

I Believe in God the Father: Psalm 33, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, Hebrews 1:1-2

Hear O Israel – the Lord is our God; the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. (Deut. 6:4)

*if you confess with your lips that **Jesus is Lord** and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9)*

This command by Moses that has since been repeated daily by every faithful Hebrew who ever lived and this confession by the Apostle Paul that “**Jesus is Lord**” are probably the two oldest confessions of faith (Jewish & Christian) ever recorded.

This Fall in response to many requests, we have begun trying to answer the question: just what are the uncompromisable tenets of the Christian faith? And we rightly began with this first Christian confession – Jesus is Lord. Then for the last few weeks we have paid close attention to three aspects of the Christian faith that, in his letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul declared to be of first importance:

- That Christ died for our sins according to scripture
- That he was buried and then raised again the third day according to scriptures
- And that there were over 500 witnesses who could attest to seeing Jesus alive again after his death.

Now for the next few weeks let’s turn our attention to the oldest creedal statement of the church, using it – as it was intended – to guide us through more of the most basic, uncompromisable truths of the Christian faith.

But first let’s ask, just what is this Apostles Creed (AC) that we often repeat every single Sunday, and why should we do so?

Legend has it that the Apostles Creed was written by the 12 Apostles --- each contributing a part. But the truth is that while it does neatly summarize the Apostle’s faith, the AC was actually first composed around 150 AD to be used as a **baptismal declaration**. New converts to the Christian faith, coming out of polytheistic Greco/Roman culture would study and then publicly profess the 12 points of AC before being baptized and admitted to church membership.

Since then the Apostles Creed has been recognized, throughout history, by almost all Christian Churches everywhere – as the simplest, clearest, declaration of what Christians believe.

One of the greatest joys coming out of my visit among Ethiopian Christians was to recognize during their worship service – primarily by the cadence of what they were saying in their own language – that they were reciting the AC which I then joined in, speaking the same faith together with them but in my own mother tongue.

This for me is the value of the Apostles Creed – knowing that no matter how far my own cultural practice of Christianity has changed from that of the early church, or the other churches around the world with different languages, different hymns, different rituals (organs or guitars or jungle drums, preaching robes or blue jeans), nevertheless the essential faith that we share has not changed – that as I stand on Sundays to recite the Apostles Creed, I am linking myself back through the centuries to the faith of the very first Christians – yes even to the Apostles who boldly faced the tyranny of Roman religion and its multiple gods to declare: ***I believe in God the Father almighty maker of Heaven and Earth.....***

So Let's begin right here to dissect this very first Phrase of the AC.



I.

"I believe" -- You can't live without some kind of faith. Everybody believes something; faith is crucial to all human existence.

- We believe that when we first step out of bed in the morning that the floor will still be there.
- We believe that if we drop an object, the force of gravity will bring it to the ground.
- We believe that day will follow night, winter will follow summer; that there is a predictable symmetry of how nature functions.

Everybody believes -- it is now just a matter of what they believe in .

So the boss asked one of his employees: "do you believe in life after death?"

"Certainly not," the employee replied, "there's no proof of it."

"Well there is now," said his boss, "yesterday, after you left early to attend your uncle's funeral, he came looking for you."

So let's add two more words to this belief statement:



With this statement you have separated yourself theologically from 10% of the American population who, as agnostics or atheists, believe there is no God or say we just can't know.

One day, a rather theatrical atheistic professor informed his college class that he was going to prove once and for all that there was no God. He loudly declared in front of his stunned students, "*God if you are real, then I want you to knock me off this platform!*" A few moments passed by as the class sat in silence and he continued his harangue against God, inviting Him to "*knock me off this platform!*"

Just about that time a huge 250-pound rugby player happened to walk by the door and heard the professor's tirade. So he ran into the class room, hit the professor with a full force tackle sending him flying from the platform.

The professor got up, obviously shaken and said, "Where did you come from, and why did you do that?"

The rugby player replied, "God was busy; He sent me!"

Nothing can be simpler than this - either there is a God or there isn't.

As philosopher Blaise Pascale famously pointed out, **if there is no god, then it makes no difference what you believe. BUT if there is a god – then what you believe makes all the difference in the world.** It's a safer bet to believe in a God that doesn't exist than to not believe in a God – who does exist.

Interestingly, 88% of Americans still believe that there is a God, in some form or another. Even a large percentage of those who answer faith surveys with "none" or "nothing in particular," say they still pray and occasionally attend a church.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/april/we-believe-in-god-what-americans-mean-pew-survey.html>

There are four classic **arguments from reason** that would point to the existence of some kind of god, which every thinking person needs to consider.

Ontological:

Universal human knowledge of God, strongly indicates that there is a God.



First is the **ontological** argument developed in the 11th century by Archbishop Anselm who argued that since the entire human race believes in some sort of "god," then there must be a reality behind this human conception.

