

The Apostles' Creed

God's Only Son

Selected Texts

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God's Only Son

Introduction

As we continue our series in *The Apostles' Creed* I would like to examine today what it means to believe in Jesus Christ as **God's only Son**. 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.*

When I share the gospel with a person I sometimes ask the question, "Who do you think Jesus is?"

Invariably, the answer I receive is something like, "Jesus is God's son."

"Yes, that's true," I reply, "but then so am I. The Bible says that I am God's son too (cf. Galatians 3:26)."

Usually my response will cause the person to react with a puzzled look on his face. I can see him thinking to himself, “This guy has a serious identity problem!”

Then after a while I tell him, “While the Bible says that I am *a* son of God, only Jesus is *the* Son of God. In other words, Jesus is God *the* Son. And there is a world of difference between the two.”

Lesson

Today, we come to that part in the *Apostles' Creed* which identifies Jesus as God's **only Son**. What does that mean? What does it mean when we affirm our faith in Jesus Christ, **God's only Son**?

I. Jesus Is God's Son

First, Jesus is God's Son.

The term “Son of God” is used in different ways in the Old Testament.

It is applied to Israel as a nation, for example, in Hosea 11:1: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (cf. also Exodus 4:22).

The term “Son of God” is also applied to the promised king of the house of David (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 89:27), to angels (Job 1:6; 38:7; Psalm 29:1), and to pious people in general (Genesis 6:2; Psalm 73:15; Proverbs 14:26).

In the New Testament Jesus appropriated the term “Son of God,” and his disciples—and even demons—occasionally ascribed it to him or addressed him by it (Matthew 14:33; cf. also 4:3; 8:29).

And so, the term “Son” or “Son of God” is used in a number of different senses. This is particularly so when used in reference to Jesus.

Let us now observe just a few ways in which Jesus is God's Son.

The Apostles' Creed

A. *Jesus Is God's Son in a Trinitarian Sense*

First, Jesus is God's Son in a Trinitarian sense.

The term "Son of God" serves to designate Jesus as the Second Person of the Trinity.

This is the most profound sense in which the term is used. In all probability Jesus himself invariably employed the term in that particular sense.

Jesus clearly used the term in this way in Matthew 11:27, when he said to the crowds: "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (cf. Matthew 14:28-33; 16:16; 21:33-46; 22:41-46; 26:63; and parallels).

Jesus understood himself to be the Second Person of the Trinity.

B. *Jesus Is God's Son in an Official Sense*

Second, Jesus is God's Son in an official sense.

In this sense the term "Son" is descriptive of the office of Jesus.

Jesus is frequently called the "Son of God" as God's heir or representative. The demons evidently used the term in this way in Matthew 8:29, when they said to him: "What do you want with us, Son of God? . . . Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" (cf. Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32).

In this instance the demons recognized that God has been sent by the Father to serve his will in this world. And they refer to him in his official capacity as the Son of God.

C. *Jesus Is God's Son in a Nativistic Sense*

And third, Jesus is God's Son in a nativistic sense.

What do I mean when I say that Jesus is God's Son in a "nativistic" sense? Nativism has to do with belonging to an indigenous group or culture.

And so, the term "Son of God" is given to Jesus in view of the fact that he owed his birth to the paternity of God. He was begotten, according to his human nature, by the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit, and is in that sense the Son of God.

This is clearly indicated in Luke 1:32-35, when the angel Gabriel told Mary regarding the birth of Jesus, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

So, Jesus is God's Son in a number of different senses. He is God's Son in a Trinitarian sense, in an official sense, and in a nativistic sense.

II. Jesus Is the Only Begotten of the Father

Second, Jesus is the only begotten of the Father.

The word *begotten* means "to bear" or "to be born of." And so we read, for example, in Genesis 5:4 in the *King James Version*, "And the days of Adam after he had *begotten* Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters."

The expression "only begotten"—an expression used in the *King James Version* and not in the *New International Version*—is used five times, all in the writings of the apostle John, of Jesus as the Son of God (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). In addition, it is used once in Hebrews 11:17 of the relationship of Isaac to Abraham.

The Apostles' Creed

We read in John 1:14 in the *KJV*, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the *only begotten* of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” With reference to Jesus this means that as the Son of God he was the sole representative of the being and character of the One who sent him.

The words “only begotten” indicate that a unique relationship exists between the Father and the Son. This relationship did not begin at the incarnation however. No. Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

This truth is seen more clearly in John 1:18 in the *KJV*: “No man hath seen God at any time; the *only begotten* Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.” Here we see the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son clearly expressed.

So, Jesus is not only God’s Son. He is also the only begotten of the Father.

III. Jesus Is Divine

And third, Jesus is divine.

The divinity of Jesus was denied by some in the Early Church.

In the days of the Reformation the Socinians followed their example, and spoke of Jesus as a mere man. Thus, they not only denied the Trinity, but also the divinity of Jesus as the Second Person of the Trinity.

This same position is taken by a host of liberal scholars, Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and many others in our own day.

