

We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven of Earth

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[0 : 00] everyone by raising Him from the dead. Amen. So, I guess we should begin by asking the question, you can ask me the question, why a series exploring the Apostles' Creed? I think dating from the second century, so a very ancient document. Why does it have any use and value for us today? Well, to help us into that, three different voices. The first, J.I. Packer, a great theologian of the 20th century. He says, you can think about the Apostles' Creed as being like a basic A to B roadmap, enabling us as Christian people to understand our beliefs at a glance. A document like the Apostles' Creed then makes it easier to operate and to orientate as we get into the Bible. He says, think about the Bible as being like the ordinance survey map, super detailed, gives you every undulation and contour. But a document like the Apostles' Creed is a really clear statement of faith that then enables us to dive into the Bible and have some understanding of a worldview of an understanding about God. He also made the point that it's always been used by the church for the purpose of discipleship. And just because something is old doesn't mean we have to get rid of it. And he went further to say that actually nowadays, and he was speaking a number of years ago, he's saying the Apostles' Creed might very well be useful for our mission. Because many people today, if we want to share the gospel with them, they have little background at all. And so what people need is a thorough explanation of the gospel. I think as we work through the Apostles' Creed week by week, we'll see that it gives that thorough explanation that could helpfully walk us through how to share our faith with someone else. Another voice I was listening to this week was Carl Truman, who lectures on theology and the history and philosophy of thought. I listened to a lecture that he gave what he said, the urgent need of the church today, and he was speaking two weeks ago, so right now, is that the church would catechize its own members. In other words, that we would give instruction into what we believe in the face of culture that's constantly looking to shape us and mold us in its image. The Apostles' Creed is very helpful for giving us instruction as to what we believe. The third voice, a little bit different, was the voice of an Uber driver who was reporting—this was an Uber driver in the States—who was reporting on the fact, commenting on the fact that if there was folks in his Uber car who wanted to convert him to Christianity, he was already a Christian, he said, well, the two issues, one, they never asked me what I believed. We could have had a very different conversation. But he said, secondly, without fail, if anybody plucked up the courage to share their faith, the faith they shared was a prosperity gospel. God wants you to have more than this. You just need more faith, and you won't be an Uber driver anymore. There'll be something more wonderful.

So, when even people claiming to be Christians are sharing a truth that's less than the truth, it's always good for us to get to basic beliefs. The Apostles' Creed is helpful for that as well. Secondary question, why begin in Athens? I think Athens is an excellent place for us to begin, because the city that Paul visited in the first century was described in its day as a forest of idols. So, it's a picture of the Agora there. You can see some of the statues still remaining. Somebody joked that it was easier to find a god than a man in the city of Athens. So, what Paul saw as he arrived in Athens was a very beautiful city, beautiful images, gold, silver, marble, ivory, all kinds of Greek gods. So, he encountered a city with a worship instinct. But we discover, too, that as Paul arrives and sees all this beauty, in verse 16, we see that he's greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. He's provoked by idolatry, just as God in the Old Testament was provoked by idolatry as he is robbed of glory. And Paul recognizes something about this city and about these people with a worship instinct, doesn't he? In verse 23, I walked around and looked carefully, I even found an altar with this inscription, to an unknown god. So, you are ignorant of the very thing you

worship. He recognizes their ignorance. They want to worship God. They're worried they're missing a god. And so, Paul wants to fill in the blanks and at the same time to say to them, your gods are too small. Your concept of God is too small. And so, Paul, as he addresses the folks in Athens, he reminds us that our great need is to know the God who is, the God who is there, not the God of our imagination. The great need that we have, the great need that our world has, is to know the God who is big enough to explain all of life, the God who is big enough to save.

[5 : 56] And so, as we think about God, the maker of heaven and earth, God, the Lord Almighty, God, the Father, it's really vital gospel background. And it's where our creed begins.

Go with me then to Acts 17 and verse 24, as Paul begins to introduce Athens to the God who as yet was unknown to them. And he begins with God, the maker of heaven and earth. Verse 24, the God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. He begins where God begins, Genesis 1.1. God's revelation begins in the beginning. God created the heavens and the earth. And so, Paul wants to introduce to Athens, God, the creator of all.

We need to be reminded that God is our creator. I had a wonderful reminder this week, now that the stormy weather was largely past, a couple of walks up Blackford Hill with the dog. The first day, I think it was on Wednesday, you know, when the air was all crisp and clear and the views were wonderful and you could see for miles, it was just a reminder. We live in a beautiful city. I'm from the West Coast, that can be quite a hard thing to say. But it's a beautiful city that we live in. There's hills everywhere, beautiful sea all around. And then the second day I went up, it was a wee bit more squally, and then this rainbow appeared covering all the way from Arthur's seat all the way over the castle.

