

The Faith We Confess

A Series of Sermons based on the Core Doctrines of the Nicene Creed

God the Father Almighty: “All Powerful and Personal”

Final marching orders; we have all received them. Soldiers get them before they go to the battle field. Athletes get them before the game. Students get them before the big test and employees get them in their weekly staff meetings.

Marching orders is that one final time for coaches, commanders, and teachers to go over last minute preparations, warn of impending dangers, and offer words of solace and inspiration before the big event.

Our scripture text today comes out of such a situation. Our Lord Jesus Christ has spent a great deal of time with his disciples, building them up in the faith, teaching them the truths of God, and revealing himself to them as Lord and Savior. They have heard the Sermon on the Mount, witnessed Jesus calm the storm and heal lepers, and they have learned about the cost of discipleship. Now it is time for the disciples to take what they have learned and go out and practice it themselves in their own ministries. Jesus has spent his time with his disciples for a purpose. The purpose was to equip them to be sent out to do ministry in his name. It was game day and Jesus had rallied his troops together one final time before sending them to war. This is the context in which he offered these words of encouragement, warning, and exhortation to his disciples.

God Almighty: The All Powerful God

I chose this text of scripture to talk about the doctrine of God the Father Almighty (the first person of the Holy Trinity) because I think Jesus’ words encapsulate the essence of what we mean when we say “I believe in God the Father Almighty” in the Nicene Creed.

You will notice from the text that the word “Father” is specifically used in v. 29, when Jesus refers to “not a hair falling from our head without the will of the Father.” But what about the word “Almighty”? We do not find that word used in the text, but we do find the essence of its meaning.

In this speech Jesus warns his disciples of what will happen to them when they go out into the world to minister in his name. He tells them they will face resistance. There will be persecution, arrests, and there will be people who hate them because they first hated Christ. This is what Jesus meant when he told his disciples that “the student was not above his teacher.” If Christ faced such opposition then so too will the disciples. This is something that is hard for us American Christians to grasp in our lives of comfort and ease (though I think the times are beginning to change). None-the-less, this is what is what Jesus had to say to his original twelve.

In this speech he told his disciples who it is they ought to fear. They should not fear the ones who would be persecuting them. They were not to fear the townspeople, hostile neighbors and family members, nor were they to fear governors and kings who had the power to put them to death. They were to fear God Almighty. Men only have the power to take human life; God Almighty has the power to destroy both body and soul in hell.

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

In many ways our society fears all the wrong things. Teenagers are very self-conscious. They are always wondering what their peers will think of them; therefore they are very careful to make sure they dress right, listen to the right music, and do the things the things that would make them popular and accepted, even if it is immoral and self-destructive; all in the hopes of being accepted. Adults are no different; we too want to be accepted, so we play the same games, but in more sophisticated kinds of adult ways. Not only this, but we adults also fear getting old, going broke, being alone, and dying. We do so many things to try to reverse such inevitabilities because we fear them happening to us. But where is our fear of God?

We do not like to think of God in such terms.

Liberal theologians and denominations (of which ours is one) have sought to remove the “fear of God” from our minds. There is no hell and there is no judgment, there is only a God of love who accepts us just the way we are, no matter what. God is a God who makes no demands of us and who enforces no consequences upon us for our human rebellion.

Richard Niebuhr, in his famous book *The Kingdom of God in America*, says that Americans prefer "A God **without** wrath who brought men **without** sin into a kingdom **without** judgment through the ministrations of a Christ **without** a cross." This is what theological liberalism does to Christianity. It guts truth of God being known as Almighty. It is a lie and it is a rejection of God's self-revelation in the Bible.

In many ways modern evangelicals have not done much better in recent years. In their quest to be relevant to the culture evangelicals have capitulated and turned Jesus into a “warm-fuzzy” in their preaching and worship. In their preaching it is all about Jesus being our “buddy” and our “best friend” and in their modern contemporary worship the lyrics are often loaded with casual, sappy, “me and Jesus” lyrics. There is no sense of fear and reverence of God's holiness in their worship. They have turned God into a “casual,” “come as you are,” “trendy,” “latte-sipping,” Divine Being. It is a false god.

Need I say anything about the modern charismatic, “name it claim it,” “prosperity gospel” movement in America? The most famous and most watched TV preachers in all of America are typically of this stripe. They have turned God into a cosmic candy-man who wants us happy, whole, and loaded. God's chief end for you in life is not to “glorify God and enjoy him forever,” it is that your needs be met. The holiness and fear of God has disappeared in their preaching and teaching. No wonder their churches are full. Its narcissistic and sinful human beings are in love with narcissism.

The Bible teaches us, our text teaches us, and most importantly Jesus teaches us that God is **Almighty**. So when the creed names God as Almighty she is on good grounds. God is all-powerful and God is sovereign. God is not be trifled with. Yes, God means business. This is serious stuff! Life is serious stuff. There is nothing more serious than our relationship with God. The truth matters, the relationship matters, our obedience matters. The **Almighty** matters. It is God who the Bible tells us we ought to fear; fear not in the sense of being scared, but fear in the

sense of reverence, respect, and a deep inner awareness that God is holy and is not to be taken lightly.

The book of proverbs tells us that the “fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7) and the prophet Isaiah tells us that,

The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy,
he is the one you are to fear,
he is the one you are to dread...

-Isaiah 8:12-13

God the Father: The Loving, Intimate, and Relational God

But this is not the whole story. Jesus tells his disciples that God is also our Father. God is the One who will meet his disciple’s needs. God is the One who will see them through their trials and difficulties, as they go out into the world to minister in the name of Christ. This is what a Father does.

