

# The Creeds

## Part 2: I Believe in God the Father

Old Roman Symbol (2 <sup>nd</sup> Century)	Apostle's Creed (3 <sup>rd</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> Cen- turies)	First Council of Nicaea (325)	First Council of Constan- tinople (381)
I believe in God the Father almighty;	I believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth	We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.	We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

## Faith and Belief

At the time of the Reformation, one doctrine seemed to climb to the top of the Everest of theological importance, so much so that it sometimes feels as if no other doctrines were even on the same mountain. They called it *sola fide*—salvation by faith alone. So many battles were and continue to be

fought over just what the place of this doctrine should be. Now is not the time to get into any of those debates, other than simply to restate the importance of this subject. In doing so, I want to begin this [second in a five-part series](#) on the creeds by thinking about [the words behind our English word “faith.”](#)

In [Greek](#), the noun is the word *pistis*. The verb is *pisteuō*. The noun is almost always translated as “[faith](#).” However, the verb is usually translated by “[believe](#).” In other words, biblically speaking, [faith and belief are the same thing](#). In [Latin](#), “I believe” becomes *credo* (1<sup>st</sup> person singular; cf. [Mark 9:23](#); [John 9:38](#)). *Credo* is a present tense, ongoing action of an individual; [not](#) “I *believed*,” nor “I *will believe*,” [but](#) “I believe *right now*.” For a group, the word is *credimus* (*pisteuomen* in Greek), “we believe” (1<sup>st</sup> person plural; cf. [1Jn 3:23](#)). Both individuals and groups can believe in something.

Into this, consider [two very different sentiments](#), dare I say [beliefs](#), about God. One view is stated in “[a book about the religious and spiritual lives of baby boomers: their experiences and struggles with religion, their search for meaningful spiritual styles, and how \[they are\] altering the religious landscape of America in the 1990s.](#)” Wade Clark Roof’s intensive survey concluded, “[Except among born-](#)

again Christians and ethnic faiths, such as Orthodox Jews, the beliefs held generally by white boomers are not easily articulated save in a most personal and relativistic manner. Theological language seems to have given way to psychological interpretations. If there is one theme throughout that characterizes the languages of boomer faith, it is the subjectivist character of the affirmations: ‘*I feel,*’ ‘*I have found,*’ ‘*I believe.*’”<sup>1</sup> The focus of belief is not on the thing believed, but on the *self* doing the believing. For such people, faith is all about *me*.

This kind of mentality is easily seen in many CCM songs that were coming out about God at the time. Here are two I remember that reflect such beliefs. “When *I* look into Your holiness. When *I* gaze into Your loveliness. When all things that surround become shadows. In the light of You. When *I’ve* found the joy reaching Your heart. When *my* will becomes enthroned in Your love [yes, that’s a real line]. When all things that surround become shadows. In the light of You.”<sup>2</sup> The second, “*I want to know You ... I want to know*

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<sup>1</sup> Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 1, 203.

<sup>2</sup> Kenny Henry, “When I Look Into Your Holiness,” written by Cathy Perrin and Wayne Perrin, *WOW Worship (Orange)*, Integrity’s Hosanna! Music (2000). The original song has “enthralled” in your love. Somehow, Henry changed it to “enthroned.”

*You more. I want to touch You. I want to see Your face.*<sup>3</sup> To know God is like a Depeche Mode song, “Your own, personal, Jesus. Reach out and touch faith.”<sup>4</sup>

Now consider the other view that takes this sentiment about “knowing God” in a very different direction. Stephen Nichols writes,

For some reason theology often gets pitted against spirituality. We see this tension in such popular sayings as “I don’t want to know about God. I want to know God.” Think about telling your wife or husband that you don’t want to know things about her or him; you only want to know her or him. That would not serve you very well. It makes no more sense to say it of God ... Consider the idea of “knowing God” over “knowing about God.” On the one hand, we can appreciate the underlying desire. God is not some object for our study, like something we would look up in an encyclopedia. We know God in relationship, in the full-orbed context of his covenant faithfulness to his redeemed people. But without knowing about God, we really don’t know God at all. God has revealed himself to us, showing both his person and his character. He invites us in to learn about him.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Andy Park, “In The Secret (I Want to Know You),” *Blessed Be the Name, Vol. 24 (Live)*, Vineyard Music (1995).

<sup>4</sup> Depeche Mode, “Personal Jesus,” *Violator*, Mute (1989).

