

I Believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth

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[0 : 00] so we're going to begin while Colin began with an introduction to creeds why creeds it's a great message if you weren't there go back and listen to it and how important creeds are really in the life and the history of the church and they remain important for us one way I've heard creeds described is like guardrails that keep you from wandering too far off the right road and also as a way to keep things that are outside of the guardrails from the getting in the creeds are set the boundaries of our faith what we believe and we have you know other things that we might speculate about or talk about or have conviction about that are often called secondary matters and those some of them are pretty important but nonetheless there is this core of faith that has been fought and won by the church over the centuries and so it's really great that we're doing this and we're looking at the apostles creed named for the above none of the apostles wrote it but nonetheless believed to reflect what that basic core teaching that the apostles handed on from one generation to the next and it's been given to me to talk about the first proposition of the apostles creed I believe in God the father almighty maker of heaven and earth now I was saying to Colin earlier it's this is different because normally we have a text that we work with you know from the bible and we we do our exegesis we work it out we figure out this is what God wants us to say this time around well this time we're dealing with a creed and it's come almost more like a systematic theology class you're pulling from different places to talk about what these doctrines are but hopefully these will still be sermons and not lectures in some way shape or form but but tonight we're going to deal with this very first statement the statement of the father and I've broken down to four four times we're going to talk about I believe in God then I believe in God the father and I believe in God the father almighty and then I believe in God the father almighty maker of heaven and earth yeah pray with me please gracious God we ask your help as we look at these seminal doctrines they're so important that we have them before our eyes and most importantly in our hearts and that they shape our understanding of of life and that we would heed them and and cling to them and indeed fight for them as each generation has had to do so God we give you thanks for this opportunity to work our way through this confession together and we do say all this in Jesus name amen so first I believe in God now when a Christian says I believe in God he or she is making more than a confession of a proposition that he or she believes to be true actually when we say I believe in God we're expressing an understanding of reality and in turn about how we are to live our lives in the light of that reality these kinds of things shape how we live you might recall how Paul was writing to the church in Corinth and he had gone there and preached the gospel which included the resurrection of Jesus the resurrection from the dead and he learns that there are some among Corinth who are denying the resurrection he says well the resurrection is in truth and Jesus didn't rise and and and you're still in your sins if the dead do not rise he says let's let's eat drink tomorrow we die yeah see when we have a confession when we have something that we believe it's meant to shape our understanding of how we are to live and so when we say I believe in God it's a message that we're preaching that if it's not true then there's no reason to heed it or to have an effect on our understanding of reality how we live our lives yeah but we confess it because it's true because there is a God I believe in God

now furthermore when we say I believe in God what we are saying is not this is what I think you might think something different and that's okay but this is what I think no when we say I believe in God we are making an assertion that is binding on everyone everyone no matter their native country no matter their local customs traditional beliefs preferences imaginings when the Christian confesses I believe in God they're confessing a crucial vital truth for every human being because it

holds forth reality a reality that is both inspiring and terrifying comforting and unsettling simple yet incredibly complex and most importantly it is a reality that is inescapable and it's undeniable if you were standing on a tall building in downtown Glasgow and you've got a friend standing next to you and the friend says to you you know what I could step off this building and I can fly and you go well I can fly too in a plane no no no I mean I could step off this building I could fly to that building across the street or maybe that one down at the end of the street and you know maybe you thought he was normal before but then you look at him he goes a little daft and he said well you can't fly oh yes I can fly no no you can't fly unless you've got some sort of adaptive technology like maybe a jetpack or something no no I can fly and you look at him you go you're not serious are you you're not serious you understand that when you step off of this roof there's something called gravity and gravity is going to take you and draw you down all the time you think you're going up and what's going to happen is you're going to end up on the pavement splattered no you see your belief system your belief that you can fly that's not going to do it for you it's going to be your death in fact there's a proverb that says there's a way that seems right to a man but the end of it is death I mean it's a different context but it's very applicable to your thinking right now your belief system is not going to save you and so when a Christian says I believe in God and somebody says well I have another belief you say well you know what just like gravity it's not going to do it for you we are confessing something that is binding upon everyone the reality a Christian confesses in the Apostles

Creed is just as inescapable just as undeniable as gravity and clinging to a belief system that denies or defies what the Creed confesses will have even more devastating consequences that's why it's important as Colin pointed out last week the creeds are are missional they're missional we we confess more than our own beliefs we confess the reality that every soul who has or ever will live will be confronted with on the day when the Apostles Creed says Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead you know it's interesting we're looking at the Heidelberg Catechism the Heidelberg Catechism uses the Apostles Creed as an explanation of the gospel what they say is the true faith that one must believe to die in comfort to in confidence in life and in death to live in confidence they they look at the Heidel they look at the Apostles Creed as what something that expresses to us the gospel what God has revealed to us of how it is that we might live not just in this life but in the life to come so our confession I believe in God is more than a personal statement of faith it's more than an orthodox

