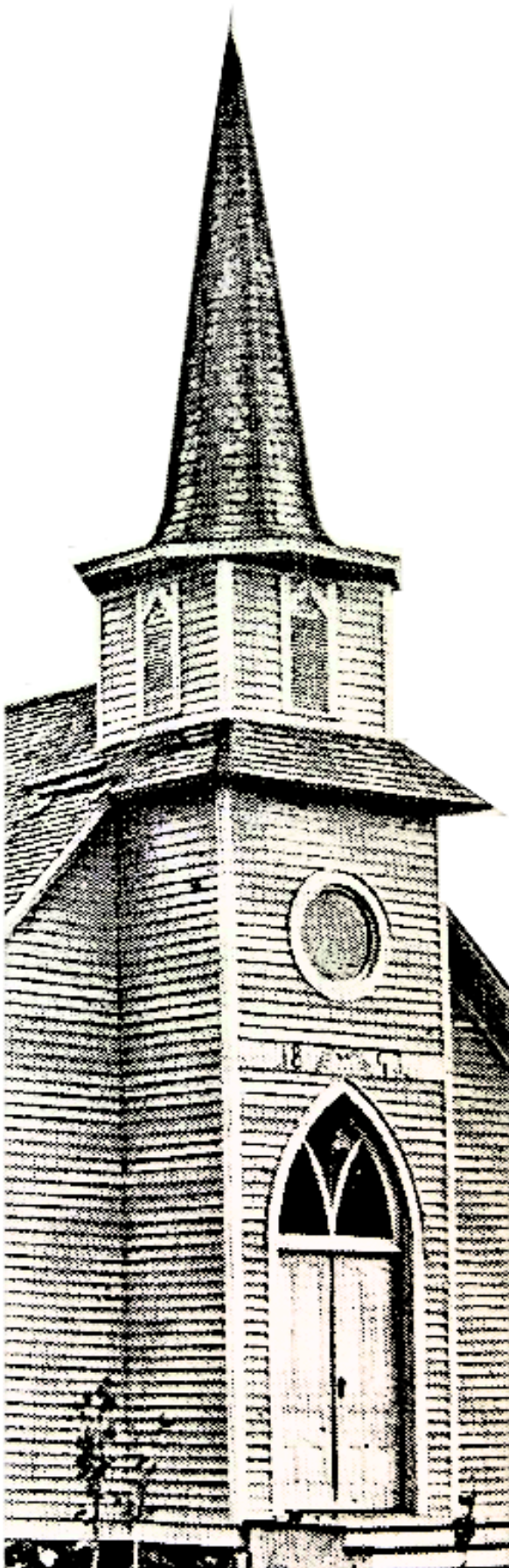




Almighty

I believe in God,
the Father **almighty**,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ,
his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

Almighty

“Going for the Jugular”

A significant amount of theology is done in the margins - on things that somewhat matter but are not anywhere close to the main thing in spirituality. Every so often, though, someone “goes for the jugular.” With the word almighty, we are touching down squarely on a concept that affects how we experience everything else in Christianity. Our understanding of everything in Christianity is dependent on whether or not God is actually almighty. This is an essential beginning point by which the rest of our theology will spill out of. If God is actually almighty, we’ll go in one certain direction. If God is not almighty, we’ll go in a very different direction.

What Will God do with His Almightyness?

God’s almighty-ness has long-been given lip-service. Almost no Christian will confess anything other than an almighty God when asked the simple question: Is God almighty? Functionally, though, is where you see a partially-mighty God appear over and over again. When true beliefs are actually being spelled out and articulated, very few take God’s almighty-ness to mean that he is actually almighty.

