

I Believe in God, the Father Almighty (Genesis 1)
Apostles' Creed: The True Confession of Our Triune Faith
Zionsville Fellowship | May 10, 2024 | Drew Hunter

What do Christians believe?

Many things. But how would you answer that question in 30 seconds? You have 30 seconds to say what Christians believe. Would you like to be able to do that?

And what if your answer isn't just what *some* Christians believe, but what *all* Christians believe?
And not just what Christians believe right *now*, but what they have *always* believed?
And not just what Christians might tend to believe, but what they all *ought* to believe?
And not just a creative and trendy way of stating it, but ancient and historic and global?
And what if your answer provided 12 main headings of Christian theology?
And what if you could memorize this and draw encouragement and hope from it every day?
And what if this could be used as a tool to teach children and people exploring Christianity?
And what if it actually has been used for that purpose since the early centuries of the church?

That's what the Apostle's Creed is—it is a 30 second summary of the Christian faith. It is what Christians in all places have always believed.

Now, there are a few different responses to creeds like this.

1. Some of may think: *I love seeing how we are rooted in an ancient, historic, global Christianity.* This is especially the case for younger generations—they don't want a Christianity that is new. If this is you, I hope this series encourages you to see that our faith is ancient, stable, and true.
2. Others may think: *Creeds are boring and stale. I don't know why we recite them.* If this is you, I hope you grow to love this creed, because it helps you love God and the gospel.
3. And others may think: *We need no creed but Christ and no book but the Bible.* If this is you, I hope you'll see the value of biblically-rooted creeds and confessions. And you see that we all actually have them—some are in our minds; some are written down.

Here's our plan for this series.

The Apostles Creed is organized in three parts—it moves from the Father's work of creation, to the Son's work of redemption, to the Spirit's work of restoration. We will walk through these three movements with these three sermons.

This morning we'll focus on Genesis 1 and the work of the Father in creation. Genesis 1 invites us to affirm our faith in the first part of the creed. **It invites us to say, *I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.***

Here's the plan for this morning: We'll answer three questions. First, what is the Apostles' Creed and why does it matter? Second, what does this teach us about God, creation, and humanity? And third, what does it mean to say, "I believe this"?

1. What Is the Apostles' Creed and Why Does It Matter?

First, what is the Apostles' Creed and why does it matter?

Here's one way to answer this question—and it's in the title of this series: The Apostles Creed is *the true confession of our triune faith*. Each word there helps us understand the significance of the creed. So, let's walk through each part this summary.

First, this is *true*.

One of the main purposes of the Creed was to *clarify the truth* and *correct error*. It was written to distinguish between authentic Christianity and heresy. What is heresy? It is teaching that contradicts the core truth of the Christian faith. In our membership course we talk about three shelves, or tiers of beliefs and practices. The essentials are on the top shelf. Heresy refers to teaching that contradicts these essentials.

In the first centuries of the church, there was a lot of heretical teaching. This was already going on in the first *decades* of the church. Jesus said there would be false teachers leading people astray. The Apostle Paul wrote about those who contradict the truth of the of the gospel. The Apostle John warned about those who claimed to teach truth, but promoted error.

Then over the next several centuries, teachers and groups rose up with distorted teaching about the faith.ⁱ They all said they believed in Jesus, but some said he didn't really have a physical body. Or that he did, but he wasn't really divine. Or maybe a heavenly being entered into Jesus at his baptism. The creed was written to clarify the truth and correct error.

The creed still gives us the guardrails of truth today. There are boundaries to true Christianity.

Second, this is a true *confession*.

This is not a comprehensive statement of the truth. This is a concise summary of the core of the Christian faith. These are essentials that all Christians should believe.

This is why the creed was originally used in the process of teaching and baptizing new believers. The early church needed this in order to make sure converts knew the core of the faith.

This creed grew out of a very practical need in the early church. In the book of Acts, Jewish believers were converted and baptized immediately. But very soon, as the gospel spread to Gentiles, people had no idea about who God was. They didn't know the story of scripture, the nature of sin, the means of salvation, and so forth.

