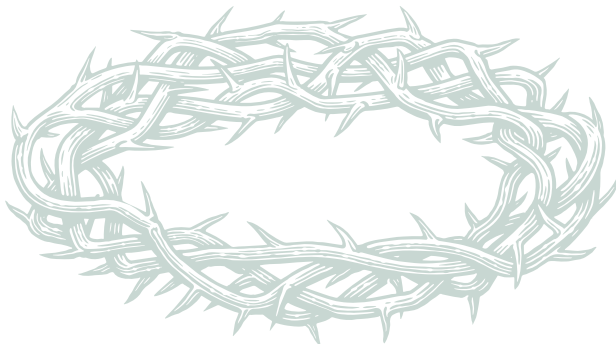




CONFESSING CHRIST

30 DEVOTIONS
ON WHAT CHRISTIANS BELIEVE

Presented to

By



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ON WHAT CHRISTIANS BELIEVE

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The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him. Yet He is actually not far from each one of us, for “In Him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we indeed are His offspring.” . . . The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.

Acts 17:24–28, 30–31

INTRODUCTION

THE APOSTLE Paul spoke these words while he was standing in the midst of the Areopagus in Athens, surrounded by Greek lovers of wisdom who wanted to know the new teaching he was presenting to them about God the Father and Jesus the Christ.

Paul was on his second missionary journey and had been sent to Athens, away from the hostile crowds who sought to kill him in the Roman province of Asia. His companions hoped he would use his time in Athens to rest and recuperate. That's when Paul went to the Areopagus and saw the multitude of altars for gods and goddesses that filled the space. He even saw an altar for an unknown god, and he saw this as the perfect opportunity to teach anyone who would listen about the one true God.

Paul commended the Athenians' sincere desire to know God, and he began teaching them who God is, how He created the heavens and the earth and all things, how He stands in relationship with humanity, what He has done to save the world, and what will happen when He comes at the end of time.

This devotional book builds upon Paul's sermon and fills out the story of God's love for us from the beginning to the end. In these pages, we will consider topics such as knowing God; the way God reveals Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;

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humanity's fall into sin and God's rescue plan to save us; the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the Holy Spirit's work for and in us; the gifts God gives us through His church; the way God organizes our lives and provides for them; and Christ's return.

Five pastors contributed to these thirty devotions, each one sharing stories and providing further information from the Bible to help us better understand each topic. It is our fervent prayer that our Lord Jesus will richly bless your reading, meditation, prayer, and faith through His Holy Word; reassure you of His love and forgiveness; deepen your appreciation of His love and mercy; turn your heart in love toward your neighbors; and fill you with anticipation for the day He will return to judge the living and the dead and to make all things new.





For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Romans 1:20



DAY 1

HOW DOES GOD REVEAL HIMSELF TO US?

WHEN MY grandparents retired from their life on the farm, they continued to work the soil on a smaller scale. One summer day, my grandmother was enjoying the trees that had been planted years before and the flower beds and vegetable garden she and my grandfather had planted. She stood in the middle of the lawn and asked me, “How could anyone look at all of this and not believe in God?”

She wasn’t standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon or at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. God had revealed Himself to her in her everyday surroundings. She could see God’s creation in the shade of the trees, the beauty of the flowers, and the food destined for their table. God’s “*invisible attributes*” had been revealed to her “*in the things that have been made.*” She received God’s blessings with her senses.

God reveals Himself to us in the rhythm of the seasons. His world rests in winter, comes to life in spring, walks in full stride in summer, and slows down in autumn. “*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork*” (Psalm 19:1).

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God reveals Himself to us in the gift of human life. Tears come to the eyes of a new mother and father as they hold their child in their arms for the first time. What a miracle! The child that was once invisible in his mother's womb has been made known by God's blessing and creation.

Best of all, God reveals Himself to us in His Son, Jesus Christ. God loves us so much that He became one of us! Invisible in Mary's womb, Christ was revealed to us at His birth. God continues to reveal Himself by His Word and in Christ, the Word made flesh. Jesus reveals His love for us by His death and resurrection. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God reveals His salvation to all creation.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us to slow down and enjoy the wonder of Your creation. Let us rejoice in the gift of Your Son as He has been revealed to us in Your Word and by His presence among us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DIVINE AND NATURAL REVELATION

God reveals Himself to mankind in the beauty and force of His creation. Nature tells us that our Creator continues to care for all His creation. The forces of forest fires, floods, and hurricanes reveal God's power and might today.

God's Word is written on the hearts of all people. Our conscience helps us know right from wrong. It helps us to see that we are imperfect, but it does not solve the problem of sin or offer any comfort for guilt and shame.

