

Practical Theology Course – Lesson 3

Jesus Christ, Son of God, Crucified

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.*

What does it mean to “believe in God”?

The first two words of the Creed form the foundation of our new life as believers in Christ: *I believe*. To come to God, we first have to believe that he exists. But we, being finite, fallen creatures marred by sin, cannot come to God, who is infinite and perfectly holy, unless he first gives us the faith to believe in him. So here, at the beginning of the Creed, we are affirmed and comforted by the truth that God, who seeks and saves the lost, has chosen us. Whereas we respond to God in the faith that he has given us, he is the one who has shown the initiative in our relationship by first calling us to himself.

Total Depravity:

Romans 8:7-8 - *"For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."*

After the Fall (Genesis 3), man became tainted by sin. Man's nature is now predisposed to continue sinning. Scripture tells us that sinful man cannot submit to God. Without God's intervention man would forever be enslaved to sin.

Romans 14:23 - *"For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."*

Furthermore, God doesn't merely want us to follow rules, sin isn't limited to an external physical act. Sin is an attitude of the heart.

Mathew 5:27-28 - *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*

Unless we follow God's commandments with an attitude of honoring and worshiping God our "good" becomes a counterfeit good. Man's unrighteousness is in opposition to God's righteousness.

Faith as a Gift, Election:

A crowd of 5,000 people, whom Jesus had fed the day before, caught up with him in Capernaum. Jesus charges the crowd with only seeking him for food when they should seek him for spiritual nourishment. Jesus, in the discourse, discloses some aspects faith.

John 6:37 - *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."*

The crowd then denies his divine origin and Jesus then responds:

John 6:44 - *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day."*

All those who come to God are chosen or drawn in and Jesus will never turn them away or cast them out. God has

revealed to us who Jesus is.

Ephesians 2:8 - *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."*

Throughout history God has initiated relationship with his people. It is true to his character that he has taken initiative in our relationship with him. By his grace we have faith in Christ Jesus.

What Does it Mean to Believe in God the Father?

The Scripture not only says we first have to believe that God exists, but we must believe that he is a rewarder of those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6). Our belief first in the existence of God and also in his love and goodness shown in his desire to reward us bring us to an important principle contained in the words *I believe*, which resound throughout the Creed. To believe in God means to place our trust in him. And we can do this because he has first given us the faith to believe but also because he is perfectly and fully trustworthy, faithful, good, loving, and caring. In other words, he is a perfect Father to us.

God is first a father to all of his creatures. He cares for and sustains the birds, sea creatures, and all the animals of the earth, and he provides rain and sunshine for both the unrighteous, who are in rebellion to him, and the sons and daughters he has called to himself. But through our adoption in Christ, we are no longer at enmity with God, and he is now our loving heavenly father, whom we can call by the tender term *Abba*, or *Daddy* (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6). And it is our heavenly father who sustains and cares for us, and who works all things for our good, whom we put our complete trust in.

A Proclamation of Trust:

To believe in God (who is invisible, Hebrews 11:3) and to believe that he rewards those who seek him (fulfills his promises, Hebrews 11:6) is to trust God. Saying, "I believe" is to proclaim our trust in God.

Even though we cannot approach an infinite holy God, as fallen finite man, God can approach humanity. God's love becomes his motivation for his immanence. God, contrary to his transcendent nature becomes immanent with his creation. This is because it is God who reveals himself to us. Therefore, our relationship is not prohibited by his transcendent nature.

To be imminent is to, "exist or operate within". God operates in and sustains the universe by his will. He orchestrates the affairs of human history and has a plan and will for humanity.

The Character of God:

Exodus 34: 6-7 - *"LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."*

God himself proclaims his character in scripture.

Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says the following regarding *abba*:

"Abba is an Aramaic word, found in Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6 In the Gemara (a Rabbinical commentary on the Mishna, the traditional teaching of the Jews) it is stated that slaves were forbidden to address the head of the family by this title. It approximate to a personal name, "Father," with which it is always joined in the N.T. This

is probably due to the fact that, "Abba" having practically become a proper name, Greek-speaking Jews added the Greek word Pater, father, from the language they used. "Abba" is the word framed by the lips of infants, and betokens unreasoning trust; "father" expresses an intelligent apprehension of the relationship. The two together express the love and intelligent confidence of the child. (Vines: page 11)"

Romans 8:28 - *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."*

God's nature renders him to be the perfect Father. Furthermore, we are invited to participate in this relationship with him.

1 Peter 5:6-7 - *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."*

What does it mean to believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth?

Just as we trust God as our heavenly father, we put our complete trust in God the Almighty. By the term almighty we mean that God has absolute power over all. God can do what he pleases (Psalm 115:3). Our first indication in the Scriptures of the absolute power of God is seen in his creation of the heavens and the earth ex nihilo, or out of nothing. Since we are made in the image of God, we also create. But whereas our creative acts must always use preexistent materials, God created simply by divine fiat, from nothing.

Scripture also tells us that God is sovereign. He has absolute power, authority, and rule over his creation and his creatures. Despite occasional appearances to the contrary, God's rule of his earth as well as the heavens is absolute and unshakeable. His will is being done and will continue to be accomplished, both now and in the ages to come. It is God our father and our sovereign creator whom we trust. As our father, God loves us beyond all measure, cares for us, and works out all circumstances for our good. As our sovereign creator, God is able to accomplish his good purpose in us, and we can trust him to bring his purpose to pass.

God Almighty, creator:

Our God is omnipotent. To be omnipotent is to be all-powerful (from Latin: *Omni Potens*: "all power"), the ultimate power and influence, able to do anything.

Psalm 33:6 - *"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host."*

Through his omnipotence he created. There was nothing and God through his limitless power created everything. God not only created, but also sustains creation.

*"Or who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb,
when I made clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling band,
and prescribed limits for it
and set bars and doors,
and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?"*

- Job 38:8-11

God is sovereign over his creation:

Through the Old Testament we can see that God was active in not only Israel's affairs, but the worlds. He, according to his will makes nations rise and fall. Since God works within the world we know that no circumstance is beyond his control or notice.

*"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.
He changes times and seasons;
he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding;
he reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what is in the darkness,
and the light dwells with him."*

-Daniel 2:20-22

Just as God is involved in culture and human affairs he also has a will and purpose for our life.

Ephesians 2:10 - *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*

God's sovereign purpose includes us as co-laborers. He has created opportunities for us to become co-laborers in sharing the Gospel through word and deed. By doing so we participate in God's will for our lives and his will for the world.

God as a loving father and as sovereign creator is at work within us. Likewise God has begun a work within us. And because we know that God is trustworthy and good we can depend on him to fulfill his promises to us.

Philippians 1:6 - *"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."*

There is no situation that God cannot handle and there is no situation that God cannot understand. As our perfect father we can come to him in prayer and be reassured of his good intentions, love for us, and his faithfulness to finish that which he has started in our lives.

Note on General Revelation

We read in the Bible that God's creation declares his glory (Psalm 19:1) and all humanity can clearly perceive God's attribute in his creation, so that all will be held accountable to God (Romans 1:20). This is commonly understood as general revelation, whereby God reveals himself in his creation. (We will examine special revelation, whereby God reveals his plan of redemption through Scripture, in Section II.)

Who is the God we trust?

God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth