

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

I Believe In God
January 10th, 2021
Genesis 1:1
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! I hope you brought your Bible with you and that you are able to open it now to Genesis 1:1. We are starting something NEW today – although it is actually something very old. It goes back all the way to the earliest generations of the ancient church.

In the very first generation most of the new converts to Christianity were ethnic and religious Jews. They had a lot of background. They knew about God. They knew about sin. And they knew about Messiah. They had read the prophecies of David, Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Isaiah. They knew what to expect so when they converted, all that was needed was for them to acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

That was the ORIGINAL Christian creed.

But in the second generation a great number of Gentile persons begin to convert and to make their way into the church. These people did not generally have a great deal of biblical background. They likely hadn't read the Old Testament and they didn't have the same frame of reference as their older Jewish brethren. And therefore a tradition emerged very early on of catechizing or instructing potential converts in the foundational truths of the Christian faith. They

were taught an extended creed. And it is that extended creed that we intend to look at over the next several weeks and even months together.

It is called The Apostles' Creed, not because it was written by the Apostles, but because it was understood to summarize the Apostolic Gospel. It was this creed that the early converts to Christianity recited immediately prior to their baptism.

This creed was so widely used in the early church that it came to be known as "the rule of faith". It represented the foundation and anything that departed from its essential shape and pattern was not to be permitted.

The Protestant Reformers were great admirers of the Apostles' Creed. Along with the 10 Commandments and the Lord's Prayer it formed the basis of all Christian education in Protestant churches for generations. It was how Christian parents taught the faith to their children. Martin Luther wrote fondly:

"Although I'm indeed an old doctor, I never move on from the childish doctrine of the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. I still daily learn and pray them with my little Hans and my little Lena."¹

Modern day evangelicals are sometimes hesitant to embrace the creed because of two tricky phrases that we will deal with when we get to them in due course. But once these phrases have been explained and properly understood, the creed can and should take its place again in the teaching calendars of modern-day churches.

To be clear, the Apostles' Creed is not an exhaustive statement of Christian belief. Dr. Albert Mohler says here in the introduction to his book on the Apostles' Creed:

"All Christians believe more than is contained in the Apostles' Creed, but none can believe less."²

¹ Martin Luther as cited by Ben Meyers in *The Apostles' Creed: A Guide To the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018), ix.

² R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Apostles' Creed: Discovering Authentic Christianity In An Age Of Counterfeits*, (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019), xvi.

That's it exactly!

The Apostles' Creed is not exhaustive – it is foundational. There is nothing in here about the mode of baptism. There is nothing in here about church government. There is nothing in here about how Christians should relate to the state. All of those things are important – but they are not foundational. Good Christians can disagree on those things – and still be considered good Christians. But we have to agree here. If you don't agree here then you aren't a good Christian. You aren't any kind of Christian at all.

That's why they used this Creed to prepare people for baptism. This is the front door. This is the foundation and the beginning so let's read it together now. I know you already have your bible open to Genesis 1- that's good. Keep it open because as you will see, the Creed will lead us back there in just a moment.

Now, just as there are many English versions of the Bible, so there are many English versions of the Creed. We will be reading the one from the old red Pew Bibles. I believe the words will appear on the screen in front of you. Please recite these words as a family, along with me as I read. If you have a copy of the old red Baptist hymnal at home, this is #622. Let's read together:

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body: and the life everlasting. Amen.”³

Well, I'm sure you noticed the couple of phrases that cause modern day evangelicals pause. We wonder what it means that Jesus descended into hell. We wonder if it is appropriate for us to say that we believe in the holy catholic church – and we wonder how this line made its way into the red Baptist Hymnal! We'll get to each of those concerns in due time. For now I will just say that the word “catholic” simply means “universal”. It is not referring to a particular denomination. Just as there are many Christians other than BAPTISTS who appreciate the doctrine of

³ The Apostles' Creed as cited in *The Hymnal*, (Canada: The Baptist Federation of Canada, 1973), #622.

BAPTISM so there are many Christians other than Roman Catholics who appreciate the doctrine of catholicity. We'll talk more about that in a few weeks' time.

For now, I want to direct your eyes back to the beginning – the very beginning. Look at those first words again:

I believe in God.

That is where the creed begins and that will be our focus this morning. I hope you still have your Bible open to Genesis 1:1. The Creed is not intended as a substitute for the Bible it is intended as a summary and so it begins, as you would expect, where the Bible begins. Let me read to you now the FIRST VERSE in the Holy Bible:

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1 ESV)

That's ALL of verse 1, but this morning I just want to zoom in on the first 4 words:

In the beginning, God (Genesis 1:1 ESV)

That is where it all begins. That is the ORIGINAL and ESSENTIAL crossroads for all human thought and behaviour. The Apostle Paul understood it that way. In Romans 1 Paul said:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools,²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Romans 1:18–25 ESV)

Paul says that belief in God is SELF-EVIDENT. You don't need to take a course in apologetics, you don't need to visit a monastery in Tibet – all you need to do is look up at the stars!

his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world (Romans 1:20 ESV)

King David said the same thing in the Old Testament:

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

³ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. (Psalm 19:1–3 ESV)

Anyone with two eyes in their head knows that there is a God! There is no speech, there are no words or language where the voice of creation is not heard!

