



The Apostle's Creed

Part 3 – God's Son, Our Lord

I believe in...Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord...

John 3:16-18

Jesus Christ is God on display. If you want to know what God is like then you must look to Jesus. But you must look to Jesus not only in his state of self-humiliation as the carpenter's son. You must see him for who He is as the eternal Son of God, the Christ, the Savior, the returning Lord who will judge the living and the dead.

It should not surprise that the Apostle's Creed spends more time on affirming the truth of Jesus Christ than any other topic. The Person and work of Jesus Christ separates the truth of biblical faith and witness from all other religious claims in history. As John chapter three makes clear, our eternal destiny hinges upon what we believe about Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Lord.

1. The expansive love of God revealed in Jesus.

Vs. 16a – “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten* Son...”

- John uses this particular word for love (agapao) 36 times (far more than any other NT book except for 1 John which uses it 31 times). It is a distinctly Christian idea that God loves the whole world; all nations and peoples without exception. God does not restrict his love to one particular nationality, race, or region. God's love proceeds from the fact that he *is* love (1 John 4:8). Therefore it is in God's nature to love. Love is bound up with His “God-ness.”
- Moreover, God's love is qualitatively supreme. God loves by giving the very best to those he loves. God sent his Son into the world to die in the place of sinners. The atonement was an act of love which proceeded from the loving nature of God. The love with which God loves humanity is a love which came at an unimaginable cost.
- God does not love the world because the world is easy to love. God does not love humanity because we are so wonderful and anyone, including God would be crazy not to love us.
- As one commentator concludes:

Therefore when John tells us that God loves the world (3:16), far from being an endorsement of the world, it is a testimony to the character of God. God's love is to be admired not because the world is so big but because the world is so bad. (Carson, 123)

- “World,” is translated from the Greek word *kosmos* which, in the New Testament typically is meant to refer to fallen humanity and its ways, apart from and alienated from God and his truth. *Kosmos* is not necessarily meant to encompass every individual on the face of the earth. Here it is used to communicate the startling depth of God's love; that he loves humanity despite their sin and wickedness.

2. The gift of God for all who believe in Jesus.

Vv. 16b-17 – "...that whoever believes should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

- Faith in Jesus is the God-ordained condition of the covenant of grace. There is no pleasing God and no salvation apart from faith in Jesus. From the moment God established his covenant of grace with Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17) faith was the condition. That has never changed. The message found in the New Testament is "believe and be saved."
- Faith is the one condition for salvation precisely because there is no work, no achievement, no spiritual technique which can bring about the sinner's salvation. Faith is the only proper response of those who realize they cannot save themselves.
- Jesus' first coming was for the purpose of accomplishing redemption for all God's people. When Jesus returns he will do so to judge. But John's concern in verse 17 is to establish the purpose of Jesus' first advent.
- We should not take "world" (*kosmos*) in this instance to mean every individual who will ever live. Scripture is clear that God has elected his people from before the foundations of the earth (Eph 1:11). We also know that God's purposes cannot fail. Therefore, John's use of *kosmos* is meant to refer to the fact that God will save men and women from out of all the world. That is, people from every nation and tribe will be saved just as was promised to Abraham (Gen 26:4) and witnessed by John (Rev. 7:9).
- The Creed refers to Jesus as the "Christ." Christ is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew *Messiah*. It means anointed one. That is, Jesus is the One sent from God to accomplish his redemptive purpose.

3. The judgement of God administered by Jesus.

Vs. 18 – "Whoever believes is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten* Son of God."

- It is not unusual for John to drive home a truth by putting it in both positive and negative terms. Here he contrasts the fate of the one who believes with the one who does not believe. Condemnation is the just end for all those who refuse to receive God's gracious gift of salvation. In fact those who harden their hearts in persistent unbelief walk in a present state of condemnation. For the hard-hearted, condemnation is something which begins long before the judgment in the age to come.
- The verb for *believe* is used three times in verse 18. The moral dimension of unbelief is brought out by John's reference once again to the "only begotten Son of God." Begotten speaks to the union between the Father and the Son in the eternal Godhead. Jesus is not simply a good teacher or wise sage whose advice may be accepted or rejected. Jesus is the eternally begotten Son from the Father; the second Person of the Holy Trinity; the Divine Savior. To reject the Son is to reject God and his unfathomable love and kindness.

* "only begotten" (*monogenes*) – Some modern translations leave out "begotten" preferring "only." The other instances of *monogenes* are translated as "only" meaning unique. The debate on the usage of *monogenes* in John 3:16 and 18 centers on whether or not John intends to indicate the metaphysical relationship between the Father and Son in the Trinitarian relations. If this was John's intention then "only begotten" is appropriate. The *begotten-ness* of the Son does not indicate that he is begotten the way created beings are begotten. Rather it is used to point to the metaphysical reality that within the Trinitarian relations the Father is always the Father and the Son is always the Son. If John's only intention was to point to the fact that the Father has only one Son rather than emphasizing the metaphysics of the Trinity then "begotten" is not necessary in translating *monogenes*.