



Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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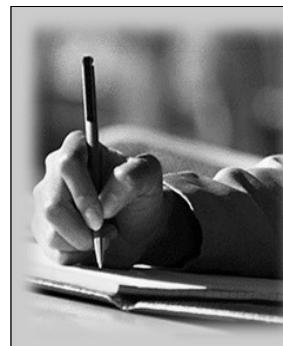


HG164 The Apostles Creed: I Believe In ... God, The Father Almighty ...

Genesis 1:1-5 & 1 John 4:7-13

Home Group Study Notes

13 May 2018 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful for your discussions.



Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

Many cultures around the world have, or at least had, a host of different gods. How many such gods and goddesses can you think of, and what were their areas of responsibilities?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



HG164 *The Apostles Creed: I Believe In ... God, The Father Almighty ...*

Genesis 1:1-5 & 1 John 4:7-13

Home Group Sermon

13 May 2018 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction

Legend has it that the Apostles' Creed is so called because, on the Day of Pentecost, the twelve Apostles composed the creed between them with each of them making a contribution to it. Historians have proved that it didn't come about in that way. However, for nearly two thousand years the Apostles Creed has established itself as one of the most important confessions of faith produced by the Christian church. The statements of belief embodied in the Apostles Creed are, of course, grounded in the beliefs of the early Apostles and it was written to refute heresies of the early church. The Apostles Creed includes a broad overview of Christian doctrine and Biblical orthodoxy. It summarises who we are, teaches us what is important about our faith and enables us avoid making theological errors and helps us to understand a little more about the God we worship.

Many churches recite the Apostles Creed every week yet, for many, it can be a dull statement, full of doubt and confusion, rather than one filled with confidence and joy and a declaration which summarises all that we believe to be true about the Christian faith. When we recite the Creed, we are joining with Christians across time and space. The Apostles Creed begins with 'I' rather than the 'We' of the Nicene Creed and that's because it was first used as a personal confession of faith before people were Baptised. The 'We' of the Nicene Creed (agreed at the Council of Nicea in 325AD) became a declaration of the faith of the worldwide church. We begin our series this morning looking at the phrase: '*I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth*'

I Believe

Many people turn off Christianity, or any other religion for that matter, by saying they don't believe it; but rarely do those same people sit down and say...okay, then, what do I believe? The term 'creed' comes from the Latin word credo and means 'I believe.' But Christians are not the not only ones to have a creed to live by. Most people have a system of beliefs that shape their behaviour, their world view, their morals, ethics and values. John Wayne famously said: "*A man's got to have a code, a creed to live by no matter his job.*"

When we as Christians say 'I believe in God' we're not just saying we believe in God's existence or that being a Christian is a good way of life (although that's true) we are saying much, much more. Declaring 'I believe' is an act of defiance against other systems of belief and a politically incorrect declaration of, and allegiance to 'The one true God'. It helps us to distinguish the God of the Bible from the gods of other religions. When we say 'I Believe' it means that we are placing our whole faith and trust in God. We are placing our life into His hands - and that's not something we do lightly.

When you go to the Doctor and seek his advice when you're unwell, they usually prescribe medication for your condition. But you don't truly believe in your Doctor until you take the medication. Until that moment, it's all just talk.

4. What promises have you had from God, either in the Bible or personally? How does knowing that His power is sufficient for His purposes shape your thinking about those promises?

5. What suggestions have you come across explaining how God created the heavens and the earth? Does it matter what you believe about the method of creation?

6. If you were asked by an atheist friend why you believe in God, how would you answer?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. Why do you believe there is a God, and what difference does this fundamental belief make to your life?

2. Read Isaiah 46:10-11 and Romans 8:31. How might statements such as these be affected if there was not only one God, but many gods, such as those worshipped in Ancient Greece and Rome?

3. Read 1 John 3:1. How does it make a difference to your life knowing God as your Father?

To believe in your Doctor means to trust yourself completely to their care, to accept their diagnosis, and put your life into their hands. That's true faith. Believing in God means to trust him completely with your eternal destiny.