There is no such thing as an honest atheist. There are atheists, to be sure, but there are no honest atheists. Paul says here that it is not so much that people can't quite make their way to the truth – no he says THEY SUPPRESS the truth in unrighteousness. He says that in verse 18:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness **suppress the truth**. (Romans 1:18 ESV)

Again – that's the same thing King David said in the Old Testament:

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." (Psalm 14:1 ESV)

When David says "fool" he doesn't mean "stupid person" he means "wicked person". The next verse makes that very clear:

They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. (Psalm 14:1 ESV)

According to the Bible, people who deny the existence of God aren't doing that because of their lack of intelligence they are doing it because of the obvious implications. They don't WANT there to be a God because of what that logically entails. So they lie – to themselves and to others.

Even the odd non-Christian intellectual will admit that. Aldous Huxley in his book *Ends and Means* said:

"I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption... For myself... the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation... sexual... [and] political."⁴

Are you hearing that?

Huxley says, "I became a spokesperson for atheism and materialism not because I believed it but because I needed COVER for my sexual and political desires."

Smart people understand that believing in God has MASSIVE implications, therefore the wicked FOOL says in his heart – there is no God.

Because if there is a God that changes everything!

There is a world that lies down this road and there is a world that lies down that road making THIS ISSUE – THIS FACT – THIS TRUTH – the essential crossroads in the human experience.

Look again at what Paul says in Romans 1:

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools,²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,²⁵ because they exchanged the truth

⁴ Aldous Huxley, *Ends And Means*, internet citation:
https://www.archive.org/stream/endsandmeans035237mbp/endsandmeans035237mbp_djvu.txt

about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! (Romans 1:21–25 ESV)

So if you come face to face with this FACT and you suppress it – you see the implications and you reject those implications and therefore you reject God, refusing to honour him as God, this is what happens:

You become FUTILE in your thinking.

No system of thought that begins anywhere else than here will ever make sense or have enduring explanatory power. It will all end in frustration, deceit and nihilism.

You will also descend into darkness. Paul says they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were DARKENED. A person that rejects God – a society that rejects God – slides into shadow and ruin.

They slowly but surely DIMINISH. They become smaller. Meaner. More bestial. That’s what Paul is depicting when he says they:

“exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” (Romans 1:23 ESV)

This is exactly the opposite of the glory they were created for!!

Do you remember what the Bible says about our original purpose and destiny? 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.” (Genesis 1:26 ESV)

We were supposed to be UNDER GOD and OVER ALL CREATION – and yet, when we turn away from God and refuse to acknowledge him we don’t become MORE – we don’t become

God, like the devil promises, rather we become LESS. Instead of LEADING creation we begin to SERVE CREATION. Paul says they:

“exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” (Romans 1:23 ESV)

If you come to this crossroads and turn the wrong way, you take a long winding road down into darkness, diminishment, futility, death and ruin.

That is what the Bible says.

So obviously the Apostolic Gospel is pointing us in the exact opposite direction. Don't take that road, take THIS ROAD. Take the road that begins with GOD.

So let's talk about that.

The Christian life begins WITH GOD. It comes to the essential crossroad and it embraces the first 4 words of the Bible:

In the beginning, God (Genesis 1:1 ESV)

Let's use our remaining few minutes to talk about what comes next.

I believe in God

I believe in God:

1. Therefore I must acknowledge that I am subject to his authority

As I mentioned above, there are immediate entailments involved in making this essential confession. If you believe in God then you believe in a HIGHER POWER – you believe in an authority ABOVE YOU.

Put simply, if you believe in God, then you believe that you are not god and that you do not have the authority to decide right and wrong for yourself.

Of course that was the original temptation wasn't it? The serpent came to the woman in the garden and immediately attempted to undermine the authority of God. He said:

“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Genesis 3:1–6 ESV)

The devil lured the man and the woman OFF of this road over here that leads to life and onto this road over here that leads to darkness, death and diminishment by QUESTIONING the AUTHORITY of the Word of God.

Did God really say?

Is God's word to be treated as authoritative?

God said that you must not eat this fruit or you will die? Is that really so?

No!

“You will not surely die.⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:4–5 ESV)

God's Word is not authoritative, the devil says. It is not true. You need not fear it. You need not obey it. Because YOU can do better on your own. You can be like God – deciding good and evil.

That is the first temptation and that is EVERY TEMPTATION – and that is why all faith BEGINS with the decision to TREMBLE before the Word of God. There is no salvation APART from the decision to SUBMIT to the Word of God as authoritative.