<sup>5</sup> Stephen J. Nichols, *Bonhoeffer on the Christian Life: From the Cross, for the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 113-14.

Similarly, ponder [the outline](#) of J. I. Packer’s best-selling book *Knowing God*. This is a book that by its own title seeks the same thing as the song. However, rather than pure sentimentality rooted in the mystical subjective emotional experiences of wanting to touch him, his first chapter is called “[The Study of God](#).” From here, he launches into all kinds of deeply theological and biblical thoughts such as “[God Incarnate](#),” “[God Unchanging](#),” “[God Only Wise](#),” “[The Grace of God](#),” “[God the Judge](#),” “[The Wrath of God](#),” and so on.<sup>6</sup>

Packer’s goal, of course, is not merely that you know *about* God. He says, “[One can know a great deal about God without much knowledge of him](#).”<sup>7</sup> [The goal is always to know God. However](#), like Nichols, Packer knows that you can’t know God unless you also know about him. Citing Charles Spurgeon, who was amazingly only 20-years-old at the time, he gives us a word we all desperately need to hear.

[The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to](#)

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<sup>6</sup> [J. I. Packer](#), *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021, 1973).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumbline cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with solemn exclamation, "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing," No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God.<sup>8</sup>

Packer himself explains the significance.

**Knowing about God** is crucially important for the living of our lives. As it would be cruel to an Amazonian tribesman to fly him to London, put him down without explanation in Trafalgar Square and leave him, as one who knew nothing of English or England, to fend for himself, so we are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing about the God whose world it is and who runs it. The world becomes a strange, mad, painful place, and life in it a disappointing and unpleasant business, for those who do

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<sup>8</sup> Packer, 17-18.

not know about God. Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul.<sup>9</sup>

## Knowing and God

The famous retort of Reformers to the false accusations that they were teaching a Gospel void of obedience to God was that we are saved by faith alone, *but not by a faith that is alone*. By a faith that is not alone, they were referring to good works, the necessary fruit of saving faith. But today, I have another just as important component in mind. The faith we have in God must not be void of *knowledge*: content, facts, doctrines. These are not doctrines abstracted from God, but doctrines *at the very heart of who and what God is*, as he himself teaches us through the Holy Scriptures, and which in fact are the very teachings of the Apostles who laid the foundation for Christ's Church at the command of their Savior whom they knew.

*They tell me what God is like.* Imagine investigating whether or not you should date a certain prospective boyfriend or girlfriend. You ask around for people who know the person. Is she nice? Is he kind? Does she worry all the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 19.

time? Does he have a temper? Does she like children? Is he driven to work hard? Is she high maintenance? Does he only care about himself? Under ideal circumstances, **you want to find out basic things about them before you invest** a lot in a personal relationship. This is what doctrines and theology about God do. They show you who he is.

If you know true things about God, then why would you not want to believe?

Theologically speaking, when you believe, you **enter into a relationship** with God; this is faith. If this is foundational to salvation, it is critical to know **what is meant by faith**. Is faith a giant leap in the dark? Is it contrary to reason? Is faith just facts forming in your mind? Do you even need it to believe something that is obviously factual?

Sproul explains, “**During the Reformation a threefold definition of saving faith emerged. The constituent elements of saving faith are (1) *notitia*, (2) *assensus*, and (3) *fiducia*. Each element was regarded as necessary for saving faith. None of these elements ... taken alone or separately, is a *sufficient condition* for saving faith. All three are essential to it.**”<sup>10</sup> *Notitia* is knowledge—the **content** of faith. *Assensus* is **agreeing with conviction** that the knowledge is true. *Fiducia* is

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<sup>10</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 75.

personal trust and delight. We might say that *notitia* is what the **mind** does, *assensus* is what the **intellect** does, and *fiducia* is what the *heart* does.

Given that most have probably never heard of these three words, and given that this is a *three*-fold definition of faith, I am going to **match our study of the creeds in their first three parts (or Articles) with one of these aspects of faith: *notitia* going with our study of the Father, *assensus* with the Son, and *fiducia* with the Holy Spirit.** Of course, we need all three for true faith in the One True God. And yet the Three are One, and so to think of these three aspects of faith with each of the three persons is really to think of faith in total with the One True God. **The final Article** we will spend thinking about how **faith is never done in a corporate vacuum**, but must exist in its “we” form as we are members of Christ’s church—the fourth and last aspect of the creeds.