So, I took a terrible picture while trying to tame the dog. And it was a reminder to me that the God who made us is the God who's preserving life to give people the opportunity to know him and his salvation.

Our creator is good. But Paul begins with this emphasis on the distinction, the gap between the creator and creatures. The Bible begins there as well, reminding us God made this earth as a home for humanity. That's both how big and how caring our God is. So, then it stands to reason that we cannot imagine that we could create a home for God. God is unlimited. God is infinite.

[8 : 29] God made us in His image, according to Genesis 1. We don't make gods in our image, which is what was happening in Athens. We don't imagine God. I think God is light. And as soon as Paul introduces the God who made the world and everything in it, he's introducing points of contrast with popular beliefs in the first century and in the 21st century. Because he's saying God made the world. It's not the product of random forces. God is Lord over His creation. There is personal rule. The world doesn't work by impersonal forces.

And He is the Lord of heaven and earth. He's the Lord of it all. He's not local, and He's not limited. Basic ideas that challenged worldviews and continue to do so today.

Paul begins by introducing God the Creator. The creation question in the Bible is principally about who, not how. It's an important thing to realize that the Bible isn't a science textbook.

Nor does the Bible seek to go about to necessarily prove that God is there. The starting point, the assumption is that God is there. That God is the Creator, and the evidence is all around us.

The account of creation in the Bible is that our Creator has made a world that is good, a world that is very good. And in that world, we should not worship the creation. We should worship the Creator.

[10 : 26] And so, Paul, as he begins to speak about the God who is, begins with God the Almighty Maker. One of the problems in Athens that was that their gods were too small.

One of their problems was that their worship was being misdirected, so that they were worshipping idols. And so, the great need was to know the one true and living God, so that they and that we might worship Him. So, God is the Maker of heaven and earth. God is also Almighty. And Paul's speech is so helpful for us in moving us away from kind of vague notions about God, you know, I think God is like or should be like, by speaking to us in terms of revelation. So, Paul doesn't quote from the Bible in this context, but he has ideas that come straight from the Bible. So, he's communicating effectively in this particular culture. But he very clearly reminds us that we need to take God on His terms.

Another thing that is really helpful in Paul's speech is it lays the foundation for the reality of God's providence, God's control, God's care over everyone and everything, which is an idea that can be difficult and comes with challenges.

But the alternatives would be profoundly unhelpful. The idea of a God who knows but is powerless to act, the God who is taken by surprise, the God who doesn't interfere and get involved, or a God that comes second to our human free will, is not a God worthy of worship, and He's not the God of the Bible.

So, the idea of God's sovereignty and God's providence, while it's difficult, and sometimes we encounter hard circumstances or we find ourselves in hard conversations, it is much preferable to an idea of a small and a limited and in some ways powerless God who is unworthy of worship.

[13:11] It is God's providence, ultimately, that will help us to sleep at night, knowing there is a God in control that we can trust. It is God's providence that will enable us to walk our streets, not living with daily fears that overwhelm us. It is the providence of God that will enable us to live in our society and to bear witness to God, trusting in His kingdom coming. Now, how does Paul show God Almighty in this little section? Well, notice again, verse 24, He is the Lord of heaven and earth, and He does not live in temples built by human hands. So, there's that reminder that the God of the Bible, the God we worship, He's unlimited. No temple could contain Him. Maybe we think of Solomon as he dedicates the temple in the Old Testament. He testifies. The temple can't contain our God.

Even the highest heavens can't contain our God, because there is no place where God is not. He is unlimited. Our God is also self-sufficient. Look at verse 25. He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything. The idols in Athens, they needed to be served. They needed to be made. God does not need us for anything. People are not made because God is lacking. People do not complete God. Rather, we are created from an overflow of the joy and love that He has in Himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our God is self-sufficient. He is almighty. He is the life giver. Look at the end of verse 25.

Rather, He Himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. Every breath we take is a gift from our God. We depend entirely on God's mercy, on God's sustaining of us. Every good thing that we have, every good that we have enjoyed or will ever enjoy, come to us from our Almighty Father in heaven. And Paul speaks to the people in Athens, and as he speaks, he reminds us of God's absolute rule.

Verse 26, from one man He made all the nations that they should inhabit the whole earth, and He marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. The rule of God Almighty governs our heartbeats, He's the life giver, but also governs the rise and fall of nations.