Christian belief it is a challenge and a corrective to all other belief systems and as such it's a necessary thing to confess now something else under I believe in God when we join our Christian brothers and sisters in confessing that ancient creed I believe in God we are confessing something that's not explicitly stated but is absolutely presumed about the God that we confess and that is that quote God eternally exists as three persons Father Son and Holy Spirit and each person is fully God and there is one God what we call the Trinity now Trinity does not show up in the Bible that word it's from a Latin Trinitas excuse me which means freeness and it's a term that the church has adopted to describe the nature of God that we confess that God revealed to us in the Bible now the Trinity difficult to describe to find analogies for they always fall short

Calvin says Calvin insists that we should not be inquiring about the Trinity elsewhere than from his word and he warns against too subtle a penetrating into the sublime mystery of and wander through many evanescent speculations Calvin says just stick with what the word gives you and make your confession based upon that and as we'll see in the Apostles Creed the fullness of the Godhead Father Son and Holy Spirit are active in the work of redemption a work that was agreed upon in God before the foundation of the world and one incident recorded for us in scripture that illustrates the cooperation and the presence of the Godhead in our redemption is when Jesus is baptized right there is Jesus the Holy Spirit descends like a dove upon him empowering him to carry out his ministry and what does God the Father say this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased the Trinity is throughout the New Testament it's hinted in the old but it's explicit in the New Testament one theologian points out how Paul's Trinitarian perspective of redemption history pervades all of his letters and he quotes Galatians 4 4 through 6 but when the fullness of time had come

[9 : 55] God sent forth his Son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons and because you are sons God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying Abba Father there's a Trinitarian redemptive cadence redemptive cadence to Paul's teaching and of course there's the Great Commission when we're told to go out into the world to make Jesus known and baptizing people in the name of the Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit now because it will come up during the course of the Apostles' Creed in the coming weeks it's helpful to remind ourselves that as Christians we confess Deuteronomy 6 there is one God but what the Scriptures go on to reveal is that this one God in this one God there are three persons in essence absolutely the same each fully possessing all divine attributes without measure but in relationship and roles there are distinctions again Calvin it's not fitting to suppress the distinction that we observe to be expressed in Scripture it is this to the Father is attributed the beginning of activity and the fountain of wellspring of all things to the Son wisdom counsel and order disposition of all things but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of all that activity without taking more time

I want us to be clear that when we say I believe in God we are not confessing something that is the product of human designs desires or desperation He is the one who is we didn't make Him up He made us and it's He that has made us and who out of sheer grace has revealed Himself to us and what He has revealed to us is that He is beyond our comprehension that we might turn from idols to worship the true and living God the Belgic Confession in Scripture we are fully taught that there are three persons in one and only one divine essence and although this doctrine surpasses human understanding we nevertheless believe it now through the Word waiting to know and enjoy it fully in heaven I believe in God I believe in God as a confession of inescapable reality and therefore necessary to confess a confession not of our making but of God's revealing next

I believe in God the Father use of the term Father in the Old Testament it's not pervasive but it does show up Jeremiah I'm the father to Israel and Ephraim is my firstborn Hosea when Israel was a child I loved him out of Egypt I called my son Isaiah but now oh Lord you are Father we are the clay you are the potter we are all the work of your hand and Malachi have we not all one Father has not God created us one way in which spoken of is how Yahweh the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob looks upon the king as his son Psalm 2 7 you are my son today I have begotten you and one person notes the basic idea of God as Father was one of authority over his people or of authority exercised through the king or the Messiah and it goes on to say the Old Testament concept of God as Father is thin and undeveloped nevertheless the Old Testament concept is the foundation for the New Testament doctrine in the Apostles Creed the term Father relates first and foremost to his relationship to Jesus Christ his only son our Lord and the significance of Jesus claiming the fatherhood of God and I know this will be more fully addressed when the Apostles Creed moves forward when addresses the son but Jesus confessed a unique relationship with God by describing him as father and this was not just a claim to some sort of special knowledge or particular intimate relationship like some human mystic might have

Jesus stated the relationship to the father put him on an equal plane with his father and for this the Jewish leaders wanted to put him to death when we confess that we believe in God the father we are confessing that he is father to the son and that the son is son to the father the term father has no meaning apart from relationship and in this case it involves a relationship to his only son however when we confess I believe in God the father we are also confessing a relationship that exists between God the father and every believer who confesses him as father Jesus Jesus urges his followers to address God as father our father who art in heaven he assures us that our father knows what we need before we even ask of him because our father values us we need not be anxious we can have confidence that he will supply what we need we can do this because by God's grace we have a personal relationship with God the father now there's a sense in which every human being has a relationship with the father for he's created them all as Paul argues in Athens in him we live and move and have our being and there was a pithy phrase that was developed in the liberal church about how