## “I Believe”

**Why do this?** It is because perhaps the most overlooked part of most of the creeds is **the first two words of them all** (one word in the Greek and Latin). “**I believe,**” *Pisteuō, credo* (Old Roman Symbol, Apostle’s Creed). Or “**we believe,**” *pisteuomen, credimus* (First and Second Nicene Creeds). These

two words are found **only a single time** in all but the Apostles' Creed, where we find it **twice**. However, it is **implied** many more times such that it doesn't need to be said over and over. Once is sufficient, so long as you understand its importance.

It is from this word that we derive **the whole point of these documents**. These are *our creeds*. They are *my* creeds. If you move past this opening, you will have lost the entire point of the creeds. *You must know (notitia)* what they say here, and what they say is, theologically, **the first half** of all the creeds—even though it is only two words. All of what follows in the creeds are the flip-side, the complement, the match to “I believe.” This puts incredible weight on these two words to make them equal all that follows.

As we go through them, I thought it would be fun, since there are no original proof-texts, to use those supplied to us by **Martin Luther in his *Small Catechism***. He gives three here (\* See Appendix at the end of the Sermon for the full text with notes). To the creed itself (“I believe”) he gives **Romans 10:17**, “**So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**” His aim is obvious. He wants *you* to **come to faith through hearing the word** of Christ. And if this is the proof-text for the beginning of the creed: “I

believe,” then he is implying that what comes next is the very word of Christ. Of course it is since everything in the creeds comes from Scripture itself. The question is, **will you believe it?**

In his answer to “**What is meant by this Article**” (about the Father, see below), he gives **two more**. The first goes with the “**I**” in “I believe.” **2 Timothy 1:12** says, “... which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for *I know whom I have believed*, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.” This is the Apostle Paul admitting that *he* has believed in Christ. He says so in straightforward language. The implication is that you are to emulate the Apostle, who though he suffered greatly for Christ, **knew whom he had believed personally**. The **second** goes with the “believe” in “I believe.” The verse is **a warning**. “**Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it**” (**Heb 2:1**). Luther knows **we easily drift** from what we hear if hearing is not combined with faith. To know a thing, which will be the focus of what follows, is not enough. You must **combine that knowledge with full-fledged belief** in it yourself. It must become yours. So do you *know* what it means that “*I believe?*” Is this something personal for you? If so,

praise God. If not, continue with me as we begin to look at [the content](#) of our faith. By God's grace, as you hear all that follows, may he grant you the gift of biblical faith so that you may say, "I believe."

## Knowledge of God

For today, let's take our first aspect of saving faith: *notitia*. *Notitia* means [knowledge or acquaintance](#). Every good climber will spend some time reading facts about the route they are going to take. However, when you want to do something truly dangerous, you need more than abstract factual knowledge. In what I consider the single greatest athletic achievement in human history, when [Alex Honnold](#) climbed the 3,000 ft. face of El Capitan free solo (without any ropes) in just under four hours (the first ascent took 47 days!) in June 2017, he had not only spent hours reading about the route, but he had also spent 10 years on the wall doing all the moves himself so that he knew with deep personal acquaintance every square inch before he went up there without any ropes. This is the kind of knowledge he had prior to putting his faith into an actual climb that for anyone else would be suicidal.

*Notitia* begins with knowledge of facts, but it is always striving to move to the level of acquaintance, so that it becomes *personal* acquaintance that you have of who God is. If you do not know (*notitia*) who God has revealed himself to be, then you do not know God. And if you do not have knowledge of God, you cannot have faith in him. The goal is, “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10). This is “knowledge that goes beyond an intellectual apprehension and entails both a personal relationship of trust and the ethical ability to obey the Lord.”<sup>11</sup> *I believe*. To say it is supposed to be to affirm it. To affirm it is to know it.

To know it this way is to have faith, or better, “the faith.” There is an overlap here between full-fledged saving faith, which gets us ahead of ourselves since we haven’t talked about the other two components, and “the faith.” Irenaeus and Tertullian and other Fathers called these facts the “Rule of Faith.” It is like Jude, “Contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). Knowing “the faith” leads to saving faith—belief and trust.

