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Chapter One

BELIEF IN

GOD IS PERSONAL

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

The Apostles' Creed begins simply yet profoundly: "I believe . . ." With that beginning, the Creed supports the biblical truth that faith in God is personal. It is each person's statement of faith, calling the reciter to witness to what he personally believes.

A person does not subscribe to the Creed because he is a member of a church that holds to it; instead, he already believes the truth stated in the Creed before associating himself with a church that professes it. "I believe," he says, and on the basis of his personal testimony, he is received into the fellowship.

A Christian church is a community of believers; every member believes the same basic truths as revealed in the Bible. Otherwise they would not gather together, for "what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?"

(2 Corinthians 6:15). Hence, the Creed is an expression of their belief by virtue of its having been first an expression of the personal faith of each member.

The importance of this truth cannot be overstated. Belief in God through our Lord Jesus Christ is utterly personal. Unless one understands this, sooner or later the practice of religion becomes tedious. This happens in many lives. Teenagers drop out of Sunday school because it bores them. Adults fall away because the sermons meet no conscious need.

In some cases the sermons are pointed. The listeners understand but reject the truth. They are like the wicked of Psalm 10, who “do not care about the Lord; in their pride they think that God doesn’t matter” (Psalm 10:4, TEV).

There is little hope for men and women who think that God does not matter. There *is* hope for men and women who think that God *does* matter, but who do not yet know Him personally. Having been reared in a church, they assume that their church membership safeguards their future. The truth is, they are as lost *in* the church as the unchurched are *outside* it.

Salvation belongs only to those who internalize the truth of the gospel, those who turn from their sin and in faith ask Christ to come into their lives. They are genuine Christians, responding to Christ’s call. They heed the apostle who says, “If *you* confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in *your* heart that God raised Him from the dead, *you* shall be saved” (Romans 10:9, emphasis added).

If *you* do this, you will be able to recite the Creed truthfully:

I believe in God . . .

Chapter Two

“I BELIEVE IN GOD”

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

*I*t is not always easy to believe in God. Sometimes we feel like the man who cried out, “I do believe; but help me not to doubt!” (Mark 9:24 NLT). Only those who sense a deep need for God really believe. Others accept the idea of God without actually committing themselves to Him, or they dismiss Him as a superstition no longer tolerable in the age of science. It is necessary to thirst for God in order to believe in Him (Psalm 42:2), and in the Apostles’ Creed we express our belief.

None of us reasoned the way to God. The Bible makes no effort whatsoever to prove that God is; it assumes His existence.

However, there is ample evidence to support the probability of God. Christians find it convincing. The

evidence is also damning, because those who ignore it have no excuse for their refusal to believe in God.

Consider the rationality of the universe. Its existence gives evidence for a thinking, reasoning Creator. Theologians usually discuss the rationality of the universe under four headings.

The first is *cosmology*. The dictionary defines *cosmology* as “that branch of metaphysics which treats the character of the universe as an orderly system, or cosmos.” Only an almighty God could have produced the universe as we know it.

The second heading is *teleology*. Teleology is “the doctrine or belief that design is apparent in nature.” Nature’s design is too complex for things to have just happened or evolved. Behind the functioning of nature is an intelligent Creator.

The third is *anthropology*. This is the science or study of man. Christians believe that man is the chief evidence of design in the universe. Of all the creatures, he alone is able to understand that design. Thus, man, like his Creator, is intelligent.

Man also has personality. Can anyone really believe that man is an accident, a chance collision of matter? Since we cannot produce something from nothing, a person cannot have evolved from an impersonal source. Thus, the God who made man must be personal.

The fourth heading is *ontology*. The dictionary defines *ontology* as “the science of being or reality; the branch of knowledge that investigates the nature, essential properties, and relations of beings.” According to this argument, man’s striving for perfection is evidence of a perfect source—God Himself. We are imperfect crea-

tures living in an imperfect world. Where did we get our concept of perfection, if not from the source of life, God Himself?

There is only one explanation for the nature of man: creation by a perfect God. As David wrote many centuries ago: "O Lord, You have searched me and known me. . . . For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:1, 13–14).

