

THE APOSTLES CREED

Session 2

I. FAITH AND THE NORMS OF FAITH

- A. Faith is the grace-enabled act by which we place our trust in Christ and obey him as our Lord (TBC, 13). Faith is an act of the whole person (heart and mind) which brings about our union with Christ. Faith accepts what God reveals about himself to be true because God himself is the source of all Truth.
- B. The New Testament speaks of both the act of faith and the content of faith. Paul speaks about some people being “sound in the faith” and teaching “sound doctrine” (Titus 1:13; 2:1). To speak about “sound doctrine” implies that there are norms for faith; Christians are not free to decide what they believe for themselves. While the act of faith is truly personal, the norms which govern it are not
- C. The first and most important norm of faith is Scripture. Scripture consists of two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The writings of both were inspired, meaning that they were written by people under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (TBC, 31). Together, the Old Testament and the New Testament constitute the canon of Scripture. Because Scripture was inspired by God as a witness to his self-revelation in history and is a means by which God continually speaks the Church, it is “the Church’s final authority in matters of faith and practice” (TBC, 26).
- D. The Old and the New Testaments are to be read and interpreted together. Christians read the Old Testament as pointing to Christ and we read the New Testament in the light of what God revealed to Israel in the Old Testament (TBC, 30). Together, the Old and New Testaments constitute a unified witness to God, who inspired both for the benefit of his people.
- E. In interpreting Scripture, we need to remember three fundamental principles:
1. All Scripture must be interpreted in the light of Christ who is himself the Word of God (TBC, 33).
 2. Scripture should be interpreted in its canonical sense. We should not simply read random or isolated passages to support what we already think but we should read all Scripture texts within the context of the whole of Scripture (TBC, 34).
 3. When reading Scripture we must subject our interpretation of it to the Church’s “historical and consensual reading of it” (TBC, 34). No individual interpretation of Scripture is self-authenticating and the Church’s “historical and consensual” reading of it can check those interpretations which are idiosyncratic.
- F. Creeds also serve as norms of faith. A Creed is simply a statement of faith that is intended to be normative. Creeds serve an important purpose since they “declare and safeguard God’s truth about himself, ourselves, and creation, as God has revealed it in Holy Scripture” (TBC, 20).
- G. Some people think that creeds somehow stifle thought. The opposite is actually the case. Creeds are the products of thought and historically they have provoked further thought. The development of creeds throughout the history of the Church reflects the value that Christians have placed on reflecting upon their faith and stating it in as clear a way as possible.
- H. One of the most important of all Christian creeds is the Apostles’ Creed. This creed had its origin in an early baptismal liturgy used in the church in Rome and professes faith in the Triune God. The fundamental revelation of God in Scripture concerns God’s character and identity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All Christian teaching finally rests on this revelation. Belief in “God, the Father almighty,” “Jesus Christ his only Son” and “the Holy Spirit” involves three ways of believing in one God. The first article of Christian belief is

that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all equally and fully God and that there is only one God who reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All affirmations of Christian faith stem from believing in the one God who has revealed himself to us in this way. Scripture and creeds guide us into the true knowledge of this God.

II. “GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH”

A. Thinking and talking about God is not easy. There are two fundamental reasons why this is so.

1. The first reason is what we might call the natural reason. God is the Creator and we are his creatures. This means that because God is the Creator of the universe of space, time, matter, physical laws, etc., God is literally beyond them. It is difficult to speak about God because God is beyond our frame of reference.
2. The second reason is what we might call the unnatural reason. We find it difficult to speak about God not only because God is the Creator and we are creatures but also because sin clouds our knowledge of God. Knowing God is not like knowing anything else in the universe; true knowledge of God only comes to those who are holy and, thus, fitted to know God. When we speak of God as Father, as almighty or as Creator we have to remember that we are using terms drawn from our own frame of reference and applying them to God who is beyond our frame of reference.

B. The idea of God being “Father” is certainly not unique to Christianity; however, the Gospel reveals God to be Father in a way that is unparalleled. The revelation of God as Father begins in the Old Testament and reaches its culmination in Christ.

C. It is important to note that when we speak of God as Father we are not implying that God has a gender. Since God is the Creator, all the categories of creation (space, time, gender, etc.) simply do not apply to him. In order to understand what it means to speak of God as Father we must pay attention to how he reveals himself through the narrative of Scripture.