The Latin form *notitia* appears only a single time in this form in Jerome’s Vulgate. The context is the opposite of

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<sup>11</sup> Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 159.

this. **Romans 1:28**, “And since they did not see fit to *acknowledge* God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done,” or as the Douay-Rheims 1899 puts it, “And as they liked not to have God in their *knowledge*, God delivered them up to a reprobate sense...” The Greek word it translates is *epignōsis*. The word refers to a willful recognition, a conscious acknowledgment and understanding. Of what? In this verse, it is *of God*. Paul’s point is that **humanity has willingly given up their knowledge of God**. What a horror! We are seeking to regain in worship and his church what we all deliberately forsook.

The root word is the word *gnosis*, which is the word “**knowledge**.” We get **Gnostic** from this word. Gnostics were those who sought and to this day seek mysterious knowledge, hidden knowledge, secret knowledge, forbidden knowledge. Of what? Of God. But the knowledge we are going to be looking for is not something that comes from a mystery school or an esoteric lost writing or a cult-leader “in the know.” It doesn’t come from knowing the high arts of geometry or astronomy or secrets of astrology or theurgy. Instead, **we will seek our knowledge from the Fount**, the Spring Himself, as he has told us, not merely in nature, but **in his very public word**. And thus, we will see the

fulfilling of the prophecy of Isaiah and Habakkuk, “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14).

## In *One* God

The creedal counterpart to “I believe” is all that follows in the creed. To affirm “I believe” is to affirm **the second half of the creeds**, the content, the meat, the doctrine. Now, the second half of these creeds is something we cannot look at all at once; there is too much information in them to do that. I said earlier, that “I believe” is implied many times. I’ll divide those for the sake of this series into **four Articles: God the Father**, then **Jesus Christ**, the **Holy Spirit**, and **those things** that remain.

“I believe **in God the Father...**” These are the words that immediately follow “I believe.” They are our focus today. The article on **God the Father is the shortest** of the four. Here is how the Old Roman Creed puts it, “**I believe in God the Father almighty.**” That’s short and simple, consisting of **three parts. God, the Father, and Almighty.**

*I believe in God.* **What do we mean by “God”?** Are we affirming that we believe in the gods, that they are real? Are

we denying that there are other gods? It is interesting that Luther gives **two proof-texts** for the word “God.” One says this, “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1Co 8:6). The previous verse helps us answer our question. “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many)” (8:5 KJV). The Bible affirms that there are other entities called “gods.” These are what we today call **fallen heavenly beings**. The word “angel” came to be used of them by the time of the NT. Yes, these are real entities. But nevertheless, the focus of the creeds is not on them.

This is made clear in other versions of the creed. Both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Nicaea add the word “one” here. “We believe in *one* God.”<sup>12</sup> And God, of course, is singular here, not plural. But they didn’t just make this up. It was found already in the second century in Irenaeus’ extremely early creeds. To say we believe in “one” God isn’t affirming that there are no other gods, but like the Apostle himself, “*For us there is one*

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<sup>12</sup> Tertullian’s Rule of Faith in *Prescription Against Heretics* 13 says, “UNUM omnino DEUM esse, nec alium prater mundi conditorem.” Schaff translates it, “That there is but one God, and no other besides the Maker of the world.” The context is crucial. There is no God that was before this God; he made all things.

God.” This is in line with the greatest of all the OT creeds, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut 6:4).<sup>13</sup> We are going to need to find out more about this God in order to see who it is that we are affirming as the only God.

## *The Father Almighty*

If the focus of our knowledge and belief is on the one God, then what is God like? What the creeds say is crucial, for they give us more context for what it means that we believe in one God. Is he just one among many? Are we

<sup>13</sup> **Going Deeper.** It takes me too far beyond the scope of this sermon to look into this verse extensively. Nevertheless, this is a notoriously difficult verse to translate as the following table makes clear:

Six translations of Deuteronomy 6:4													
	The	LORD	is	our	God	.	The	LORD	is	one	.		
	The	LORD		our	God	,	the	LORD	is	one	.		
As	for	the	LORD	our	God	,	the	LORD	is	one	.		
	The	LORD		our	God	is			one	LORD	.		
	The	LORD	is	our	God	,	the	LORD		alone	.		
				Our	one	God	is	the	LORD	,	the	LORD	.

(Adopted from Cynthia L. Miller, “Pivotal Issues in Analyzing the Verbless Clause,” in *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches* [ed. Cynthia L. Miller and M. O’Connor; Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic 1; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999], 4-5.)

In coming to an understanding of what “one” means, it is important to consider that just a few verses later the command is, “You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you—for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God” (Deut 6:14-15). The consistent interpretation is that the Shema teaches that God is God alone—that no other gods compare to him. He is utterly unique in his incommunicable attributes. The Jewish Tanakh translation is very sympathetic to this realization when it translates it, “The LORD is our God, the LORD alone” (see also the NRS).

