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Tillamook, Oregon

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*I Believe in God the Father – The
Apostles' Creed, Part 3*

September 24, 2023

Sermon Text: Hebrews 11:6

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 31

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

At Lord's Day #7, saving faith in Christ is addressed and at Question 21 we are asked, "What is True Faith"? As we saw last time, the Catechism, after defining the faith which is a gift from God and through which we are justified, points us to the object of that faith:

22. Q. What, then, must a Christian believe?

A. All that is promised us in the Gospel,[1] which the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith teach us in a summary.

[1] *Matt. 28:19; John 20:30, 31.*

23. Q. What are these articles?
[And here then we have our subject, the Apostles' Creed] -

A. **I believe** in God, the Father almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten 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 to hell.

The third day he rose again from

the dead. He ascended to 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.

God the Father

It is interesting and worth noting that the first object of faith is not only God, but *God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth*. What does “Father” mean when it is a title which we address God by? Why did the early church consider it to be so important that this is the first name applied to God here in the Creed?

Listen to William Perkins (1558-1602) on this [Perkins Works, Vol 5, contains his in depth Exposition of the Apostles’ Creed]-

“Thus we see what the Father is. Now to believe in the Father is to be persuaded that the first person in

the Trinity is the Father of Christ and in Him my Father particularly, and that for this cause I intend and desire forever to put my trust in Him.” [Banner of Truth, The Works of William Perkins]

It is one thing to believe in God, even to believe in the God of the Bible, the living and true God – and yet even that faith is not necessarily justifying faith. To confess truly that “I believe in God the Father...” is to declare that He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and further – that He is the God who desires to be OUR Father, and for us to be His children by adoption in Christ. *I believe in God the Father* is to confess that God is a covenant-making God who establishes a covenant with His people so that He will be their God and they will be His people. That He will adopt them as His own children and be a Father to them and give them hearts to know Him as their Father.

In other words, *I believe in God the Father...* is a confession that true religion is more than mere intellectual knowledge, but that it

entails a Father/child relationship of love whereby we are set at peace with God and He with us. A relationship in which He knows us and we know Him and in which we become heirs of every blessing He lavishes upon His children. You see it all through Scripture, but only realized in Christ in the New Covenant:

Isa 63:16 For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.

Jer 3:19 “I said, How I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful of all nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me.

Jer 31:9 With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back, I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my

firstborn.

Jer 31:33-34 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (34) And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Jesus modeled this Father/Son relationship and it is in Him and only by being in Him that we enter into this Father-relationship ourselves:

Luk 2:49 And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?”

Joh 5:17 But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

Jesus prayed to His Father and taught us to pray in that manner as well:

Mat 6:9 Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

And all through the New Testament this same theme is taught over and over:

Joh 1:12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

Rom 8:14-17 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (15) For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” (16) The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (17) and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

2Co 6:17-18 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, (18) and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”

Gal 3:26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

Gal 4:4-7 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, (5) to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (6) And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (7) So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

1Jn 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Rev 21:7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

You see then that to confess, *I believe in God the Father*, is to confess genuine faith that *God is the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God who, by His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, has established a covenant with His elect in which He relates to us as our Father and we His children. It is a covenant of everlasting love which can never, ever be broken. To declare – I believe in God the Father – is to renounce all dead religion which has a form of godliness but is devoid of resurrection, saving power. I believe in this God who, purely and entirely by grace, set His love upon me and adopted me as His child. And now I am an heir in Christ of every blessing God has richly and lavishly poured out upon me in Jesus.*

In addition, we also confess by this that *no one except God's children can address Him and know Him as*

Father. Listen to Perkins once more-

“By nature, who is our father? Seeing that God promises this great privilege to them that love Him, that He will be their Father, Scripture declares that every man still in his natural condition [ie, not born again] must look to see who his father is by nature. Job says (17:14) that corruption is his father; but if we mark well the condition of man's nature (ie, unregenerate) we shall see that every man is a child of wrath, and that Satan is his father. For so long as a man walks in his sins (which ALL natural men do), so long does he show himself to be the child of the devil. Thus Christ told the Pharisees, ‘You are of your father the devil.’”

Children, Honor Your Father and Mother

And still there is more when we confess to believe in God the Father. “A wise son makes his father glad” (Proverbs 10:1). Only a hypocrite will confess “I believe in God the Father” and yet still

walk in his sins, caring not a bit about displeasing God and showing that God is not his Father at all.

