

The Apostle's Creed: I Believe in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord

Romans 1:1-7

By [J. Ligon Duncan](#)

If you have your Bible, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 1. We're working our way through the Apostles' Creed. Previously we were looking at Creation, and the phrase "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." And it was appropriate that we pause and look a little more closely at that doctrine.

I want to make an assertion. It is the doctrine that God is the transcendent Creator that is the doctrine most under assault in our culture today. Now, that may not seem to be the case at first glance. When you look around you, the issues which are cultural bellwether issues seem to have to do more with your view of man, your view of humanity, what theologians would call anthropology. For instance, abortion has to do with the doctrine of man very clearly. Homosexuality and the normalization of it would seem to have to do with the doctrine of man. The definition of the family, male-female role relationships, all of those things have to do with the doctrine of humanity; and if you said they did, you'd be right. But behind the cultural shifts we are seeing in all four of those areas today, and we could more, for instance, in what's being done in the area of bioethics today with regard to cloning and various other experimentation with human beings who are very, very tiny and very, very young — but behind all of those things which do have to do with the doctrine of humanity, is in fact, a shift with regard to the doctrine of God, the transcendent Creator. We could actually see other shifts in the area and elsewhere in that particular area, but it is that doctrine of God, the Transcendent Creator, that is behind all the cultural mega shifts we are seeing.

And we've seen the most amazing mega shifts in the world in the last 30 years. Think of it, 30 years ago in a business a man could have been fired by his superiors had he been discovered to be a homosexual relationship. Perfectly legal. In fact, not only perfectly legal, but it would have been the norm. Thirty years later, were you to do that in a major business, you would be in big trouble. Thirty years, from something being totally culturally unacceptable and illegal, to the reverse of it, being totally unacceptable and illegal. Amazing. That's just an illustration of the mega shifts.

But behind that mega shift is a total assault on the doctrine of God, the

transcendent Creator. So, it's perfectly appropriate that Christians pause and think about these central affirmations we make in the Apostles' Creed, because they impinge upon the way we live our lives day to day in this increasingly hostile culture. In fact, I'd argue that each of the assertions of this Apostles' Creed, grounded as they are in Scripture, points to very important matters for Christians in the cultural setting in which we find ourselves today. But that's not our topic today.

Our topic is the Lord Jesus Christ. And could you pick a more central issue than the person of our Savior? We're going to think about the subject of Jesus Himself. The phrase that we are going to look at today says that we believe in Jesus Christ, His, that is God's, only Son our Lord. And this section and this subject is vital because what you think about Jesus Christ will determine what you think about everything else.

Turn with me to Romans 1 and we'll look at the first seven verses.

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of the descendent of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God by the power of the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the* obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His names' sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called his saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired and inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we would ask You that, by Your Holy Spirit, would help us to see wonderful things in Your word. That you would teach us, that we would embrace this truth and live this truth, and that, especially in a time and place in a culture and a society hostile to the unique, universal, and absolute claims of Jesus Christ; you would purchase in us this day, by the work of your spirit, a loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ and an understanding of why it is so important that we hold forth the truth of Jesus only. This we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

Each of the truths in the Apostles' Creed asserted about Jesus Christ are important for the understanding of why it is that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Now to say that, even in a church in our day and time, gives some people in the pews a little discomfort. To say it in other places, that Jesus is the only way of salvation, gives people positive heartburn. And if you are concerned a little bit about the audacity of that statement, about the forcefulness of that statement, about the completeness and the unqualifiedness of that statement,

take comfort. It was just as audacious when it was first uttered as it is today. Remember, the proclamation of Jesus as the only way of salvation, a proclamation which we heard from Peter's own lips in the Scripture reading from Acts 4:12, that audacious statement was made in the context of a dominant pluralist culture.

Rome was the controlling power in the Mediterranean world and Rome was perfectly happy for you to believe in your 'god' as long as you did not believe that your 'god' was the *only God*. Rome was quite happy to add Jesus to the pantheon of its gods. There were Roman emperors that did that. But Rome was not prepared to tolerate people who made universal claims--at least, not usually. The Jews got by with it for a while, but the Romans didn't like them. So when the Christians came along and began to make these outlandish claims, it quickly caught the attention of the Romans authorities and the persecutions of early Christians almost always emanated from that very point. Because of total, universal, unconditional, commitment to Jesus Christ, Christians were considered a threat to the stability of the empire. So when you are looked upon as if you just crawled out from under a rock, when you say that Jesus Christ is the only way, join the club. Christians before you had those same looks and worse. At any rate, each phrase of what the Apostles' Creed says about Jesus really explains to us why it is that Jesus is the only way.

We are not going to look at all those phrases today, but we are going to look at this clause which really has four parts to it: "Jesus, Christ, His only Son, our Lord"--four parts. 1. Jesus--the humanity of Christ. 2. Christ--the Messiahship of Christ. 3. His only Son--the unique, divine, Sonship of Christ. 4. Our Lord--the Lordship of Christ. Those are the four things I want you to see today. The humanity of Christ, the Messiahship of Christ, the unique, divine Sonship of Christ, and the Lordship of Christ. Now, these things are so basic to many of us that it be very easy to skip over them, so let's remember as we study these things that we're studying our Lord, what more appropriate thing would there be to do in the worship of God than to learn about God. What more practical thing could there be in the worship of God than to learn about God, and if we already know these truths about God, to grow deeper in our embrace of these truths about God.