Mormons who affirm polytheism that our God was once like us? We differentiate in English between gods (little “g”) and God (capital “G”) to show that there is only one God like this God. **He is God alone** and none compare in any way. This is made clearer by what we next affirm about this one God.

We begin with a title: **the Father**. Importantly, we will not end with God as Father, as if the only thing said about God is that he is Father. **The creeds go on to say that this one God is also Son and Holy Spirit**. We will see this **in coming weeks**, but it needs to be said now so that there is no confusion. For today, let’s stick with this first Article of the Creed on the Father.

Let’s tease out some **implications that God is “Father.”** First, it is interesting that in the OT, the gods are called “sons.” **“I said, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you’” (Ps 82:6)**. “Gods” is the word *elohim*, which is the same word for God. The word **is plural in form**, like “sheep” or “deer” or “fish.” Only the context can tell you if it is translated as “gods” or “God.” Here, the context is obviously plural, because the next word is “sons.” The gods are sons (*beney*). They are called **“sons of the Most High.”**

That these sons are *heavenly* beings is clear in **Psalm 89:6**, “For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the *sons of god* (*beney elim*) is like the LORD?” Clearly, these are heavenly beings, and the ESV even translates “sons of god” as “heavenly beings.” **Job 38:7** also calls them “sons of God,” saying that they were singing for joy at the creation of the world, **before God had even made Adam!** The point is that God calls certain of the invisible members of the heavenly host “sons.” God is their Father.

**But it isn't just them.** Paul told the Athenians, using one of their own poets, that their “**unknown God**” was actually the God of the Bible, God the Father, and that “**we are indeed his offspring**” (**Acts 17:28**). Adam is called the “**son of God**” (**Luke 3:38**). So in a sense, **all the sons of Adam are also God's “sons.”** He is the Father of all. In fact, one of Luther's proof-texts for this word is **Ephesians 4:6**. He is “**one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**”

But there is **a special sense in which only Christians call God “Father.”** Jesus did not teach *the crowds* to pray, “**Our Father who art in heaven,**” but his *disciples*. In the OT, Israel is called God's “**firstborn son**” (**Ex 4:22**). This is the son of prominence, the son of the promise, the son who inherits the

blessings. **Deut 14:1** says, “You are the sons of the LORD your God.”

In the NT, this identity is transferred to Christians. Paul says, “All who are led by the Spirit of God are *sons of God*” (**Rom 8:14**). He says, “In Christ Jesus you are all *sons of God*, through *faith*” (**Gal 3:26**). Interesting that it takes faith, true belief to be God’s son here.

If we have faith, then it is because we were adopted into the family of God as sons (**Gal 4:5**). And by the Spirit we call God Abba, Father (**Rom 8:15**). This word truly brings home what it means for us that God is Father. Luther explains, “The Hebrew word “Abba” –which, as the Apostle himself interprets it, means ‘Father’ – is the word which the tiny heir [inheritor] lisps in childlike confidence to its father, calling him ‘Ab, Ab’; for it is the easiest word the child can learn to speak: or, as the old German language has it, almost easier still, “Etha, Etha.”<sup>14</sup> Is it not remarkable that God makes the word for father so simple in every language? It is usually the first word that a child will learn. In Spanish it is the repetitious “*papa*.” Same in Swedish (*pappa*). In French it is “*papa*” or “*peri*.” In Nepali it is *bubā*. In Chinese it is *bàba*. Same in

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Epistle Sermons: Trinity Sunday to Advent* vol. III, trans. John Nicholas Lenker (Minneapolis, MN: Luther Press, 1909), 176.

Swahili. Italian is the same as the English: *dada*, *daddy*. God wants his people to see, by way of earthly analogy, that he is the first and easiest person to speak to. Indeed, very often in the NT especially, “God” is simply a synonym for the “Father.” To speak of God is to speak of the Father. I believe in God the Father. That is, he is *my* Father.

But *some people have not had good fathers* or even a father at all that they remember. A great problem here, perhaps for all of us, is to superimpose our own fathers onto God, as if what it means for him to be our Father is exactly what it was with our earthly fathers. If you had a terrible Father, then if you do this to God, you will certainly not appreciate that God is a Father. You may even hate it. In this, *you must not create God in your father’s image*. Whether you had a good or bad father, a present or totally absent father, a father for 70 years or one for only a handful of years, you must never impose your earthly father onto God the Father. *For he is unique*.

