I Believe In The Forgiveness Of Sins

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[0:00] as Christ, and the third section of that creed begins with, I believe in the Holy Spirit. I'm not going to say a lot about these comments I'm making by way of introduction. I just want you to notice them and to think about them yourselves. So the first thing is, notice its Trinitarian structure, and the second thing is, notice its unity. This creed has got great depth, although it is quite short. And it is not simply a list of separate statements.

It is an organic unity. The second section of this creed is anticipated by the opening statements in the first part of the creed, and similarly with the third part of the creed.
So there's a unity to this creed. And I want you to notice also its Christological emphasis. You see even the amount of words and the amount of space given to the second part of the creed, compared, for instance, with the first and even third part of the creed.
And I also want you to notice, because we're going to be looking at that third part of the creed, and in particular, the statement, I believe in the forgiveness of sins.
I want you to notice that the last part of the creed begins with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Catholic Church before it goes on to speak about forgiveness of sins. And I think that's partly because it is the Holy Spirit who applies and conveys the benefits of Christ's redemptive work and salvation through the church, which proclaims the forgiveness of sins offered to us in the gospel.
[2:06] Now, the last three assertions of the Apostles' Creed are, as you know yourself, we recite it every week, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

And they deal with our present need, the forgiveness of sins, our future, the resurrection of the body, and our eternal home, the life everlasting.
And they are considered, I believe, in the light, respectively, of Jesus's death, his resurrection, and his exaltation. And finally, I wonder if you would agree with me, is it not remarkable that the only statement in the Apostles' Creed that addresses our entire present existence as believers in this world and in this life and in our pilgrimage is, I believe in the forgiveness of sins.
Because, as you can see, immediately following the forgiveness of sins, it leapfrogs to the resurrection of the body. And it even has a greater leap after that to the life everlasting.
And the statement about the Holy Spirit and the Catholic Church and the communion of saints are preparatory in some ways to this statement, the only statement in the Creed that addresses our entire present existence as believers.
[3:55] Let's look then at our two points. Firstly, God and forgiveness. Forgiveness. We might be tempted to begin our discussion of the Creed's mention of forgiveness around ourselves.

But I want you to pay particular attention to the language of the Creed at this point. I believe in the forgiveness of sins.
It is the forgiveness of sins in this statement, according to the Creed, is an objective fact. Forgiveness is a noun.
It names something that exists already. The Creed is not firstly focusing on our acts of forgiving, nor our being forgiven, but on the objective matter of forgiveness itself.
Because forgiveness is something that has been won for us in the great victory of the cross. Let me put it this way.
[5:05] It is given to us as part of the package of God's redemption. It's something that is offered to us.

We see that even early in the ministry of the church in Acts chapter 13, verse 38.
Paul preaching comes to this point in his sermon. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, I want you to know that through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.
And not only is it an objective fact, its origin is holy in God.

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God the Father is the fountain and source of forgiveness exclusively. Jesus Christ is the one who secures our forgiveness by his redemptive life and death and resurrection.
[6:12] Jesus has offered to take upon himself the responsibility of all our guilt and all our sin against God, against our fellow human beings, against our fellow believers.

And in so doing, has opened up the floodgates of God's forgiveness to all who receive him as Lord and Savior.
Did you know I use that word responsibility? And let me put it this way. We Christians are the responsibility of God.
He has taken it to himself, not only to take the responsibility of our guilt and sin upon himself, but he has taken us as his responsibility.
Jesus is the one that says, I will never leave you nor forsake you. Jesus is the one that says, no one shall pluck you out of my hands or out of my father's hands.
[7:26] Our life is hid with Christ in God. Jesus has taken complete and full responsibility, not only for our sins, but for our journey to glory.

I worked in the York Hill Hospital when it was in York Hill. And it was my first real post as a chaplain. I was working there for two years. Before, sorry, I was working there for three years. But before then, I had only done a very short stint for maybe six months in a mental health ward in Ayr.
But here was my first real post. And I was allocated as a speciality to the intensive care unit and to the Shehalian ward.
That's the children's cancer ward. And after two years, my boss, both of us went for a coffee down to the dining room.
[8:36] And it was a kind of informal meeting. It was a meeting, but it was an informal meeting. And he made a lovely compliment to me that day in the course of our conversation and discussion.

