THE CREED: I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER

Jan-Feb 2017

**about these notes**

Although I hope that they will be useful also to individuals, these notes are intended to assist disciple group leaders as they prepare to lead a session for their group. They will serve you best if you DO NOT SIMPLY SIT AND READ THEM TO YOUR GROUP. I am anticipating that the leader will look at them prayerfully in advance of the session, using them as a prompt or guide to your discussions according to the particular circumstances of your groups. I hope that they will prove useful as you invite the Holy Spirit to lead you into a deeper knowledge of what Jesus wants for your lives.

**Introduction to the series**

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| 8th January  **I believe in God the Father:**  **I believe…** | 15th January  **I believe in God the Father: The Father, our Father** | 22nd January  **I believe in God the Father: Creator of heaven and earth** |
| John 20:1-18 | 1 John 2:28-3:10 | John 1:1-11 |

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| 5th February  **I believe in God the Father: Holy Father, rebellious children** | 12th February  **I believe in God the Father: Full of grace and truth** | 19th February  **I believe in God the Father: who made an eternal covenant** | 26th February  **I believe in God the Father: Committed Father, whatever the cost** |
| John 1:9-14 | John 1:9-18,32-4 | Genesis 17:1-8 | John 12:1-6,23-26 |

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;

he ascended into heaven,

he is seated at the right hand of the Father,

and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. **Amen.**

1. Holy Father, rebellious children

**John 1:9-14**

**9**The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. **10**He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. **11**He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. **12**Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— **13**children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

**14**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

**GETTING THE CONVERSATION STARTED**

These questions can be used as ice-breakers in the beginning OR interwoven between the

questions below to draw the group into the discussion.

* How would you define ‘sin’?
* We have all looked down on people who are different from us. What makes us think that we are better than them?

**Questions for your group**

In this passage, in the Prologue of John’s Gospel, he is very carefully and deliberately setting a context for us to understand Jesus’ identity and earthly mission. For that reason, we can know that the concepts that he introduces are fundamental to a proper understanding of ourselves and of our relationship with God. Importantly, he gives us a fundamental insight into the root of sin, and into the consequent need that the world has of a saviour.

We’ll look at the passage later, but firstly we’ll explore some things in general principle.

A. IS THE CONCEPT OF SIN OUTDATED AND IRRELEVANT? DO WE NEED TO WORRY ABOUT SIN ANY MORE?

Nietzsche taught that everything was relative. There was no absolute good or evil, but morality is simply relative to who we are and what we - as individuals - consider to be true, equal, good & bad etc. His teachings were famously adopted by the Nazi regime and led to unprecedented atrocity. Today, many evolutionary biologists have picked up a similar line of philosophy, with the result that popular culture has still blindly incorporated aspects of it into everyday living in the West.

* + **What are the implications and consequences of promoting a society in which there is no absolute ‘good’ or ‘evil’, beyond what is promoted by whomever happens to be in authority at the time?**
  + **Can our world truly function in a civilised way without the concepts of sin, judgment and justice?**

B. WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF SIN?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines sin as *‘an immoral act considered to be a transgression against divine law’,* and we often likewise regard sin as being a tick-box concept. Sin is regarded as a failure to act in certain morally upright ways: a failure to keep God’s laws. Before being too quick to accept this view of sin, though, read John 1:10-11.

* **What does John highlight as being the core problem that needed to be remedied?**

[The problem that John highlights is not humanity’s failure to keep moral laws, but humanity’s rejection of Jesus. Sin is defined her as being fundamentally a relational breakdown. Look also at Genesis 3, where Adam and Eve similarly reject God’s authority as being God, and try to put themselves on his throne.]

* **What is the significance of the difference in emphasis between verse 10 and 11.**

[The world is in view in v10, and ‘his own’ in v11. Everyone is together in their rejection, without exception. See also Psalm 13 and Romans 1-3, which emphasises the same, and highlights that there is no excusing people for failing to recognise God.]

If sin had been simply a failure to keep moral laws, then people could very easily slip into comparison with others, and consider themselves better than others who live by other standards, or appear to have fallen wider of the mark than themselves.

* **How does Jesus treat people who have failed to keep God’s commandments? Is there any justification for a Christian to stand aloof and adopt superior airs towards another?**

[Consider also Paul’s description of himself in 1 Tim 1:15. As someone who has been exemplary in keeping God’s laws, how does he describe himself? What does Jesus warn regarding judging others (Matt 7:2)?]

* **How do you think John would have defined ‘sin’ from a Christian, as opposed to a pre-Christian or non-Christian perspective?**

C. WHY IS RECOGNISING OUR NEED FOR FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS SO CRITICAL TO OUR FATH IN GOD?

Read verse 12-14.

* **How has God the Father, in his holiness and perfection (full of grace an truth, v.14), made himself accessible to those who have rejected him? What does that say about the full extent of his love?**

The American pastor Don Carson writes that ‘[God’s] love is to be admired not because the world is so big, but because the world is so bad. Those who come to faith are no longer of the world, they have been chosen out of the world. If Jesus is the Saviour of the world, that says a great deal about Jesus, but nothing positive about the world. In fact, it tells us that the world is in need of a Saviour.’

* **What do you make of his observations?**
* **Is it possible to believe in Jesus’ name (to accept him and receive him as your one true Saviour) without coming to understand sin in the way that John presents it here?**

**Application:**

* + **How does this understanding of sin change the way that you will see yourself?**
  + **How does this understanding of sin change the way that you will try to relate to God?**
  + **How does this understanding of sin change the way that you will look at others?**

**ALLOW TIME FOR GOD TO MINISTER TO YOU AS YOU PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER.**