

The Apostles' Creed

LESSON
TWO

GOD THE FATHER



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Contents

I. Introduction.....	1
II. God	2
A. Singularity	3
1. Polytheism	3
2. Monotheism	4
3. Christianity	6
B. Simplicity	8
III. Father Almighty	10
A. Name	10
B. Person	12
C. Fatherhood	14
1. Creator	15
2. King	16
3. Family Head	17
D. Power	19
1. Unlimited	20
2. Matchless	22
IV. Maker	23
A. Work of Creation	23
B. Goodness of Creation	25
C. Authority over Creation	27
1. Absolute	28
2. Exclusive	29
3. Exhaustive	29
V. Conclusion	30

The Apostles' Creed

Lesson Two

God the Father

INTRODUCTION

Many religions worship a being they refer to as “God.” And this brings up an interesting question: Are they all worshipping the same being, just by different names? Or are they worshipping different gods altogether? Well, the Bible explains that although many different religions use the same word — “God” — they mean very different things by it. Scripture insists that there is only one true God — the one worshiped by Christians. And that means that the gods of the other religions are imposters, idols, false gods. This is why Christianity has always placed such a strong emphasis on knowing the God of the Bible. He is the only true God, the only one who has the power to create, to destroy, and to save.

This is the second lesson in our series *The Apostles' Creed*, and we have entitled it “God the Father.” In this lesson, we will focus on the first article of faith in the *Apostles' Creed* — the article that affirms belief in God the Father, the first person of the Trinity.

As we saw in a prior lesson, the *Apostles' Creed* appeared in various forms during the early centuries of the church. But it was standardized by about A.D. 700 in Latin. A popular modern English translation reads as follows:

**I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
And born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
And is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From there he will come 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.**

You will recall that in these lessons we have divided the *Apostles' Creed* into five main sections: The first three sections deal with the three persons of God: the Father, the

Son and the Holy Spirit. These are followed by a section on the church, and then a section on salvation. In this lesson, we will focus on the first of these five sections, which consists of only one article of faith:

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

There are many ways we might divide the topics mentioned in this article of faith. But in this lesson we will focus on three themes that have been central to Christian theology: the idea of God, the person of the Father Almighty, and his role as the Maker of all creation.

Following these three themes, our lesson on God the Father will divide into three parts. First we will address the basic idea of God, looking at some general things the Bible teaches about his existence and nature. Second, we will focus on the phrase “Father Almighty,” paying attention to some distinctive qualities of the first person of the Trinity. And third, we will explore the Father’s role as the Maker, or creator, of everything that exists. Let’s begin with the concept of God that the Bible presents to us.

GOD

Our belief in God is really fundamental to our belief about everything else. And so if you think in terms of the worldview, God is at the center, and everything else is as it is because of its relation to him. And that puts God-centered thinking on a different wavelength altogether from the way of thinking that’s usual in our culture, which is self-centered, me-centered, and then concerned with how everything else, including God himself, relates to me. And that is utterly contrary to the Bible way of looking at things, I think, I dare say, utterly contrary to God’s own way of looking at things, as Scripture reveals it. So, in ministry today, it’s very important to challenge me-centeredness, which is so natural to us, and to try and put God-centeredness and a God-centered worldview in place of the me-centered perspective.

— Dr. J. I. Packer

We will consider the basic idea of God as he is presented in Scripture by looking at two subjects. On the one hand, we will explore what theologians often call “the singularity of God,” the fact that he is the only God that exists. And on the other hand, we will focus on the simplicity of God, noting that he really is only one God, despite the fact that he has three persons. Let’s begin with God’s singularity, the doctrine that the God of the Bible is the one and only true God.

SINGULARITY

As we explore God's singularity, we will look first at the polytheism that was prevalent in the world during the early centuries of the church. Second, we will explore monotheism as the affirmation of a single god. And third, we will speak of Christianity and its conception of God. Let's turn first to the topic of polytheism.

Polytheism

Polytheism is belief in the existence of multiple gods — powerful supernatural beings that control the universe. Some such gods are thought to be eternal, uncreated beings, while others are thought to have been born or even created in some fashion. In polytheistic systems, the gods are often distinct from one another, and therefore unique in some sense, just as individual human beings are all unique. But in polytheism, no one god can claim to be the only supernatural being who exercises significant control over the universe.

One popular type of polytheism, known as henotheism, expressed primary dedication to one god without denying the existence of other gods. For example, some people in the Roman Empire honored Zeus as supreme while still acknowledging other gods.

In the world of the early church, most non-Christians were polytheists. Many believed in the false gods of the Greeks and Romans, while others worshipped the idols of the ancient Near East. There were also polytheists who believed in cosmic powers, and some who worshipped the elements or other aspects of creation. Atheism — the belief that no gods exist — was rare.

One reason that belief in various gods was so common was that polytheism was often required by law. For example, in the Roman Empire, the government enforced the worship of the Roman gods. The Romans required this worship in order to gain the gods' favor and protection for the Empire. But a more basic reason for the belief in various gods was the sinfulness of human beings.

The Bible indicates that humans are very prone to turn away from the true God to false gods. This has to do especially with the Bible's doctrine of sin. It doesn't have to do as much with the fact that we are creatures in relation to the great creator but rather that we are sinful creatures in relation to God. Sin acts in such a way as to actually blind us even with regard to the truth of God as God has revealed it to us in creation. And so, left to ourselves we will in fact identify as God or identify as divine qualities those things that are not true of God at all. In other words, we will create gods of our own imagination as substitutes for the true God.

— Dr. David Bauer

As Scripture teaches, all people know deep down in their hearts that the universe could not possibly have come about without the hand of a divine creator. But in our sin, human beings do not naturally acknowledge the true God and credit him for these things. Instead, we attribute his work to other sources. Listen to the way Paul talked about this in Romans 1:20-23:

Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened... [They] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles (Romans 1:20-23).

According to Paul, the existence of the God of Scripture is obvious to everyone — it is clearly seen and understood. Paul even went so far as to say that human beings knew God through his self-revelation in creation. But we are so sinful that we refused to glorify him or to give him thanks. Instead, we exchanged his glory for false gods that we invented and worshiped in his place.

The Bible tells us that all men and women and children know God deep down in their hearts, in their minds, and in their consciences. But Romans 1 tells us that ever since Adam and Eve sinned, that we have turned in the depths of our hearts from worshiping the true God to worshiping idols or anything that's created by God. And so the human heart is practically a factory, a source, the root of all kinds of idols.

— Dr. Samuel Ling

With this picture of polytheism in mind, we are ready to explore monotheism, the belief that only one god exists.

Monotheism

Technically speaking, monotheism can refer to any religion that affirms belief in only one god. For example, in the modern world Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all monotheistic religions because they all insist that there is one and only one divine being.

Many passages in Scripture assert God's singularity by explicitly stating that there is only one God. Listen to just a few examples. In 1 Kings 8:60, Solomon proclaimed:

The Lord is God ... there is no other (1 Kings 8:60).

In Psalm 86:10, David sang to the Lord:

You alone are God (Psalm 86:10).