God says that himself in Isaiah 66:2:

“this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word.” (Isaiah 66:2 NRSV)

Jesus said the same thing:

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46 ESV)

A relationship with God BEGINS with the decision to submit to his authority. That is what it means to call Jesus our Lord.

The second implication is this; I believe in God:

2. Therefore I must expect that he will assign to me my identity and duty

We meet this entailment very early on in the story. In Genesis 1:26 God says:

“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.” (Genesis 1:26 ESV)

Genesis 1:27 says:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27 ESV)

In the very first chapter of the Bible we are ASSIGNED an identity and a calling. We don't choose those things – rather they are given to us by God!

If you go down this road you don't get to choose your gender – you are assigned a gender by God. And you don't get to choose your destiny – that comes from God too. The Apostle Paul said:

For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (Ephesians 2:10 NRSV)

So to be a Christian – to be an Apostolic, God's authority accepting Christian – is to EMBRACE the identity and DUTY that God assigns. It is to BE who he made us and to DO what he commands us because he is God and he knows best. We do it by the grace that he supplies – but we do it. Because he is God. He is Lord. And he knows best. We take that on FAITH initially, but inevitably it proves TRUE in our experience. Thanks be to God!

The third implication is this; I believe in God:

3. Therefore I must attend to the means and mediation he supplies

God made us and therefore, when we fall, only God can save us. We cannot fix what we do not own and we cannot lift ourselves up out of the messes we have made any more than a man can lift himself up by pulling upwards on his waistband. We need salvation from outside ourselves. And we encounter the promise of that very early on in this story.

Immediately after the fall God comes looking for the man and the woman. He speaks to them and he explains to them the consequences of their actions. But then he also speaks to their oppressor. He addresses the serpent in Genesis 3:15 and he says:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15 ESV)

He promises the devil that his short-term victory will not result in long-term dominion. God will sustain his wayward creatures in perpetual enmity against their oppressor. He will let them struggle, but he will not let them fall.

A champion will come from God. Born of a woman. He shall defeat our enemy utterly – at some cost to himself.

That is the Gospel.

That is what theologians call the *prot-evangelium*. The first giving of the Gospel. It never changes, though it gets bigger and more expansive as we make our way from one side of the Bible to the other.

But its essence is unchanging: A redeemer will come. He will be from God and one of us. A human. A man born of a woman. But he will be greater than us. He will do for us what we could never do for ourselves and he will return us to the glory we once enjoyed in God.

That is the Gospel. That is the MEANS and the MEDIATION that God supplies. That is THE ROAD home. And there is no other.

Jesus said that. He said:

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6 ESV)

If you want to go home, you go home BY THE MEANS that God supplies.

Fourthly, I believe in God:

4. Therefore I rejoice in his overwatch and care

If you don't want God to exist then the fact of his existence and interest is cause for despair. Cain found it quite oppressive. He wanted to do harm. He wanted to use VIOLENCE and POWER in his human relationships but discovered to his dismay that God was reading his mail. God was listening in on his thoughts and intruding upon his plans and intentions. In Genesis 4:6-7 we read:

The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.” (Genesis 4:6–7 ESV)

God saw a turn signal in Cain’s heart. He saw what he intended to do and he did not leave Cain alone to pursue his murderous design. He spoke to him. Today we would call that CONSCIENCE. Cain wanted to take a turn. He wanted to go further down the road that leads to death and GOD was holding onto the back of his cloak. He was whispering into his ear. He was RESTRAINING HIM.

But Cain persisted. Cain PULLED AWAY.

The story goes on to say:

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. (Genesis 4:8 ESV)

So Cain PUSHED THROUGH the restraining voice of God. He did what he wanted to do – and STILL GOD PURSUED HIM.

Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” ¹⁰ And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.” (Genesis 4:9–10 ESV)

Cain learned to his great regret that NOTHING CAN BE HIDDEN FROM THE LORD. He is watching you!

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. (2 Chronicles 16:9 ESV)

God is watching!! He blesses righteousness and he marks iniquity. He gives support and grace to those who want to follow him and he brings to ruin all those who oppose him. Proverbs 21:12 says:

The Righteous One observes the house of the wicked; he throws the wicked down to ruin. (Proverbs 21:12 ESV)

But if you believe in God this doctrine is no cause for alarm; rather it is cause for rejoicing.

David LOVED this doctrine! He said:

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,"

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. (Psalm 139:7–12 ESV)

No matter where your journey takes you, even should it pass through the Valley of the Shadow of death – God is there. You are not lost to him. The fog and the dark are as LIGHT TO HIM. So no matter what you are going through, if you are HIS through faith in Jesus Christ then you can be SURE that HE SEES YOU; HE IS FOR YOU; HE IS WITH YOU, and HE KNOWS THE WAY.

Thanks be to God! Let's pray together.