God the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man but the apostle John teaches that it is faith in God's only son that makes a person more than just a creation of God faith in the father's only son makes us a child of God but to all who did receive Jesus who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God who were born not of blood nor the will of the flesh nor the will of man but God and the apostle Paul writes for you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry Abba Father the spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if children then heirs heirs of God and fellow heirs of Christ yeah when we confess I believe in God the father we're confessing a relationship that we have with this God something that he has generated something that he has accomplished and by his spirit has brought us for that spirit of adoption to be called one of his

children and what can we expect from our heavenly father what does Jesus teach us ask it will be given to you seek you'll find knock it'll be open to you everyone who asks receives and the one who seeks finds and the one who knocks it will be open to you and he says this or which one of you if his son asks him for bread will give him a stone or if he asks for a fish will give him a serpent if you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him what can we expect of our heavenly father that he will give good things to us when we ask him

[17:07] Paul writes he did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not graciously give us all things amen and amen by God's grace we can confess God as our father our heavenly father and our heavenly father is not stingy he's not parsimonious our heavenly father is generous my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus I believe in God the father next I believe in God the father almighty the father who has made us his children whom we are taught loves us cares for us is not lacking in any resources or power to carry out his purposes for us now what does it mean for our heavenly father to be almighty or omnipotent it means that he's unbounded he's unconstrained and therefore he is free all of his actions are positive free acts the decisions that he has made and continues to make even a decision not to act is an expression of his almighty power this language from Psalm 2 why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain the kings of the earth set themselves the rulers take counsel together against the lord and against his anointed saying let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us he who sits in the heavens laughs the lord holds him in derision

God the father almighty possesses all power he is omnipotent I don't remember what it was but I still have a memory of sitting with my mother as a little boy and my father had done something fixed something and I remember saying to her boy papa can do anything can he and she was very sweet she smiled and said yes yeah yeah he can now me on the other hand when I inherited a small house from my father it was in pretty bad shape but nonetheless it was a place out in the country and we lived in the city and so there was going to be this house in the country and what did I promise my children I would build them a tree house the house was sold no tree house ever built yeah I know there's nothing lacking when God promises what he's going to do for us as his father he really can do everything and he doesn't break his promises see that's not the case with God though we have notions of fatherhood because it is part of being a member of the human family it's just not the same

God as father is unbounded he's not constrained he's lacking nothing and we are his children now I should amend slightly what I said about the freedom of God to act what about suffering the question might arise if God is our father and he loves us and cares for us and he is almighty why can't he stop the suffering I'm going through right now perhaps he isn't as loving as we think or perhaps he's not almighty now if we accept a current meaning of almighty or omnipotence as power to do all or everything we should not make the mistake in thinking that the power to do everything means that all things are possible see I have had more than one person maybe you've had the same experience one person who challenged me with the proposition if God is all powerful can he make a square circle and I suppose it sounds clever to him but it's just nonsense a square circle is self-contradictory and if it's self-contradictory it is absolutely impossible you hold up a circle a square oh yeah

I push that up I push that up I push that up I push that up I've got a square what happened to the circle that's not there because a square is a square and a circle is a circle so if God is all powerful he doesn't contradict himself he doesn't contradict reality we affirm that God is almighty but we also affirm that God is loving indeed not just loving but love himself and this is important because because God loves and it may very well be self-contradictory i.e.

impossible for him to do certain things remember I said if he's almighty and if he's loving why doesn't he deliver me it might just be that he can't it's impossible because it would go against who he is C.S. Lewis considers it important to make the distinction between kindness and love love and kindness have different ends kindness he says cares not if its object becomes good or bad providing only that escapes suffering right a child a parent who doesn't correct their child when they do wrong things because it makes the child unhappy is not loving because what's going to happen that child will just grow up to be an insufferable boar that no one wants to be around but the child the parent who is loving is willing to make the child unhappy because it has a real vision for what that child wants and what's going to need as it grows up and that's a distinction and God's

omnipotent love works like that if he in his goodness sees that the best thing to do to make a person into what he or she needs to be is to bring them into circumstances that make them unhappy in order that they might learn what is the best way to live remember he chastises us to shape and mold us not primarily to punish but to lift us up to transform us then it would be impossible for him to do the opposite but God just doesn't do good he is goodness itself he doesn't just love he is love itself and because he is good and he is love nothing that he does can be understood in any other light he cannot mean a hardship for evil but only for good no matter how great the pain so we confess that God is our loving caring father almighty even when it would appear to us that the loving thing to do for him would be to exercise power to extricate us from that difficult situation but one thing that our loving omnipotent