So the early churches developed and used this creed to instruct and educate them. Many churches has a three-year period where they taught the essentials with this creed. And then this would culminate with their baptism, where they would confess this creed. And then they would share in the Lord's Supper for the first time. So the Apostles Creed was a core part of a three-year membership course.ⁱⁱ

So this is a concise summary of the essentials of the Christian faith. Now, that doesn't mean these are *all* the essentials that Christians believe. This is selective. There is a lot assumed here, or only implicitly taught here. And each phrase still needs to be taught clearly. So other creeds like the Nicene Creed were late developed later to clarify and expand on this.

Third, this is the true confession of *our* triune faith.

This creed is unifying. Think about it. When we say this creed, we are confessing the same things Christians said from the earliest centuries. And we are confessing the same things our brothers and sisters confess all over the world.

By confessing this creed, we are saying that we are united together. Whatever differences we have, we are united historically and globally in this.

And think about it. I listened to an acquaintance of mine talk about this creed, and here's how he put it. "Imagine an old farmer in Corinth in the second century, and he hears the gospel, and he's 80 years old, and he comes to Christ, and imagine him getting baptized saying these words. Imagine a wealthy merchant in the third century, living just outside Rome, and he comes with his whole family to the waters of baptism and they are saying these words. Imagine an actress and prostitute in Gaul in the fourth century who comes to Christ, her life completely changes, 180 degrees, and she says these words when she's baptized. Imagine a young slave boy in ancient England; he's converted around the sixth century through Augustine's missionary labors there. All of these people, this diverse set of saints and martyrs and other wonderful Christians are saying these words."ⁱⁱⁱ We have a great privilege of joining them. This is *our* confession—the confession of diverse Christians through history.

Fourth, this is the confession of our *triune* faith.

There is a trinitarian structure to this creed. You can see it on the card we gave you that has it written out. It progresses in three parts—from the God the Father, to the Son, to the Holy Spirit. Now, later creeds like the Nicene Creed will clarify and refine how Christians articulate the Trinity. But from the earliest days, Christians worshipped God as triune.

And finally, it is a confession of our *faith*.

J. I. Packer asked a great question in his little book on this creed. He asked, "can you find the gospel in the apostles creed?" Look at it in front of you. Can you find the gospel in there? Where do you see it? Here's how Packer answered that question: the creed *is* the gospel.^{iv}

It covers the sweep of God's plan of salvation: God creates us, then it overviews the story of Jesus—from his birth, to his death, to his resurrection, to his ascension, to his return. And then the work of the Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, our future resurrection and eternal life.

This is the faith that we confess. It covers the main doctrinal categories of systematic theology. And it plugs it all into the narrative sweep of history from creation to restoration. This is why we affirm it as the true confession of our triune faith.

2. What Does This Teach Us About God, Creation, and Humanity?

Second question: What does this teach us about God, creation, and humanity?

The opening of the creed says: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth." This is a reflection of what we learn on the first pages of the Bible from Genesis 1.

So, let's look at Genesis 1 and the work of the Father in creation. What does Genesis 1 and this first part of the creed say about God, creation, and humanity?

Let's read the beginning and end of Genesis 1.

Gen. 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

What does this teach us about God?

First, God is the creator of everything.

He made the skies, the seas, and the land. He made all the stars and the sun and the moon. He made every creature that exists.

I love how Nehemiah summarizes this in his prayer in Nehemiah 9:6, "You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you."

We can debate about how exactly to read Genesis 1 & 2 and the *way* God created. Some think it was six literal, 24-hour days. Some think these chapters have a bit more of a literary and poetic sense. Christians have dialogued about this for many centuries. But what is clear is God did create the world.

J. I. Packer made this observation. He said the message of Genesis 1 is this: “You have seen the sea? The sky? The sun, moon, and stars? You have watched the birds and the fish? You have observed the landscape, the vegetation, the animals, the insects, all the big things and little things together? You have marveled at the wonderful complexity of human beings, with all their powers and skills... Fantastic, isn’t it? Well now, meet the one who is behind it all!”^v

I love that. Think of this the next time you’re taking a walk in the local forest. Or hiking in Colorado. Or laying on a beach listening to the waves. Or watching a little cricket hop around your yard. Or picking fruit out of your garden. Think about the God who is behind it all.