So when we declare I believe, we're not just rattling off truths or doctrine we are committing to a way of living. It's a bit like Wedding Vows. These are not usually made lightly are they? *"Do you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife?"* Just imagine if the groom responded: *"Let me think about that for a moment will you?"* Or *"I give you this ring as a sign of our marriage. With my body I honour you ..."* The bride doesn't suddenly interject: *"Hold that thought will you."* Their marriage wouldn't last long if that was their attitude would it? Getting married is a statement of commitment to a way of life. And so it is with us. We enter into a relationship with God when we say 'I believe'.

In God

"Is there a God?" is a question that every human being has to figure out for themselves, and I could spend this entire sermon going over the arguments from theology, philosophy, sociology, and just about every culture in all times and places. But I won't. The point for today is that, as Christians, we have declared for 2,000 years that, whatever else others may think, we believe in God. The first point that we must make about the creed is that it affirms the biblical teaching that there is only one God. It was natural for the creed to begin with the doctrine of God the Father, for the creed is Trinitarian in its arrangement and content: Father, then Son, and Holy Spirit. And although there are only a few brief ideas stated here about God the Father, those ideas cover a wide range of theological ideas. It is simply impossible for us to do justice to them all in one short sermon but at least we can affirm the major points. The rest of this series of studies will keep coming back to the nature of God in relation to all the other doctrines of the Christian faith.

The Father Almighty

The creed begins its description of this one God with the description of the first person of the Godhead as the "Father." It's a powerful term. However, the language of "father" is the description God has chosen whether we, living in this gender neutral PC world in which live, like it or not! Some people suggest that we shouldn't trivialise the term to mean 'daddy' which is what Jesus' use of the word 'Abba' to address his father is interpreted as. But you could argue that if we are created to have a relationship with our heavenly father then using this intimate language isn't out of place at all. I'll leave that to you to ponder!

When we call God Father, we are saying that he is the **sovereign creator** of all things. He produces everything, but he also provides for it, and he protects it. Creation, provision, providence. All of these ideas are there with the image of 'Father.' No other description could capture them all at once. And since God creates and sustains everything by his decree, he is truly "Almighty." But we'll come back to this in a moment. The second meaning of the expression "Father" has to do with **Covenant**. When we call God our Father, it means that we enjoy a covenant relationship with him. We thought a bit about this when we began our study on Moses - refer back to your notes to remind you of the points I made. *A covenant is a promise made by God for a specific purpose to bestow blessing and Shalom on His people.*

In the world of the Bible 'Father-son' language is the language of covenant. In the New Covenant that Jesus inaugurated, we who have put our faith in Him, the son of God, have the right to be called the sons or children of God, and the privilege to call God 'Our Father' especially in our prayers. God is not only our sovereign creator, but our redeemer (rescuer/saviour) as well, bringing us into a covenant relationship with him.

And third, when we call God 'Father' we are also declaring that God is a person, one who we can know and have fellowship with, because the language is that of human relationship and **community**. This is no impersonal God, no abstract force in the universe. God is personal, and the description indicates that the relationship he has with his people is intimate and relational. This is because the language first applies to the relationship within the Godhead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Trinity: This, of course, touches on one of the essential beliefs of the Christian Faith, and one of the great mysteries, in that God exists in three persons (not three people, or three separate Gods) but Father, God and Holy Spirit and during this series we'll look at each of these separately. But this study of the doctrine of God the Father is a little complicated, because all three persons of the Godhead are actively involved in every work of God. We normally say that the Father decrees the work, the Son carries it out, and the Spirit enables the work to be done - whether it is creation, salvation or judgment, for example. And when we survey the attributes of God, all the attributes apply to all three persons of the Godhead. Therefore, faith, prayer, praise, and all other forms of worship and service must include the entire Godhead.

Creator of Heaven and Earth

The creed focuses on the doctrine of creation at the beginning, and rightly so. If the biblical teaching on creation is removed or watered down, our faith will not be the same. The doctrine clearly reveals that God is the sovereign over all his creation; remove this and he is not sovereign, we are not accountable to him, and in fact, there is no basis for believing and trusting in him as the author of salvation. The Bible teaches that God is the primary cause of all things. Out of his will, and by his decree, he brought everything into existence. One may quibble over the means used in all the evolution, creation, but the fundamental point, the non-negotiable teaching of the Bible, is that he is the Maker of everything. And he did this by his powerful word. We saw this in Genesis 1 (but also in Ps. 33; Isa. 44&45; John 1; Romans 1; Colossians 1). At the risk of simplifying this too much, it's worth noting: 1) The Bible affirms that God existed before anything else; and that He is the creator of everything that exists. 2) The Bible affirms that God created everything that exists by decree; he called everything into existence. This does not say anything about intermediate means; it does say that God is the source of everything. 3) The Bible affirms that God created everything after its kind (Gen. 1). This rules out the idea that from one form evolved all the species.