How so? *2 Corinthians 6:18* says, “I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord *Almighty*.” This time the word “*Almighty*” is found near the context of sons. In Greek this is the word *Pantokrator* (cf. *Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15;*

21:22). Very often, the LXX translates this from *Sabaoth*, “The LORD of Hosts.” This is the word that is next in the creed. “I believe in God the Father *almighty*.” In fact, this word is found in all four of our creeds, and in nearly all the other early creeds as well.

It is a title that gets at the heart of describing God as a Warrior, but also the Head, the Captain, the Ruler of all. If you don't know him through faith, you could fixate on this as if it means God is out to get you. But if you trust in him, then he fights *for* you. That's why “Father” precedes this title. The truth of the matter is that this is a glorious promise that the Lord Almighty, LORD of Hosts, Ruler of the Nations should tell those who have rejected the very knowledge of him that he will be their Father. Who can imagine what such a privilege really means?

### *Creator/Maker Of Heaven and Earth*

The Old Roman Creed ends its article of the Father here. But the Apostles' Creed adds more. In it, the title “Almighty” is followed “Creator of heaven and earth.” A most obvious verse here is Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Luther gives us three other verses

here to think about. In all of them, the Father is creating, but curiously, **all three of them also speak of the Son and Spirit as the Powers the Fathers uses to create** (see **Ps 33:6; Heb 11:3; Jer 10:10-12**),<sup>15</sup> which is fine since **there is only one God**. **Jeremiah 10:10-12** is a powerful passage. “**But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation. Thus shall you say to them: ‘The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.’ It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.**”

Indeed, **there is a Power here** that you and I cannot possibly begin to understand. To say that we believe in the God who made all things is to contemplate the impossible, for **only God can contemplate all things?** To have this kind of power aligned against you should cause you great terror, for what will he do to you for your rebellion against him? But to know that this God is your Father? To have that kind of

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<sup>15</sup> **Going Deeper.** In **Psalm 33:6**, the LORD makes the heavens “by the word” (the Son) and “by the breath of his mouth” (the Spirit). In **Heb 11:3** it is the “word of God” who created. Yet, this is will the Father’s word and the Father’s breath. In **Jer 10:10-12**, the LORD’s “power” and “wisdom” and “understanding” made all things. Christ is the “wisdom” and “power” of God (**1Cor 1:24**), and the Spirit is God’s “power” (**Luke 1:17; 4:14**) and “wisdom” (**Eph 1:17**). Nevertheless, again, they are the Father’s.

Power aligned *for you* rather than against you? This should also make your knees buckle.

Now, there was a context into which this idea of God as creator of heaven and earth became so important to the early church that most of the creeds talk about this. The context is **Gnosticism**. Isn't that curious? We are focusing our attention on the knowledge we need to know about who God so that we might have faith. The word Gnostic has as its root the idea of knowledge.

Gnosticism has a long and interesting history, predating in some ways the early church, having its roots all the way back in pre-Kabbalah Jewish Babylon.<sup>16</sup> But as it developed in the Greek world after the close of the NT, the **Gnostics began to pose a clear and present danger to the burgeoning church**. Especially, they taught that **matter was evil, and spirit was good**. To put that another way, the material universe, the stuff that God created, is evil. Gnostics both then and ever since have in their own ways sought to escape this prison-house called the body and become “free-spirits” untethered by material evil. This is the primary context behind all the creeds insisting that God the Father is the creator of

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<sup>16</sup> See **Daniel Boyarin**, “The Gospel of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John,” *HTR* 94:3 (2001): 243-84.

heaven and earth. This kind of statement safeguards young Christian minds from being tempted to abandon the biblical truth when slick snake-oil salesmen come into their midst and tempt them to live the “higher spiritual life” and demean God’s “good” creation. “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31).