The second thing this teaches us about God is that he is almighty.

That’s the word the creed uses, and it’s fitting. That is away to summarize one of the first things we learn about God in the Bible. We learn that he is almighty—he has all might, all power.

He said, “let there be light, and there was light.” We are in awe that we can send people around the moon; God made the moon. Along with all the countless galaxies far beyond.

We use the word “omnipotent” to refer to this—he is all-powerful. Now, some people say we have a logical problem here. If we say that God can do anything—then can he make a square circle? Can he make himself not exist? Can he decide to sin? That’s not a real problem though. The most careful theologians don’t say God can do anything; they say he can do anything he *intends* to do. He can do anything he wants. Psalm 115:3 says, “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”

And the point of the creed saying God is almighty is to say that he can accomplish his purposes. This is the beginning of the creed so that we know He can do the rest of it. Because God is almighty, it means that we can bank on his promises.

The third thing this teaches us about God is that he is the Father.

The creed says, “I believe in God, the Father almighty.” Now, if you read Genesis 1, you will not get the full picture of the fatherhood of Go. But there are hints here, and they develop from this point to the rest of the Bible. Here are three aspects of the fatherhood of God.

1. First, he is the father of humanity.

He is the creator of humanity, and is therefore the father of humanity. We see this in the way Genesis 1 portrays the way he made Adam and Eve. Verse 26 says he made us in his image, and then verse 28 says he commissioned us to rule over creation. In the Ancient Near East, the only people who were considered sons of the gods were kings. It was only royalty that was in a father-son relationship with the gods. But here God creates all of humanity in his image, and he makes them royal rulers of creation.

There are other indications that Adam is viewed as God's son.^{vi} And in the gospel of Luke Adam is called a son of God (Luke 3:38). Paul even quoted a poet affirming that there is a sense in which we are all God's offspring (Acts 17:29). To say that God is the Father of creation and humanity isn't to say that everyone is saved. That was a mistake that theological liberalism promoted.

2. So, first, God is the father of humanity. Second, God is also the Father of the Son.

God is a triune being—eternally existing as Father, Son, and Spirit. Jesus referred to himself as both divine, and also in a unique relationship with God as his Father.

The structure of the Apostles' Creed makes it clear that this is in view. It begins, "I believe in God, the Father." Then it moves to "Jesus Christ, his only son and our Lord." Then the final part begins, "I believe in the Holy Spirit."

We see God's triune nature reflected in Genesis 1:26. When God makes humanity, he speaks to himself as a plurality. He says, "Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness." And then he created humanity in the plural as well—as if being made in God's image is closely connected to community. Now, some scholars interpret this differently, and this is not explicitly referring to the Trinity. But at the very outset of Scripture, we see that God is not solitary. And the rest of the Bible unfolds God's triune nature. He is the Father, Son, and Spirit.

In fact, the New Testament even shows that the Trinity was involved in the act of creation in Genesis 1. We see God the Father creating here. And the gospel of John opens by saying, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." When God speaks to create, the Son is identified with his word. The Father creates *by means of* the Son.

3. The third way that God is the Father is by saving and adopting his people.

Although humanity was made in God's image in Genesis 1, we failed to honor God in Genesis 3. We failed to reflect God's character as his image. We fail to rule the world well. And we have all sinned against him and are therefore born disconnected from him. We are dead in our sins and deserving of judgment.

But, as the creed later says, Jesus died and rose, and this provides the forgiveness of sins. This is how we become God's children—through faith in the God and redemption of this creed. We receive forgiveness and God becomes *our* Father.

What a gift—that we whom the almighty God created, who then rejected him—he then rescues and adopts through Jesus. The Creed invites us to say, "I believe in God, the Father." And Jesus the Son invited us to pray, "Our Father." To recite this line is to rest in this Father's care.

This is what the creed, in light of Genesis 1, teaches us about God: God is the creator, he is almighty, and he is the Father.

Second, what does this teach us about creation?

Genesis 1 teaches us that creation is *created*, it is *good*, and it is a *gift*.