Interestingly, the Bible supports this argument! Solomon wrote that, *God has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that*

he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11
English Standard Version (ESV).

Cosmological:

*what we see happening
must have a reason for happening.*



Second is the ***cosmological*** argument. Put forth by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. This is based on the "principle of cause and effect." What we see happening must have a reason for happening.

When an egg comes flying through the air and splatters on the shoulder of a political candidate, you assume that the egg didn't, in its simple egg-ness, suddenly decide to take wings and fly through the air. We know that someone threw it. Everything must have a beginning.

Take this thought out into the stars and either we have an infinite universe that was uncaused and is unchanging, or we have a universe that had a beginning – which is what modern science now believes. They can track the path of our expanding universe all the way back to the "big bang," that first fraction of a second after our universal egg cracked open, but they can go no further. They reluctantly admit that something had to cause the Big Bang, something had to set the process in motion; whatever you name it, this uncaused cause is God. As our Bible simply declares, *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth* (Genesis 1:1).

Teleological

Evidence of design
demands a designer



Third is the ***teleological*** argument. Look around you. What do you see? Did it all just happen –just a quirk of time plus chance (a lot of time plus a lot of chance), or was there reason behind its design? The French philosopher Voltaire said that if you see something as complex as a working **watch** then there must be, somewhere behind the existence of that watch, **a watchmaker. Design demands a designer.** Just as it is absurd to think that the watch made itself, it is nonsense to believe that this complex universe, which functions in such exquisite ways, could all have come about by happenstance. A design this complex points to a designer.

As the Apostle Paul declared,
what can be known about God is plain to [humanity], because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. Romans 1:19

Sense of morality:

knowing what is right or wrong
points to a rule maker.

Fourth is the ***moral argument*** which notes that, built into our basic instincts, there is a sense of what is fair and what is unfair, what a person ought to do and ought not to do. Where did we get such moral sensibility? Moral relativists will say that each culture develops its own sense of right and wrong. However, most cultures have very similar moral codes against theft, dishonesty and murder. Again, the Bible agrees with this argument. The apostle Paul points to those people who, without having the law still instinctively obey the law, as proof that God's moral commands are written on our hearts (Romans 2:14-16).

Now, when you put all these proofs together, you have a pretty solid logical argument for the existence of God, but not necessarily for the God of the Bible.

But reason can only take a person so far; to go any further we need a ***revelation***. So, the only way we will get to know this reasoned out God any better is if HE chooses to reveal Himself to us.

The Bible assures us that is exactly what happened; this unmoved mover, who put it all together, revealed himself to us in His son Jesus the Christ. John's Gospel opens with this most astounding phrase:

In the beginning was the Word ...
All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being
John 1:1-3

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. John 1:1-3

And the Word became flesh
and lived among us, and we have seen his glory,
the glory as of a father's only son,
full of grace and truth.
John 1:14

That's what we are saying when we declare, "I believe in God." But let's add just two more words: **"I believe in God the Father"**



It is an amazing thing to think that this reasonably conceived, self-revealed God is not only personal – but he wants a relationship with us! This is where *The Apostles' Creed* begins to get specific in its description of the Christian God.

If I were putting together this creed, I would have probably reversed the order, moving from the grand perspective of God to His more personal attributes; something like: **"I believe in God, the Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of all that is, who has now revealed himself to us as Father."**

But the historic church chose just the opposite; to first emphasize our family relationship with God before detailing the attributes of God. So our creed states, **"I believe in God the Father Almighty,** (who just so happens also to be) maker of heaven and earth."

Why is this? – because with this single word **"FATHER"** the Christian church chose for itself **theism**; thus ruling out **pantheism** or **deism** the other two classic notions of how God might relate to his creation.

Pantheism believes god is in everything
Deism believes god is uninvolved with His creation
Theism believes that God is other,
yet actively involved with His Creation

Pantheism, believes that in some sense, everything is literally God. In pantheism, God *is* the world. The universe and God are identical. We are in God and God is in us.

This is the god of religions as ancient as Hinduism and as modern as Scientology, and Gaia worship. This is not the God of the Bible who while being "Wholly Other,"

(separate from) nevertheless interacts with His creation in special & personal ways.

Thus while Gaia worship often speaks of "Mother Earth" their concept of motherhood does not treat the humans living on planet Earth's surface as in any way of more value than the worms in its dirt, or the oil dwelling peacefully beneath. In pantheistic religions your relationship to god is no different from that your relationship to the

butterfly or the gravel on the roadbed (or their relationship to you). God is like "the force" in Star Wars, everywhere present even in the tiniest of particles yet only concerned with maintaining balance within the universe.

