

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

I Believe In God The Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth

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Genesis 1:1

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! I hope you have your Bible with you and that you are able to open it now to Genesis 1:1. A.W. Tozer said many years ago:

“What comes into our minds when we think of God is the most important thing about us.”¹

And so that is what we are going to be talking about today. Last week we were talking about the FACT of God and about how the way we respond to that FACT influences our trajectory and our destiny as human beings.

But of course we need to do more than believe in the FACT – we need to believe and delight in the person. And so the Apostles’ Creed does not allow us to affirm merely an intellectual faith in God – it immediately compels us beyond that into a person knowledge of God:

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

¹ A.W. Tozer as cited by R. Albert Mohler Jr. in *The Apostles’ Creed: Discovering Authentic Christianity In An Age Of Counterfeits*, (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019), 3.

We'll look at both sides of that today, beginning with that which is most primary and then concluding with that which is most glorious.

I hope you still have your Bible open to Genesis 1:1. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1 ESV)

Last week we looked exclusively at the first 4 words of that verse – In the beginning, GOD! But this week, directed by the Apostles' Creed, we broaden out our lens and consider the verse as a whole. What does it mean, first of all, to confess our belief in the GOD who is Maker of heaven and earth?

Maker Of Heaven And Earth

I'd like to suggest that it means at least 4 things in particular. It means first of all that:

1. God is the cause of it all

The expression “the heavens and the earth” is a Bible way of saying: EVERYTHING. God is the maker, the source, the cause of EVERYTHING – that is the opening statement and the foundational premise in the Bible.

And it stands in absolute contrast to the opening premise in the philosophical system known as secular materialism. In the 1980 television miniseries called “The Cosmos” Carl Sagan opened the program with these intentionally crafted words:

“The cosmos is all that ever was, or is, or ever shall be.”²

Carl Sagan intended that as a counterpart to the opening words of the Bible because as every philosopher knows, in order for anything to exist, something or someone must have existed forever and must have the power of life within itself.

² Carl Sagan as cited in R. Albert Mohler Jr. in *The Apostles' Creed: Discovering Authentic Christianity In An Age Of Counterfeits*, (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019), 22.

The Bible starts with a someone – GOD. Secular materialism begins with a something – the universe. Now you might think that the Big Bang Theory (the scientific theory, not the show) put an end to that kind of thinking – science KNOWS now that the universe had a beginning – but people committed to this worldview simply push that problem into another dimension, literally, suggesting that perhaps our universe broke into existence from a parallel universe. Regardless – they refuse to begin with God – they begin with matter. That is what secular materialism MEANS and it is the dominant worldview in our culture.

Secular materialism believes that the universe is an accident and human life is meaningless. But the Bible rejects that on page 1. On page 1 of the Bible – VERSE 1 of the Bible – we are told that the universe was created by a PERSON³ and we were created for a PURPOSE.

And that changes everything.

As Christians we believe in GOD – maker of heaven and earth. He is the source of all, the author of all and the cause of all – thanks be to God!

The second thing implied in these very important words is the idea that:

2. God is above it all

As we mentioned a minute ago, the universe had a beginning – that’s why the bible says:

In the **beginning**, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1 ESV)

Time, space and matter go together – if you don’t have space or matter then you don’t have time – so TIME began when God created the heavens and the earth – but God did not begin with the creation of the heavens and the earth. God is eternal – that means he exists before time – AFTER time and ABOVE time.

³ Christians confess that God is a person, but that does not mean that God is a human. To call God a person is to say that he is a self-aware, rational Being that has a personality.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Psalm 90:2 ESV)

That's very important for us to understand because SCIENCE is limited, by definition, to observable, repeatable and testable phenomenon – and God as God doesn't fit into that category. You will never find God at the bottom of your test-tube or at the end of your telescope. He is SPIRIT – HE IS ABOVE, He is APART and he is OVER all things and therefore BEYOND the reach and grasp of science.