In 2 Kings 19:19, Hezekiah prayed:

You alone, O Lord, are God (2 Kings 19:19).

In Romans 3:30, Paul insisted:

There is only one God (Romans 3:30.)

And in James 2:19, James said:

You believe that there is one God. Good! (James 2:19).

There is only one divine being. This was true in the days of the Old Testament. It was true in the days of the New Testament. It was true in the early centuries of the church. And it is still true today.

Now, we need to point out that not all monotheistic religions worship the same god. As we have said, Judaism, Christianity and Islam each worship only one god. And more than this, they all identify this one god as the God of Abraham, at least in name. But the concepts they attach to the name "God of Abraham" are very different. They disagree over his character, his divine actions, and even over his very nature.

Consider Judaism. Judaism bases its faith on the Old Testament, which Christians also do. But they deny the Trinitarian God that the Bible reveals. In fact, they deny each person of the Trinity. They reject Jesus as Lord and God incarnate. They deny that the Holy Spirit is a divine person. And by rejecting Jesus and the Holy Spirit, they deny the Father who sent them. As Jesus himself said in Luke 10:16:

He who rejects me rejects him who sent me (Luke 10:16).

Judaism rejects Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and thereby also the Father.

Judaism believes that it worships God as he is revealed in the Old Testament. It points to the same Old Testament that Christians love and says, "We worship that God." So, superficially, there is a sense in which we can say that we worship the same God. But there is another sense in which their god is different from ours because they have rejected the fuller revelation of God in Jesus.

And when we consider Islam, it is even clearer that their concept of God contradicts the Bible.

An important question is: what does the Islamic faith claim regarding the concept of one God? I believe that Islam affirms a type of unity within God, but Christianity attributes different characteristics and attributes to the Lord than Islam does. We have the doctrines of redemption and incarnation, and those are important doctrines that highlight our Lord's character in a clear, fundamental way in

people's lives. Both redemption and incarnation are absent from the Muslims' understanding of God's unity.

— Dr. Riad Kassis, translation

Islam's conception of God does indeed contradict the Bible, and one of the most significant ways in which it contradicts the Bible is in the assertion that God is an undifferentiated monad. In Islam, if I can explain that technical term, God is absolutely one and there is no community of being within him. In Christian theology there is an absolute fidelity to monotheism, the belief that there is only one God. The very earliest creed of the Bible is, "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one." So an emphatic assertion of monotheism has been a part of the Judeo-Christian theological tradition from its very fountainhead. And so Christians are monotheists. Now many of our Islamic friends don't think that we are. They will think that we're tri-theists. And they will actually think that you believe in the father, and the mother, and the son, because Mohammed was mistaken in this regard in his understanding of the Christian doctrine of God. But that Christian doctrine of the Trinity — that the one God eternally exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are not simply different modes of expression of one deity nor are they simply three different metaphors for the one God, but that there is a real and substantial fellowship between persons in that one true God — that is a radically different conception of God than Islam has.

— Dr. J Ligon Duncan III

So, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all monotheistic religions. They are all distinct from polytheism because they deny that multiple gods exist. But they are also clearly distinct from one another because of their very different doctrines of who God is.

Having looked at polytheism and monotheism, we are ready to describe the conception of God affirmed by Christianity and taught in the *Apostles' Creed*.

Christianity

The statement about God in the *Apostles' Creed* is fairly plain. It simply says:

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

You'll notice that the creed does not explicitly say that there is only one God. If we did not know the origin of the creed, it might be possible to read these words as proclaiming faith in the god of Judaism, or the god of Islam. Or even as affirming one god among

many. So, how do we know that it is talking about the triune God of Christianity in contrast to non-Christian monotheism and polytheism?

On the one hand, the creed denies non-Christian monotheism through other things that it says plainly about God. As we saw in a prior lesson, the creed is organized around a Trinitarian formula. It reflects the belief that God the Father, Jesus Christ, his only Son and the Holy Spirit are three different persons in the Godhead, all sharing the same singular divine essence.

Again, recall that the creed was intended to be a summary of beliefs, not a comprehensive statement of faith. And when it was used in the church's liturgy, everyone in the church knew that to mention these three persons of God in this way was to imply the doctrine of the Trinity.

On the other hand, the creed denies polytheism by using the singular form of the generic word "god" as a divine name.

The word "god" can mean many things. Many religions refer to their deities as "gods." And the Bible itself sometimes uses the word "god" to refer to things like demons, idols, and perhaps even human leaders. But these so-called "gods" also tend to have actual names. For instance, in the religion of ancient Rome, Mars was the god of war, Neptune was the god of the sea, and Jupiter was the leader of the gods.

In the same way, the God of Scripture is known by actual names. Most of them are descriptive, such as *El Shaddai*, which is often translated "Almighty God," meaning the God who is all powerful; and *El Elyon*, which is usually translated "God Most High," meaning the God who rules over all; and *Adonai*, which is generally translated "Lord," and means master or ruler.

But the name that most closely approximates what we might think of as God's proper name is Yahweh. In older translations it appears as Jehovah. But in modern translations, it is generally rendered "Lord," though its meaning is quite different from *Adonai*.

God revealed himself by the name Yahweh extremely early in human history. For instance, human beings were using this name for God at least as early as the days of Seth, the son of Adam, as we learn in Genesis 4:26. Noah referred to God as Yahweh in Genesis 9:26. And Abraham called God by this name in Genesis 12:8.

Yahweh is also the name that God described to Moses in Exodus 3:13-14, where we read this account:

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:13-14).

The name Yahweh is related to the Hebrew word *'ehyeh*, which is here translated "I AM." It is the most intimate name that God revealed to his people, and the one that, more than any other name, distinguishes him from all the false gods.

In fact, of all the names by which the Lord is called in Scripture, "God" is the most generic. In our modern Old Testaments, the word God usually translates the Hebrew word *el* or *elohim*. And in the New Testament, it usually translates the Greek word *theos*.

But in the days of the Bible, other religions used these same words to refer to their own gods. So, why did the *Apostles' Creed* choose this generic name for God instead of a more distinctive name like Yahweh? Because by using the simple term “God” to identify the Lord, the *Apostles' Creed* indicates that the God of Christianity is the only one who deserves to be called “God.” As we read in 1 Kings 8:60:

The Lord (or in Hebrew *Yahweh*) is God ... there is no other (1 Kings 8:60).

Yes, other religions believe that they worship actual gods. But in reality, they worship imaginary beings, or even demons — inferior, created spirits who are ruled by the Christian God. Paul made this clear in 1 Corinthians 10:20, where he wrote these words:

The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God (1 Corinthians 10:20).

The pagans did not believe they offered their sacrifices to demons; they believed they offered them to various gods. But they were wrong.

There are many religions besides Christianity in the world today. There is Hinduism, Shinto, paganism, Wicca, Islam, Judaism, tribal religions, and so on. But their gods are false. Some worship demons. Some worship the creation. And some worship figments of their imagination. But the Bible insists that only the Christian God is truly divine; only the Christian God will judge the world; and only the Christian God has the power to save us.

