

Series Apostles' Creed Message 2

This Message "God the Father Almighty"

Scripture Reading Ephesians 1:3-14

This is the second message in our study of the Apostles' Creed. In the first message we considered the need for believers to have a solid basis for their faith, and that it is helpful to have an organized method to learn about the essentials of our faith. The Creed provides a structure for both of these things.

In the previous message we concentrated on the words "I believe." When we say "I believe" with a sincere attitude, we are personally affirming the most essential truths of God's Word. We discussed what the word "believe" means: belief is action taken in response to information which has been learned. We said that faith is not simply mental assent to the information, but rather the practical submission of our lives to the guidance of the truth contained in God's Word.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

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

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

I want to give a warning about this message. The subject today is one of the most complex and mysterious I have ever studied. We have to cover a lot of deep significant theology when we think about "God the Father Almighty." I need to divide this message into four parts. We will first think about God as One; then God as Trinity; God as Father, one member of the Trinity; and finally God as Almighty.

The first topic is the oneness/unity of God. All of the Creeds which have come down to us from the early Church mention or imply that God is “one.” The Apostles’ Creed probably at one time began with the words “I believe in one God.” This was an important teaching emphasized by believers to offset the polytheism of the Greek/Roman cultures. In other words, in contrast to the many deities which were part of the mythology and pagan worship practices of the dominant cultures of the early centuries, the members of the early Church emphasized monotheism, the doctrine of the oneness of the Godhead.

The concept of the “oneness” of God goes back into the Old Testament. When God called Abraham from his home in Ur of Chaldea, God expected him to separate himself from the many pagan gods of his culture. Abraham testified to God with the words, “I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth” (*Genesis 14:22*). When Moses explained the law to the Israelites before they entered the promised land, he said, “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one LORD” (*Deuteronomy 6:4*).

The “oneness” of God was embedded in the minds of the Jewish people for 2000 years, but then, beginning with the incarnation of Jesus, there had to be a new understanding of the nature of God. Jesus, during His earthly ministry, made many references to His father in heaven, and also introduced His followers to the Holy Spirit which He and the Father promised to send to believers. Numerous New Testament passages highlight the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Since the New Testament era, the Church has had to embrace the doctrine of “tri-unity,” what we call “the Trinity” — God in three persons.

The doctrine of the Trinity has been a difficult concept for believers through the centuries to understand and to explain, even though the relationships of the three members of the Trinity to each other as revealed in the Bible are quite easy to recognize. For example, in the reading from Ephesians 1:3-14, there is a description of the cooperative activity of the Trinity at work in our lives. Notice who initiates all the actions. It is God the Father who “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing;” He “chose us in Christ before the creation of the world;” and He “predestined us to be adopted as His sons in accordance with His pleasure and will.”

The passage also states that the Father worked out His plan through Jesus Christ, so that redemption came to us through the blood of Jesus Christ, and we received the forgiveness of sins through Him. In verses 13-14, we read that we have been given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance in the Father's family.

The Scriptures reveal and emphasize the harmony and cooperation between the Persons of the Godhead. They function as One, with the Father planning, the Son carrying out the Father's plans, and the Spirit applying the Father's truth to those who are believers. In spite of such enlightening passages, the tri-unity of the members of the Godhead remains a mystery, a transcendent fact, one of the spiritual realities which is beyond our human comprehension.

Theologians have used numerous illustrations in their efforts to explain the tri-unity of the Godhead. For examples, the Trinity is compared to an egg; there is the yolk, the fluid sac which surrounds the yolk, and the shell. Together they make up one complete egg. Some commentators suggest that water is an appropriate way to illustrate the different roles of the members of the Trinity. Water can appear in three distinct forms: as a fluid, as ice, and as steam. Other commentators suggest that the responsibilities of people are like the roles of God: for example, I am a husband to my wife, a father to my children, and I am the son of my parents.

All these descriptions are interesting, and perhaps helpful to some people, but overall they are a very inadequate picture of who God is. It is really unwise for us to try to explain the three-in-one nature of God from our human perspectives because explanations which begin with us only serve to diminish the reality of who God really is. I found a quote which states the human problem of comprehension: "Try to explain the Trinity and you'll lose your mind; try to deny it, and you'll lose your soul." As I said, the Trinity is a mystery.

The leaders of the early Church accepted both the oneness and the tri-unity of God even though they could not resolve the apparent contradiction. Both truths were written into their creeds. They used the word "God" as a generic term for the Trinity and then they proceeded to explain the work of each member of the Trinity. Notice that the Apostles' Creed is in three paragraphs. The first statement is about God the Father; the middle paragraph is about God the Son, and the third paragraph mentions God the Holy Spirit.

With this as background information, now I want us to focus specifically on God “the Father Almighty.” When believers framed the Apostles’ Creed, they wanted to convey that God was a personal being rather than impersonal like all the gods of the Greek/Roman culture. Their way of doing this was to acknowledge that God was, first of all, a loving and caring “Father” to them.

This term fits with both the Old and New Testament Scriptures. For example, when Moses described how the LORD God protected and helped the Israelites, he said, “You saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son” (*Deuteronomy 1:31*). In the Psalms, God is described as a “father to the fatherless, and a defender of widows” (*Psalms 68:5*). Jeremiah prophesied that God would bring His chosen people back from exile because He was “Israel’s father” (*Jeremiah 31:9*).

