

The Apostles' Creed

The Father Almighty

Selected Texts

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The Father Almighty

Introduction

As we continue our series in *The Apostles' Creed* I would like to examine today what it means to believe in God **the Father Almighty**. Please listen as I recite the Apostles' Creed:

*I believe in God **the Father Almighty**,
Maker of heaven and earth.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand
of God the Father Almighty.
From there he will 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.*

In our study of the *Apostles' Creed* we have now come to the phrase where we affirm our belief in God **the Father Almighty**. Author and theologian J. I. Packer wrote:

You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of

the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father.

If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God.¹

So, today we come to a very important phrase in the Apostles' Creed.

Lesson

Let us learn what it is we affirm when we affirm God as **the Father Almighty**. We shall do so by asking two questions. First, what do we mean by the term **Father**? And second, what do we mean by the term **Almighty**?

I. What Do We Mean by the Term *Father*?

First, what do we mean by the term **Father**?

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher of the 19th century said: "The proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy that can ever engage the attention of a child of God is the name, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father."

My goal for you is that you will get to know God better as your Father. Frankly, I am not really interested in you growing in a merely intellectual understanding of the truths of Scripture. I want

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 182.

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you to go beyond understanding Scripture, as it were, to deepen your personal knowledge of God as your Father.

Today, let's learn three truths about God as Father.

A. *God Is the Creator of All Creatures*

First, God is the Creator of all creatures.

When the *Apostles' Creed* speaks of "God **the Father Almighty**, maker of heaven and earth," it has in immediate view the fact that we and all things depend every moment on God as Creator for our existence. Since God is the Creator of all things, the Bible implies that God is the Father of all his creatures.

For example, in the Old Testament we read in Malachi 2:10a: "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?"

And in the New Testament we read about Paul preaching in Athens and quoting with approval a Greek poet's statement in Acts 17:28b: "We are his [i.e., God's] offspring."

Interestingly, both these statements come from statements threatening divine judgment. Paul's evangelistic sermon at Athens makes it very clear that though the offspring relationship implies an obligation to seek, worship and obey God, and makes one answerable to him at the end of the day, it does not imply his favor and acceptance where repentance for past sins and faith in Christ are lacking (see the whole speech, Acts 17:22-31).

Some who stress the universal fatherhood of God treat it as implying that *all* people are and always will be in a state of salvation, but that is not the biblical view. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:18 Paul speaks of persons to whom "the message of the cross is foolishness" as "perishing," and warns the "unrepentant" in Romans 2:5 that "you are storing up wrath against yourself on the day of God's wrath," however much they are God's offspring.

So, although the Bible does speak of God as Father in reference to creation, this is not the primary sense in which God is referred to as Father. The next two ways are the primary ways in which God is referred to as Father in the Bible.

B. God Is the Father of the Son

Second, God is the Father of the Son.

Within the eternal Trinity is a family relation of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. On earth, Jesus called the One whom he served, “my Father” (cf. Matthew 10:32, 33). Furthermore, he prayed to him as “Abba,” which is the Aramaic equivalent of a respectful “Daddy” (cf. Mark 14:36).

What this relationship of Father and Son is Jesus himself declared. On the one hand, the Son loves the Father (John 14:31) and always does what pleases the Father (John 8:29). He takes no initiatives, depending instead every moment on the Father for his lead (John 5:19 ff., 30), and is tenacity itself in clinging to the Father’s known will. “My Father,” he said, “not as I will, but as you will. . . your will be done” (Matthew 26:39, 42).

On the other hand, the Father loves the Son (John 3:35; 5:20) and makes him great by giving him glory and great things to do (John 5:20-30; 10:17 ff.; 17:23-26). Giving life and executing judgment are the twin tasks that have been completely committed to the Son, “that all may honor the Son” (John 5:23).

God’s loving fatherhood of his eternal Son is both the archetype of his gracious relationship with his own redeemed people and the model from which derives the parenthood that God has created in human families. Paul spoke of “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” as “the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and earth derives its name” (Ephesians 1:3; 3:14-15). Human families, by their very constitution, reflect the Father-Son relationship in heaven, and parent-child relationships should express a love that corresponds to the mutual love of Father and Son in the Godhead.

C. God Is the Father of Believers

And third, God is the Father of believers.

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The Bible speaks of God as Father with respect to the believer's adoption into the family of God. This is a supernatural gift of grace, linked with justification and new birth, given freely by God and received humbly by faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The Bible says in John 1:12: "Yet to all who received him (i.e., Jesus), to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

The message Jesus sent to his disciples upon rising from the dead was: "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17b). As disciples, they belonged to the family of God; indeed, in that very same verse Jesus called them "my brothers." All whom he has saved are his brothers.