In its first article of faith, the *Apostles' Creed* calls new Christians to abandon the false gods they used to worship, and to acknowledge the God of Scripture as the one true God. And this call reflects a teaching that is absolutely essential in Scripture. The Bible obligates every person in every age to acknowledge that the God of the Old and New Testaments is the only true God. And it demands that they worship only him.

Now that we have looked at God's singularity, we are ready to focus on his simplicity, the unity of his nature or essence.

SIMPLICITY

You will recall that when we defined the doctrine of the Trinity in a prior lesson, we stated it this way: God has three persons, but only one essence. We also said that the term “person” refers to a distinct, self-aware personality, and that the term “essence” refers to God's fundamental nature, or the substance of which he consists. Well, when we speak of God's simplicity, it is his essence that we have in mind — his fundamental nature, the substance that makes up his being.

Now, theologians use terms like “simple” and “simplicity” in a rather technical way. We are not saying that God is simple in the sense that he is easy to understand. Instead, we mean that his essence is not a composite of different substances but a unified whole consisting of only one substance.

We can illustrate this idea of simplicity by comparing pure water to mud. On the one hand, water may be viewed as a simple substance. It is composed entirely of water, and nothing else. But if we add dirt to our pure water, it turns into mud. Mud is a complex substance because it is composed of two distinct parts: water and dirt. God's essence is like absolutely pure water: it is composed of only one substance.

But why is this important? Why does Christianity emphasize that God is simple and not composed of different substances? To answer this question, let's look once more at the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity states that: God has three persons, but only one essence.

Central to the Doctrine of the Trinity is the distinction between person and essence. God is one with respect to essence and three with respect to person. In fact we might say that with God, there is one "what" and three "whos."

— Dr. Keith Johnson

As strongly as the Bible insists that God has *three* persons — the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit — it also insists that there is only *one* God. And very early in the life of the church, theologians determined that a useful way to talk about there being only one God was to speak in terms of his essence or substance. So, when they said that God has a simple, unified essence, they were denying that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were three separate Gods that somehow joined together in the Trinity. And instead, they were affirming that these three persons had always existed together as only one God.

In this way, the church made it absolutely clear that Christians do not believe in three Gods, as we are often accused by other religions. Instead, we believe in only one God — one divine being — who exists in three persons.

Often in speaking with Muslims they say, the Christian view of the Trinity is an affirmation of three Gods or tri-theism. Nobody in the history of the church has ever affirmed this because alongside the affirmation that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, is from Genesis to Revelation, the affirmation that God is one. There is one living and true God. So that the only way that we can make sense of the full revelation of God is to say, there is one God, there is no other; the Father, Son and Spirit share in that one Godhead. The language of the church has been they subsist in that one Godhead as three persons and that is why we do not affirm that there are three gods. One God, yet in three persons. That which is taught in Scripture, affirmed by the Church and distinguishes us really from all of our religious competitors in that fashion.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

This idea is stated explicitly in another ancient creed — the *Nicene Creed* — which says:

Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God ... [is] of one substance with the Father.

Because the *Apostles' Creed* is more basic than the *Nicene Creed*, it does not mention this detail explicitly. Nevertheless, it implies this idea by insisting that we believe in only one God who exists in three persons.

The fact that Christians believe in one God in three persons has countless implications for the Christian life. For example, traditional Christian worship has always been fully Trinitarian: we worship all three persons of the Trinity, and we offer songs of praise and prayers of petition to each one of them. To neglect any person of the Trinity in favor of another is to neglect God himself. We owe honor, service and love to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit because they are all one God.

Having addressed the basic Christian conception of God and the nature of his existence, we are ready to focus on the phrase Father Almighty, looking at the distinct things the Bible teaches us about God the Father, the first person of the Trinity.

FATHER ALMIGHTY

Our discussion of the Father Almighty will divide into four parts. First, we will look at the way the name “Father” is used of God in Scripture. Second, we will consider the person of God the Father in terms of the Trinity. Third, we will explore the nature of his fatherhood, the things he does in his role as father. And fourth, we will discuss his power. Consider first the name “Father” as it is used of God in Scripture.

NAME

The Bible uses the term “Father” in at least three distinct senses. First, it’s used of God as the creator of all things. An example of New Testament use of this sense would be 1 Corinthians 8:6 where Paul identifies the Father as the one from whom all things exist. Now, it’s important to recognize that not every Biblical reference to God as Father in this first sense is a reference to the first person of the Trinity. A second use of the term “Father” denotes the relationship that believers have with God as a result of their adoption as sons and daughters. When Paul says in Romans 8:15 that we have received the spirit of adoption by which we call God Abba, Father, he’s using “Father” in this second sense. Finally, the term ‘father’ is used to denote the unique relationship that exists between Jesus Christ and His Father. We might summarize these three uses by saying that the first speaks of God as creator, the second speaks of God as redeemer

and the third speaks specifically of the person of the Father in relation to the Son.

— Dr. Keith Johnson

Unfortunately, some Christians mistakenly think that every time the Bible uses the term “Father,” it is talking about the first person of the Trinity. But the doctrine of the Trinity is not clearly revealed until the New Testament. There are hints of it here and there in the Old Testament that may indicate some awareness of plurality in the Godhead. But the Old Testament overwhelmingly stresses the oneness of God.

So, when God is called “Father” in the Old Testament, the reference is to the entire Trinity, not just to one person. Now, in some sense, the use of the word “Father” does emphasize the person of the Father. But it’s important to remember that before the clear New Testament revelation of the three persons of God, all the terms used for God, including the name “Father,” applied in some measure to the entire Trinity. The term “Father” refers to the entire Godhead in passages like Deuteronomy 32:6, and Isaiah 63:16 and 64:8. For the sake of illustration, let’s look at just one example of this use of “Father” in the Old Testament. In Malachi 2:10, the prophet asked these questions:

Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? (Malachi 2:10).

Here, the entire Godhead — including the Father, Son and Holy Spirit — is spoken of as “Father” because the entire Godhead participated in the creation of humanity. The New Testament makes it clear that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit each played a somewhat different role. But this Old Testament passage does not make such distinctions between God’s persons. Instead, it ascribes the name “Father” to all three persons collectively because of their role in creation.

To complicate matters further, as New Testament writers drew from the Old Testament, there were times when they also referred to the entire Trinity as Father in a general sense. For example, it is likely that the entire Trinity is described as “Father” in Matthew 5:45 and 6:6-18, and in Acts 17:24-29. In these passages, the entire Trinity is called “Father” for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it is because the whole Godhead participated in creating the world. At other times it is because all three persons of God are the ethical standard to which we must conform. Again, let’s consider just one verse for the sake of illustration. In James 1:17, we read these words:

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights (James 1:17).

Prior to this verse, James argued that God’s character is ethically pure. So, his point here was that everything that comes from God is good, and everything that is good comes from God. Since good things come from all the persons of our Triune God, Christian interpreters often see this as a reference to the whole Trinity. Again, as in the Old Testament, it is reasonable to see an emphasis on the person of the Father here. But it’s important to affirm that the Son and the Holy Spirit also provide good gifts for us.