1. First, it is created—which is obviously implied by calling this world “creation.”

But think about the importance of this. Genesis 1, and this creed, answers one of the most important questions: Where did everything come from? This answers that everything was made by God. In light of the rest of the Bible, we learn that God eternally existed in a fellowship of love—as Father, Son, and Spirit. And this eternal God created everything seen and unseen.

Now, maybe you disagree with that. Or maybe you have started to doubt that in light of scientific or philosophical arguments. There are obviously brilliant minds that wrestle with the question of origins.

But it’s important for us to recognize that there are ultimately two alternatives to a creator. This is a very simplified way to say it, but these are our options: either everything came from nothing, or everything came from something eternal, but impersonal.

- One option is that everything came from nothing.

If you believe there was some kind of big bang—you would still need to answer the question, “where did the material for this come from?” And you would need to answer, *it came from nothing*. Or maybe it came from some kind of primary law or particle or material in another form. But then you still have to say that *that* came from nothing.

If you believe this, it’s important to recognize that you *do* believe in at least one miracle.

- The other option is that everything came from something eternal, but impersonal. You may still believe in something like a big bang. But you have to answer the question, where did the material for this point come from? Some would say that matter is eternal. Or maybe that the material for our universe came from an eternal law, or principle particle. And this then spontaneously created the material world.

I’m not an expert in these matters, but I try to read and listen widely on this. But it seems like no one can get away from miracles and faith claims.

So, the best thing to do is to compare the options. Compare the view of Genesis 1 and the creed with the alternatives. Compare them and ask which miracle is harder to believe? That everything came from nothing? That everything came from something eternal, but impersonal? Or that everything came from a personal creator—and in particular, a God of love and justice and beauty?

Christians answer that Genesis 1 and the creed make sense of reality. It makes the most sense of our longings and sense of morality, love, and meaning. If there is not personal God of justice and love who made us, then how can we say there are universal human rights? How can we ever say that someone *ought* to do something? If there is not a personal God who made this world, then it's hard to believe that our sense of purpose and morality ultimately matter.

This is, by the way, part of why someone like Richard Dawkins—one of the most famous atheists—said recently that he is a cultural Christian. He does not yet believe that this creed is *true*. But he recognizes that the morality and values we hold in western culture—compassion, education, human rights, care for the vulnerable, love, dignity, and so forth—these cannot be grounded in an atheistic or secular worldview. And if Western Civilization loses this grounding for morality, it's not going to go well.

So, Genesis 1 and the creed affirm that this world was *created*.

2. Briefly, it also shows us that creation is good and it is a gift.

The repeated refrain in Genesis 1 is that God saw what he made and it was good. And then at the end of the chapter, in verse 31, it says: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” This physical world is not evil. It is not trash. It is God's artistic creation. He designed it. And he gave it to us to rule as a gift.

When the Creed declares that God is the “creator of heaven and earth,” it is correcting error. In the early centuries, many people believed that this world was bad. They believed that salvation was a way to escape the prison of our bodies. But the creed affirms the biblical view that God did not make creation as a prison, but a paradise. It is not garbage, but a gift. It is not something to escape, but something to enjoy.

Yet because of sin, this world has been subjected to futility and decay. But God is not done with it. The Bible ends with God's declaration that he will make all things new. Not that he will make new things; he will make all things new.

Third, what does it teach us about us—who we are?

It says that we are made in God's image as rulers over his good world.

Genesis 1:26 says, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’” And then he created humanity, he blessed them, and he commissioned them to rule creation.

To affirm that God is the creator of heaven and earth is to affirm that you are created. You are dependent. You are not ultimately self-determining. You do not ultimately create your own identity and meaning.

And this is good news. Because instead of making up our own identity, we receive it as a gift. We are created in God's image. We are royal rulers over all—God created humanity as the pinnacle of his creation. He made the whole world, and then he gave it to us as a gift to enjoy.

3. What Does It Mean to Say “I Believe This”?

This now leads us to ask our third and last question: What does it mean to say “I believe this”?

What does it mean to say, “I believe” at the beginning of this creed? What does it mean to read Genesis 1 and say, “I believe this”?

Here are four observations about belief—its content, its nature, its community, and its renewal

First, the content of our belief.

Do you “believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth”?

Do you believe that God is there?

Do you believe that he is the Father of creation, and the Son, and his people?

