

SESSION 2

Who Is God?

The *Study Catechism*: Questions 6–14

Question 6. What is the first article of the Apostles' Creed?

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

Question 7. What do you believe when you confess your faith in "God the Father Almighty"?

That God is a God of love, and that God's love is powerful beyond measure.

Lam. 3:22 "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end."

Song of Sol. 8:7 "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of [one's] house, it would be utterly scorned."

1 John 4:8 "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love."

Question 8. How do you understand the love and power of God?

Through Jesus Christ. In his life of compassion, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead, I see how vast is God's love for the world—a love that is ready to suffer for our sakes, yet so strong that nothing will prevail against it.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Heb. 1:3 "He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being."

1 John 4:9 "God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him."

Matt. 9:36 "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

Ps. 106:8 "Yet he saved them for his name's sake, so that he might make known his mighty power."

Question 9. What comfort do you receive from this truth?

This powerful and loving God is the one whose promises I may trust in all the circumstances of my life, and to whom I belong in life and in death.

Ps. 12:6 "The promises of the LORD are promises that are pure, silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times."

Rom. 8:38–39 "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Question 10. Do you make this confession only as an individual?

No. With the apostles, prophets, and martyrs, with all those through the ages who have loved the Lord Jesus Christ, and with all who strive to serve him on earth here and now, I confess my faith in the God of loving power and powerful love.

Heb. 12:1 "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us."

Rom. 1:12 "So that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine."

Question 11. When the creed speaks of "God the Father," does it mean that God is male?

No. Only creatures having bodies can be either male or female. But God has no body, since by nature God is Spirit. Holy Scripture reveals God as a living God beyond all sexual distinctions.

Scripture uses diverse images for God, female as well as male. We read, for example, that God will no more forget us than a woman can forget her nursing child (Isa. 49:15). “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you,” says the Lord” (Isa. 66:13).

Isa. 49:15 “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.”

Isa. 66:13 “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.”

Matt. 23:37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

Question 12. Why then does the creed speak of God the Father?

First, because God is identified in the New Testament as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Second, because Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of this Father. Third, because when we are joined to Christ through faith, we are adopted as sons and daughters into the relationship he enjoys with his Father.

Rom. 1:7 “To all God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

John 14:9–10 “Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.”

John 17:24 “Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”

John 1:12 “To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”

Gal. 4:6 “Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”

Question 13. When you confess the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, are you elevating men over women and endorsing male domination?

No. Human power and authority are trustworthy only as they reflect God's mercy and kindness, not abusive patterns of domination. As Jesus taught his disciples, "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matt. 23:11). God the Father sets the standard by which all misuses of power are exposed and condemned. "Call no one your father on earth," said Jesus, "for you have one Father—the one in heaven" (Matt. 23:9). In fact God calls women and men to all ministries of the church.

Gal. 3:28 "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Eph. 5:21 "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Question 14. If God's love is powerful beyond measure, why is there so much evil in the world?

No one can say why, for evil is a terrible abyss beyond all rational explanation. Its ultimate origin is obscure. Its enormity perplexes us. Nevertheless, we boldly affirm that God's triumph over evil is certain. In Jesus Christ God suffers with us, knowing all our sorrows. In raising him from the dead, God gives new hope to the world. Our Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is himself God's promise that suffering will come to an end, that death shall be no more, and that all things will be made new.

Pss. 23:4 "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me."

1 Peter 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

2 Peter 3:13 "But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home."

Rom. 8:21 "The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

Job 19:25 "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth."

Reflections

What does a Christian believe? Answering this question is at the heart of understanding what it means to be a Christian. To believe in something means to put your complete faith and trust in it. A Christian puts his or her faith and trust in the story of Jesus Christ. To be a Christian means you believe that Jesus Christ came into the world as God's Son for the salvation of the world. Believing in Jesus Christ means believing in the gospel message, the good news of the coming of the Messiah. Through the centuries Christians have used a variety of statements to proclaim the basics of their faith. The Apostles' Creed is one universal statement of what Christians believe. Both Catholic and Protestant Christians use this creed to state the main content of the Christian faith. The Apostles' Creed is divided into three paragraphs explaining the three persons of the Trinity: God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

GOD'S LOVING POWER AND POWERFUL LOVE

The first paragraph of the Apostles' Creed talks about God. When we confess our faith in "God the Father Almighty" we are saying we have faith in God's loving power and powerful love. The truest manifestation of God's love for us is seen in God's Son, Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John sums it up this way: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Through the centuries people of faith have found strength in a God whose love was powerful enough to suffer the agony of the cross in order to bring us back into relationship with God. Scripture promises that in life and in death we belong to God. God's power reaches beyond the grave to hold us in the palm of God's hand forever.

GOD THE FATHER

God was the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus called God "Abba," an affectionate term for father. In today's world the image of God as Father is difficult for many people because of the sinful nature of human fathers. However, our relationship with God transcends all human realities. When we pray to God as "Our Father" we do not mean that God is male, nor do we advocate the domination of men over women. Scripture uses a variety of images—male and female—to explain God's love. In Isaiah 66:13, God says, "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you." Gal. 4:6 reads, "Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his son into our hearts, crying "Abba! Father!"

GOD'S TRIUMPH OVER EVIL

"Why is there so much evil in the world?" The catechism voices a question that challenges each of us. The reality and enormity of evil in our world is undeniable, and yet we cannot explain or understand it. As Christians, however, we hold on to two central truths in the face of evil and suffering.

The first is God's promise "that suffering will come to an end, that death shall be no more, and that all things will be made new" (question 14). Jesus Christ's death and resurrection confirm this promise and give us a sure and certain hope that God will triumph over evil. And so, "in accordance with [God's] promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home" (2 Peter 3:13).

The second truth to which we cling is that God is present with us now in the midst of all evil and suffering. We are never alone. The psalmist writes, "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me" (Psalm 23:4). We cannot deny evil, or explain it, but we do not fear it, for God walks with us and comforts us. The catechism affirms our belief that "in Jesus Christ God suffers with us, knowing all our sorrows" (question 14).

Keeping a Journal

1. Reread the catechism questions and answers for this session. Choose one sentence or phrase to reflect on for the week. Here are some ideas:
 - A love that is ready to suffer for our sakes, yet so strong that nothing will prevail against it.
 - This powerful and loving God is the one whose promises I may trust in all the circumstances of my life, and to whom I belong in life and in death.
 - God will no more forget us than a woman can forget her nursing child.
 - In Jesus Christ, God suffers with us, knowing all our sorrows.

See if you can memorize the sentence or phrase you choose, or at least remember the gist of it. Let this phrase stick with you through the week. Include it in your prayers, think about it while you are in the car, and remember it in the midst of a stressful situation. Look for connections between the phrase you selected and the world around you. Perhaps a conversation, a TV show, a current event, or a situation at home or at work will remind you of it.