Nevertheless, it is also clear that Scripture uses the word “Father” in another sense to refer to a person of the Trinity that is distinct from the Son and the Holy Spirit. We see this in John 1:14, 18; John 5:17-26; Galatians 4:6; 2 Peter 1:17. Once more, let’s look at just two examples to illustrate this point. In 2 John 9, the apostle distinguished between the Father and the Son when he wrote these words:

Anyone who ... does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son (2 John 9).

And in John 14:16-17, Jesus distinguished the Father from the Spirit when he gave this assurance to the apostles:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth (John 14:16-17).

Now that we have seen how the name “Father” is used in Scripture to indicate the entire Godhead as well as the first person of the Trinity, we are ready to look at the person of God the Father in distinction from the other persons of the Trinity.

PERSON

The Father’s association with the Son and the Holy Spirit may be described in a number of ways. But in the history of theology, two particular perspectives on the Trinity have come to the foreground. Specifically, it has been common to speak in terms of the ontological Trinity and the economic Trinity. Both these approaches speak of the same Trinity — the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit — but they emphasize different aspects of the relationship between the three persons of the Godhead.

On the one hand, it has been common to speak of the ontological Trinity when we are focusing on God’s being. The word ontological means relating to being. So, when we speak of the ontological Trinity, we are looking at the Trinity in terms of being or essence. We are considering how the three persons of the Trinity are integrated with one another, and how they share a single essence.

From the perspective of ontology, all three of God’s persons are infinite, eternal and unchangeable. And each has the same essential divine attributes, such as wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.

On the other hand, we normally say that we are speaking of the economic Trinity when we consider how God’s persons interact with each other, how they relate to one another as individual persons. The word “economic” means “relating to household management.” So, when we speak of the economic aspects of the Trinity, we are describing how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit relate to one another as distinct individual personalities.

When we view the Trinity from an economic point of view, each person has different responsibilities, a different level of authority, and a different assigned role with different tasks to perform. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit engage in conversations with

each other. They make agreements with each other. They act upon each other. And they interact in many other ways.

From both the ontological and the economic perspectives, the Father is said to be the first person. The Father is called the first person of the ontological Trinity because the Son is said to be generated by the Father, and the Holy Spirit is said to proceed from the Father.

Listen to the words of 1 John 4:9 regarding the generation of the Son:

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him (1 John 4:9).

The phrase “one and only” comes from the Greek word *monogenes*, and is often translated “only begotten.” Unfortunately, some people in the early church thought that this meant that the Son was created and not fully divine. Even today some cults deny the divinity of the Son because he is called “begotten.”

To counter this false teaching, Christians have traditionally said that the Son is eternally generated or eternally begotten by the Father. These terms emphasize that there was no time when the Son did not exist. Listen to the way Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit's procession in John 15:26:

When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me (John 15:26).

The phrase “goes out” translates the Greek word *ekporeuomai*, and is often rendered “proceeds.” Traditionally, this verse has been understood as referring to the source of the Holy Spirit's existence.

Unfortunately, passages like this have led some people to conclude wrongly that the Holy Spirit is not eternal or fully divine. So, traditional Christian theology has been careful to insist that the Holy Spirit is a full member of the Trinity, and that he is fully divine, even though his personhood eternally proceeds from the Father.

Besides being the first person of the ontological Trinity, the Father is also called the first person of the economic Trinity. From the economic perspective, the Father is said to be the “first person” because he has authority over the other two persons, much like a human father has authority over his household.

We see the Father's authority over the Son in many ways. For instance, the Son does the Father's will, as we learn in John 6:40. And the Son gets his authority and kingdom from the Father, according to passages like Ephesians 1:20-22. In fact, Scripture repeatedly tells us that the Son's kingship is subordinate to the Father's kingship. We see this in the frequent idea that Jesus sits at God's right hand, that is, on the right side of God's throne, as in Psalm 110:1 and Hebrews 1:3. God's right hand is a place of honor and power, to be sure, but it is not the throne itself. And ultimately, the Son will hand over his kingdom to the Father, as Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 15:24. In short, in the economic Trinity, the Father has authority over the Son.

The question of the relationship between the Father and the Son and the exercise of all authority is a complex one. But, um, it really has to do with the distinction between the roles that the Father and the Son play within the Trinity. And the fact that in His role the Son voluntarily has a subservience to the Father. He came to earth to submit himself to the Father's will and the Father exercises all authority. But at the same time these are relationships of love in which the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father, and they seek to please and honor one another within the Trinity. So, we need to sort of unpick a little bit, the difference between the roles in which they play and the relationships of love in which they enjoy.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

Similarly, the Father has authority over the Spirit. For instance, we are often told that it is the Father that sends the Spirit, as in Luke 11:13 and Ephesians 1:17. We also learn that it was the Father that empowered the Son with the Spirit in Acts 10:38. Throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit is the Father's agent in the world, being instructed by the Father to carry out his will. In the economic Trinity, the Father has authority over the Holy Spirit, just as he has authority over the Son.

The Father's authority is always an authority of love. The Father's authority is an authority that loves the Son, desires the Son to be glorified, just as the Son then desires the Father to be glorified. And finally, if they share a heart of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then the idea that there would be a disagreement of wills between the Father, Son and Spirit becomes kind of comical in one sense because if the Son eternally and the Spirit eternally long to do the will of the Father, and the Father eternally longs to glorify and honor the Son and the Spirit, then essentially in the life of God there is unanimity of will, a unanimity of love; because a unanimity of being in this fellowship of the Trinity.

— Dr. Steve Blakemore

With this understanding of how the name "Father" is used in Scripture, and of the person of God the Father, we are ready to look at the nature of his fatherhood over creation and humanity.

FATHERHOOD

Before we describe God's fatherhood in detail, we should pause to point out that a large number of Scriptures that talk about God's fatherhood come from the Old Testament, prior to the time that God clearly revealed his triune nature. In these passages,

the word “Father” refers first and foremost to the entire Trinity, and not just to the person of the Father.

Nevertheless, the New Testament associates God’s fatherhood primarily with the person of the Father. So, it is legitimate to see in these Old Testament texts an emphasis on the person of the Father.

The fatherhood of God has many aspects that we could discuss. But we will focus on three of Scripture’s more prominent ideas. First, we will consider the Father’s role as creator. Second, we will look at his fatherhood in terms of his position as king over his creation and people. And third, we will focus on the idea that the Father is the family head over his people. We’ll begin by exploring his role as creator as an aspect of his fatherhood.

Creator

In the broadest sense, Scripture sometimes refers to God as being the father of everything he has created. For instance, we find this in passages like Deuteronomy 32:6, Isaiah 43:6-7, and 64:8, Malachi 2:10, and Luke 3:38.

As just one example, listen to Paul’s words to the Athenians in Acts 17:26-28:

From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live... As some of your own poets have said, “We are his offspring.” (Acts 17:26-28).

Here Paul quoted from pagan poets Cleanthes and Aratus, who had said that Zeus was the Father of human beings because he had created them. Of course, Paul insisted that the God of the Bible was the real creator, and not Zeus. But Paul also affirmed the idea that to create something is to become its Father.

