

“WE BELIEVE IN ONE TRUE GOD, THE FATHER”

Genesis 1:1-31, Galatians 4:4-6, John 3:16-21

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In his book, *Deepening Your Conversation with God*, Ben Patterson writes:

“[W]hen [my children] got old enough to wrestle with me, we played a game we called ‘Jabba the Butt.’ The name came from a large, disgusting evil character in the *Star Wars* trilogy called Jabba the Hutt. We changed the surname for the sake of humor.

“I would play Jabba and roar around the room as the kids would shoot their laser guns at me and try to wrestle me to the floor. Sometimes I would get into the role too much and their little imaginations would slip into stark terror. They would feel my great strength and hear my booming voice, and Daddy would be transformed into Jabba. The game would stop, and I would hold them tenderly and remind them that I was their Daddy. The juxtaposition of great overwhelming strength and power with tender love is as hard for a child to hold as it is for an adult. My love for them was staggering when they coupled it with my power.

“Addressing God as Father can become electrifying, if we can put these two together in our minds: combining infinite love and tenderness with infinite holiness and power. It can become the source of our greatest seriousness and our deepest joy, that one of such might can be called Father, and that our Father can be one with such might! . . . Fear and love go together.”¹

In our world today, we can also come upon great and mighty enemies that also seek to overwhelm us and hold us captive to their will and their ways. Problems come up that send us into complete terror and fear. But we have One who is greater than all the powers of this world, the Lord our God. He is Almighty, with none to compare to, and none that can measure up to Him in power or wisdom or authority. He is the Mighty and Everlasting God.

So when we consider Who God is, what comes to our minds? When confronted with all the things of this world, do we consider God in our lives? Maybe we don’t even think about Him at all.

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2002] pg. 91-92)

And there is such a controversy today about who God is, it is possible that we find ourselves believing something that is quite opposite of who God really is. So as we look at this first phrase of the Nicene Creed today, "*We believe in One God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen,*" I want to help you to begin to discover a healthy understanding of who God is.

Our Old Testament lesson of Genesis 1 gives us the first look at who God is. He is the Creator of heavens and the earth. Just think of that - the Creator of the heavens and the earth. I took the time to read the whole first chapter of Genesis for you today so that you could begin to grasp the awesome power and creativity of God. He speaks, and everything comes into being. Out of nothingness, God called the world into existence. One step at a time, God sculpted the earth and all the universe around it.

As we look at each day's activities in that first week of creation, we begin to see the awesome power that God has to do His good will. Everything that IS came into being by God's great power, and through God's great design. Nothing that IS came about on its own, but God put it into being just as He wished. Though people in this world try to explain how everything came into existence all on its own, without any influence or organization from any higher power, we have no better understanding of how the universe and the earth came about than what is listed here in Genesis 1. Without God's creativity and power to bring about everything in this world, there would not have been anything at all. Out of nothingness, He established everything, merely by the power of His voice. He spoke and it came into being. The marvelous power of His voice gave existence to all we know.

Let's look briefly at all that God has made for life to exist here on the earth. First we have the earth itself. This massive planet set into space. Rather than just a rock out in the middle of nowhere, God created light that began to shine upon the earth. He set the earth into motion, revolving at just the right pace so as to establish day and night. He moved it into orbit to establish months and seasons and years. He put the earth at just the right distance from the sun to keep it warm and bring forth life.

And to bring life to the earth, God spoke the atmosphere into existence, separating outer space from the surface of the planet. In this atmosphere, He designed different layers upon which to protect

the earth from all sorts of dangerous things, like severe ultraviolet light and solar rays, asteroids, and other cosmic particles. In the midst of these layers of the sky, God brought about clouds, and moisture, and oxygen-rich air in which to bring about life.

Then God spoke into existence the oceans and seas that formed because of the separation of the layers of the sky. These waters began to collect and fill the earth, to the point that God separated the dry ground from the waters, providing different environments in which life could be sustained. On the land, God created plants; trees and bushes and grains and flowers, all to reproduce and fill the land with life.

And He did the same thing with the oceans, bring forth fish, and whales, and sharks, and minnows, and all kinds of sea creatures that could multiply and fill the oceans and seas and lakes with life. The ecosystems were put into place that gave life to all the creatures that live in the waters.

And God put birds in the air to rule the sky, great condors and eagles, hawks and ospreys, and also the robin, the cardinal, the hummingbird and the sparrow. Each kind was given flight so that it could soar freely in the air, and live within the vegetation of the land. Each was instructed to reproduce to populate the whole earth, each with its own niche in which to live and thrive.