So regardless of the debates of the age of the earth, fossils, natural selection or beneficial mutations, there are some straightforward declarations in the Bible that clearly teach that God is the creator of everything, and that as a result he is the one who has control over the world he created. He is called "Almighty" because he must be almighty to do the things that he has done, notably create and sustain everything! All power belongs to him; he is the sovereign Lord of the universe he has made (Perhaps people would accept the biblical doctrine of creation more readily if it did not mean that he is the almighty God who will hold them accountable for what they do).

But a god who cannot create, is not a sovereign god; it is a god who does not have to be listened to. However, to acknowledge God as the creator is to accept him as the sovereign Lord, all-knowing, all-powerful, and ever present everywhere. And to accept him as the almighty God is to accept that he is the sovereign Creator.

The Attributes of God

Most theological studies on the Creed will begin with a list of the attributes of God his revelation in his words and works. One of the more helpful works on this would be J.I. Packer's *Knowing God*. The attributes of God are divided into two categories: the non-communicated attributes and the communicated ones. In other words, there are attributes that belong to God that he did not share with humans through creation, and there are those he did.

We conclude from the Bible that God is **sovereign** over all things, **eternal** and **infinite**, **all powerful**, **all knowing**, and **present everywhere** at once. These are some of the theological words that we use to describe God - you may be familiar with some of them:

- **Omniscient:** God knows everything and His knowledge is complete.
- **Omnipotent:** God has no external limitations.
- **Omnipresent:** God is present in all places at all times.
- **Immutable:** God is absolutely unchanging.
- **Immanent:** God is present in the world (Emmanuel - God with us).
- **Transcendent:** God is outside of space and time.

Only God is like this. Trying to imagine or understand that is very difficult. We can look at the acts of God revealed in Scripture and begin to appreciate it. But we are like Moses on Mount Sinai, seeing only a glimpse of the Glory of God. We have an easier time with the communicable attributes, for these we possess in a measure. Some of these are **love, mercy, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, compassion** and the like. We know, however, that we have only a finite amount of compassion, or love, compared to the amount that exists with God. So as we study the Bible we can see these key words as they relate to the God who is sovereign over all things.

Belief In Action

One of the things I believe is that really examining our core beliefs, dredging them out of the recesses of our brains and saying them out loud and digging deeper in your home groups, will change us. It will help to bring your actions more in line with your beliefs. But as we go through this series you won't hear me, or anyone else say that you're going to hell if you don't believe a particular phrase in the Creed. But I want to emphasise today that you really do need to anchor your life somewhere.

Terms like God, Almighty and Creator can seem somewhat irrelevant to daily life - they are so grand and abstract they can be hard to understand. But the point of the Apostles Creed is not to reel off objective facts, but to help us grasp truths that should shape our lives. If we really believe that there is a God, a single being who created the heavens, the earth and everything in it, and who rules over them, then the whole purpose of our lives must surely be given over to seeking Him and must be lived in complete devotion and service to Him and follow His teaching on how best to live our lives. And if we really believe that God is Almighty, that He is able to do what He says He will do, then we will trust Him no matter what life in this fallen world throws at us. And we will come to Him with our requests, because He alone has the power to do as He desires.

We are part of the Creation God has made. God created us as a father creates a child, which also means we share God's DNA. Genesis puts it that we are made in the image of God. And when we consider that we call this amazing God 'Father' and recognise we have been granted an intimate, loving relationship - abstract and objective facts suddenly become wonderful, personal, life-changing truths: we are loved by the creator of the universe. We are sons and daughters of the living God. *I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth.* I really do.

Emmanuel Church Text for 2018

*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear,
but you received the spirit of sonship. And by him we cry 'Abba Father.'*
Romans 8:15