He says, David, I consider you a safe pair of hands. And, you know, when we say this, Creed, and even when we say this, I believe in the forgiveness of sins.
Because it is something that has been won for us in the cross. Because God and Jesus have taken the responsibility for us.
Not simply for our guilt and our sin, but for our whole Christian life. We're in safe hands. We're in everlasting and eternal safe hands.
And therefore, forgiveness is objective. The origin of forgiveness is in God. And forgiveness is also an object of our faith like the rest of the Creed.
[9:46] Just as we say, I believe in God the Father Almighty. And God the Father Almighty is an object of our faith. Just as we say, I believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus is an object of our faith.

And so is the Holy Spirit. But so is the forgiveness of sins. Among other things. And apart from anything else.
It's an object of our faith. Look what it says in Colossians. In chapter 1.
In verse 13. I think it is. Or verse 14. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness.
And brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. In whom we have redemption. The forgiveness of sins. Do you notice how these two are placed together?
[10:46] Juxtaposed. In whom we have redemption. We have redemption. We have the forgiveness of sins. And then in Colossians 2.

Verse 13. When you were dead in your sins. And in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature. God made you alive. With Christ.
He forgave us. All our sins. Having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness. Which stood against us and condemned us. He's taken it away.
Nailing it. To the cross. Is that not something to rejoice in this evening? That he pledges that we are his responsibility.
Not only in terms of our justification. And our sanctification. But in terms of our entire pilgrimage. Now that brings me to my second point.
[11:50] Forgiveness and ourselves. There is of course also. A subjective dimension. To this statement. About the forgiveness of our sins.

After all. It does say. I believe. And at this point. Sometimes.
It's difficult for us. To. Grapple. With what we might call. The already. But the not yet. It's difficult. It's difficult for us to grapple. Because. Existentially. In the here and now. We know that we are still sinners. And it's true. We are still sinners.

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Luther used a phrase. As he was thinking about all this himself. And this is what Luther said. We're justified sinners. So.
[12:46] There is this subjective dimension. And in mentioning this. In the creed. What is being.

Conveyed. Is that. Here is the greatest need. Of men and women. Boys and girls. Of all the needs that we have.
Here is the greatest of them all. We need. God's forgiveness. Forgiveness. I hope that everyone tonight. That is listening to this.
Has. Reached out their hand. And taken the offer. From the hand of the crucified one. Of the forgiveness. Of all of our sins.
And forgiveness. Is not only our greatest need. It's the foundation and basis. Of all our Christian life. And living. That this.
[13:46] This forgiveness. This statement about forgiveness. Don't forget. It presupposes justification. And it looks forward. To the resurrection. And the life everlasting.

Because in being forgiven. We become the children of God. It's the foundation and basis. Of all our Christian living. We. We are able to.
Serve God. And worship God. And seek to have a relationship. With him. Not on the basis. Of some sort of. Sense of terror.
That we need to try. And keep the Ten Commandments. But on the basis. Of his love. Towards us. And our response.
To that love. Forgiveness. Is to be. Seventy. Seven times. Isn't it? Remember. How often. Shall I forgive my brother? Seven times.
[14:44] And. The answer that Jesus gave. Was seven. He said. Meaning. You're never to stop forgiving. And see. When you think of it.

If. Jesus feels that. That is to be. Our. Duty. Surely. Surely. That shows. Even that. That itself. How generous.
And how liberal. Must be the forgiveness of God. Somebody called him. The great liberal. And forgiveness. Is critical.
To the entire network. Of our relationships. It's critical. For parents and children. And parents need to be willing.
To ask forgiveness. For their children. Parents are not infallible. I'm a parent. All my children are fairly adult now.
[15:39] But. Did I make mistakes? Did I get it wrong? Was I too strong? Was I too liberal? Did I.

Offend. And hurt. Some of my children. And I shouldn't have. Either with my physicality. Or my. My. My. My. Verbal.
Voice. Did I treat. My children. The way that I would never. Treat anybody outside. Or any adult. Forgiveness is critical.
For the family. For a relationship. With God. For work. For friends. For church. Now. All of this. Is all very well.
And I'm convinced. That like me. Everybody finds. Forgiving. Those who have wronged us. Very hard. Like many things.
[16:39] In a real. Lived. Christianity. There's often. A yawning. Gap. Between the ideal. And the real. There is no question.