That's why we speak of God as, in some sense incomprehensible – not because he makes no sense, but because he exceeds our grasp. He is:

“the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,¹⁶ who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.” (1 Timothy 6:15–16 ESV)

So we will NEVER know God exhaustively, but we can know God intimately through his gracious self-disclosure in the Scripture and ultimately in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said to Philip:

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9 ESV)

So we can know God TRULY – not exhaustively but TRULY – through the person and work of Christ - Thanks be to God!

Thirdly when we say that we believe in the God who is MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH we are saying that while he is ABOVE IT ALL – he is by definition connected to it all.

3. God is connected to it all

It comes from him – and it SPEAKS of him. Psalm 19:1-3 says:

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

³ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. (Psalm 19:1–3 ESV)

So when you walk in the forest and you pick up a leaf – you are not SEEING GOD – but you are seeing something that speaks of God. This world reverberates with the whispers of eternity. As the old hymn writer said:

“This is my Father’s world,
And to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.”⁴

Remember that?

This is our Father’s world – and therefore we must not treat it or speak of it as if it were intrinsically evil. In fact most historians of the creed suggest that it was the pagan tendency to do that very thing which occasioned these particular words. This is the Creed pushing back on the early gnostic tendency to view creation as essentially evil. Christianity rejected that view categorically.

How could we not?

Have you read Genesis 1?

God saw that the light was good. (Genesis 1:4 ESV)

God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:10 ESV)

The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:12 ESV)

God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:17–18 ESV)

⁴ https://hymnary.org/text/this_is_my_fathers_world_and_to_my

So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:21 ESV)

And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:25 ESV)

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31 ESV)

7 times in Genesis 1 God looked at his creation and said that it was GOOD – so who are you to say that it is not good? The pagans say that – but biblical religion rejects that, Old Testament and New. The Apostle Paul said:

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—²¹ “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (Colossians 2:20–21 ESV)

Legalism is for babies, Paul says. Asceticism is for babies. That’s paganism! The Christian faith begins with the understanding that our God CREATED THE WORLD, therefore it is GOOD.

So as Christians we don’t become more holy by moving further away from the world or by eating fewer things that come from the world:

“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.” (1 Timothy 4:4–5 ESV)

So the world is good – it is fallen, it is confused, it is off course – but it is NOT fundamentally evil and the Creed begins by reminding us of that. Ben Myers says here:

“A guitar makes an evil sound when it goes out of tune; its “evil” is not a positive quality but only a deficiency.”⁵

So it is with the world. It is out of tune – but it is good. This is our Father’s world.

⁵ Ben Meyers in *The Apostles’ Creed: A Guide To The Ancient Catechism*, (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018), 32.

The birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their Maker's praise.⁶

Thanks be to God!

God is connected to it all – and God is responsible for it all, that's the fourth thing implied in the opening words of the Creed.

4. God is responsible for it all

If God is the maker of heaven and earth – if he is the ultimate source of absolutely everything that exists – then it is only reasonable to admit that he is ultimately responsible for everything that exists. The Bible makes no attempt whatsoever to avoid that implication. God makes no attempt to avoid that implication. In Deuteronomy 32:39 God says:

“See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.”
(Deuteronomy 32:39 ESV)

That's all-embracing Sovereignty – that's God saying, I am responsible for it all.

Now, that is not to say that he is responsible for it all in the same way. God made human beings in his image and part of what that entails is moral responsibility. So God is the author of US and we are the author of a great deal of pain and suffering in this world. But God claims responsibility for that – that's the Gospel! God says: I will do for you what you can no longer do for yourself and I will pay for what you have done in the body of my Son Jesus on the cross.

That is God taking responsibility for what we – AS HIS CREATURES – have authored.

You need to know that – the Creed makes no attempt to DODGE that. It associates God WITH EVERYTHING in creation.

⁶ https://hymnary.org/text/this_is_my_fathers_world_and_to_my

So you may ask – or your loved one may ask – if God is ALMIGHTY – if he is responsible for all things – then why does he not REMOVE all evil, all pain and all suffering from the earth?

That is a fair question – and there is a great answer!

