

## I Believe in God

### [Ephesians 3:7-19](#)

The Apostles' Creed

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When I recite the first four words in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God," I think back to my infancy. For when I first learned to talk my mother taught me to pray, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Watch me through the starry night, wake me up in the morning bright." My parents believed in God and I believe in God.

Then, when I first went to Sunday school, I was taught to memorize John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." My Sunday school teachers believed in God and I believe in God.

Furthermore, I have lived in a nation whose motto is "In God we trust," and whose pledge of allegiance includes the words "under God." Yes, I'm aware that the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals declared the words "under God" unconstitutional, but according to a recent ABC poll, 95% of Americans say they believe in God, 88% say heaven is a real place, and over 80% believe miracles are still being performed by the power of God. What is more, 78% say they've always been believers. And because the great majority of my fellow citizens believe in God, I believe in God.

But if background and breeding are the sole sources for belief in God, then sociologists may be right when they conclude that the Christian faith is little more than second-hand clothing, patched up and passed on from one generation to another. Ah, but the original clothing had to come from somewhere. The faith that has been handed down from generation to generation got its start somewhere, sometime, with someone. And that start, that beginning, that Someone, is what the Apostle Paul describes in today's text.

He makes three claims which I hope will inform us every time we say, "I believe in God." The first is this, in verses 8 and 9: "The news of the boundless riches of Christ (makes) everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things." In other words, GOD BECAME VISIBLE IN CHRIST. We no longer have to guess about God<who God is, what God likes, whether God knows us, whether God cares about us. "The plan of the mystery hidden for ages" is now visible for everyone to see in Jesus of Nazareth.

Many prefer to look for God in nature, but nature's evidence is inconclusive. Yes, the great expanse of the universe points to a God of order and of great power. Yes, beautiful sunsets and lovely flowers suggest a God who creates and celebrates beauty. Yes, the orderly progression of the seasons implies that God is dependable. But when a volcano erupts and buries whole villages, when an earthquake snuffs out thousands of lives in a matter of seconds, when floods ravage farms and destroy businesses, what does that say about nature's god? Is god loving or indifferent? Is god reliable or capricious? Nature by itself cannot tell us.

Others look within themselves to find God, but the self is like a bank of telephones, all ringing at the same time, each one calling out competing orders. Which of the score of competing voices within us is the true voice of God? Unfortunately, the self has no operator to cut through the competition and tell us to which inner voice we must listen. The self by itself cannot lead us to God.

But perhaps the search for God is fruitless anyway, for how can the invisible be made visible? And yet it happens all the time. Who has ever seen love, who has ever touched goodness, who has ever measured truth? All these are intangibles. We know they exist but they are as invisible as God. Yet once in awhile we meet someone whose words ring with authenticity, and in that person we see truth incarnated. Here and there are persons who radiate kindness, and in them we see goodness embodied. In my wife I have experienced unconditional caring for almost forty-nine years; she is love personified. And so it is with

Jesus. In Jesus we see the essential attributes of that mysterious Being that we humans insist on calling "God" and whom we hope really exists. In Jesus, as John puts it in the prologue to his Gospel, "the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." (John 1:14, 18) God shines through Jesus' words and deeds. God is visible in Christ.

Moreover, GOD IS ACCESSIBLE IN CHRIST, for, as Paul writes, "We have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him," that is, through faith in Christ.

Several of our founding fathers believed just the opposite. Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, all Deists, believed in a God who created the world, set it ticking, and then went off to do other things, leaving behind a world that must fend for itself. Jefferson actually took a pair of scissors and cut out all the miracles in the Bible, and all the claims of Jesus to be equal with God. He was absolutely convinced that God is not accessible, either by prayer, or miracle, or through Jesus.

In modern times, Sigmund Freud has been the most influential opponent of an accessible God. According to Freud religion is nothing more than an infantile desire to have a divine protector. "The religions of mankind," he writes, "must be classed among the mass delusions." Yet Freud himself struggled with God all his life. His letters are replete with phrases such as "if God so wills," "God's grace," "God above," and "if someday we meet above." His last book was "Moses and Monotheism," written in his eighties. One must ask why a man who was so militant an atheist just couldn't put God to rest.

Perhaps the reason is that God would not let him rest. For we learn from Jesus not only that God cares for us; God takes the initiative toward us, God comes to us before we can ever come to God. And, amazingly, God keeps coming, whether we believe in God or not. In Christ, God is accessible!

And, thirdly, GOD IS OBTAINABLE IN CHRIST: "I pray," Paul writes, "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (vs. 19) What does that mean? It means that we may obtain the very Spirit of God who witnesses with our spirits that we are children of God. We may obtain the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We may obtain the gifts of the Spirit through which we can serve others as God has served us. We may obtain guidance when we're mystified, comfort when we're bereaved, courage when we're afraid, forgiveness when we fail. The fullness of God means, finally, that we may obtain an inheritance from God, eternal life at the side of our Savior.

The late Markus Barth called this text "the enthronement of man . . . to his highest possible elevation." "This passage," he wrote, "constitutes a creed to man: Man shall be strong! More power to man—from God!" A creed to man? The enthronement of man? More power to man? Does that border on blasphemy? Must we not reserve the throne for God? Ah, but Barth knows that when we confess our faith in God, God turns right around and unsparingly fills us with all the fullness of God, thus raising us to the highest possible elevation. It's as if God were saying to you personally, whatever the problem you are facing, I am here for you! Whatever the rift that needs healing, I am accessible for you. Whatever the void in your life, I will fill you with all my fullness.

A few minutes ago you said, "I believe in God." Now God is saying, "And I believe in you. All that I have is yours: "More power to you . . . from God."