D. God first reveals himself as Father in relation to his people Israel, speaking of Israel as his “firstborn son” (Exodus 4:22). To speak of God as Father is to say something about God’s essential character: “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Psalm 103:8).

E. The principal reason Christians refer to God as Father is because this is the way that Jesus Christ addressed God. When we refer to Jesus as the Father’s Son, we are not speaking biologically but relationally. We refer to Jesus as the Son because he shares the same divine being as the Father and has a perfect knowledge of the Father.

F. We address God as Father only because Christ, through the Holy Spirit, enables us to share in his relationship with the Father. When we speak of God as Father we are speaking about the deep and intimate relationship which God creates with us through the Son and the Holy Spirit.

G. When we speak of God as Father we are giving voice to an important truth: that we were created for a relationship with God, that we were created in God’s image, that through Christ and the Holy Spirit we have become God’s adopted children, and that God intended all of this “before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4).

H. God does not simply reveal himself as Father but also as the Father who is “almighty”. This means God “has power over everything and accomplishes everything he wills” (TBC, 43). It is precisely because God is our almighty Father that we can trust him completely. God’s power is exercised in wisdom and motivated by love; a perfect power exercised under perfect wisdom for the sake of a perfect love. The Gospel proclaims that God’s relationship to us is not simply a function of how we respond to God. God’s relationship to us is completely gratuitous: “In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us” (1 John 4:10).

I. The affirmation that God is the “creator of heaven and earth” is the foundation of the Gospel. To say that God is the Creator is to say that whole of reality falls within the scope of God’s creative and providential purposes. Through Jesus’ resurrection, God has begun the renewal of his whole creation such that “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption” (Romans 8:21).

J. God’s relationship with creation involves all three persons of the Trinity. God the Father creates through his Son (Colossians 1:16) and in the power of his Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:2). As a result, God is the “sole originator of everything that exists,” the source of the universe’s rational order and the cause of its continued existence and development. The order and rationality of the universe, upon which the natural sciences depend, have their origin in the design and purpose of God.

K. Because God created the whole universe, it reveals something about its Creator (Psalm 19:1-6) and his glory. When we say that God is the “creator of heaven and earth” we are saying that God is the source of the whole of reality in both its physical and spiritual aspects. We do not separate creation into the physical and the spiritual as if these two categories were unrelated. Creation is a fundamentally physical and spiritual order. This is why the truth of theology and the truth of the natural sciences must finally be complimentary. Both theology and the natural sciences provide us with knowledge about creation but do so in different ways. Theology is based upon God’s revelation and communicates to us what we could not learn on our own. The natural sciences are based upon what we can discover about creation but they presuppose the order which God has implanted in creation and the human mind which God has enabled to be an organ of truth.

L. Creation is fundamentally a gift from God and it is to be received as such. Life is not our possession or something that we give to ourselves but a gift which is to be received with gratitude, humility and joy. Sin involves the human attempt to deny the gift character of life and to live as if life were our possession.

M. Many people today only think about creation in terms of the supposed conflict between “creation” and “evolution” or between “science” and “religion”. It is important to say at least two things about this supposed conflict.

- 1.** First, it needs to be said that Genesis 1-2 cannot be read as a scientific account of the origin of the universe simply because this was not the purpose for which it was written. Genesis 1-2 makes a fundamental statement about the nature of the universe: Creation exists as the God-willed and God-created arena in which God and his creatures interact. Creation is fundamentally about the relationship between the Creator God and his creation.
- 2.** Second, it needs to be said that while evolutionary theory has proved to be scientifically fruitful, some have misused it to claim that the universe was the cause of its own origin and order. Evolutionary theory presupposes the existence of life and presupposes the conditions necessary for its fruitfulness. Evolution is only possible within a very specified context. While we need to acknowledge that Genesis 1-2 does not provide us with a scientific account of the origin of the universe, we also need to acknowledge that evolutionary theory has become for some a secular creation story.

N. It is unfortunate that some Christians have come to understand the doctrine of creation only in opposition to the natural sciences and that some scientists have come to see the doctrine of creation as inherently opposed to the natural sciences. When we speak of God as Creator, we are not claiming to have an alternative scientific theory about the origin of the universe. Instead, we are speaking of the meaning of creation and our place in it. He created human beings as creation’s stewards, managers and caretakers. He entrusts his good creation to us as a gift to enjoy and a responsibility to fulfill (TBC, 45). From a Christian standpoint, both the acquisition of scientific knowledge about creation and our stewardship of creation must joint responsibilities given us by God.

