

God the Father

The prominent 19th century theologian, Adolf Harnack, in a book called *What Is Christianity* sought to simplify the Christian faith into two basic affirmations, the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man. There are few things more dangerous than a half-

truth. Certainly in a sense of being created by God, **“we are also His offspring” (Acts 17:28)**. But this is not the sense in which it is generally used.

The Fatherhood of God is used in a Trinitarian sense, in that God the Father stands in this relationship to God the Son **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:3)**. But the sense that I would like to end on this morning is the sense in which God is the Father of those who trust in Him – that sense in which John writes above **“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!”**

It may very well be that this short epistle was written by John later in his life (perhaps A.D. 80-95). I happen to be under the impression that John wrote the Revelation in A.D. 70 or slightly earlier. Why do mention this?

We live in an atmosphere where the Christian faith is often a means to an end. Christians are offered and pine away for more personal power in their lives – we question whether or not our faith is working when struggles comes – both external (jobs, marriages, relationships, health, finance) and internal (discontent, impatience, greed, lust, anger).

There is a certain sense in which we are to fight our way through the faith – seeking the victory. But when these things take over as our central focus, the church, the body of Christ, loses something precious – we lose the vision to appreciate that which we already have. It’s like taking a spouse for granted and then having things go awry – we’ll make every effort at making things right. Or when we’re sick, all we want is the enjoyment of feeling well – we begin to realize how precious that is.

The Apostle John was the apostle whom Jesus loved (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20). He reclined at the bosom of Jesus at the Last Supper. He had walked with Jesus for three years of His earthly ministry. At one point John’s mother (in the presence of her two sons) approached Jesus asking to give John and his brother James a special seat of prominence in His kingdom (Matthew 20:21). John was a Christian, but he wanted more.

If John wrote the Revelation, as I suspect, prior to writing this, he was given a glimpse of the glorified Christ; the only description ever given of Jesus in the Bible:

Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the

midst of the seven lampstands *One* like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. ¹⁴ His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; ¹⁵ His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; ¹⁶ He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength. ¹⁷ And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last (Revelation 1:12-17).

It is with this God-given expansion of John’s knowledge of the holiness of Christ that he writes “**Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God**” (1 John 3:1)!

We speak of the love of God and the Fatherhood of God as if every man has it and every man deserves it. John writes of it in no such way. It is to those who “receive Him” that He gives “the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name (John 1:12). He then explain from whence this belief and right comes – “...who were born, not of blood, nor if the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). It is not a blood line (as if being a certain ethnicity places one in the favor of God), it is not the natural inclination of our flesh or nature, nor our innate ability to make a wise decision – nor anything else. It is the grace, mercy and power of God.

May it be our prayer, when we recite this Creed – whenever we come before God – to have the insight of John, an insight shared with us in God’s word, to apprehend the holiness of God that we might have the grace and wisdom to marvel at our very inclusion in the family of God.

Questions for Study

1. What are three major foundations to our understanding of God (pages 2, 3)?
2. What are some implications of God being the maker of heaven and earth (pages 3, 4)?
3. What does it mean that God almighty? Are there limitations to God's power? Explain (pages 5, 6).
4. How is the universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man accurate/inaccurate (pages 6, 7)?
5. What are three ways that God is Father (pages 6, 7)?
6. Discuss John's disposition toward being a child of God (pages 7, 8).