God reveals Himself to us in His written Word. Through the pages of the Old and New Testaments, He reveals the story of salvation that began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God wants all people to be saved. The Bible points us to Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the fulfillment of every promise God has made to His people. He wants everyone to understand what He has done for us in Jesus Christ. Jesus took the burden of our sin to the cross of Calvary and gives us His own righteousness in place of our guilt and sin.



Now when all the people were baptized,
and when Jesus had also been baptized
and was praying, the heavens were opened,
and the Holy Spirit descended on Him
in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice
came from heaven, “You are My beloved
Son; with You I am well pleased.”

Luke 3:21–22



DAY 2

HOW ARE THREE PERSONS ONE GOD?

I COULDN'T BE the only eighth grader who was surprised when our pastor told us we would be writing in our Bibles. We did not write in books in my home, and certainly not in the Bible. I trusted my pastor, and I've been writing in my Bible ever since.

After a man on my porch insisted that the Holy Trinity did not exist because the word *Trinity* was not in the Bible, I started drawing triangles in the margins every time I saw the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit together. There are plenty of triangles in my Bible!

At the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus was baptized. As He prayed, the Holy Spirit descended on Him, and the Father said, "*You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.*" Of course the Father is pleased. He is pleased with Jesus' perfect obedience and perfect life as our substitute. The Holy Spirit nods in agreement. Remembering our own Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we make the sign of the cross over ourselves when we hear that triune name.

The question remains: How are three persons one God? The word *Trinity* means "three in one." The Holy Trinity is

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made up of three distinct persons in one divine being. We think of the Father as our Creator, Jesus Christ as our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as our Sanctifier.

As each person of the Trinity does His work, He does not exclude the other two persons from participating. Each person of the Trinity works together as a perfect team. Each person works with the other two in complete agreement with one another. The Trinity works together toward the same eternal goal because God wants all people to be saved.

PRAYER

Dear Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, continue to reveal Your saving work among Your people. Let me bear Your name as I rejoice in my Baptism. Enlighten me that I may always marvel in the mysteries of the faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THE HOLY TRINITY

The one true God comes to us daily in the mystery of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity consists of three distinct persons in one divine being. The Father begets the Son from eternity; the Son is begotten of the Father from eternity; the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, again, from eternity. This means that God has no beginning and no end.

The creeds of the church give us an outline of the work of each person of the Trinity: The Father creates us, the Son redeems us, and the Holy Spirit makes us holy. We confess that there is no God apart from the triune God revealed to us in the Scriptures. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. We are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We begin each worship service in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We may pray to any member of the Trinity or all three together.



And God saw everything that He had made,
and behold, it was very good. And there was
evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 1:31



DAY 3

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO CREATE THE WORLD?

SOME OF us are mechanically minded and some of us are not. When my parents would visit us in our first home, my father would bring his toolbox. We would work our way around the house, completing the little repairs that needed to be done. Most of our do-it-yourself projects took more time than we had planned, often including a trip to the hardware store.

Are you frustrated when you have to put something together or repair something you already own? Do you enjoy the challenge and the satisfaction of a job well done? These moments give us all the more reason to marvel at God creating the world in six days. He didn't even have to go to the store for His materials! God said, "*Let there be . . .*," and there it was.

God created everything in order. Where I might have started off with a rabbit with soft fur, God provided oxygen, green grass, and cool water first. Day after day, God brought order and care to His heavens and the earth. He worked His way systematically to creating Adam and Eve in His own image. "*And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*"

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We confess in the Nicene Creed, “*I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.*” The world wants to dismiss God’s creation with scientific theories and fluctuating timelines, but Genesis 1 and 2 tell us it is “*good*” just as God created it. The seventh day surrounds all of God’s creative work with a day of rest for God and His people to enjoy together. “*And behold, it was very good.*”

PRAYER

Father and Creator, every day belongs to You. By Your example, teach us to enjoy every aspect of Your creation. Bless the work of our hands and the day of rest You give to us. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

CREATION IN SIX DAYS

In Genesis 1 and 2, God's Word teaches that the triune God created light and darkness, heaven and earth, oceans and dry land, vegetation, sun and moon, stars, livestock, birds, sea creatures, insects, and everything else. Finally, God created mankind and gave them dominion over His creation. He created Adam and Eve and blessed them. He gave them and all their children the work of caring for what He had created for them.

By the power of His spoken Word, God called all things into being. In six days, He created the world and everything in it. At the end of each day, God settled the work of the day and *"saw that it was good."* On the seventh day, He rested from all His work. As part of His ongoing creation, we are called to rest from our labors at the end of each week to let Him work in our hearts through His Word and Sacraments and to give the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit the honor and praise that is due Him.



The earth is the LORD's and the fullness
thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.

Psalm 24:1



DAY 4

DOES GOD EVEN CARE ANYMORE?