In the New Testament, the imagery of God as Father becomes much more meaningful to us because we discover that believers become God’s children through new spiritual birth. Scripture explains that we are adopted into God’s family through new birth, and that we are then declared to be the heirs of God. The Apostle John wrote: “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God” (*1 John 3:1*).

There is the general sense in which everyone is a child of God through His work of physical creation, but the majority of people on earth are not qualified to pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven” because they do not recognize the existence of the Father or honor His name. Born again believers are the only people qualified to address God in an intimate way as their “Abba, dear Daddy” (*Romans 8:15*).

The Scriptures declare that God, our heavenly Father, loves us, His adopted children, no less than He loves His only begotten Son, and that He has promised that we, His children, will share the blessings of an eternal inheritance. It is this Father-child relationship that we acknowledge when we confess, “I believe in God our Father.”

The compilers of the Creed also wanted to call attention to another important aspect: the relationship of Jesus Christ to the Father. Jesus Himself frequently explained His family relationship to the Father during His years of ministry. He said that He had come from the Father (*John 8:42*), and that He was one with the Father (*John 14:11, 20; 5:16-17*). He said that He loved the Father (*John 14:31*) and always did what pleases the Father (*John 6:38; 8:28-29*). He said that He depended on the Father for guidance and strength (*John 5:19, 30a*).

We also know that the Father loves the Son and has placed everything in the hands of the Son (*John 3:35; 5:20*). All matters of life and judgment have been granted to the Son (*John 5:21-22, 25-27*) because the Father wants everyone to honor the Son just as they honor Him (*John 5:23*).

The title “Father” appears in Scripture many times. This term was given to us by revelation to help us understand one aspect of the Godhead. Unfortunately, we don’t really know and can’t really understand what God is in Himself; that is, Who He is by nature, in glory, and in eternity. Yes, we understand that the Father had eternal plans and purposes, and that He created both physical and spiritual life. We understand that He sent His Son to be the Savior of the world and jointly sent the Holy Spirit to believers. These are facts made clear in Scripture.

But what is less clear to us is exactly how the members of the Trinity relate to each other. Heretical teachings in the early centuries of the Church went from one extreme insisting that there was no personal differences between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to the other extreme of saying that the members of the Godhead were unequal in glory and that the Son and Holy Spirit owed their existence to one supreme Being. In order to counter these heretical ideas, the early Church councils issued statements affirming that the members of the Trinity were joint partakers of the same divine nature and substance (“consubstantiality”) while they maintained the distinction of their personalities.

At the same time, Scripture indicates that there is a hierarchy which exists in the Godhead, with the Father as the Head. Believers can point to several Scripture verses which indicate this hierarchy, but we can’t fully understand the interdependent interactions between the Members of the Trinity. In John 20 we read the instructions of Jesus to His disciples: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” This statement represents three levels of accountability – the Father commissioned His Son who, in turn, has commissioned us.

In I Corinthians 11:3 there is another example of ranking: Paul explains that the head of Christ is God, the head of man is Christ, and the head of woman is man. Paul then goes on with an explanation of interdependent interaction. He wrote: “in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman, for as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman, but everything comes from God” (including Christ).

Another example concerns the Holy Spirit. Jesus announced the coming of the Holy Spirit several times in different ways. He said, “The Father will send the Holy Spirit in my name;” and “I will send the Counselor to you from the Father;” and “He (the Counselor) will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”

Perhaps the greatest evidence of headship in the Trinity is in I Corinthians 15:24-28, a passage which describes the end of the age. Here’s the quotation: “Then the end will come, when He (Christ) hands over the kingdom to God the Father.” Paul goes on to explain: “For He (Christ) must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Now when it says that ‘everything’ has been put under Him, it is clear that this does not include God Himself, who put everything under Christ. When He has done this, then the Son Himself will be made subject to Him who put everything under Him, so that God may be all in all.”

In the context of the verses I have just referred to, it is clear that there are characteristics of the Godhead that exceed our comprehension. God the Father is described as the administrative Head of the Trinity. I Corinthians 8:6 informs us that “there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live.” Ephesians 4:6 informs us there is “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

What are we to make of all this? When the believer recites the first statement of the Creed, he or she is confessing the Father as the Planner and Creator of all things, as the One who made salvation possible through Jesus Christ, and as the one who guides circumstances throughout eternity.

God the Father worked out His plans and purposes through His Son Jesus Christ. According to Ephesians 1:3-14, the Father wanted to “bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ, and so He, the Father worked out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will” in order that everything will be to the praise of His glory.

It should be obvious from what we have been discussing that the Father is the “Almighty” One. He can and will accomplish all that He intends to do. The word “almighty” implies that the Father is the omnipotent One who sovereignly rules over all of creation.

The first statement of the Creed links the truth of the Fatherhood of God with the truth of His sovereignty; links His Father’s heart with His unlimited power and His eternal purposes. I hope this study has helped you to gain a greater understanding of the interdependent interactivity of the Godhead and, in particular, a deeper appreciation of our heavenly Father. The Psalms declare, “My help comes from the LORD who made heaven and earth” (*Psalms 121:2*). The Creator of everything is concerned about His children. God the Father Almighty loves us and helps us. He is our Father, who is in heaven.