The Bible was written in human language. Our human relationship to God as creator is often expressed in terms of the relationship between a father and his children. In this context, God’s fatherhood represents our origin and his authority.

— Dr. Paul Chang

Just as human fathers are patient toward their children, God’s general fatherhood over creation motivates him to show great patience with our fallen world, and with sinful humanity in particular. This does not mean that he will always withhold judgment from the creation. But it helps explain why he is slow to anger and quick to show mercy. As we read in Psalm 145:8-9:

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made (Psalm 145:8-9).

Having looked at God's role as creator, we are now ready to see how his role as king relates to his fatherhood.

King

In the ancient Near-East, it was common for people to refer to human kings as their fathers, and for kings to refer to their people as their children. This language is often reflected in Scripture, as well. For example, the Israelites referred to David as their father because he had been their king. Of course, some of the Israelites were direct descendants of David, so he was their forefather in a literal sense. But when the nation as a whole referred to David as their father, they meant that he was their king. Listen to Mark 11:10, where the crowds cried out in this way:

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! (Mark 11:10).

Here, David's fatherhood over Israel is explicitly connected to his kingship. Similarly, in Acts 4:25-26, the church praised God with these words:

You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One." (Acts 4:25-26).

Once again, David was called the father of Israel because he was the Lord's Anointed One, the king who sat on the Lord's throne and led Israel in battle against enemy nations. But why did the ancients refer to kings as their fathers?

Kings in the ancient world called themselves "fathers" because they were portraying themselves as paternalistic, that is they were caring for their people, taking care of their needs, protecting them and those kinds of things. Now, in reality, most of that was just propaganda because kings in the ancient world, for the most part served themselves rather than serving their people. But at the same time, when God revealed himself to Israel, he used this common way of thinking about kings as fathers. And in the case of God being our father, our royal father, our imperial father, it's not propaganda, it's true. God takes care of us. He provides for us. He protects us like a father would. So he's the father of his entire empire, the father of his kingdom.

— Dr. Richard Pratt, Jr.

And just as human kings were called the fathers of their nations, God was called “Father” because he was the great king that ruled over all the kings of the world, and because he ruled directly over his chosen nation Israel.

Listen to the way Isaiah 63:15-16 talks about the Lord’s fatherhood:

Look down from heaven and see from your lofty throne, holy and glorious. Where are your zeal and your might? Your tenderness and compassion are withheld from us. But you are our Father ... you, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name (Isaiah 63:15-16).

Here, God is referred to as Father because he sits on the heavenly throne, ruling over all creation in general, and over Israel and Judah in a special way. Specifically, the plea is for the divine king to lead his armies into battle, to redeem his people by defeating their enemies.

Knowing that our divine king cares for us in the same way that a father cares for his children should give us great confidence and comfort. On our own, we are incapable of standing against the evils of this world. But our divine king loves us like a father, and readily helps us.

In fact, this is one of the ideas Jesus taught in the Lord’s Prayer when he instructed his disciples to pray to “Our Father in heaven.” In this petition of the Lord’s Prayer, God is acknowledged as our Father in heaven. And throughout the Bible, the image of heaven is the same: it is God’s throne room, the place where he sits and rules as king. So, when Jesus told his disciples to pray, “Our Father in heaven,” he meant for them to pray to God as their royal father, the divine king enthroned in heaven. Our confidence that God will give us our daily bread, forgive our sins, keep us from temptation, and deliver us from the evil one is based on the fact that as our loving king, he has both the power and the desire to do these things.

With this understanding of God as creator and king in mind, we are ready to consider his role as family head as an aspect of his fatherhood.

Family Head

One of the interesting things for me is that theology always has pastoral implications. What we believe affects the kind of people that we become, and this is true with respect to God the Father. I think it works both ways — for those of us who have had good fathers, and for those who haven’t. I’m fortunate in having had a good father, so it has never been difficult for me to think of God as my Heavenly Father. All of the things that my dad said to me, and did for me, and the way that we related to each other — that was very, very important, and brings God the father into a very positive sense for me. But over the years I have met and worked with people for whom the language of fatherhood was very negative, very challenging, very difficult. But I remember it one day working with one of my students,

who framed it for me in a way that, she said that “God became for me the Father that I never had.” And, so I think that when we explore the fatherhood of God, even from the place of deficiency, we begin to learn that the heart of God is a heart that is disposed towards us, whether or not we have actually had that experience with our earthly fathers.

— Dr. Steve Harper

Everyone is familiar with the concept of a family head. Usually it is a parent, grandparent, or other relative who leads and makes decisions for the family or household. Well, Scripture often describes God's relationship to his people in these very same terms.

At times in the Old Testament, we catch glimpses of God as the head of the family of the human race. For example, in Genesis 5:1-3, Moses described God's relationship to Adam in the same way that he described Adam's relationship to his son, Seth.

More often in the Old Testament, though, God is portrayed as the family head of the nation Israel. We see this in the care he takes for his people in places like Deuteronomy 1:31, Psalm 103:13, and Proverbs 3:12. As just one example, consider the Lord's words in Hosea 11:1:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son (Hosea 11:1).

Here the Lord portrayed himself as a parent who had loved the nation of Israel since its childhood. We also find God described as Israel's family head in Numbers 12:7, where the Lord referred to Moses in this way:

My servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house (Numbers 12:7, NRSV).

The word translated “house” is the Hebrew term *bayit*. It is the normal word that referred not only to a domestic building, but also to the people who lived in the building. Here, Moses is described as a son or servant who rules over the people and possessions of the head of the household, implying that God is the family head of the nation of Israel.

Of course, the description of God as the family head of his people also continues in the New Testament. In Matthew 7:9-11, and Luke 11:11-13, Jesus taught that the Father answers our prayers in the same way that human fathers provide for their children. In John 1:12-13, as well as in 1 John 2:29 and 3:1, we learn that the Father loves us because we have been born into his family. And in Hebrews 12:5-10, we read that the Lord disciplines us for our own good in the same way that a human father disciplines his children. And in passages like 1 Timothy 3:15 and 1 Peter 4:17, the church is referred to as God's household and family.

I believe there are tremendous pastoral implications of the fatherhood of God. I think one of the things we see right off the bat is: God is

Father. I mean, it's a tremendous look at what the Father is like, what God is like in Scripture. So, we see right from the get-go that family must be very, very important to God. And I believe that right from Deuteronomy 6 when the Lord says, "Listen, this is how I'm going to perpetuate the law and the love of God; it's going to be through families." It's going to be as parents rub shoulders, rub their lives against the lives of the children; tremendous things are done there, obviously. Family is exceedingly important to God. I think also you look down and you see that Fathers are critical to the family. And the pastoral implications there, you can see it all around the world where Fathers are strong, you have strong cultures. Where Fathers become weak in cultures, weak within the cultures, you have a weakening dynamic there that simply cannot be replaced by motherhood. We need strong mothers, no question about it, but fathers are absolutely critical, and I think one of the things you see in the Fatherhood of God is that very dynamic. I see when you have a lack of fatherhood you have abuse that's on the rise, you have a lack of education, you have crime that's on the rise. So this whole thing of dysfunction across the culture happens when you have a weakening concept of fatherhood and that will happen when you have a weak concept of God as Father.