God IS removing all evil, all pain and all suffering from the earth! Through Jesus Christ, bad people like you and me are being saved and changed. And new pain free, disease free bodies are already on the way! The curse has been absorbed by Christ on the cross! And all evil and all causes of evil will soon be removed from the earth.

All of that is already in motion and J.I. Packer says here:

“If God moves more slowly than we wish in clearing evil out of his 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.”⁷

God is going slow because God is being gracious to as many people as possible – praise the Lord!

That is the God we confess in the opening words of the Apostles’ Creed. I believe in the God who is maker of heaven and earth. The God who is the cause of it all, the God who is above it all, the God who is connected to it all and the God who is responsible for it all – and according to the Creed, that same God is the God who invites me to address him as Father – and that is perhaps the most glorious truth in all creation.

The Father Almighty

Jesus told his disciples, when you pray:

Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” (Matthew 6:9 ESV)

⁷ J.I. Packer, *Affirming The Apostles’ Creed*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 48.

That is the GLORY of the Christian faith – and that is the glory of the Apostles’ Creed. We don’t just believe in God the CREATOR – we believe in God the Father Almighty – maker of heaven and earth. The God who is SOVEREIGN and the God who draws near. That is the miracle and the marrow of it all!

Now, to be clear, this doctrine was not “invented” by Jesus, rather it was “foregrounded”. God is referred to as “Father” 15 times in the Old Testament – and then 165 times in the Gospels alone⁸, so this is one of those concepts that was somewhat hidden in the Old Testament but that is gloriously revealed and highlighted and celebrated in the New Testament. It is definitely not a NEW DOCTRINE, but it is a MASSIVE shift in emphasis.

Now – some people get distracted here by the masculine imagery and by the biological imagery – as if we are saying that God is a MALE and that he somehow had a baby that grew up and became his Son. But that is not at all what the Bible is saying.

God is not a male – God is above gender – he is neither male nor female and these terms, “Father and Son” are relational metaphors intended to be accessible and intelligible to human beings. The church father Athanasius says here:

“Every bodily thought must be shunned in these matters”⁹

This is a metaphor. God doesn’t have an Adam’s Apple – that’s not what we are saying here. To call God FATHER is to make the astonishing claim that the Creator of the Universe is RELATIONAL. He is relational WITHIN HIMSELF and he is relational OUTSIDE himself - he is drawing people TO HIMSELF through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. That’s what the language is communicating – thanks be to God!

So let’s take a few minutes and unpack that. What does it mean to say that we believe in God The Father Almighty? Well it means first of all that we believe that God created us.

⁸ Robert H. Stein, “Fatherhood of God,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 247.

⁹ Athanasius as cited by Ben Meyers in *The Apostles’ Creed: A Guide To The Ancient Catechism*, (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018), 22.

1. He created us

These are OVERLAPPING theological concepts – particularly in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, in the passages where God is spoken of as Father, it is usually in reference to his identity and role as creator. So for example in Malachi 2:10 it says:

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? (Malachi 2:10 ESV)

By the way, that is exactly the sense in which Paul used the term when citing some pagan poets in Acts 17. He says:

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.’” (Acts 17:26–28 ESV)

So Paul says – even some of your own poets understand God in this sense. He is the creator of mankind – we are indeed his offspring – God is in that sense, the Father of us all.

So to call God Father is in some sense merely to repeat or assume everything we just said about God as Creator. The biblical doctrine begins there, but it doesn’t end there. To call God our Father in the biblical sense, is also to recognize him as our judge.

2. He judges us

In fact, in both of those passages that I just cited, God’s Fatherhood is acknowledged so as to warn people about the reality of judgment. In Malachi 2 the text goes on to say:

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?¹¹ Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.¹² May the LORD cut off from the

tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts! (Malachi 2:10–12 ESV)

God is our Father – therefore you will be held accountable for your faithlessness and rebellion! That’s the whole frame of reference for Malachi’s prophecy. Earlier in the book he records God as saying:

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name.” (Malachi 1:6 ESV)

So to call God a Father, in a biblical sense, is to recognize that we will all have to answer to him for the honour or the dishonour we have paid him.

