

We Believe in one God, the Father
Nicene Creed, #2

Welcome to “The Faith Once Delivered,” proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. This is a ministry of Good Shepherd Church, a Baptist Reformed Fellowship in Dallas, Texas, in the United States. My name is Jeff Gregory, the pastor.

Let me ask you a question. Who do you call God? What name do you use? If you pray, if you talk to God, how do you usually address him?

In the same way that it is true that the God we worship or perhaps do not worship tells much about what kind of person we are, so it is true that how we address God, what we call him, reveals much about what we think of God and even of our relationship with him.

Today we are going return to our study of that ancient Confession of the Christian faith called the Nicene Creed.

How does the Creed begin? It does not begin like this, “We believe in one God, the Almighty...” but it begins with “We believe in one God, the Father almighty...”

The Creed is careful to include this truth: that God is not only almighty but he is Father. If you are from another religion, you may find it strange to address God as “Father,” and indeed it is for many people. For Christian people, this way of addressing God is most natural and most precious. This whole truth of God being the heavenly Father of his people is particularly unique in Christianity among the religions and philosophies of the world. Today I want to help you understand why Christians call God, “Father,” and why this is important.

Let me remind you that although we will be studying how the Creed addresses God, what we are really studying is what the Bible says about how to address God. The Nicene Creed is a summary of what Christians believe about God, and it is based, it comes directly from the sacred Scriptures of the Christian faith found in the Bible. The Bible always stands supreme in authority over this Creed, and every other creed, but at the same time the Creed is a useful summary of essential truths of Christianity and is a valuable tool for teaching.

You may remember from last week that this creed is an ancient summary of the essentials of the Christian faith that was written 1,700 years ago by a large group of leaders of the Christian churches who were called Bishops. It was very important then and it is just as important today. Many churches in the world recite this creed together in their worship services as a reminder to them of what the church believes and confesses regarding God.

We are living in difficult times all over the world with the corona virus pandemic. Many people are no doubt thinking about their lives, about what is really important in life.

Some may be wondering if there is another life to come. What will happen to us after we die? Is there a God, and if so, who is he? If he exists, how can I know him?

The Nicene Creed answers these crucial questions and therefore deserves our serious consideration. It sets forth truths about the nature of God and about a Savior who came to earth to save a people from the disastrous consequences of their sin. What is the sin of humanity? It is their neglect of God and living their lives independent of him. But God sent a Savior to deal with our sin and his name is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Creed actually focuses most of its attention on him.

Last week I read the entire Creed, which is several paragraphs long, but I'm not going to that today. I just want to read the first statement: "We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible."

Why does the Creed call the one God "Father?" The **first reason** is because this is how he is revealed in the Bible. What is the Bible? It is the authoritative book of the Christian religion which was written by men who had been inspired by God's Holy Spirit to write what God wanted them to write. This Bible is divided into two major sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Bible we learn of this creator God who formed the universe and the earth by his own sovereign act. Then in the course of the centuries he revealed something of his nature and will to one group of people, the ancient Hebrews, the Jewish people. Through this race of people was born the Savior of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason we call him the "Savior of the world" is because by his death and resurrection he paid the sin-debt in behalf of his people that they owed to God; he saves his people from their sins.

We need to be saved from the corona virus which destroys our bodies, but even more we need to be saved from our sins, which destroys our souls and sends us into an eternal hell. This is not pleasant to talk about, but we must acknowledge reality; this is what the Bible teaches us. Sin has eternal consequences for the sinner.

As I said, the first reason the Nicene Creed declares that God is not only Almighty, but he is Father, is because that is how the Bible reveals him.

In the Old Testament, which is a lengthy document of 39 books, we see that the Creator God is addressed as "Father" in several places. For example, we read in Isaiah 64:8:

*But now, O LORD, you are our **Father**; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.*

Here God, who is called LORD, is affirmed to be our "Father." In contrast to him, we people are as clay which is fashioned by his hand, by the potter's hand.

We also read in Malachi 2:10: ¹⁰ Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?"

In both of these texts we see that an essential work of God “our Father” is that he is the creator of his people. This focuses in on an essential truth regarding what it means to be a father, whether human or divine – it is to be the initiator of life. God the Father is, in fact, the great Creator of all life.

If we turn to the New Testament, we see abundant testimony that God is Father, and we learn that a **second major reason** the Creed begins with this designation of God as Father is because Jesus Christ himself revealed clearly and often that God is Father. In fact, this was his most common term to use in referring to God. In the Gospel of John, which has 21 chapters, he addresses God as “Father” 97 times!

Jesus taught us much about the Fatherhood of God. In fact, the concept of a loving human father is an appropriate illustration to help us understand the nature of God as Father. Although many people have not had a human father who was the kind of father they would have wanted, God as Father is the perfect heavenly Father – He is loving, kind, and compassionate. Psalm 103:13 describes the nature of God as Father:

As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 11, verse 13, Jesus said this, ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

So a characteristic of God as Father is that he is good and gives his Holy Spirit to those who ask him.

One of the chief things we learn about Jesus’ relationship to his heavenly Father is that it is a personal relationship. Hear these words from the Gospel of John, chapter 14, verse 31:

“...but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.”

