



# St. Andrew**Academy**

## *What Christians Believe and Why It Matters*

Week 2

“God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven  
and earth . . .”

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### *Four key affirmations: God, Father, Almighty, Creator*

#### ❖ God

- Paul: “yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist” (1 Corinthians 8:6).
- The God-Who-is: personal, not a philosophy
- This immediately sets Christians apart from the eastern religions and so-called New Age Spirituality.
- Christianity is not a religion based on ideas but on what God has done.
- Christianity is grounded in God’s revelation of himself. We could never reason our way to the affirmations we make about God.

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## *The Problem of Jesus*

- ❖ All of Jesus' first followers were Jews and, thus, committed monotheists.
- ❖ Jesus' death on the cross posed no "problem of understanding" for the disciples.
  - Was Jesus of Nazareth just another crucified would-be Messiah?
- ❖ But . . . Jesus' resurrection changed everything! What did it mean?
  - The disciples/apostles began to look back at what Jesus said and did, trying to make some sense of it, in light of the resurrection.
  - Yes . . . Jesus must be the Messiah, but that was not the same thing as claiming Jesus was God!
- ❖ Could Jesus be God? Would that explain these most extraordinary happenings?
  - Again -- the Jews were fiercely monotheistic!

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## *God, the Father . . . Son . . . Holy Spirit*

- ❖ Is the Father, God? Is the Son, God? Is the Spirit, God?
  - Is each Person addressed by distinguishable divine names?
  - Is each Person assumed to have divine attributes?
  - Does each Person engage in actions that only God can accomplish?
  - Is each person thought to be worthy of divine worship?
- ❖ The early church concluded that the answers to all these questions are Yes!

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## *Seeing this at work in Scripture (a few examples)*

### ❖ The Father as God

- Jesus called God, “Father” – Matt 5:45; Mark 14:36
- “Holy Father” (John 17:11) “Father, Lord of heaven and earth” (Matt 11:23)

### ❖ Jesus as God

- John’s prologue – John 1:1-18; Jesus is named the word of God
- Jesus forgives sins! Mark 2:7

### ❖ The Spirit as God

- “the Spirit of God,” “the Holy Spirit,” “the Spirit of Christ”
- The Spirit gives new life to believers (Titus 3:5)

### ❖ The baptismal formula – Matthew 28:19

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## *A New Understanding of God*



- One God in three persons
- God has always known himself as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
- God is inherently relational!! God is a community of three!!

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## *Three key distortions*

- ❖ Sometimes it is easier to what something is not, than to define it.
- ❖ Collapse the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit into one
  - modalism is an example -- where God appeared first as the Father, then as the Son, then as the Spirit
- ❖ Trying to “rank” the Father, the Son, and the Spirit – particularly, making the Son less than the Father
  - Differing roles – Father sends the Son; but not a ranking
  - Was there a time when the Son was not? Is the Son of the same substance as the Father?
    - Arius and the Council of Nicea
- ❖ Focusing too much on one person of the Trinity

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## *Three Key Affirmations (from Daniel Migliore)*

- ❖ The eternal life of God is personal life in relationship
  - God IS love (1 John 4:16b) – this makes sense only because of God’s inherent relationality
  - God’s identity is personal relationship
- ❖ God exists in community
  - Yes . . . God has a social life! -- the three persons of God “indwell” each other
  - God creates a people to live in relationship with him
- ❖ The life of God is essentially self-giving love
  - The compassion of God – stronger than sin and death!

What does this say about us – we who are made in God’s image?

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## *Holy God as Loving Father*

- ❖ God is the Father of his people; the husband to his bride (Isaiah 54:5-8; Hosea 2:16, 18-20)
  - But there is no OT prayer to the Father, as in the Lord's prayer. The Church Fathers held that this was because it is only in Christ that we have been adopted as God's heirs.
- ❖ The NT is a fuller expression of God as Father, emphasizing covenantal intimacy
  - *Abba* = "daddy" Jesus refers to the Father as *Abba*, as does Paul, speaking for the early church (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:16)
- ❖ Encompasses two key tasks of fathers
  - righteousness/standards/instruction/discipline/provision
  - love/affection/encouragement/support

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## *What do we really mean by God's love?*

- ❖ God's love is bound up with God's holiness.
  - Exodus 15:11,13 – "steadfast love" translates the Hebrew word, *hesed*
    - A very rich covenant word; steadfast love, faithful love, loving kindness, mercy
- ❖ Love in the New Testament
  - *Agape* in the Greek – expresses the unconditional self-giving love of God
    - Not *eros*, romantic or physical love; not *phileo*, friendship or family love
- ❖ God's love is faithfulness rooted in self-sacrifice; it is action, never sentimentality

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## Almighty

- ❖ “Almighty” translates the Latin *omnipotens* (omnipotent) and the Greek *pantokrator* (ruler of all things).
- ❖ In the New Testament, “Almighty” is found only in the Revelation to John.
- ❖ “Almighty” emphasizes the power and grandeur of God.
- ❖ Does not claim that God can do anything!
  - Could God lie? Die? Do unjustly?
  - To understand what we mean by saying that God is all-powerful, we must look to God’s character, which is revealed in what God has done.
- ❖ It does affirm that God is in charge
  - But what this means, how God’s sovereignty plays out, is a perennially challenging subject. Christians can disagree here.

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## Creator

- ❖ God created everything there is and created it out of nothing (*ex nihilo*).
  - Nothing exists that was not created by God – physical and “spiritual.”
  - Careful here: Jesus was not created. Jesus is God’s ‘only begotten son.’ Jesus is God. Jesus is creator, not created. See I Corinthians 8:6 again.
- ❖ God pronounced all of creation “good.”
  - The world is not as God created it. It has been terribly distorted and warped and awaits its own redemption. Sickness, tragedy, death are all symptoms of this distortion. But still, God’s purpose is to renew his creation, not destroy it.
- ❖ God could not create evil, therefore evil is not created. Evil is nothingness. Those who do evil only destroy, they do not create.

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