There is a church in northern California that has portraits of famous people hanging in its vestibule. There is a portrait of Socrates and another of Eleanor Roosevelt. There is a portrait of Abraham Lincoln and Gandhi and Jesus. These words are written in beautiful gold letters over the assembled portraits, "And we are all children of God." I am sure people pass by those portraits every day and marvel at the universal brotherhood of man. There is only one problem: the universal brotherhood of man (and the universal fatherhood of God) is an inclusive, benevolent, politically correct, loving lie. The quote in gold letters is even a quote from the Bible—but it is incomplete. "We are all children of God," the Scripture says in Galatians 3:26, "through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

So, when the Christian says the first clause of the *Apostles' Creed*, he puts all this together and confesses his Creator as both the Father of his Savior and his own Father through Christ—a Father who now loves him no less than he loves his only begotten Son.

And that is a marvelous confession to be able to make. Is this your confession?

II. What Do We Mean by the Term *Almighty*?

And second, what do we mean by the term **Almighty**?

The *Apostles' Creed* declares faith in God the Father **Almighty**. Does the adjective matter? Yes, a great deal. It points to the basic Bible fact that God is the Lord, the King, and the omnipotent One who *reigns* over his world.

People treat God's sovereignty as a subject for controversy, but in the Bible it is a matter for worship.

We need to realize that we cannot properly understand God's ways at any point until we see them in the light of his sovereignty. That, no doubt, is why the *Apostles' Creed* takes the first opportunity of announcing it. But, though the believing heart warms to it, it is not an easy truth for our minds to grasp and a number of issues arise. Let me mention three.

A. *God Cannot Do Literally Anything*

First, God cannot do literally anything.

Omnipotence does not mean that God can do literally anything. There are many things God cannot do.

He cannot do what is self-contradictory or nonsensical, like squaring a circle.

Nor—and this is vital—can he act out of character. God has a perfect, moral character and it is not in him to deny it. He cannot be capricious, unloving, random, unjust or inconsistent. Just as he cannot pardon sin without atonement because that would not be right, so he cannot fail to be “faithful and just” in forgiving sins that are confessed in faith and in keeping all the other promises he has made, for failure there would not be right either. Moral instability, vacillation and unreliability are marks of weakness, not of strength; but God's omnipotence is supreme strength, making it impossible that he should lapse into imperfections of this sort.

The positive way to say this is that though there are things which a holy, rational God is incapable of intending, all that he in-

tends to do he actually does. Psalm 135:6a says, “The Lord does whatever pleases him.”

When God planned to make the world, “he spoke, and it came to be” (Psalm 33:9a; see Genesis 1). So it is with each other thing that he wills. With men, “there’s many a slip ‘twixt the cup and the lip,” but not so with God.

B. God Is Not Limited by Man’s Choices

Second, God is not limited by man’s choices.

God’s power to fulfill his purposes is not limited by the choices of man. Man’s power of choice is a created thing, an aspect of the mystery of created human nature and God’s power to fulfill his purposes is not limited by anything that he has made. Just as he works out his will through the functioning of the physical order, so he works out his will through the functioning of our psychological make-up. In no case is the integrity of the created thing affected and it is always possible (apart from some miracles) to “explain” what has happened without reference to the rule of God. But in every case God orders the things that come to pass.

So, therefore, without violating the nature of created realities, or reducing man’s activity to robot level, God still “works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Ephesians 1:11b).

But does that mean that what we think of as our choice is an illusion and unreal? That depends on what we mean. It is certainly an illusion to think that our wills are only free if they operated apart from God. But free choice in the sense of “free agency,” as theologians have defined it—that is, the power of spontaneous, self-determining choice referred to above—is real. As a fact of creation, an aspect of our humanness, it exists, as all created things do, in God. How God sustains it and overrules it without overriding it is his secret; but that he does so is certain.

We know that this is so, both from our conscious experience of making decisions and acting “of our own free will,” and also

from Scripture's sobering insistence that we are answerable to God for our actions, just because in the moral sense they really are ours.

C. God Is Sovereign over Evil

And third, God is sovereign over evil.

The existence of evil—moral badness, useless pain and waste of good—does not suggest that God the Father is not almighty after all.

Someone might say that if he were truly almighty he would remove these things if he could. The truth is that he is in fact removing evil. Through Christ, sinners like you and me are already being made good. New pain-free and disease-free bodies are on the way and a reconstructed cosmos with them. Paul assures us that “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18; cf. 8:19-23). If God moves more slowly than we wish in clearing evil out of this world and introducing the new order, that, we may be sure, is in order to widen his gracious purpose and include in it more victims of the world's evil than otherwise he could have done. (Study 2 Peter 3:3-10, especially verses 8ff.)

Conclusion

The truth that our Father is almighty in creation, providence and grace is the basis of all our trust, peace and joy in God. It is also the safeguard of our hopes of answered prayer, present protection and final salvation. It means that neither fate, nor the stars, nor blind chance, nor man's folly, nor Satan's malice controls this world; instead, a morally perfect God runs it and none can dethrone him or thwart his purposes of love. And if I am Christ's, then I can say with the poet:

*A sovereign protector I have,
Unseen, yet forever at hand,*

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*Unchangeably faithful to save,
Almighty to rule and command.*

*If thou art my shield and my sun,
The night is no darkness to me,
And, fast as my moments roll on,
They bring me nearer but to Thee.*

This is what we affirm when we say, “*I believe in God **the Father Almighty.***” Amen.

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