In naming himself as Father, God as revealed himself as One who condescends himself to us. He comes down to us as One who is approachable. God is not Almighty at the expense of being unknowable and unapproachable. God is personal. God is our Father. He knows everything about us. As Jesus says in the text “there is not a hair that can fall from our head apart from the will of the Father.” That is how intimate God is. This is how personal He is, that is how approachable God is. God is a God of relationships, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; each One being in perfect harmonious, loving relationship with one another. Because God is this way he desires to draw us humans into relationship with him. The language of calling God Father reflects this deep intimacy that he has for us. God can be known, intimately, through the way of the Son.

Unfortunately, calling our God Father is no longer vogue in many quarters of the church.

In the mainline church we often go to great lengths to avoid naming God as Father. The language of the Bible has long been under assault by radical feminists and inclusivists. They believe that Father and all masculine language perpetuate patriarchy, male domination, and exclude women from the fold. They think that by avoiding the word “Father” they will ease the consciences of women who had abusive dads. This is why they have tinkered with the wording of our hymns, this is why they use the clumsy language of “God’s self” in place of the masculine pronoun “he” when they refer to God, and this is why the word “God our Parent” is beginning to creep into the liturgy of the church, even in the Lord’s Prayer. God is not parent. God did not name himself as such. God is much more intimate than parent, God is Father.

There is a reason why the Bible uses masculine pronouns (as opposed to feminine pronouns) when referring to God and it is not because of patriarchy. In Bible times the writers of the Bible were surrounded by cultures that affirmed feminine deities, so it could not be because of patriarchy. The reason the Bible uses masculine pronouns and the name Father is because feminine imagery ultimately was typically associated with fertility cults and copulation amongst the deities.

This does not mean that the Bible does not have feminine imagery for God. In Isaiah, the prophet tells us that God is like “a mother who comforts her child” (Isa. 66:17) and Jesus said that he “longed to gather the children of Israel together as a hen who gathers her chicks under her wings.” (Matt. 23:37.). There is also strong feminine imagery that is associated with the Holy Spirit. But we must always remember that Jesus, the one whom we believe and claim to have been God’s very own Son, and the supreme revelation of God, (for we Christians believe he is God in human flesh) named God as “Father.”

Jesus always referred to God as Father; never as Parent or Mother. He revealed God’s name to be Father so when we let go of that language we are really letting go of Jesus. Do we really want to go there? This is not to mention the fact that when we let go of Father, we ruin the whole Biblical understanding of the relationship of the Trinity. The “Father sends the Son” and “the Son reveals the Father.” The Father and the Son are different (the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father) yet they are also the same. “I and the Father are one.” There is a sameness that exists between the Father and Son that would not be there if we were to say “Mother and Son.”

I offer this quote to you from the late Elizabeth Achtemeir, former Old Testament professor and teacher of homiletics (preaching) at Union Seminary in Richmond. She was very much an “against the grain” kind of female theologian in the PCUSA. She fought against the onslaught to remove Father (and all things masculine) from the Bible and liturgy of the church.

But when the radical feminists started changing the language for God, they struck at the heart of my faith. They wanted to eliminate “Lord,” “Father,” “Master,” “King,” but God is all of these- the Lord and King who has ruled my life in love for countless years, the master whose commands can lead me in the way of life abundant, the Father who sent His only Son to die in order to forgive all my sins and include me eternally in his joyful household. Those truths about God have been given to me, not by male patriarchal desire to degrade me and to make me a second class citizen, but by the very speaking of God through the scriptures, in love and mercy and grace. Jesus teaches me to pray “Our Father...” He offers me the same relationship he has with the Father! Should I then turn my back on that fantastic offer of communion, especially since I have come to know that Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? (*Not Till I Have Done*, Achtemeir, WJK, 1999, pg. 18-19)

Application for the Christian Life

To think about this message in terms of practical application for the Christian life I offer you these two considerations:

1. Whose opinion matters to you most? Do God and his desires hold sway? Or does the world and your own? In our text today Jesus warned his disciples about being more concerned about what others think than what God thinks, when he told his disciples that they “ought to fear the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell.” (did you know that God’s judgment was a favorite subject of Jesus?) They should not worry about what others think about or could do to them. They should not fear the wrong things, or the wrong people. Those people and things, in the end, could do little harm to them. They

would certainly of no help in the ways of salvation, as evidenced by their ability “to only kill the body.” But God is quite different. God is the Almighty, all powerful God who can destroy both “body and soul in hell.” Do we have a healthy view of God’s Almighty power, holiness, and awesomeness? If we don’t then it may be a sign that there are more important things in our lives than the **Almighty** God.

2. Do you know God as Father and do you trust him as such? The world tells us that God cannot be known. The best we humans can do is to faintly grasp for this “far off God,” who has left this world to spin out of control on its own. The Bible says that God can be known intimately, as Father, through the revelation of the Son. Jesus reveals God to us face-to-face, intimately and relationally. Do you know this God who can be intimately known, or are the words of the creed just jumbled jargon? And do you trust him? Do you trust God as the Loving Father who desires to give good gifts to his children (good gifts as God defines them), who will meet your needs and who “knows the very number of hairs on your head,” and who will see you through your time of trial and suffering? Do you trust God as Father in your life? The word of application for you is to trust God for your provisions; for he is a good Heavenly Father.

I believe in God the Father Almighty.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.