— Dr. Matt Friedeman

Now that we have explored the name, person and fatherhood of the Father Almighty, we are ready to investigate his unlimited power to accomplish his will.

POWER

Look once again at the first article of faith in the *Apostles' Creed*. It says:

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

When the *Apostles' Creed* says that God the Father is almighty, it means that he has unlimited, matchless power. In traditional theological terms, God's almighty power is referred to as his omnipotence, from the root *omni*, meaning all, and the word potency, meaning power.

The Father's power is unlimited because he has the strength and ability to accomplish whatever he chooses. And it is matchless because he is the only one that possesses this type of power.

We'll consider both aspects of the Father's power that we have just mentioned: the fact that it is unlimited, and the fact that it is matchless. Let's begin with the unlimited nature of his power.

Unlimited

Scripture describes the Father as having power to do anything he wills to do. And it demonstrates this unlimited power in many different ways. It speaks of him as having the power to create the universe and to destroy it. It says that he has power to control the weather, to defeat his enemies in battle, to rule and to control human governments, to perform mighty miracles, and to save his people. Listen to how the prophet Jeremiah described the Lord in Jeremiah 10:10-16:

The Lord is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath... God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding. When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar; he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses... He is the Maker of all things, including Israel, the tribe of his inheritance — the Lord Almighty is his name (Jeremiah 10:10-16).

God ultimately controls every aspect of the created world. He has the power to do whatever he pleases. In Isaiah 46:10-11, the Lord himself summarized his power this way:

My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please... What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do (Isaiah 46:10-11).

God's omnipotence is a good reminder to us as believers that when the world seems like it's spinning out of control, feels like it's descending into chaos, it's not. God cannot be bound by another source or power superior to his. The world, whatever else it may seem like, the world is not spinning out of control, God is sovereign, we may have confidence that he has not been overpowered, and it gives us strength to walk with faith in those times that appear mysterious to our limited perspective. When we don't see all that God sees, it is good to know that God has not had his control or his power wrested from him against his will. Whatever is coming to me, whatever is taking place in my life, is taking place under the authority of God's loving hand. And I can take confidence, even when I can't explain my circumstances that I know the God who sustains me and walks through this with me.

— Dr. Robert G. Lister

Throughout the Bible, Scripture commonly points to God's redemption of his people as an ideal demonstration of his power. In the Old Testament, we frequently read that he proved his power in the Exodus when he smote the Egyptians with plagues, freed the Israelites from slavery, sustained them with food from heaven for forty years in the desert, and gave them conquest over the Promised Land. In the minds of ancient Israel, the Exodus was the greatest example of God's redemptive power they knew.

We find references to God's power in the Exodus throughout the books of the Law, in passages like Exodus 14:31; Numbers 14:13; and Deuteronomy 9:26-29. We also see this theme in every other part of the Old Testament. We find it in the historical books in 2 Kings 17:36; in the poetic books in places like Psalm 66:3-6; and in the prophetic books in places like Isaiah 63:12.

Now, this is not to say that the ancient Israelites ignored the surpassing greatness of the spiritual redemption they received by grace through faith in the Lord. It was perfectly valid for them to say things like, "I believe in God's power by faith." But many Old Testament authors found it more compelling to say things like, "God proved his power by single-handedly freeing our entire nation from slavery." And this should not be surprising. After all, the external demonstrations of God's might in the Exodus were so irrefutable that even the unbelieving Egyptians were convinced.

With this understanding of God's unlimited power in mind, we should pause to mention that there are certain things that God cannot or will not do, despite his unlimited power. Specifically, the Father's nature governs everything he does. As a result, he never does anything that is contrary to his nature.

Nature is a broad term that includes both essential and personal attributes. We might define it as one's fundamental character; or the central aspects of one's being. In the case of the Father, his nature includes not only his being and his character, but also his relationships with the other members of the Trinity. And the Father's nature is absolutely immutable and unchangeable, so that it will always lead him to exercise his power in similar ways. James 1:17 speaks of the unchangeable quality of God's nature in this way:

The Father of the heavenly lights ... does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17).

The Father's nature does not limit his ability to do things that are compatible with his nature. But it does guarantee that he will only exercise his almighty power in ways that are consistent with his attributes. For example, he will never cease to be eternal. He will never revoke his authority over the Son and the Holy Spirit. He will never do anything sinful. And he will always keep his promises.

It's very interesting to me that one of the factors in the rise of modern science was the recognition that God operates the same way today as he did yesterday. Whereas wherever animism obtains in this world — the belief that there are many gods and that gods reside in the elements of this world, beliefs that God is utterly unpredictable — and if God is utterly unpredictable, you're not able to study this world because you don't know if it'll act this way today and a different way

tomorrow. But if God is unchangeable then you can actually go out and study the world and understand how God made it and how it works. And so that very belief in the unchangeability of God enabled the rise of modern science. Well, in the same way that it enabled the rise of modern science, it enables the assurance and the comfort and the peace of a Christian in uncertain circumstances, because we don't have to figure it all out. We don't have to know what's coming around the corner. All we have to know is that our God is completely sufficient to meet any and every challenge that we encounter, and that he will predictably address that situation in the same way he promised to David, to Abraham and to Adam and to Jesus and to Paul — that he's dependable, that he's faithful, that he's not fickle, that he doesn't change from day to day, and he has every power within himself to address our every circumstance.

— Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III

Now that we have discussed the unlimited nature of the Father's might, we should turn to its matchless qualities, noting that God alone is omnipotent.

Matchless

Listen to the way God's matchless power is described in Isaiah 14:24-27:

The Lord Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand. I will crush the Assyrian in my land; on my mountains I will trample him down. His yoke will be taken from my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders." This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? (Isaiah 14:24-27).

Notice that in this passage, the description of the Lord's unlimited power is followed by an assertion that he alone possesses omnipotence. There is no one who can thwart him, no one who can turn back his hand.

The fact that the Father's power is matchless flows naturally from the fact that there is only one true God. Certainly if there were another being of infinite power, God's status as the only God could be challenged. After all, a being of infinite power would either be divine, or could make himself divine by virtue of his own power.

This is essentially what God told Job in Job 38, when he said that Job would be able to justify himself if he could first do the same powerful acts that God had already done, such as creating, ordering and providentially controlling the universe.

But the reality is that only God is truly divine. And therefore only God has unlimited power.

Sadly, in our day many well-meaning Christians deny that God is all-powerful. They misunderstand the Scriptures to teach that God himself is doing all he can with his creation. But the omnipotence of God is a wonderfully practical teaching of Scripture. When the people of God are in trouble, they cry out for God's help because they know that he is able to save. When evil seems to be in control of the world, we can rest assured that God has total power over evil. Without faith in God's omnipotence, we have no basis for our confidence that God will defeat his enemies, and that his children will receive the eternal blessings he has promised.