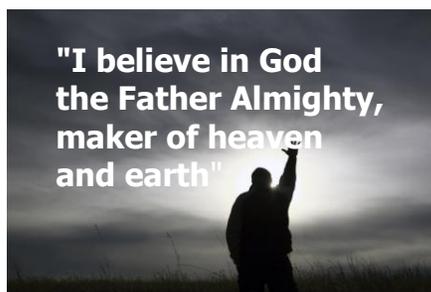
The other belief: **Deism**, removes God from the world altogether; he is the absent watchmaker. According to deism God functions above and beyond our world; uninvolved with its history. God, the unmoved mover, the original watchmaker, created a world, wound it up and said "*isn't that lovely*" and then moved on to other more interesting projects.

And there is or belief, **Theism**, which sees God as other than the world, above it and beyond it, yet also intimately involved in the world (we say "immanent yet transcendent"). **The creator God who has existed from eternity and who is separate from our world yet chose to enter into His creation to save us and direct our life.** *For God so loved He gave ... (John 3:16)*

Thus, when we say "**I believe in God the Father**" we are saying that we believe the creator of the universe not only knows our name but is personally concerned with our life, listens to our prayers, and works to make all things in our life work out for good.

And so that you may understand just how personal, how intimate, God our Father wants our relationship to be: notice that often when talking about God or praying to God, Jesus used the Aramaic word, *Abba*. Which literally means "Daddy." **Abba, amma, dada, mama** – these words are almost the same in every language the world over because they are the first words that a baby can say. And according to the Apostle Paul, we have the same privilege as Jesus of lifting our prayers to God saying "Abba Father" (Romans 8:15)

God the Father is personal and caring, involved in the larger world and in our own lives. But remember this God who would be our father *is also the all-powerful Creator God!*



All this is wrapped up in this single sentence: "*I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.*" So perhaps You can now see how every phrase in the Apostles Creed triggers many more thoughts that urge us unpack its meaning. While expressing the basic essence of our Christian faith the AC invites us to dive deep into the theology it expresses, to get to know better the God we have been invited to call "Father." That's why such statements as the APOSTLES CREED are so important to us.

They give us theological sinew, strong substance to undergird our faith.

C. S. Lewis, was a gifted, highly-intelligent, militant atheist, and respected faculty member at Oxford University. But still at the age of 32, he not only embraced the Christian faith, he spent the rest of his life defending it and becoming one of its most influential spokesmen

In his younger years at Oxford, Lewis had stated, "*Though I like clergymen as I like bears, I had as little wish to be in the church as in a zoo.*"

The notion of an Ultimate Authority who might interfere in his life made him feel nauseated. He wrote how he had surrounded himself with a barbed-wire fence declaring, "No Admittance," to anything that remotely resembled God.

But he goes on to describe a transformation in his life, "*very gradual and intellectual ... and not simple.*" First, throughout his life, from the time he was a boy living in Belfast to his conversion in his early thirties, Lewis periodically experienced a **sense of intense longing for some place or person. He described this longing as a "yearning for Joy that no human relationship could ever satisfy."**

Then he met Oxford faculty whom he admired but who were devout believers; one of them being his good friend Professor J. R. R. Tolkien, author of *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*. Then he discovered that of the writers he most admired many embraced a "spiritual worldview." G. K. Chesterton's book, *Everlasting Man*, profoundly impressed him with arguments he later used in his own writings. Then Lewis realized that Chesterton had that same "kink" as some of the other authors that he greatly admired: "Chesterton was a believer." So Lewis glibly warns that a young man who wishes to remain a sound atheist cannot be too careful of his reading.

About the same time, a second event happened that had "*a shattering impact*" on his thinking. One of the most militant atheists among the Oxford faculty, T. D. Weldon, sat in Lewis' room one evening and remarked that **the historical authenticity of the Gospels was surprisingly sound.** This deeply disturbed Lewis. He immediately understood the implications that if this "*hardest boiled of all the atheists I ever knew*" thought the Gospels true, where did that leave him? He had considered the New Testament stories myth, not historical fact. If they were true, he realized that all other truth faded in significance.

That which he had greatly feared had at last come upon him. Lewis wrote, ***"I gave in and admitted that God was God and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."***

Although Lewis wrote that at first he felt he was posting letters to a non-existent address, once he accepted, with considerable resistance, the presence of an Intelligence beyond the universe, Lewis concluded that this Being demanded complete surrender and obedience. This was the beginning of his conversion, not yet to faith in Jesus Christ, but to the conviction there was a God who was alive, personal, all powerful, who had been and was now seeking him out.

Perhaps you don't believe at all.
Or perhaps you feel that God is pursuing you in a similar way.

So why don't you open your life to Him with an openness of mind, openness of heart. That can be the starting point of what can also be for your life: transformational.

And for the rest of us who are already believers, hopefully this study of our loving Father God – as described in the Apostles Creed, will make clearer to us the basic objective truths of our faith and the personal application of those truths in our daily lives.

So that when we say **"I believe in God the Father Almighty"** it is more than just a movement of our mouths but our whole being.

Let's pray about this.