Why can’t we be content with an almighty God? What situation are we in the midst of if God is almighty? If God is almighty - if he has all of the might - then what are we left with? The word almighty describes

someone with all of the might. If he's got all of it, we're left with none of it. An almighty God is a source of fear because we'd like at least some might. For God to hog all of it is offensive to us. People do not seek out relationships where one person has all of the might. We'd label that kind of a relationship with hideous words like "abusive" or "manipulative." Our initial response to God's almightiness is to be greatly offended by it. We have no agency, no say, no freedom. If he holds all the might, God can do whatever he wants with us. Of course, this is a great misunderstanding or miscommunication. It's an extremely cynical interpretation of God's character. It's proof that we don't know God very well. We don't know where his heart is at.

Doing Something About God's Almightyness

Humanity simply cannot live in a relationship with God under those terms. Something must be done. The first attempt to do something about God's almightiness occurred in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve's attempt at solving the problem of God's almightiness was to become equal with him. This was a failure of epic proportions. Because attempts to become equal with God have created more problems than solutions, most of Christianity has settled for winning a battle but losing the war. For the time being, we've settled for something of a consolation prize - even if it's a counterfeit prize that we merely pretend is real. Since we cannot be equal with God, we settle for a piece of the almightiness pie. We deal with God's almightiness by thinking of him as mostly mighty. We insist that we have just the smallest of "says" in our relationship with God. Adam and Eve's attempt to do something about God's almightiness was a full-frontal onslaught in comparison with these more recent attempts which are not targeting equality. The targeted objective is lowered considerably. What humanity appears to be currently bargaining

for is simply *something, anything* really. These attempts to grab some of the might appear functionally in sayings like “*all we/you have to do is...*” God does all of the work except for the final little stamp of approval. Most commonly that proposed phrase is “*All you have to do is accept it.*” This sets up a system where God is *mostly* mighty. But the final “say” is given to the person - the final morsel of might resides with the person. This whole program assumes that God’s almightiness is not a good thing for us. It assumes that God’s almightiness is something to be feared. It begins in the assumption that God messes up our freedom with his almightiness. This program's starting point is that people were free before God came in and started ruling things by force and divine necessity. God is understood to be a wet-blanket, a party-pooper, who messed up the fun we were having.

Reframing the Situation

With Luther, a complete reframing of this situation began construction. Instead of making the starting point freedom, Luther suggests that the starting point is captivity. He assesses that we don’t just do what we want. We do only what we want. We are in captivation - held captive by our own desires. That’s the starting point. God didn’t ruin our freedom afterall. We never had freedom! We were so scared of his almightiness, not knowing what his intentions were for us. So we set out to build our own system that serves us much better - a system in which we would actually be free. What we create, though, is not a system of freedom. We create a counterfeit freedom system where we functionally have no freedom, might, or will to speak of. We create a system of captivity, where the only thing we ever do is exactly what we want to do. The only way to break out of this captivity is to have an almighty God who desires to enter into a relationship. The solution to living with an almighty God is not to get equal or to win over at least a small fraction of his mightiness. The

solution is for the almighty God to actually be almighty. The solution to this captivity is God exercising his almighty will on us. A part-mighty God won't cut it. An almighty God is required to get this job done. The people the almighty God could set free are fiercely obstinate, rebellious, and content in their captivation. If they have any amount of might whatsoever, they'll drive the whole enterprise directly into the ditch. They can not be trusted with even some of the might. God begins and remains almighty. The reversal of beginning points still does no good, though, if we're left with an almighty God and no indication of what he intends to do with us in all of his might. The fear still remains, even if we begin in captivation instead of freedom. Understanding that God is actually almighty perhaps only makes matters worse. It is now obvious that God has the ability, the might, to do something about our captivation. Now the only question is: will he? The only possible comfort at this point is the direct revelation of God's will. No amount of peaking behind the curtain "Adam and Eve-style" will help us to learn what the almighty God's intentions are for us. We must go to how God actually encounters us - through the preached word. Through the preacher's announcement to you as he/she is looking you directly in the eyes: "In the name of Christ Jesus, I forgive you all your sins." In this moment, the fear of God's almightiness is removed, and God's almightiness is revealed not as something to be feared but something to be hoped in. Amen.