Better, perhaps, than any intellectual argument for the existence of God is the Christian's experience of Him. As David also said, "How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You" (Psalm 139:17–18). Hence, we can say individually and unitedly,

I believe in *God* . . .

Chapter Three

“I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER”

I believe in God the *Father* Almighty ...

The Creed does not permit belief in God as an abstract force. It states simply but firmly, “I believe in God the Father.” What does this term imply? The answer is partially given through the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32).

The Prodigal Son is perhaps the best-known story of the Bible. What family does not have its own “prodigal son,” and perhaps a prodigal daughter as well? The younger son in the story was worse than a spendthrift; he was thoroughly rebellious and wayward. His squandering of his father’s money was symptomatic of a disease of the soul. But eventually he came to his senses and returned to his old father, whom he had forsaken so callously.

That beloved story, however, is more than the spiritual odyssey of a young man. The central revelation concerns the character of the father. The miracle is that the

father never stopped waiting for his son and was willing to take him in when he came home. Every family has its prodigal son, but not many fathers are as loving and forgiving as that father. The son is what literary critics might call an archetype (that is, a type which occurs frequently in life and literature). The father is not an archetype; he is a rarity.

God is like that father who ran to meet his returning son. Or, better yet, the father is like God, who welcomes sinners home to His heart. This is no doubt one of the loveliest truths of the Bible. God is our Father.

God is Father in two distinct senses: He is the Father of all humankind by creation, and He is the Father of Christians by redemption. This is a most important distinction. Non-Christians are not entitled to address God in prayer as “Our Father who art in heaven.” In their case, He is Father only in the sense that He is the source of all life—their Creator.

Paul quotes approvingly a Greek poet who said, “For we also are His children” (Acts 17:28). And in Ephesians Paul says he bowed his knees “before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name” (Ephesians 3:14–15).

Yet He is Father in the redemptive sense, and the Bible notes this truth about the character of God. The story of the Prodigal Son dramatizes this aspect of His character: there He is, waiting with outstretched arms for His wayward children to repent and come home. All who turn from their evil ways and return to Him in faith find the warm embrace of a Father in heaven.

The concept of God as Father does not begin in the New Testament, but in the Old. When our Lord taught

His disciples to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven," He was not talking about something entirely new to them. Their Hebrew Old Testament revealed that God wished to establish a father-son relationship with His ancient people. He tried, even though He seems not to have succeeded.

That is evident in David's conversation with his son Solomon. David told Solomon that God had denied him the privilege of building the temple; Solomon would build it instead. God said to David, "A son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest. . . . He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son and I will be his father" (1 Chronicles 22:9–10).

Earlier God had taught David to call Him his Father. In a passage that really looks beyond David to the Messiah, God says, "He will cry to Me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation'" (Psalm 89:26). But there isn't much evidence in the Old Testament that David or anyone else was truly conscious of the fatherhood of God. They called upon Him as Adonai and Jehovah, but seldom as their Father.

God yearned for such a friendship. Israel spurned it. Through the prophet Isaiah, God complained about Israel's coldness of heart. "Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have revolted against Me," says the Lord (Isaiah 1:2). A moment later, God laments: "Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him" (Isaiah 1:4).

God called His people "sons who act corruptly." That may be the source of our Lord's parable of the

Prodigal Son. The people of ancient Israel, whom God wished to bring up as sons, rejected His fatherhood. There were a few exceptions. Isaiah, for example, called upon God as Father. He prayed, “For You are our Father . . . You, O Lord, are our Father” (Isaiah 63:16; cf. 64:8).

Jeremiah was like a voice crying in the wilderness. Ancient Israel had no regard for the fatherhood of God, much to God’s sorrow. He mourned over the people. “‘How I would set you among My sons and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful inheritance of the nations!’ And I said, ‘You shall call Me, My Father, and not turn away from following Me’” (Jeremiah 3:19).

There was no response. Not until the unique Son of God came into the world was the fatherhood of God truly recognized. But God still invites people to become His sons through faith in Jesus Christ. As Paul says to Christians, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26).

Have you responded? If not, God is not *your* Father. He wants to be, but cannot be until you come to Him through faith in Christ Jesus. Then you, too, will be able to say:

I believe in God the *Father* . . .