And do you believe that he is almighty? That he not only has affection as a father, but authority. He is holy, he is strong, he is infinite. He can do anything he intends to do. Nothing can stop him. Nothing can overpower him. And yet he is also a Father—with personal affection and care for his creation, his Son, and his people.

And do you believe that he is the creator of heaven and earth—and that he made this good? This world is meant for us, and we were meant for us. God made us embodied creatures, and he made our bodies good. He gave us our gender—it wasn't assigned at birth, it is a gift from God, and it is good. And he will one day resurrect our bodies and make them even better—and equip them to live on a new earth forever.

Do you believe this? This is the content of our belief.

Second, the nature of our belief.

To say, “I believe” is not just to affirm that you agree that these statements about God are true. It is to entrust yourself to him. It is to say you are dependent on him. It is to commit yourself to him personally.

Belief is not just the assent of the mind to truth; it is the inclination of the heart to God.

Third, the community of our belief.

On one hand, our belief is inescapably personal. The creed does not say, “we believe.” It says, “I believe.” Every one of us must affirm this individually and personally.

And yet the creed was written so that it could be affirmed by all true believer. It is an ancient, global affirmation. When we say, “I believe,” we are united together with brothers and sisters from all centuries, from all places, from all backgrounds.

Sometimes we feel alone in our faith. Some of you work in environments when it seems like no one else believes this. They may even think this is irrational and foolish. And you can feel alone. But when you affirm this creed, you are not alone. You are connected to the stains from all centuries and all places. This is what the creed later says is the holy, catholic—which means universal—church. You are joined together in this.

And you are not just joined to people affirming truth—you are united in a historic, global family. We are all saying—as the very first affirmation—that God is a Father, and he is our Father, and he made us. He is our Father, Jesus is our brother, and every Christian is our sibling.

Fourth, the renewal of our belief.

The creed may sound basic to you. Maybe you read it and think, I already know this. And then to have a sermon series on it seems even more boring—going over things you already know.

But that misses the point of how faith works. Faith is not static—it is dynamic. Yes, we either believe or we don't. But our faith can be weak or strong. It can be confident or filled with doubts.

And so we can say at one level—yes, I know this creed is true. And yet we can live as though creation is bad, God is not there, God is not almighty, or God is not our Father. We live this way when we're ungrateful. When we feel insignificant. When we think our circumstances are out of God's control. When we think God doesn't care for us as his people.

So the creed is meant to be re-believed every day, and believed more deeply every day.

This is why Martin Luther recommended including this in your daily prayers. Luther's barber named Peter asked him how to pray. In response, Luther taught him how to pray through the Lord's prayer. We considered that in our sermon on the Lord's prayer in January. Jesus gave us this daily template to pray.

But Luther didn't end there. He also recommended praying through the Apostles creed every day. This is why I included it in a handout for you. So that you can renew your faith in this every day, and find strength from it.

Luther said to do four things with each of the three parts of the creed:

1. First, you affirm it. You let it teach you, you reflect on it, you enjoy it, you affirm it.
2. Second, you thank God for each part—you thank him for being the creator, for being almighty, for being the Father, for meeting all our needs, for caring for all things. You thank him for making us in his image, with dignity, intelligence, senses, and so forth.

3. Third, you confess your lack of faith and lack of gratitude. You confess that you fail to affirm and reflect on these truths, and you fail to be grateful.
4. Fourth, you ask for a true and deep confident faith to affirm this.

So, what do Christians believe?

How would you answer that in 30 seconds? You now have the first five seconds of your answer. “I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.” Just 25 seconds to go, and we’ll consider that the next couple Sundays.

ⁱ For examples, see Michael Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 23.

ⁱⁱ Carl Trueman, *Crisis of Confidence* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2024), 72-73; J. I. Packer, *Affirming the Apostles’ Creed* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 17-18.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gavin Ortlund, video, *Truth Unites*.

^{iv} Packer, *Apostles’ Creed*, 15.

^v Packer, *Apostles’ Creed*, 54.

^{vi} For example, when Adam has a son, Genesis 5 says that the son is made in Adam’s image. This demonstrates a connection between the concept of sonship and image-bearing.