

The Apostles' Creed: I Believe in God (4)

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

*I believe in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord
Who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and 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
He will come again 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*

- In this study we will begin to consider the first section of the Creed that treats the subject of God the Father. And yet as we come into this first section, we are struck with the simple, but profound, words: *I believe in God...*
- A first matter that we must consider when we confess that we believe in or trust in “God” is the question of who this God is. When as Christians we confess that we believe in God, we are not talking about a general concept of god nor that we think there is a single god worshipped by different names and different religions. Rather, we are very exclusive in our confession, and when we say, *I believe in God* we are saying that there is only one living and true God, and He is the one that we believe in. We are also saying that all other “gods” acknowledged by other religions are invalid and actually non-existent. In other words, we do not believe that God is like the hub of a bicycle wheel and all religious roads—like the spokes of the wheel—ultimately lead to Him.
- We are exclusivists when it comes to God, because God has revealed Himself to be the only real God: *You shall have no other gods before Me* (Ex. 20:3). Particularly, in Isaiah 45, God is speaking to Cyrus—a pagan king—and He says (45:4-5, 21),

“I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other... Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me.”

- Thus we join with the people of God throughout the history of the world confessing our faith in the one, living and true God:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Deut. 6:4

...we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Cor. 8:4-6)

- Not only do we confess that there is only one, living and true God, but we confess that this one, living and true God is a Trinity. That is, we confess in the Apostles' Creed that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- The doctrine of the Trinity—which the whole Creed is organized around—is the unique foundation of the Christian faith and the most profound teaching of all of God's self-revelation.
- The doctrine of the Trinity—or the Triunity of God—is that there is only one God, but that this one God exists in three distinct persons. Thus when talking about God we say that each of the members of the Trinity is “the same in **substance**, equal in power and glory”(WSC #6). Another Christian creed called the Athanasian Creed (Late 5th or early 6th Century) states it this way:

...we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost is all One, the Glory Equal, the Majesty Co-Eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father Uncreated, the Son Uncreated, and the Holy Ghost Uncreated. The Father Incomprehensible, the Son Incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost Incomprehensible. The Father Eternal, the Son Eternal, and the Holy Ghost Eternal... So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not Three Gods, but One God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not Three Lords but One Lord...

- Why do we believe this? We believe and confess this truth about God, because of how God has revealed Himself in the Scriptures. It is absolutely clear that there is only one, living and true God, but it is also absolutely clear that there are three distinct persons that are said to be this one, living and true God.
- We first see the Trinity revealed in the first 2 verses of the Bible:

*In the beginning, **God** created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And **the Spirit of God** was hovering over the face of the waters. **And God said**, "Let there be light," and there was light.*

Here we have the Father, the Spirit, and the Word of God all active in creation. These allusions to God as a Trinity are found throughout the OT. For example, in Isaiah 48:16, one who is identified as the Servant of the LORD (cf. 42:1) says, "*Draw near to Me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.*" And now **the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit.**" Again, here we have, "the Lord God", "the Servant", and "His Spirit".

- Along with the numerous allusions to the Trinity in the OT, there are even more—and more explicit ones—in the NT:

*Now when all the people were baptized, and when **Jesus** also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and **the Holy Spirit** descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven [**the Father**], "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Lk. 3:21-22)*

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of **the Father** and of **the Son** and of **the Holy Spirit.**" (Matt. 28:19)*

*...there are varieties of gifts, but the same **Spirit**; and there are varieties of service, but the same **Lord**; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same **God** who empowers them all in everyone. (1 Cor. 12:4-6)*

*The grace of **the Lord Jesus Christ** and the love of **God** and the fellowship of **the Holy Spirit** be with you all. (2 Cor. 13:14)*

*...the foreknowledge of **God the Father**, in the sanctification of **the Spirit**, for obedience to **Jesus Christ** and for sprinkling with his blood. (1 Pet. 1:2)*

- God's Triune nature is profound and mysterious—known only from His revelation of Himself in the Bible—but it is also very practical and helpful in our daily lives, not to mention essential to our salvation.
- The Trinity means that at the ground of all existence, the very nature of reality is both one and many. This means that we do not always have to choose between two alternatives or set two important things in conflict with each other. On the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity, we can hold that two things are "equally ultimate". For instance, is your individual relationship with God or your corporate relationship with the Body of Christ more important? Neither. They are both equally ultimate. Are the individual identities of a married couple or their identity together more important? Neither. They are equally ultimate.
- The Trinity means that God has exercised and given His love forever. Thus He did not need to create us to be able to express this attribute. The three persons have loved one another from all eternity.
- And finally, the Trinity means that God can pour His eternal wrath out upon a substitute and have it fully satisfied, for the Eternal Father can and did forsake and punish the Eternal Son, enabling Him to pardon our sin and justify us in Him.
- Thus, we are saying something very profound when we confess, *I believe in God...* in the Apostles' Creed. We are saying that there is only one, living and true God, and that He is a Trinity. And, in saying this, we are confessing that we are relying upon Him alone for our salvation, **for only this God could save us.**