Paul made the same point in Acts 17. He says:

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.” (Acts 17:30–31 ESV)

So the FATHERHOOD OF GOD is acknowledged so as to remind people that we will all stand before him at the Final Judgment.

Peter ASSUMES that perspective and, like Paul uses that perspective to call on people to embrace the salvation that is ours through Christ. He says:

And if you call on him as **Father who judges** impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:17–19 ESV)

God is “Father who Judges” therefore clothe yourself in the blood of Christ so that can stand with confidence and boldness before him on the last day.

This brings us to perhaps the most precious aspect of this doctrine. God is not merely “the father of all” in a general sense, he is also the Father of a particular people through the grace and miracle of adoption.

3. He adopts us

Ben Myers says here:

“Jesus is God’s child by nature, and we become God’s children by grace. Jesus is born of God; we are adopted.”¹⁰

According to the Bible, that’s how we BECOME the children of God. There are only two people in the Bible who are called son of God in a natural sense. Adam is the son of God in a created sense and Jesus is the Son of God in an eternally begotten sense.

The rest of us become children of God by adoption. John makes that point at the beginning of his Gospel. He says:

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12–13 ESV)

So, as I said, Adam became God’s son by creation, Jesus is God’s Son in an eternal sense – the rest of us become God’s children in an adoptive sense. We are given the right to BECOME children of God, not through any kind of biological process, but by the will and choice of God.

Hallelujah!

What could be more certain and permanent than that? What God chooses stays chosen so if we are God’s children by God’s choice then our identity is SECURE.

Praise the Lord!

¹⁰ Ben Meyers, *The Apostles’ Creed: A Guide To The Ancient Catechism*, (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018), 20.

We are God's children by CHOICE and we are God's children by GIFT. In Galatians 4:4-7 the Apostle Paul says:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:4-7 ESV)

That's the Gospel – the Good News that if you are in Christ then you are God's child. By his choice. By his grace. By his WORK – by the work God did in Christ you are MADE SONS. Again – not in a gendered sense – not in a biological sense. These are METAPHORS. To call someone a son is to refer to them as an heir – that is the point the Apostle Paul is making here. He is saying that if you are joined to Jesus Christ through faith – then you are received by God as a SON. Not just A Son - THE SON.

You are AS JESUS to God.

The SON maketh MANY SONS – that is the heart of the heart of the heart of the Christian Gospel.

If you are IN CHRIST then you are AS CHRIST – thanks be to God!

Fourth thing we want to say here about this glorious reality is that to call God our Father is to acknowledge – and to celebrate and to GLORY OVER THE FACT that God loves us.

4. He loves us

And there is absolutely no reason for us to have expected this. There is no compelling rule of logic that dictates that if an ENTITY created us he must therefore love us. That isn't LOGICALLY necessary – the pagans certainly didn't think so. The pagans all had some notion of divine creation – you don't meet anyone believing in a purely naturalistic universe until the 19th century – the pagans believed in gods who were responsible in some way for the physical

universe – but they didn't infer from that any sort of love or affection between god and man. In fact that's why most pagan worship is so noisy, bloody and frantic. It was about GETTING GOD'S ATTENTION. Because he didn't care. He was off frolicking with other gods. He was not the God of the Bible. The God who sees. The God who rescues wandering slave girls in Genesis 16. The god of the pagans didn't care about slave girls – didn't care about anybody.

He may have been creator, he may have been mighty, but he was not father. He did not love us.

But the God of the Bible – the God who is there – DOES. God LOVES US. That's one of the first things we learn in our Christian education, isn't it? That:

God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 ESV)

That is the God we believe in and that is the God of the Apostles' Creed. J.I. Packer says here:

“When the Christian says the first clause of the Creed, he will put all this together and confess his Creator as both the Father of his Saviour and his own Father through Christ – a Father who now loves him no less than he loves his only begotten Son. That is a marvellous confession to be able to make.”¹¹

Indeed it is.

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

Thanks be to God! Let's pray together.

¹¹ J.I. Packer, *Affirming The Apostles' Creed*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 42-43.