JESUS TOLD His disciples, “*In the world you will have tribulation*” (John 16:33). Jesus didn’t say, “You might have trouble” but “You will have trouble.” Issues in our family or workplace. Tragedies and emergencies we never saw coming. The memories of physical or sexual or emotional abuse that linger for years. Suffering and death. Sooner or later, we will ask, “God, where were You? Why did this happen? Don’t You even care?”

When our friends suffer, we suffer with them. Offering a sunny proverb and going on our way is no comfort. When Job faced his losses of property and children, his friends came to stay, but perhaps they should have been quiet. “*Be still, and know that I am God*” (Psalm 46:10). Sometimes our presence speaks louder than any words we could say.

The psalmist reminds us that “*the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.*” God is deeply concerned about His creation. He does not walk away from it. He does not walk away from us either. He does not sleep while we are sleeping. Our suffering will drive us to the comfort of God’s Word. Our troubles will bring us to our knees in

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prayer. The Spirit intercedes for us when things are so bad we don't know what to pray. He is our Comforter!

From the cross, Jesus asked, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*” (Matthew 27:46). Jesus knew His Father had to turn away from the cross, as hard as that is to imagine, for Jesus to take our place. Even so, Jesus knew the glory that was about to be revealed in the resurrection. Jesus is beside us in our suffering. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we have no words. God still cares about us!

PRAYER

Merciful God, remind me to be still and know that You are God. Even in times when You are silent, I know that You grieve with me. You hold me in Your hand and will never let go. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND PRESERVATION OF CREATION

God created the world and continues to care for it as a loving Father. The consequences of sin continue to play out among us in natural disasters, war, power struggles, hatred, murder, and accidents. All these things are so far from the perfect world God created. That being the case, we may wonder why God allows some things to happen and yet prevents others.

No one can know the entire will of God. While we do not believe that God sends trouble our way, He does not waste it when it comes. Our life of faith grows stronger when we have to wrestle with the difficulties and trials of this earthly life. We lean on God harder during our times of trial. *“Call upon Me in the day of trouble,”* He says. *“I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me”* (Psalm 50:15). God hears our prayers and answers them. We know that Christ will deliver us when He welcomes us into His kingdom. Our rejoicing will have no end.



Are they not all ministering spirits
sent out to serve for the sake of those
who are to inherit salvation?

Hebrews 1:14



DAY 5

WHY DID GOD CREATE ANGELS?

OUR CULTURE has many beliefs about angels. A popular Christmas movie tells us the ringing of a bell corresponds to the “winging” of an angel. Some people believe that they can pray to angels or that they and their loved ones will become angels when they die. You won’t find any of these ideas in the Scriptures. What does God’s Word say about angels?

The book of Hebrews describes them as “*ministering spirits sent out to serve.*” They are messengers of God’s Good News. Angels appear throughout the Old Testament, revealing God’s will and bringing messages in daylight or in dreams. In Luke’s Gospel, angels appear to Zechariah, Mary, and then Joseph, giving birth announcements for John the Baptist and for Jesus. A host of angels rejoice at Christ’s birth. Mark tells us that angels ministered to Jesus following His temptations in the wilderness.

While the Bible doesn’t use the phrase, Psalm 91:11 tells us that God sends guardian angels to protect us from danger. This is another way angels serve us and minister to God’s people. The Scriptures tell us to pay attention to those who help us, as angels can take on human form. It is possible for us to “*entertain angels unawares*” (see Hebrews 13:2). This means that we may

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be served by angels or be in their presence without recognizing them at the time.

Before he says “Amen” at the end of his Morning and Evening Prayers, Martin Luther prays, “*Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me*” (Small Catechism, Daily Prayers). Not only do angels spare us from physical harm, but they protect us from the powers and temptations of the devil. Although angels may be invisible to us, the devil sees them when he charges in our direction.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, place Your holy angels beside us as we face danger and temptation on this earth. Keep us faithful until we worship You with saints and angels and all the heavenly host in the presence of Christ in Your kingdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.

ANGELS

The Word of God tells us that God created angels to be His messengers and servants. Angels reveal God's will in specific situations, and they offer direction to those who trust and believe in God. The Old and New Testaments offer many examples of the interactions between angels and people.

The angels of God are in constant praise of the Father who created them. Their never-ending praise invites us to join with them and the saints who surround God's throne with glory, honor, and praise to the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

There are also evil angels who fell from heaven because they rebelled against God. The devil and every evil angel seek to destroy everything that is good and right and holy, but especially our faith in Jesus Christ. As Christians pray, "*deliver us from evil*" (Lord's Prayer), we pray that God would surround us with His holy angels to sustain us through the trials and temptations of the evil one and his devils.