About it. Forgiveness. Is hard. Let me read. An excerpt. From an article. That appeared. In the eye paper. Published.
On the 2nd. Of April. Quote. Countless victims. Have said. That forgiving.
Forgiving. Those who wronged them. Or their families. Was as liberating. For them. As it was. For the perpetrator. Trapped in fantasies.
Of vengeance. Anger was breaking them. Forgiveness. Liberates. We need more forgiveness. And less anger.
[17:36] Except. Imagine. What it would actually mean. To forgive. The police officer. Accused of murdering. Sarah Edrin. Or to forgive.

Derek Chauvin. Or to forgive. China. For its treatment. Of Ugar Muslims. If the prospect. Doesn't turn your stomach.
I doubt. You have understood. What forgiveness is. Unquote. At this point.

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As we move. Towards the end. Of the sermon. I want to. Say a couple of things. With you. About what forgiveness. Doesn't imply. When I worked.
In the health centre. And saw 500. Patients. Every year. One third of them. Presented. With relationship issues. And the.
[18:35] A lot of those. Issues. Were around. The. Tremendous. Challenge. Of forgiveness. Forgiveness. Does not.

Imply. That the wrong. Or the offense. Was okay. That the hurt. Was okay. If it was wrong. If it was wrong. If it was an offense.
It did need forgiveness. If it wasn't wrong. It wouldn't need forgiveness. So. Forgiveness. Does not imply.
That the wrong. Or the offense. Was okay. When you're. Forgiving someone. You're not saying to them. That was okay.
When you hurt me. And you offended me. You're not saying that. Secondly. Forgiveness. Doesn't suggest. That the process.
[19:30] Of justice. Can be done away with. It can't. If somebody. Breaks into my house. And sets it in fire.

But me and Mary. Manage to escape. That person has. Committed. A crime. And there are consequences.
In a society. For that. And in terms of. Natural justice. And legal justice. So. Forgiveness. Doesn't. Stop. The process.
Of justice. The process. Of justice. Cannot. Be done away with. And thirdly. Forgiveness. Doesn't mean.
That I shouldn't. Address. The wrongdoing. Or offense. Given. You know. That verse. That says. Before you go. To the altar.
[20:25] Go to your brother. If you've got something. Against him. Or your sister. So. What does. Forgiveness mean. And obviously.

To forgive. Like everything else. In the Christian life. We need God's grace. And we need. His strength. And we need. His spirit. It means this.
I must not. Nurse. And hold on. To the anger. Or the grudge. Or the hurt. And that's not easy. Particularly.
If the hurt. Is deep. And personal. All. I must. I must. Let it go. Notice.
That last phrase. I just said. I must. Let the hurt. Go. The anger. And the grudge. And the bitterness. I must.
[21:22] Release it. Now. I've just. Explained to you. The meaning of forgiveness. In the Bible. It means.

To send away. It means. To release. It means. To let it go. Maybe.
There's somebody. In the. The. Congregation. That's. Clinging on. To those. Fantasies. That the writer. Spoke about.
Of vengeance. And bitterness. And anger. And maybe. Even hatred. And it's. Destroying. You.
If anybody. Out there. Is experiencing. That. As much. As it. Anybody. Else. Course.
[22:20] Then. We can. Ask. The question. Who is. Sufficient. For these. Things. And. We know. That. We need. God's. Grace. But.

Is there. Anything. Else. That we. Should. Bear. In mind. As we. Seek. To follow. In our. Discipleship. Our. Lord. And Savior. And being. A forgiving. People.
Yes. There is. Seriously. Remembering. The mountain. Of offense. And hurt. That I have. Caused. My heavenly. Father. Second.
Seriously. Remembering. It's my sins. That hammered. Those nails. Into his hands. And treating. Others. In the way. That I am magnanimous. To my. Self. And my own faults. And my own sins. Isn't it true?
[23:17] We can be quite liberal. And forgiving. To ourselves. And understanding. But to others. And finally.

Remembering. That we are. Disciples. Of our. Master. And Savior. Who said. If you won't. Forgive others. Neither.
Will your father. Forgive you. We recite. This creed. I believe. In the forgiveness.
Of sins. It is firstly. Objective. An object of our faith. It is secondly. What.

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Followers of Christ. The people of God. The church of God. And you and I. Should have as one of our. Distinctives.
[24:15] And leading. Characteristics. Is this. Part of. Your creed. And my creed.

In practice. Amen. May the Lord. Add his blessing. To. His word. This evening. Amen. Amen.

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