

The most radical words in the Apostles Creed are the first four: ***I believe in God.*** Now you may be thinking that's not so radical because all cultures, past and present, have believed in some kind of god. This is true, but in those first four words of the Creed, we are saying much more than just that we believe God exists. We are declaring that God is the central truth around which our lives revolve. He is Sovereign and He's supreme. God is the ultimate being!

We say *I believe in God*, rather than I know that there's a God, this is because what we *believe* is based on faith, but what we *know* is based on knowledge. Let me illustrate the difference between the two. If I reach into my pocket and then tell you I have something in my hand and ask you to guess what it is; you may think I have a coin in my hand. Now that's your opinion, but faith is not the same as opinion. If I tell you that I have a pound coin in my hand and then asked if you believed me, I hope you'd respond: *Yes Mike, I believe you because we've found you to be truthful in the past.* If that's your response, then you are making a statement of faith. You've faith that I have told you the truth. Let me demonstrate how faith can be destroyed: I will open my hand and show you the pound coin. Now you no longer need faith because you have knowledge. You know I have a pound coin in my hand!

God hasn't subjected himself to proof because God wants us to live by faith. Hebrews 11:6 teaches that *without faith it is impossible to please God.* As Christians we live by faith alone, not by worldly proof. When we say *I believe in God*, we are expressing a wisdom which is built on faith. When you think about it, everybody has a god, because god is whatever you centre your life around. We Christians centre our lives on God the Father who is totally above the creation.

Next: **We declare that we believe in God the Father.** Some people have a problem with referring to God as Father. If they've had a difficult relationship with their earthly father, then references to God as *Father* become an obstacle.

This obstacle can be overcome and I speak from experience. Many people who have had trouble with their earthly fathers, are the very ones who yearn to know their perfect Heavenly Father. I refer to God as Father for several reasons. The main reason being that this is what Jesus called God. Jesus taught us to refer to God as *Abba*, which is an intimate term meaning *Dad*. The New Testament has Jesus using that expression for God nearly two hundred times. And think on how Jesus began his model prayer: *Our father, who art in heaven*. Another reason to use the term *Father* for God, is that every other term tends to make God rather impersonal. Father is so much more personal than *Creator, Holy Lord* or just *God*.

I was driving along the M8 during the heavy rains in July, and I found myself hitting water and aquaplaning across the carriageway. I was really afraid that my car would mount the central reservation and I would have a crash. As I felt the car begin to lose traction with the road I prayed urgently, and I can assure you that I was not conversing with *the Ground of my being*. I was conversing rather urgently with my *heavenly Father!*

In the Apostles Creed, we add another descriptive word about God. ***I believe in God the Father Almighty***. By definition, God is all powerful, and the Bible declares *For with God nothing will be impossible*.(Luke 1:37)

Some years ago when communism was collapsing, an American senator called Sam Nunn visited Moscow to speak before the Russian Parliament, the Duma. The Russians were very sensitive about having lost their super-power status. Sam Nunn was aware of this and he made this very diplomatic statement: *In my opinion, there is only one super-power in the world, and that is God Almighty*. Isn't that the truth! Worldly super powers come and go and sometimes in a matter of a few years. The Roman Empire, the Napoleonic French Empire, the Third Reich, the Soviet Block; all of them consigned to history! God and God alone, deserves the adjective **almighty**.

The next creedal statement about God is this: **He is the maker of heaven and earth.** This line in the Creed simply declares that God is the maker of everything that has been, or is, or ever will be! The very first sentence in the Bible declares that *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* The Hebrew word for create is *Bara*. The verb *Bara* does not describe the activities of human beings, it's reserved for God's work alone. The Bible declares that all people should be able to see God's fingerprints all over this marvellous universe. In Romans chapter one; the Apostle Paul said that unbelievers have no excuse because signs of God's creative work are everywhere. Surely, it strains our common sense to think that the universe with its complex design is just an accident? Look at the mountains, rivers and valleys, the seasons that bring rain, wind and sun to aid the growth of crops. None of this is a happy accident, but the work of our Creator God!

Was the creation of this planet and universe just an accident of science, or has an Intelligent Designer been at work? Though God's fingerprints are all over our universe, God never wanted the scientists to be able to prove His existence. It is God's will that He be discovered by faith, and that believers would declare in grateful wonder: *I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth!*

MP 1227 - The splendour of the King (How great is our God)

Having looked at the Creed's first line, let's consider what it means for us today. The first implication for us is that **God owns everything.** Whatever God made belongs to him: ***The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. (Ps 24:1)*** When we started our E100 series with Genesis, we touched on the implications of God's control and ownership for the truth is that we do not own this planet. God has given us responsibility to care for the time we on this earth. We should never forget that we're using God's resources and we may have to account for how we have cared for His creation.

There's a second implication of that first line in the Creed: *God is still creating!* His creative work was not limited to the past.

God told Isaiah, *See, I am doing a new thing. (Is 43:19)* Each time I see a new dawn, or a beautiful sunset, I think of God's creation. When I see people working for the church, I see God at work. God is always creative, restoring, healing and reconciling. Can we understand all of God's ways? No! If we could understand God's ways, then we would be God! God told Isaiah long ago: *As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Is. 55:9)*

The third lesson from the first line of the Creed: ***Our God is a blend of power and grace.*** If God were just Father, but not almighty He might be too indulgent, and if God were Almighty but not Father he would scare the daylights out of us. God is a wonderful blend of power and grace. What is God really like? Jesus gave us the answer in Luke 15 through the parable of the Prodigal Son: A rebellious teenager leaves home wanting his inheritance to live as he likes. The father's heart is broken, but the boy takes his money and heads for the bright lights. He wastes all his resources in fast living then comes to his senses and returns home, asking forgiveness. His father doesn't ask *where have you been and how much did you waste?* The father in Jesus' story is *Abba* or *Dad!* He hugs and kisses the boy, weeps on his shoulder and says: *How I've missed you, I love you so much. Welcome home!*

Rembrandt painted the return of the *prodigal son* and this painting is on display at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. Rembrandt knew personally the acute agony of loss, having lost three sons, two daughters and his wife. He painted this masterpiece in 1668 near the end of his life. In this painting we see the father's left hand touching the son's shoulder, with gentleness and love. That is what God is like. He is always searching for us, until we are safe and secure in his house. This is the God we are talking about when we declare *I believe in God the Father Almighty.*

Perhaps there are people here today who yearn to be on personal terms with the Heavenly Father. Maybe you have been living as if God did not exist. He has been longing for your return.

At the end of this morning's service there's an opportunity to come to the Lord's Table, which would be a marvellous time to allow God to welcome you home. We're going to have an opportunity to do that right now. I am going to offer a brief homecoming prayer, line by line. I invite you to say it silently but very sincerely to God, and you can be sure that God will hear and will receive you with open arms.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, I confess that I have failed and disappointed you. Please forgive me.

I believe your Son Jesus died on a cross, paying the penalty for my sin.

I believe that you raised him from the dead and he is my living Saviour.

I invite you to rule my life, today and forever.

I commit more of myself to you than I ever have before.

In Jesus name. **Amen.**

(1724 words)