The denial of the divinity of Jesus is made by those who disregard the teaching of Scripture, for the Bible contains an abundance of evidence for the divinity of Jesus.

Let’s note some of the ways in which the Scripture asserts that Jesus is divine.

A. *Scripture Ascribes Divinity to Jesus*

First, Scripture ascribes divinity to Jesus.

Scripture explicitly asserts the divinity of the Son in such passages as John 20:28.

Jesus, you recall, had risen from the dead and appeared to all the apostles except Thomas (cf. John 20:24). So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28; cf. also John 1:1; Romans 9:5; Philippians 2:6; Titus 2:13).

Jehovah’s Witnesses distort this text in their efforts to deny the divinity of Jesus. They say that Thomas looked at Jesus and said, “My Lord!” Then he looked up at heaven and said, “My God!”

This is clearly eisegesis (reading *into* the text what you want it to say) instead of exegesis (reading *out of* the text what it says).

Although there are other texts of Scripture ascribing divinity to Jesus, this is one of the clearest texts.

B. *Scripture Ascribes Divine Names to Jesus*

Second, Scripture ascribes divine names to Jesus.

We read about this, for example, in the prophecy concerning Jesus in the Old Testament. This is seen particularly in Isaiah 9:6: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Coun-

selor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (cf. also Isaiah 40:3; Jeremiah 23:5, 6; Joel 2:32).

C. *Scripture Ascribes Divine Attributes to Jesus*

Third, Scripture ascribes to Jesus divine attributes.

Let me mention a number of these.

First, Scripture ascribes eternal existence to Jesus.

John 1:1-2 says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (cf. also Isaiah 9:6).

The apostle John makes it clear that Jesus has existed from “the beginning,” which is simply his way of saying that Jesus had no beginning.

Second, Scripture ascribes omnipresence to Jesus.

Omnipresence means “to be present in all places at all times.”¹

Now that Jesus has risen from the dead he is able to be present in all places at all times. Jesus said in Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (cf. also Matthew 28:20; John 3:13).

And so Jesus is with believers all over the world at the same time.

Third, Scripture ascribes omniscience to Jesus.

Omniscience means “to have an infinite awareness, understanding, and insight” as well as “possessing a universal or complete knowledge.”²

The apostle John said of Jesus, “But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man” (John 2:24-25, cf. also John 21:17; Revelation 2:23).

Fourth, Scripture ascribes omnipotence to Jesus.

¹ Merriam-Webster, I. (1996, c1993). *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary*. Includes index. (10th ed.). Springfield, Mass., U.S.A.: Merriam-Webster.

² Ibid.

Omnipotence means “to have unlimited authority or influence.”³

The apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians and said, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:20-21, cf. also Isaiah 9:6; Revelation 1:8).

And fifth, Scripture ascribes immutability to Jesus.

Immutability means “not capable of or susceptible to change.”⁴

Speaking of Jesus the writer to the Hebrews said, “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end” (Hebrews 1:10-12; cf. also Hebrews 13:8).

D. Scripture Ascribes Divine Works to Jesus

Fourth, Scripture ascribes divine works to Jesus.

Some of the divine works ascribed to Jesus are the following.

First, Scripture ascribes creation to Jesus.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians and said in Colossians 1:16: “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” (cf. also John 1:3, 10; Hebrews 1:2, 10).

Second, Scripture ascribes providence to Jesus.

Question 11 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks, “What are God’s works of providence?” And the answer given is,

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

The Apostles' Creed

“God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.”

This work of providence Scripture also ascribes to Jesus. John 3:35 says, “The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands” (cf. also Luke 10:22; John 17:2; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:17).

Third, Scripture ascribes forgiveness to Jesus.

Jesus had just healed the paralytic and said to him, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5).

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . .”

He said to the paralytic, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!” (Mark 2:6-12).

And fourth, Scripture ascribes judgment to Jesus.

Peter, in preaching to Cornelius, said in Acts 10:42: “He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead” (cf. also Matthew 25: 31, 32; John 5:19-29; Acts 17:31).

E. Scripture Ascribes Divine Honor to Jesus

And fifth, Scripture accords divine honor to Jesus.

We see this, for example, in John 5:22-23: “Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son,

that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.”

So, in all these ways we can see how clearly Scripture ascribes divinity to Jesus.

Conclusion

In the Apostles' Creed we affirm that Jesus is God's only Son. When we recite that statement we are affirming that Jesus is God's Son, that he is the only begotten of the Father, and also that he is divine.

Even though Jesus is God *the* Son, you and I become sons of God through adoption. When we recognize that God is righteous and holy, and that we are unrighteous and unholy, and that we stand under God's righteous condemnation and judgment, we cry out to him for cleansing and forgiveness. In his grace and mercy, he hears us. He forgives us. He justifies us. He declares us righteous. He adopts us into his family. And you and I become the sons of God.

And all of this is because of what Jesus, God's only Son, has done on our behalf. Let us embrace that truth and rejoice in it. Amen.

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