And then there were land animals that God spoke into existence. Reptiles, amphibians and mammals of all sorts, cattle and livestock of all varieties, insects and all the creatures that crawl on the ground. Everything created to multiply and fill the earth, each according to their own kind.

And finally, God decided to establish mankind to oversee all the wonders of what God had made. He made us in His image, one spirit with Him, unique from all other creatures, to care for all of God's creation. God made man and woman, fashioned in their own way in God's likeness, so that they, too could reproduce and fill the earth. Each animal was given food to eat from the plants that God had established on the land. And "*God saw all that He had made, and it was very good*" (Genesis 1:31).

Awesome power, great wisdom, perfect design and a perfect world, God established it all by the power of His voice. Everything seen and unseen came about through the design and wonder of Almighty God. From the smallest molecule to the tallest mountain, God gave it to us to enjoy and to use

for His glory. And He designed us to give Him glory in all that He has made.

There are many who disagree with this explanation of how the earth came into existence. But God asks them the same as He asked Job, *“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone - while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy. Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, ‘This far you may come and no further; here is where your proud waves halt?...’”* (Job 38:4-11). We are only spectators and discoverers of all that God has done to make this earth what we know.

So who is this Creator of the universe and the Master Workman who established the earth? God is the one true, holy and living God, the Eternal Spirit, the Holy Trinity. He is greater than the whole universe, yet small enough to live in our hearts. He is perfect in every way. He is the one who has given us all life.

And God is perfectly holy. There is nothing evil in Him, and His laws and commandments work to guide us to the very best there is. If we follow His will and His ways, He promises to bless us and direct us to keep from evil. But if we do not follow God’s ways, He removes His hand of blessing from us, and we are left to our own resources and our own strength and our own wisdom, and that takes us into deep darkness and much evil.

As I’m reading through the Old Testament, it is very apparent that God does not tolerate us disobeying His laws and commands. In the history of the kings of Israel and Judah, the kings that followed the Lord God and obeyed His commands were able to live in peace and security, because God stood beside them and protected them and provided for them and delivered them from their enemies. But when the kings disobeyed God’s laws and commands, when they worshipped the man-made gods of the surrounding peoples, it was not long before there was great evil being done and it almost always

ended with Israel and Judah being attacked and overrun by their enemies.

God expects us to follow Him. But He has given us the choice to either receive Him or reject Him, and our futures are dependent upon the choices we make. We can become enslaved to the things of this world and follow all of the world's ways, and in the end, God will reject us because we have rejected Him. God does not tolerate any sin in His presence, so if we reject His Salvation through Jesus Christ, we are still covered by our sin, and therefore cannot even hope to be in His presence. He will cast us away from Himself.

The Apostle Paul states it well in Galatians 4:1-6 that we heard earlier. Outside of God's Salvation through Jesus Christ, there is no hope for us to become a part of His family. We may claim to be His followers, but unless we have Christ Jesus as Lord of our hearts, and profess Him as our Savior, and then live according to all the ways of God, we are not accepted into the family of God, and His Holy Spirit does not live in us.

But when we have Jesus as our Savior, we become heirs of God and receive adoption as sons and daughters of God, and God freely supplies us with the guidance of His Holy Spirit to do what is good and right in His eyes as we follow His laws and commands.

In this way, God is known to us in these three different ways: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are distinct in character, but inseparable, eternally one in essence and power. Each is the fullness of God, yet individual members of the one true God.

In the days of Abraham and Moses, in the days of King David and Solomon, even in the days of Daniel and Malachi, God the Father made Himself known to the people in fire, in storm, in earthquake and in plague. He also made Himself known through the still small voice speaking to His prophets.

Jesus is God who came to earth in human form so that we can come to understand the Father. He is the perfect Sacrifice needed to pay for the sins of the world. All those who put their faith and trust in Him receive forgiveness of their sins and salvation for their souls. In His human body, Jesus exemplified all the power and authority of God the Father, yet chose to be in our likeness so that we

could comprehend God more fully. He demonstrated that power at various times throughout His time here with us, but humbled Himself to the full plan of God for the Salvation of the world, to all those who would believe in Him, receive Him, and then follow Him. He was perfect in every way and spoke the wisdom of God. Jesus, God in human form, bridged the gap between death and life as He created the path to heaven through His death and resurrection.

And when Jesus' ministry was complete here, He returned to the Father, but sent the Holy Spirit to be with those who follow Jesus. The Holy Spirit works within the followers of Jesus to convict us of sin, and draw us closer to God the Father. Everything He does, He does to lift up the ministry of Jesus Christ, enabling us to do the ministry of Jesus here on the earth, too.