### *And of All Things Visible and Invisible*

We should add one point here to reinforce this. 1<sup>st</sup> Nicaea changes the language of the Apostles’ Creed from “Creator of heaven and earth” to “Maker of all things visible and invisible.” Lest you think that these are the same, 2<sup>nd</sup> Nicaea has them both, “Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.” This addition of that which is visible vs. that which is invisible was more targeted language against the Gnostics. For the Gnostics had a whole series of invisible powers (gods or Aeons) who preceded both the Father and Jesus (whom they viewed as distinct Aeons). But the creed here insists that God didn’t just make the material universe of the sky and the earth. He also made everything that is visible and invisible. That necessarily includes any so-

called gods. The Father is not under them; **he is their Creator.**

This again, is purely biblical language. Curiously, the closest we come is **Col 1:15-17**, a text which is all **about Christ**. “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*” But remember what we saw earlier, “*For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist*” (**1Cor 8:6**). So when the Creed says that the Father created all things, he did. But so also did the Son and the Spirit, for there is only one God.

Here, we see that **Christianity is unlike other religions**. The religions of the East insist that **God is the universe**, and the universe is God. This is called **Pantheism**. Some insist that the universe is indwelt by God; he is “in” everything. This is **Panentheism**. Christianity insists that God the Father is before everything and is distinct from his creation. We see this in one of Tertullian’s early statements of the Rule of

Faith. “There is but one God, and no other besides the Maker of the world, who produced the universe out of nothing, by his Word sent forth first of all” (Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics* 13). And, of course, even this is biblical language. For God “calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Rom 4:17). This is creation *ex nihilo*, out of nothing.

But this visible-invisible addition includes even more. It would have to include all things you can see with your eyes, but also things so tiny that you need a microscope or so far away that you need a telescope. Indeed, this reaches beyond even these instruments. Some of these things are astronomically gigantic. There are things so large that 400 of our Milky Way Galaxies could be contained in them (see Galaxy IC 1101), and others that are even bigger, but we cannot see them because they are so far away. The Father made those. There are things so small that the only way we know that they exist is through mathematical formulas that prove them to exist. The Father made those. Supernova stars and galaxy superclusters, atoms, quarks, and, strings, God the Father Almighty made them all.<sup>17</sup> Of course he did, for it is irrational

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<sup>17</sup> For a fascinating internet tour that you will not regret see Cary Huang, “The Scale of the Universe 2,” ported to Pixi.js by Matthew Martori, <https://htwins.net/scale2/>.

and absurd that they exist eternally themselves or came into being and order through chaos.

## To Know God

David once pondered, “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Ps 8:3-4; cf. Heb 2:6-8). Curiously, someone explains, “When one looks at the scale of phenomena from the human up to the largest macro scale that we know of, and from the human down to the smallest micro scale we know of, where [is man] within that hierarchy? Right smack in the middle. There’s as much above us as there is below us, there’s as much greater than us as there is lesser.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, man is the centerpiece of God’s entire creation.

We were made in God’s image. And we were made to have knowledge of him. All humans willingly gave up their knowledge of God and traded it in for sin. In doing so, they lost themselves. To have any knowledge of yourself, you

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<sup>18</sup> Randall Carlson, “Hidden Mathematics,” *After Skool* (Dec 8, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7oyZGW99os&ab\\_channel=AfterSkool](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7oyZGW99os&ab_channel=AfterSkool). This is easily visualized in Huang’s Scale of the Universe. As Protagoras said, “Man is the measure of all things.”

need to have knowledge of this God that we have seen in the first Article of the Creed. When you do, it is not possible to have a greasy familiarity, a kind of lackadaisical emotional tryst with God if you know who he actually is.

## Do You Believe?

But you must move beyond mere knowledge. The question you must answer is **do you believe** in **God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things both visible and invisible?** **Not just do you know** about him. In that sense, “**even the demons believe that God is one ... and shudder!**” (**James 2:19**). You don’t want to be just like a demon, do you? Do you *believe* in him? Allow Luther to give you the deep sense of what this belief entails.

Of all the works of Luther, and there are 127 volumes in German(!), he once said you could burn everything he wrote except two things. 1. *The Bondage of the Will*. 2. *The Small Catechism*.<sup>19</sup> After stating for us the Article on the Father from the Creed in this catechism he asks, “**What is meant by this Article?**” “**Answer. I believe that God hath created me**

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<sup>19</sup> **Martin Luther**, “Letter to Wolfgang Capito [Wittenberg] July 9, 1536,” *Luther’s Works, Vol. 50: Letters III*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 50 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 172–173.

and all that exists; that he hath given and still preserves to me my body and soul with all my limbs and senses, my reason and all the faculties of my mind, together with my raiment, food, home and family, and all my property; that he daily provides me abundantly with all the necessaries of life, protects me from all danger, and preserves me and guards me against all evil; all which he does out of pure, paternal, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me, for all which I am in duty bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey him. This is most certainly true.” Hence, his last two proof-texts for the Father are a great way to conclude. “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). This is our doctrine of God the Father. This is intimate knowledge. Do you believe?