Mat 12:50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Perkins again:

“It is the duty of everyone who makes this confession that he believes God to be his Father, first, to work to know God’s will and, secondly, to perform continual obedience to the same, like a good child that would please his father and therefore is always ready to do the best he can. And the man who sincerely takes God for his Father is the man who is the most grieved when by any sin he displeases Him. The greatest grief that the prodigal son had upon his repentance was that he had offended his father by sinning against heaven and against him. The same must also be our grief if indeed God is our Father.”
[Ibid]

Perkins also notes (I cannot do

better in application here than him!) – that a true child of a loving father strives to imitate his father, and it is a true father’s will that his children learn from him and grow to be like him.

Mat 5:44-48 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (45) so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (46) For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (47) And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? (48) You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Once more we see then another sign of a hypocrite. He or she does not desire to be like the Father, proving that they are not children at all.

When we confess *I believe in God*

the Father..., we are declaring that we believe that He will surely provide and care for us as he has promised:

Mat 6:25-33 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (26) Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (27) And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? (28) And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, (29) yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (30) But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (31) Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or

‘What shall we wear?’ (32) For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. (33) But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

“But alas, the practice of the world is contrary, for men have no care for the knowledge of God’s Word nor the means of their salvation. All their minds are set on the things of this life....When a man’s care is set entirely both day and night for the things of this life, it argues that God has either cast him off, or else that he takes Him for no Father of his.” [Perkins]

Genuine faith, the faith that truly confesses itself to be a child of the Father who is in heaven, knows that nothing touches us that is not permitted by God, and further, that all that touches us is used by God for our good – for our sanctification.

Heb 12:5-11 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do

not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. (6) For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” (7) It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (8) If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. (9) Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? (10) For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. (11) For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

counsel from witches and wise men; but let them take care, for that is the right way to double their misery and to show themselves to be lewd children.” [Ibid]

Think on this carefully. If I truly know Christ, if the Lord really is my Father and I am his child whom He loves, I will continue to walk in faith and trust in Him even (and perhaps especially) in dark times. I will look to Him for comfort and I will be helped by remembering His promises. But we must take great care when such trials come that we do not sin and doubt His love for us and yield to the temptation to turn to, as Perkins says, the devil and his servants who will always be there to craftily and deceitfully lie to us and lead us away from Christ.

It is not difficult to think of many examples of the visible church doing this very thing today. People have troubles and trials. So the temptation is to provide some kind of ministry or counseling or program to help. But the most fundamental thing we are to do, the true help we are to provide is:

“It is common practice of many among us in these days, when God’s hand is upon them, to go for help to the devil. They seek for

1. Present the gospel to them. The sinner, walking in sin, is going to experience the wages of sin. Christ is the only remedy.
2. Remind them that, if they are truly in Christ, the Lord knows their sufferings and hears their prayers to Him.

Here are some more wonderful points from Perkins in regard to looking to Christ for our comfort and consolation:

1. If we are in Christ, then we have dignity as the sons or daughters of God. It is a wonderful thing that Christ has made rebels such as we were, to be the sons of God. We are heirs of the kingdom of heaven, and having this privilege and comfort, we can take care to walk very carefully in this world of ungodly men.
2. If we are in Christ and if we are therefore striving to walk according to God's Word, then the Lord will patiently bear with our deficiencies,

just as a loving father is patient with his child. Even though we do not yet do everything in full accordance with the Lord's truth, yet our Father will be patient with us and even praise us for our, even small, improvements in holiness. When a man does endeavor through the whole course of his life to keep God's commandments, God will not cast him away, even though in weakness he fails in various things and even displease God. No one can have these privileges except the true child of God who can truly say, *I believe in God the Father.*

NOTE: It is not so with the wicked. In fact, nothing the natural man can do ever pleases God, and His wrath abides upon him.

3. Similarly, the true child of God can never, ever fall out of God's favor. Yes, when we sin He is displeased and even disciplines us – but His love for us never ceases:

Lam 3:22-25 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; (23) they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (24) “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.” (25) The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.

“When His children sin against Him and thereby lose His favor, He forsakes them – but how far? Surely He shows signs of anger for their wickedness, and yet indeed His love remains toward them still. The grace of God in the adoption of the elect is unchangeable, and he that is the child of God can never fall away wholly nor finally. On the contrary, it is a bad and comfortless opinion of the Church of Rome which holds that a man may be justified before God and yet afterward by a mortal sin finally fall from grace and be condemned.” [Ibid]

have liberty to pray to Him. The children of God have more privilege than the son of an earthly king, for they may come into the presence of Almighty God, the King of kings. And they may speak freely to Him, their Father, by prayer. Once more this goes against that lie of Rome that a Christian must come to speak to God in prayer only through the intercession of saints because we must not be so bold as to speak directly to Him. [Ibid]

These things and more we confess when we say, *I believe in God the Father*. Think carefully and thankfully upon these things.

4. The child of God with God as his Father may freely come into the presence of God and