Since God is infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness, and love, He is able to do all things that bring Him glory and honor. There are only two things that God cannot do - 1) God cannot lie, and 2) God cannot do evil. He works at all times for our best interest because He loves us so much. And He continues to call each of us to Him so that we might experience His greatness and submit our lives to His will.

Out of that great power and wisdom and justice and goodness and love, God continues to reach down to all of His creation in order to provide us real life in Him. God works in the lives of all those who seek Him, sharing His power, wisdom, justice, goodness and love by His Holy Spirit. Our Gospel lesson today explains God's Almighty plan for us. Listen to these words of Jesus to Nicodemus, found in John 3:16-21. (READ John 3:16-21)

God loves all of His creation and desires that we respect Him, and obey Him, and follow His Son, Jesus, so that when our life ends here in this world, we will be able to be with Him for all eternity. But we have the choice as to what we will do with our lives. We can follow God's ways and find His blessings and protection and provision; or we can reject God's ways and live on our own resources, seeking to find life in our own way. We can either walk with God, or stand up against God. And God determines the consequences of each action.

Jesus makes it clear to us, “*Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the Name of God’s one and only Son*” (John 3:18). Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life for all who will follow Him. He brings the light of God into the hearts and lives of those who receive Him as their Savior and Lord. But those who do not receive Him find only the darkness of this world, and they are led only by the ways of the world that contradict the ways of God. And they are limited in their wisdom, and power, and justice, and goodness, and love because it is only by their own ways that they live.

But God does not stand ready to destroy us whenever we make a mistake, or walk away from His will and His way. God desires that all people come to Him and seek to follow His commands.

Therefore, God rules with gracious regard for the well-being and salvation of all, to the glory of His Name. He grants us multiple opportunities to return to Him from our own ways, so that we might have the abundance of life that He desires for us. His guidelines and standards are for our best interests, and He loves us enough to give us the time and reason we need to recognize the error of our own ways, and to come to follow His ways.

If God had not loved us, He would not have provided us a way to find rescue from our sins, but would rather have destroyed us as He did in times past. But because God loves us so much, He granted us His grace so that we might recognize His goodness and willingly follow Him.

In his book, *Consider Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987 pg. 51), Vance Havner states it this way as he invites us to let God take over: “Suppose I try to run a store. I know nothing about it, I get the books all mixed up, I do not know how to buy or sell, things are in a dreadful mess. I turn the whole business over to another to own and manage and I become only a clerk in the same store I used to run. Mind you, I am as busy as ever but I have changed my responsibility. The care, the upkeep, the management - all that now is the owner’s concern; my part is just to be a faithful clerk.

“This Christ life is simply turning the little shop of life, so woefully perplexing, over to another. Christ becomes owner, manager, overseer; His is the responsibility, the upkeep. Your part is to be a

faithful clerk, steward of the grace of God...

“And one day, if you have been faithful over a few things, He will give you a heavenly shop in the city of the King!”²

When we consider the majesty of God, begin to understand all of His ways and all of His desires for His creation, we can understand His invitation to follow Him. God desires that we recognize only Him as our True God, one who is all powerful, one who is all knowing, one who is all present, one who is all loving, and one who is all authoritative. When we come to the end of ourselves and then begin to see the vast nature of the fullness of God, it is not hard for us to begin to seek His will and His ways for our lives. When we realize that we are not the all-in-all of this world, then we can begin to see the need for another to step in to own, manage and operate this life we have been given. God is the only one who can do that efficiently, effectively, and beneficially for us so that we might have abundant life.

As our Creator, as our Protector, as our Guide, as our Provider, as our Redeemer, as our Sustainer, and as our Friend, God delights to make Himself known to us as we seek Him. Only then can we live in such a way as to bring honor to Him.

Let's pray: Father God, we delight to be able to spend some time today considering Your majesty. Thank You for opening up Yourself for us to come to know You. Thank You for Jesus, who came to us to live here with us so that we could come to trust in You and follow You. Thank You for Your Holy Spirit, given to turn all our hearts to You, so that through His guidance we can come face to face with You. Thank You, God, for giving us life here on this earth, that we might live in a way that gives praises to You. Thank You for Your Church, where we can come to be encouraged and inspired and challenged to grow closer to You. Give us eyes to see You every day. Give us hearts that long after You, that demonstrate Your great love to those around us. Guide our lives so that we might live each and every day for Your glory and honor. We pray all these things in the Name of Jesus Christ, our Risen Savior and Glorious Lord. AMEN.

² (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 353-4)