It's amazing to think about all the rich theology that is rolled into the phrase Father Almighty. We serve a powerful, personal, fatherly God that loves us and cares for us in astounding ways. And we can be completely assured that his protection will never fail because we know that he himself will never fail. He will always be our creator, king and family head. He will always have unlimited, matchless power. And he will never change. He will always be there to save us, and the salvation he offers is just as everlasting as he is.

So far in this lesson we have explored the nature of our Trinitarian God, and the characteristics of the divine person known as the Father Almighty. At this point, we are ready to turn to our third topic: the role of the Father as the Maker of heaven and earth.

MAKER

Our discussion of the Father as the Maker of heaven and earth will focus on three facets of his creative work. First, we will consider the Father's work of creation. Second, we will focus on the goodness of creation. And third, we will mention the Father's authority over creation. Let's begin by thinking about the work of creation that the Father performed.

WORK OF CREATION

Creation is the one work that the *Apostles' Creed* specifically attributes to the Father. You will recall that its first article of faith states:

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

Of all the things that the Father is said to do in Scripture, this is the one work that historic Christianity has insisted that all Christians affirm.

Most Christians are familiar with the idea that God created and sustains the universe, largely because Scripture refers to it so often. In fact, if we open our Bibles to the first page and begin reading, the first thing we are told is that God is the maker of heaven and earth. As we learn in Genesis 1:1:

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

After this introductory verse, the rest of Genesis 1 explains that God created and ordered the universe within the span of six days.

Now, throughout the history of the church, there have been many different theories about the interpretation of the creation account in Genesis 1. Nearly all theologians have agreed that God created the universe *ex nihilo* or out of nothing. That is to say, before God created the heavens and the earth, nothing existed except God himself. There was no preexistent matter from which God made the universe. And many have suggested that God created even time and space itself.

But theologians have often disagreed about the precise manner in which the Father created the universe, especially over the nature of the six days of creation. Several Church Fathers, such as Clement, Origen and Augustine, believed that the days were figurative representations of a creation that probably took place in a single moment. Others, such as Irenaeus and Tertullian, saw them as normal 24-hour days. Later, when science began to suggest that the universe was very old, many theologians began to read the creation account in new ways. Some suggested that the days were normal 24-hour periods, but that large stretches of time intervened between the days on which God created. Others interpreted the days as figures of speech that represented eras or epochs.

Certainly the issue of the days of creation in Genesis 1 is a hot one that has been the source of a lot of arguments. I think one of the issues is: what kind of literature is this? Is this literature which is designed to give a sensuous fact, facts relating to the senses, or is it literature designed to teach spiritual fact. Now, we shouldn't drive a wedge between those two. God's the creator of this world and they should fit together. But if we read Genesis 1 as a science text, that will lead us to a different interpretation than if we read it as a discussion of the meaning and nature of creation.

— Dr. John Oswalt

For the early church and their use of the *Apostles' Creed*, what seems to have been most important was that believers acknowledge that God and God alone, led by the person of the Father, created and sustains the entire universe, including both the spiritual and material realms, with all their substances and creatures.

This is the same idea that the Levites emphasized in Nehemiah 9:6. Listen to their words:

You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you (Nehemiah 9:6).

As we read here, God alone made the universe. And God alone continues to give life to everything that exists, sustaining the universe he created.

Now, it's important to point out that even though the Father took a leading role in making and sustaining heaven and earth, these acts involve the entire Trinity in various ways. For example, the Son was the means or instrument that the Father used to make the world, and that he still uses to sustain it.

Listen to the way Paul described the work of creation in 1 Corinthians 8:6:

There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:6).

Here, Paul explained that the Father is the source of creation. Creation comes *from* him. But it comes *through* the Son. We continue to live because the Father sustains our lives through his Son.

The Holy Spirit's involvement is mentioned less explicitly in Scripture. Primarily it is implied in Old Testament passages that refer to the work of the Spirit of God. During the days of the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit had not yet been clearly revealed as a distinct person of God. Nevertheless, the New Testament teaches that he was already active in the world carrying out God's will. We see this in passages like Mark 12:36 that speak of the Holy Spirit inspiring Old Testament authors, and Acts 2:2-17, where Peter taught that the Holy Spirit was the source of prophecy and spiritual gifting even during the Old Testament.

So, when we read Old Testament accounts of God's Spirit, it is reasonable to infer that they foreshadow the later, clearer revelation that the Holy Spirit is a distinct divine person. For instance, in Genesis 1:2-3, we read this account:

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Genesis 1:2-3).

The words "Spirit of God" literally refer to God in all his persons. But from our New Testament perspective, we can see in them an emphasis on the activity of the person of the Holy Spirit.

Having looked at the Father's role as Maker in the work of creation, we are ready to focus on the goodness of the creation the Father made.

GOODNESS OF CREATION

Many religions and philosophies teach that the material universe is amoral, that is, neither good nor evil. Others actually say that the world is evil. For example, many of the pagan philosophies the early church encountered taught that the material universe was corrupt, and that to be truly saved human beings had to escape the bondage of their bodies. This negative view of the world was one reason the *Apostles' Creed* emphasized that God made the heavens and the earth. In the Bible, the universe is God's good creation that reflects his good character.

In Genesis 1, we are reminded of the goodness of creation in verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25 and 31 — seven times in all. And in the last of these, Scripture records that the entire creation is not just “good” but “very good.” As Moses wrote in Genesis 1:31:

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good (Genesis 1:31).

Sadly, soon after God created the world, Adam and Eve sinned against God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And as a result of humanity’s sin, God placed the entire creation under a curse. One text that speaks of this is Genesis 3:17-19, where God spoke this curse to Adam:

Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food (Genesis 3:17-19).

Because of Adam’s sin, God cursed the ground so that gardening became difficult, forcing Adam and the rest of humanity to work hard for their food. And this curse on the ground was not limited to farming. It affected the whole world in all of its aspects. Paul wrote about this problem in Romans 8 when he argued that the redemption of believers through Jesus Christ would eventually lead to a restoration of the creation itself. Listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 8:20-22:

For the creation was subjected to frustration ... in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay ... [T]he whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Romans 8:20-22).

Paul taught that the curse on the ground affected every element of creation.

But despite God’s curse, we should not make the mistake of thinking that the creation is no longer good. Yes, humanity’s fall into sin damaged the creation. But it is still God’s world, and it is still fundamentally good. Paul made this point when he was writing about the abiding validity of marriage, and the freedom Christians have to eat all sorts of food. Listen to his words in 1 Timothy 4:4:

Everything God created is good (1 Timothy 4:4).

Notice what Paul said here. He did not say that everything created “was” good, but that everything God created “is” good.

The fact that the physical world is good—that God declared it good—has lots of practical implications for us. For one thing, we need to protect the environment. We are stewards over this creation. For another thing, ultimately God is going to preserve this creation. He is going to recreate; there is going to be a restoration of creation, rather than destruction of creation. We are going to live forever in a new heaven and a new earth. The physical world that God created is a

good thing. Our physical bodies — our physical presence — is a good thing.