[23 : 36] God cannot do is deny himself and if in his divine love things must play out as they are then he cannot do otherwise I believe in God the father almighty means that he is free to act in ways that are consistent with his being which is loving just merciful wise righteous and the rest of his divine and glorious attributes nothing can prevent him from doing so and for that we can be joyfully confess of his almighty power and lastly I believe in God the father almighty maker of heaven and earth this last part of our confession should be proof enough of what we just talked about of God our heavenly father being almighty I mean a being that created everything that is and not out of previously existing materials like we do when we create something but simply by speaking them into existence is an act that should sufficiently demonstrate that he is almighty psalm 33 by the word of the lord he says by the word of the lord the heavens were made and by the breath of his mouth all their hosts

Moses acknowledges the difference between God's existence and ours when he says Lord you have been our dwelling place in all generations before the mountains were brought forth or ever you had formed the earth and the world from everlasting to everlasting you are God and he compares that to us he says you return man to dust you say return oh children of man for a thousand years in your sight or but as yesterday when it's passed or as a watching at night so when we say that God is the father almighty maker of heaven and earth we are acknowledging that he exists before anything else exists he is and he calls all else into being but what we want to be careful to say is while God made heaven and earth he did not as in some deist scheme abandon it to its own devices he didn't just set the top spinning and say okay you're on your own it's your problem listen again to some of the short amount of Psalm 104 and the intimacy that God maintains with his creation oh Lord how manifold are your works and wisdom you have made them all the earth is full of your creatures here is the sea great and wide which teams with creatures innumerable living things both great and small there go the ships and leviathan which you formed to play in it these all look to you to give them their food in due season when you give it to them they gather it up when you open your hand they're filled with good things when you hide your face they are dismayed when you take away their breath they die and return to dust when you send forth your spirit they are created and you renew the face of the ground now this is not some

God who just made everything and then removed himself turned his back on all that he has made he's intimately involved and why is that because he has a goal in mind a purpose for all that he's made it isn't enough to just say he creates everything he has a purpose a goal behind all that he has created I don't know if you know the boring trilogy the movies oh man I love those movies I just go back and watch them again and again and again and there's a great moment in the second one when when Jason Bourne has put himself back on the grid he shows up I think it's in Naples and the CIA has him on their monitors they're in DC they're looking at all the monitors and they sat there and said oh what's he doing what's he doing and somebody says well it seems random and somebody else says he has made his first mistake and Nicky who becomes an ally to him later goes they don't do mistakes they don't do random

God doesn't do random he doesn't make mistakes he's got a purpose in mind behind everything that he does including making of heaven and earth and the primary goal that he has is his glory glorified in the demonstration of his abundance his overflow of love and grace as he calls everything into being he didn't need any of it but he did it because he wanted to share himself with all that he makes and as we confess him as our father we can take comfort in the language of the apostle when he teaches now listen to this language again I know it's familiar from Ephesians chapter 1 but listen again blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places even as he chose us in him before the

foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him in love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved in him we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him things in heaven and things on earth in him we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will so that we who were the first to hope in

Christ might be to the praise of his glory in him you also when you heard the word of truth the gospel of your salvation and believed him were sealed with the promised holy spirit who was the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory before before before there was one atom one molecule one double helix DNA or one cell there was God and before one atom one molecule one double helix DNA or one cell was ever spoken into existence by God the Father almighty maker of heaven and earth you have been chosen in the beloved in Christ in God's only son you have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will and in true trinitarian fashion when you heard the word of truth the gospel of your salvation you were sealed with the Holy Spirit the promised Holy Spirit yes I believe in God the Father almighty maker of heaven and earth a confession of reality

[30 : 09] I believe in one God the one true living God who dwells in eternal trinitarian unity I believe in God the Father God who is father of his only son and who out of abundant grace makes children out of enemies by redeeming them from sin and death I believe in God the Father almighty God who will defeat all of his enemies who makes promises to his children and is able to keep them who always wields his power righteously and justly according to his unchanging nature I believe in God the Father almighty maker of heaven and earth God who out of the abundance of his grace calls all things into being through the word of his power God who stands apart from all that he has made yet remains intimately involved in it governing it according to his purpose for his plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in heaven and things on earth all to his glory and our benefit this is the inescapable reality that we confess when we say I believe in

God the father almighty maker of heaven and earth more more than a set of orthodox beliefs that must be defended it is a truth that must be reckoned with and therefore must be proclaimed as well as well as you