May the prayer of David be yours. “Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make

great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you,  
our God, and praise your glorious name” (1Chr 29:10-13).

## Appendix: Luther's Smaller Catechism, The First Article

*I believe<sup>1</sup> in God<sup>2</sup> the Father<sup>3</sup> Almighty<sup>4</sup>, Maker<sup>5</sup> of heaven<sup>6</sup> and earth<sup>7</sup>.*

*What is meant by this Article?*

*Answer.* I<sup>1</sup> believe<sup>2</sup> that God<sup>3</sup> hath created<sup>4</sup> me<sup>5</sup> and all that exists<sup>6</sup>; that he hath given<sup>7</sup> and still preserves to me<sup>8</sup> my<sup>9</sup> body<sup>10</sup> and soul<sup>11</sup> with all my limbs and senses<sup>12</sup>, my reason and all the faculties of my mind<sup>13</sup>, together with my raiment<sup>14</sup>, food<sup>15</sup>, home and family<sup>16</sup>, and all my property<sup>17</sup>; that he daily<sup>18</sup> provides me abundantly<sup>19</sup> with all the necessities of life<sup>20</sup>, protects me from all danger<sup>21</sup>, and preserves me and guards me against all evil<sup>22</sup>; all which he does out of pure, paternal<sup>23</sup>, and divine<sup>24</sup> goodness<sup>25</sup> and mercy<sup>26</sup>, without<sup>27</sup> any merit<sup>28</sup> or worthiness<sup>29</sup> in me<sup>30</sup>, for all which I am in duty bound<sup>31</sup> to thank<sup>32</sup>, praise<sup>33</sup>, serve<sup>34</sup>, and obey him<sup>35</sup>. This is most certainly true<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. 10:17.

<sup>2</sup> John 17:3.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. 4:6.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Chron. 29:10–13.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 1:1.

<sup>6</sup> Ps. 33:6.

<sup>7</sup> Heb. 11:3. Jer. 10:12.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. 1:12.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. 2:1.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 8:6.

<sup>4</sup> Acts. 17:24.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 1:27.

<sup>6</sup> Col. 1:16, 17. Rev. 4:11.

<sup>7</sup> Job 10:11, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Ps. 116:12.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Thess. 5:23.

<sup>10</sup> Gen. 2:7.

<sup>11</sup> Eccl. 12:7.

<sup>12</sup> Prov. 20:12.

<sup>13</sup> Matt. 10:31.

<sup>14</sup> Matt. 6:28–30.

<sup>15</sup> Matt. 6:25, 26. Ps. 145:15, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Ps. 128:1–4.

<sup>17</sup> Ps. 115:13, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Matt. 6:11.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Tim. 6:17.

<sup>20</sup> Ps. 23:1, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Isa. 43:2.

<sup>22</sup> Ps. 23:4. 2 Tim. 4:18.

<sup>23</sup> Matt. 6:8.

<sup>24</sup> Ps. 103:1–5.

<sup>25</sup> Ps. 33:5.

<sup>26</sup> Lamentations 3:22, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Luke 17:10.

<sup>28</sup> Ps. 144:3.

<sup>29</sup> Gen. 32:10.

<sup>30</sup> John 15:5.

<sup>31</sup> Ps. 116:12–14.

<sup>32</sup> Ps. 136:1.

<sup>33</sup> Rev. 4:11.

<sup>34</sup> Josh. 24:14.

<sup>35</sup> Deut. 10:12, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Tit. 3:8.

Now that you are done, go back and read the sermon according to the two outlines I had in my mind when I wrote it:

**Outline 1 (These are the Sermons First 5 Headings):**

- A. Faith and Belief
- B. Knowing and God
- C. "I Believe"
- B'. Knowledge of God
- A'. In One God
  - 1. *The Father Almighty*
  - 2. *Creator/Maker Of Heaven and Earth*
  - 3. *And of All Things Visible and Invisible*

**Outline 1 (The Sermon's Headings minus above B'.):**

- A. Faith and Belief
- B. Knowing and God
- C. I Believe
- C'. In One God
  - a. *The Father Almighty*
  - b. *Creator of Heaven and Earth*
  - c. *Of all things Visible and Invisible*
- B'. Do you Know God?
- A'. Do You Believe?

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