Jesus loved the Father, and the Father loved him. Listen to what the Father said about Jesus at the time of his baptism in the Jordan River: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Jesus, the Son of God, always pleased his Father, and indeed, the Father was always pleased with his Son. There was a deep personal relationship between the Father and his Son.

Jesus’ relationship to his Father, however, was unique, and not the same as the relationship that his people have. His relationship is grounded upon an eternal

relationship. Hear what Jesus said in the Gospel of John 17:5 when he was praying to his heavenly Father:

5 “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”

Before Jesus had ever come to the earth he had lived in the Father’s presence and shared in the Father’s glory. In all eternity past the Father and Son lived in a loving and harmonious relationship. Later the Father sent to the earth the Son, who is Jesus Christ our Lord. There was, in fact, within this eternal relationship a third person, the Holy Spirit.

Here we are introduced to the fact that that there is only one God, as the Creed states in its opening words, but that this one God has always existed, in the mystery of his being, in three persons. These three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all equally God, all equal in power and glory, yet there are not three Gods, but one God. We call this the Trinity. God, as revealed in the Bible, is a Trinity. He is one God, but exists as three persons.

Do you find this hard to understand? Indeed, it is! But God is greater than we are; he is infinite, we are finite. He is Creator; we are creatures. He is eternal, we had a beginning. There is mystery here, but also wonderful revelation. We may not understand how God can be one in three and three in one, but he has revealed this truth about himself and we should be grateful for that revelation and receive it. We should not reject it; we are not smarter than God. We must accept that revelation, and respond in worship and adoration.

The Father loves the Son, Jesus Christ, and Jesus loves the Father. What Jesus does for his people is to bring them into fellowship with himself and with his Father. The apostle John wrote about this in 1 John 1:3:

3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

One of the crucial truths we learn from the Bible is that a person cannot really know God, the Father, except through Jesus Christ. Hear these words from Jesus:

John 14:6 - 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

How could Christ make such a claim, that he is the only way to God? It is because he is the only one who ever came from God. He is the only one in the history of the world who ever lived a completely sinless life. He is the only one who performed so many miracles such as healing sick bodies, delivering people from demon possession, raising the dead back to life, and working miracles in nature such as calming a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee with a word of his command. He is the only one who ever rose up from the dead after three days, never to die again, to be alive and well and powerful.

He is the only one in the history of the human race who was holy enough, and righteous enough, and self-sacrificing enough to stand in the place of sinners and bear God's wrath against them in his own body. And he was the only one in the history of the world ever to rise from the dead after three days in the tomb and never to die again. He defeated death, he disarmed its power, he removed its sting. He defeated Satan and he broke the chains of hell.

These are reasons why Jesus is the only way to God the Father. He showed by his teaching, his miracles, and his perfect righteousness that he was God's one and only Son, who came to earth to redeem, to rescue a people for his own name's sake.

Jesus, in fact, is the only way to know God the Father and to come into a personal relationship with him. John 3:16 says ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." We must believe in Jesus to receive eternal life. Do you believe in him? Have you accepted the One whom the Father sent into the world?

The apostle Paul wrote in the Book of Ephesians, chapter one verse 3, ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

How has God blessed his people? It is "in Christ." It is only through Christ that we can come to know God as Father. We can come to know God as Father in no other way. It is only through Christ because of who Christ is and what he has done.

One of the blessings that accompanies the knowledge that God is Father is that Jesus taught his followers that they should address their prayers to the Father in his name. The prayer that we commonly call "the Lord's prayer" begins like this:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name..."

In his prayer in Ephesians 3:14, the apostle Paul models for us the way Christians should pray:

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named...

This doesn't mean it is wrong to sometimes pray to Jesus, or even occasionally to the Spirit, but the normal pattern of Christian prayer is to the Father, in the name of his Son Jesus.

We are indebted to the Lord Jesus Christ for revealing to us the great truth that the eternal God who created heaven and earth is Father, he is the heavenly Father. He is a kind Father, a loving Father, a providing Father, a nourishing Father, and a holy Father. He alone is God; there is none beside him.

Look around the world, and you will find no one like the Lord Jesus Christ who has a rich and never-ending relationship with God his Father and who wants to bring sinful humans like you and like me into fellowship with himself and with the heavenly Father. Jesus said, "Come, all you who thirst, and I will give you the water of life that springs up into a well of everlasting life. Come to me, you who are tired of your sins, and I will forgive you and renew your life. Come, all who want to have fellowship with the Father and with me, and you will be richly welcomed."

What a tremendous thing it is to know that God is Father. So let us come to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, bow before him, and confess him as our God.

If you would like, you can join me in this prayer:

"Heavenly Father, our gracious God, through Jesus Christ you are the Father and God of your people throughout the world. We bow before your holy and divine presence and worship you the Creator of heaven and earth. We thank you that you call us out of our sins to be your own children and to know you as our Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to know you better, to worship you more clearly, and to serve you in such a way that you are pleased with our lives. We pray with thanksgiving through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Please join me next week on Thursday as we continue to study together the Biblical doctrines expressed in the Nicene Creed. For questions you can contact me at our church's website: gscddallas.org

Until next time, may the kind and loving Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, bless you and keep you, make his face shine on you, and give you peace. Amen.

-by Jeff Gregory, Pastor
Good Shepherd Church
Dallas, TX, U.S.A.
May 18, 2020