[16:17] History and geography are in God's hands. Seasons and eras belong to Him. To think about the book of Proverbs 16.33, here's another way to think about the sovereignty of God. The lot is cast is cast into the lap, but it's every decision is from the Lord. So, when you or I roll a dice, God knows the number. Our God is Almighty. In stark contrast to the small gods of Athens, the small gods of our own imaginations. That God is Almighty means He can, and He will do all that He intends. He tells us that in Isaiah 46, I say, my plans will stand. I do what I please. Now, of course, there are some needed limits on that.

God can't sin. God can't tempt anyone to sin. God cannot condone sin. God cannot forgive sin without atoning for it by sacrifice. But if something is in the will of God, then it is certain that God is Almighty means that we can't stop His plans. And that's a good thing.

Think back to the Joseph story, when Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, thinking they would get rid of him. God had other plans, eventually raising him up to be second in command in Egypt to spare the whole family. And Joseph could say to his brothers, you intended it for evil, but God intended it for good. Human decisions, even human plans, can't override God's plan.

Don't we see that to be true in Jesus' story? The greatest evil ever to be carried out in the earth was when the sinless Son of God was crucified. And yet, while they killed the author of life, was God's plan and for God's salvation, so that He might save sinners who would trust in Jesus.

That the Lord is Almighty is good news. We cannot stop His plans. God's providence. God's providence then becomes good news for us, especially as we come to understand that nothing comes into our lives by chance. All of life is directed by God, and God in Christ is our Father, and He's a good Father, and He's a wise Father. And to understand that, God is for us as believers is for us as believers a source of patience. When times are hard, I can keep going, and I can trust my Father in heaven. But it's also a source of thankfulness when times are good. Thank you, God, for the good things that you bring to my life.

[19 : 57] Before we leave this, to ask ourselves briefly, what about God Almighty and the problem of evil? Perhaps, again, we've been in conversations where that topic has come up. If God is all-powerful, then how do we account for evil? Is God either not powerful, or is He not good? Actually, the Bible presents a different way of thinking about it. Just some basic thoughts. We begin at the beginning to go back to the Old Testament, to the book of Genesis. What do we learn about sin?

We learn that sin's origin comes from human rebellion and the rejection of God and His Word. And from that fall into sin comes all the misery that we see in our world. And so, it's important when we think about the problem of evil to trace it back to human sin. But it's also important to recognize that as we consider the storyline of the Bible, and it's made really clear for us in the New Testament that God plans to overcome evil through His Son. And that victory over evil begins at the cross.

Sin is defeated. Death is defeated. The devil is defeated. But it will finally be completed only when Jesus returns. We live in this gap. The victory begun, but it's not completed until the second coming of Christ. In the meantime, and I think this is helpful, Peter reflects in chapter 3 of his second letter, verse 8, he says, Do not forget this one thing, dear friends. With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. So, at least one answer to the problem of evil is the fact that our God is being patient so that people might have a chance to repent and to be saved. It still gives us a problem, but it also shows us God's gracious response.

Ask God Almighty, back to Acts 17, to think about how Paul speaks about God our Father.

Whenever we think about the fatherhood of God, I think it's important for us to recognize that that word, father, has very different associations for probably each one of us, depending on our own story and background. Some of us have very positive associations. Some perhaps we're neutral. Some have very negative thoughts about fatherhood because of our own stories.

And so, it's very important for us to recognize that God as Father is both far better than the best of human fathers, and He is totally unlike the worst of human fathers. There was a point in Matthew chapter 7 when Jesus is teaching His disciples about prayer. Matthew chapter 7. I'm just going to find those words.

[23 : 55] Chapter 11. Chapter 7, verse 11. Jesus says, If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him? And Jesus tells us something really important there. He says all human fathers, even the best human fathers, are marked by evil and weakness in some way, but there is no evil, and there is no weakness, and there is no limit in God, our perfect Father.

Father. And that's so important for us to hear and to understand. That's one of the ways that the Lord's Prayer was so revolutionary. Jesus is inviting us into a relationship with our Creator God, our Almighty God, where we call Him Father. Before the coming of Jesus and the people in Jesus' day, they wouldn't even use God's name. But for the follower of Jesus, we're invited into a living, personal relationship with God as Father. Now, how does Paul introduce the idea of God as Father?

It's interesting, isn't it? To look at verse 27 and verse 28, we discover he introduces it by quoting from Greek philosophy. End of verse 28, as some of your own poets have said, we are his offspring. So, there Paul brings to their attention that idea of the universal fatherhood of God, that because he has created us all, God, in a sense, is Father of us all. And he draws an implication. Verse 29, therefore, since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone. If God is our Father and God has made us, then by implication, a lifeless God, a lifeless God, or a God that we imagine or create, makes no sense.