— Dr. Mark Strauss

So, whether we are talking about marriage or food or any other thing created by God, we can be confident that it is good because the Father that created it is good. This is why Paul could also say, in Romans 1, that the goodness of God himself is still visible to all humanity through the things he has made. It is why Psalm 19 can claim that the heavens declare the glory of God.

John Wesley described the goodness of creation in his eighteenth-century work *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation*, part 3, chapter 2. Listen to what he wrote there:

The whole universe is a picture, in which are displayed the perfections of the Deity. It shows not only his existence, but his unity, his power, his wisdom, his independence, his goodness.

The universe displays God's goodness through its own innate goodness — a goodness that it possesses because it was created by a good God.

God's creation reflects his goodness. It tells us first of all that creation isn't in itself evil, that evil doesn't exist inherently in matter. But it also tells us that when God created the world, he created it very good. That there is beauty in creation. Now that beauty is marred as a consequence of the fall. Thorns and thistles and the sweat of one's brow, have distorted God's creation, but as Christians, we have begun the process, or God has begun the process within us of recreating us. We are a new creation in Jesus Christ and as the hymn writer says, as Christians, we see something that Christless eyes have never seen. We begin to see creation as God's handiwork. Therefore as Christians we see art, beauty, structure, coherence, integration within creation itself. And this is what we anticipate in the new heavens and new earth, when God's creation will be made entirely new and we will be able to enjoy creation as God intended us to enjoy creation.

— Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas

With this understanding of the work of creation and the goodness of creation in mind, we are ready to address the Father's authority over creation, which he possesses as its maker.

AUTHORITY OVER CREATION

There are many things we might say about the Father's authority as the creator. But we will focus on just three of its basic characteristics: His authority is absolute,

exclusive and exhaustive. We'll take a closer look at each of these ideas, starting with the absolute nature of the Father's authority as creator.

Absolute

The Father's authority is absolute in the sense that he has complete freedom to do whatever he wants with his creation. Scripture often compares his absolute authority to a potter's authority over his clay. We find this description in places like Isaiah 29:16, Isaiah 45:9, Jeremiah 18:1-10, and Romans 9:18-24. Listen to the way Paul spoke of God's authority in Romans 9:20-21:

Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? (Romans 9:20-21).

Of course, the answers to Paul's rhetorical questions are obvious. Because God is the creator of all, he has the freedom and right to do whatever he wants with what he creates.

I think when some people hear that the Bible teaches that God has ultimate authority over everything that happens in the world, they feel maybe threatened by that; they feel resentful. But Christians, really when we think about who God is, should feel incredibly thankful. It means that our lives are in the hands of an all wise, all mighty, all loving Father who has given His own son for us on the cross. And that is such incredible, incredible comfort in times of suffering in particular, in times when we wonder what is happening in our lives.

— Dr. Dennis Johnson

Even if we don't understand all things that are happening, if you belong to Jesus Christ, God is your Father and he loves you. And he's protecting you, and he's watching over you no matter what you're going through. And some things we go through in this life are incredibly painful. But no matter what you're going through, he is in control. He has even — can you accept this at this point in your life? — he has even appointed this for your good, for your sanctification. God turns the enemies in our lives, he turns them into our friends so that we more than conquer through him who loved us. We don't just conquer; it says that we *more than conquer* through him who loved us. So, God takes the trials and difficulties, and he uses them to sanctify us, to make us more like Jesus Christ. He brings the things he brings into our lives so that we will be like Christ. Hebrews 12: he disciplines

us as a kind and wise and good father. I think the fight of faith is often fought exactly at this point. We have to say to ourselves over and over again, God, God cares for me and even if I don't understand it. He is bringing this into my life for my good, for my holiness, for my sanctification.

— Dr. Tom Schreiner

Exclusive

Besides having absolute authority, the Father also has exclusive authority over everything he has created. The Father's authority as creator is exclusive in the sense that no creature possesses absolute authority. Absolute authority belongs only to the creator, and God is the only creator. And beyond this, when we view the Trinity economically, the Father also has authority over the other persons of the Trinity. For example, listen to Jesus' words in John 5:26-27:

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man (John 5:26-27).

Jesus taught that his authority to judge the world had been delegated to him by the Father. This authority ultimately resided in the Father, and was his exclusive prerogative. But the Father appointed the Son to judge on his behalf. We find a similar idea in 1 Corinthians 15:24, where Jesus' kingship over the universe is subordinate to the Father's greater kingship.

And something similar is true with the Holy Spirit as well. Passages like John 16:13, Romans 8:11, and 1 Peter 1:2 teach that the Holy Spirit also does the will of the Father.

And just as the Son's authority and the Spirit's authority are delegated from the Father, the authority of created beings is delegated as well. Angels, earthly rulers, and even average human beings have a measure of authority. But all these types of authority are delegated by God, so that the Father's authority is always superior to creaturely authority.

Exhaustive

In addition to having absolute and exclusive authority, the Father also has exhaustive authority over the universe. When we say that God's authority is exhaustive, we mean that it extends over everything he has created, in every detail. And there are at least two important implications of this fact. First, everyone is under God's authority. There is no person or other created thing that is free from the obligation to obey God.

Angels and human beings who are faithful to the Father recognize and submit willingly to him. But demons and unfaithful human beings rebel against him and refuse to submit to his commands. Even so, the Father's moral judgments apply to everyone. No matter where we live or who we are, and no matter what our culture or religion, we are all accountable to God.

Second, everything is under God's authority. His authority extends to every detail of what he has created. Because God has created all things, no aspect of creation is morally neutral. He has created everything for a purpose, and assigned it a moral character. And this means that no matter what the subject, no matter what aspect of creation is in view, there is no moral neutrality. Everything in creation either functions as God wants it to, and is therefore good, or rebels against him, and is therefore evil.

In the modern world many Christians are prone to divide life into things that are sacred and things that are secular. Most of us realize that "sacred" matters like church, worship, evangelism, and Bible study are under the authority of God. We also strive to acknowledge God's commands in our families and ethical choices, treating them as sacred as well. But many Christians tend to think that God's commands do not govern so-called "secular" matters like politics, education, and work. But this modern distinction between the sacred world and the secular world is not biblical. Passages like Proverbs 3:6, Ecclesiastes 12:14, and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 indicate that God has spoken about every area of human life, and that his authority extends to everything we do.

In a world where authority is often only thought in negative terms, the authority of God is a great thing for Christians to believe in because God still loves this world, God's still in control, God knows the end from the beginning, God is the one who will be the judge of all people. And that should make us feel good because we can be confident that somebody knows what he's doing and that is our trust and our confidence for the future.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

CONCLUSION

In this lesson on God the Father, we have looked closely at the first article of faith in the *Apostles' Creed*. We have discussed the concept of God that is implied in this article. We have spoken of the Father Almighty as the first person of the Godhead. And we have explored the Father's role as the Maker of heaven and earth.

Understanding the person of God the Father is foundational to all Christian theology. Unless we know and worship the true Triune God of Scripture, we are worshiping a false God. And recognizing and honoring the person Scripture calls the Father is a critical part of true worship. The Father is the one that the Son and the Holy Spirit obey and honor — the one whose glory they work to increase. And so he should be the focus of our obedience, honor and glory as well.