Rather, there is this wonderful dignity that Paul introduces, the dignity for humanity that we are all made in the image of God. The concept of human rights, the concept of the value of life, flows from the Bible, flows from the character of God. But we also see that clearly it doesn't mean that the Father is pleased with us regardless of how we live, because in the very next verse, we discover in the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. So, there's a reminder that there is something that is broken in that relationship.

That's why Jesus came. So, Paul speaks of the idea of God as Father in creation terms. God is Father in the sense of being Creator of us all. But the Bible, we know, goes further than that, and we need to think about that. We need to recognize that God is Father because He is the Father of

His Son, the Lord Jesus. Actually, we're going to think about that a lot more next week. But just to listen in, to see how important that is, to listen in to what the Father had to say about Jesus. Remember when Jesus was baptized? Remember when the disciples saw Jesus shining with glory as He was transfigured on the mountain? This is my Son. I love Him. I'm well pleased with Him. Listen to Him. So, the Father very clearly states that He's in this unique relationship with Jesus, the Son of God. And that's why we heard from John chapter 5 to hear the flip side, to hear Jesus speak about the unique relationship He has with God,
[27 : 51] His Father. That they act the same. That the Father wants the Son to have the same honor that He has.

And that the Son, and this goes to our verse here in verse 31, the Son, Jesus' Son, is appointed to be the judge. What does Paul say? God has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He's given proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead. The Father says, I am I am the Father of my Son. The Son says, this is my Father, lives to do His will, testifies that the Father wants Him to be honored. And importantly, for the sake of our faith, not only is God the Father in terms of creation, not only is God the Father of His Son, the Lord Jesus, God is the Father of His people through adoption. It's the gospel, isn't it? To go back to Acts chapter 17, we discover that as Paul began to speak in verse 18, he was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

And of course, as Paul preaches the good news about Jesus, he would have been preaching Him as the Son of God. To speak about the resurrection, of course, he would have spoken as Jesus, the Son of God, dying in the place of sinners. So, the gospel needs this proclamation of Jesus dying and rising as Savior, and that because of His work on the cross, because Jesus, the Son of God, has made atonement for our sin, that by receiving Him as Lord, by believing on His name, we have the right, as John's gospel says, to become children of God. Or as Paul puts it in Galatians 3.26, in Christ Jesus, united to Him, faith in Him, in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith. So, the faith that we confess is that in Christ Jesus, trusting in Him, God is my Father. In Christ, I am as loved as Jesus, His only begotten Son.

Amen. Some thoughts on this as we close. First, to recognize that God's fatherhood is perfect. I find it really helpful to listen to John Piper's description of this. He said, the gap, so picture the gap between, so our idea of a bad father and a good father, how our father is versus how we'd like Him to be. He said, picture that as being like a millimeter.

[30 : 53] The gap between the best father and God, that gap is infinite. And so, we must always be careful not to limit our view of God based on our fathers. To recognize that the God of the Bible is unlimited and sinless and perfect, and He is for us and always for us. It's a perfect fatherhood. Because of that, God's fatherhood can be trusted. This takes us to Romans chapter 8, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Nothing can separate us from the love of our Father. And we need to hold on to those truths, maybe especially in those times where life is hard and our circumstances are challenging. To recognize that they come from our Father, and we are in the hands of our Father, and we can trust that He has His purposes. Even if we don't always see them, even if we never see them,

God's fatherhood can be trusted, and God's fatherhood can be experienced. So, Paul spoke to them the good news of Jesus, the Son of God, who died and then rose.

And then he was invited to speak again, and he spoke about God, the Maker of heaven and earth, God the Almighty, God who is the Father of all. And as he closes, there's an invitation to experience God's fatherhood personally. In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent. It was the idea of repenting, it's the idea of a change of mind, it's the idea of a change of direction, in this case, a change of directing our worship towards the one true and living God, to faith in the Lord Jesus. So that in trusting in Him, there is the promise that we will enjoy an eternal welcome from our Father, that when Jesus comes back as judge, if He has already been judged in our place on the cross and we're trusting Him, then we know then we'll be welcomed into eternal glory. This is the faith that we confess. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. Every word matters.

And central to our faith is this idea that this God who is mighty and powerful in and through the Lord Jesus has become our Father. The God who is mighty to save, the God who is mighty to overcome our ignorance and our unbelief. It's the God who is mighty to bring Christ to us so that we would live our lives under His Lordship, under His fatherly care. Let's pray as we close. Lord, our God, we

thank You for who You are as revealed in Your Word. We thank You that You are our great Creator.
Thank You for the beauty that we see, all around the order and the complexity, even...