I. Jesus is truly human and fully divine.

Paul, over and over, uses the proper name, *Jesus*, in Romans 1:1-7. He's a bondservant of Christ Jesus. Jesus is born according to the flesh. He's born of a human genealogy and lineal descent. He is Jesus Christ our Lord, Paul says, in verse 4. We are called as Christians, of Jesus Christ, and he pronounces a benediction based upon the blessing of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is our Lord's proper name. It identifies Him as an historical person, not a pious figment of imagination, and when Paul repeatedly uses the name, Jesus, he is using a name which itself was given by divine revelation. Remember, just as God told John the Baptist's parents to name their son, John, God also told Jesus' parents to name their son, Jesus, for a specific reason. Because *Jesus* is just the Greek version of the Hebrew word, *Yeshua*, which means *God saves*. He saves His people. So Jesus' proper name was going to signify His work. Notice, even in Jesus His person and His work are tied together. And anytime someone tries to take apart Jesus' person and work, watch out, heresy is about to come.

Even His name describing His nature, speaks of His work. The name Jesus reminds us of His full humanity, and Jesus' humanity can either be denied or misconstrued. When it is denied or misconstrued, trouble comes. Without Jesus' humanity, He's unable to be our Mediator. But "He is able," as the author of Hebrews says, "to sympathize with us, because He has experienced life in this flesh." Without being human, He is unable to obey the Law for us, He is unable to die for us, He is unable to foster our adoption as sons; He has to be one of us to do this. And so a denial of the doctrine of humanity of Christ is a very serious thing.

On the other hand, a denial of the doctrine of the humanity of Christ can be misconstrued. It can be argued, for instance, well, if He's going to be one of us, then He has to be like one of us in every way, and that means He has to sin. So, there have been people from time to time that have argued that Jesus was able to sin, or that He actually sinned. This would be a false understanding of Jesus' humanity. On the other hand, there are many today, especially in evangelical feminist circles, who say that for Jesus to be truly like us all, He needed to be androgynous. He had to have the qualities of both male and female. And again, this is a misconstrual of the doctrine of humanity.

Jesus was truly human. But there are definitely points of discontinuity between His experience as a human and ours. For instance, He never sinned. But to say that because He never sinned, He's unable to sympathize with us, is not simply to misunderstand Him; it's to misunderstand what it is to be truly human. You see, we've saying long, "That to err is human," that we've forgotten that to err is not human. To err is fallen. To err is sinful. To err is of the works of the devil. That's is not God's original plan for human. We're not more human when we sin; we're less human. And Jesus is not less human because He doesn't sin; He's more human. And one day He's going to make you more human than you are now. So Jesus' humanity is absolutely essential to His work as a Savior, but when we say we believe in Jesus, we don't stop there.

II. Jesus is God's appointed and anointed Savior-King.

We go on to say we believe in Jesus Christ. And that's another term that we

miss, because for us, the term *Christ* - which we normally use with Jesus - Christ sounds like His last name. But Christ is not Jesus' surname. It's a title. It's a very important title. And from that title we learn something about the Messiahship of Jesus. He is the chosen Savior-Mediator. He's not only truly human; He's God's chosen Savior-Mediator for His people. Jesus is God's appointed and anointed Savior-King. You see, *Christ*, again is the Greek word for the Hebrew word, *Messiah*. And *Messiah* means *the anointed one*. It's not a surname; it's a title. And it means that God anointed Christ as His Savior-King for His people, that Jesus was God's appointed Savior-King, about whom the Old Testament prophesied, and for whom the Jews had long been waiting.

For Paul and for Peter and for the other apostles to announce Jesus as the Christ, was a colossal claim in their own time. It was big for the religious Jews of the time, for they were saying, look, the One about whom our Scriptures have been speaking for hundreds of years is here." And then to the Roman world it was a colossal claim, because it was an announcement that the Messiah for the whole world had come, the One Way of salvation, and hence Peter's words in Acts 4:12, "There is no other name other heaven whereby one can be saved," but through Jesus Christ. He is the Messiah. It is a claim, that Jesus the Messiah was unique in His place in history and universal dominion. It's a claim that Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, and was the One appointed by God as our prophet, priest, and king. And so, to say Jesus Christ, is not to simply name the person of Jesus, but to indicate about Him, through His title, that you believe He is the Messiah. When we say, the Lord Jesus Christ, we're speaking about the Lord whose name was Jesus, who is the Messiah. And so, the phrase Jesus Christ is packed full of significance, and when we stand together and repeat the Creed and say, "I believe in Jesus Christ," we've already said enough to spend weeks and weeks meditating on, glorying in, and drawing implications from. Our *Westminster Larger Catechism* says, "Our Mediator was called Christ because He was anointed with the Holy Ghost above measure, and so set apart and fully furnished with all authority and ability to exercise the offices of prophet, priest, and king of His Church in the estate of both His humiliation and exaltation." And it spends the next several questions fleshing out what that means. But that's only the second thing we are saying about Jesus when we say, "I believe in Jesus Christ." There's a third thing.

III. Jesus is rightly identified as the eternal Word and Son.

We believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son. In other words, when we draw attention in our Confession that Jesus *is the only Son*, we're drawing attention to the unique, eternal Sonship of the Word. Jesus is rightly identified as the incarnation of the eternal Word and Son, and notice how Paul stretches this in Romans 1:1-7. Just as he uses the human name of Jesus, just as he constantly refers to Jesus as the Christ, the One who was according to the lineage of David, because the Messiah was coming from the line of David, so also he emphasizes His

unique Sonship.

Notice that Christ, Paul says, is the subject of the Gospel of God. What is the Gospel of God? Verse 3: it concerns His Son. What does He say about His Son? Well, that God declared His Son to be the Son of God, with power, by the resurrection from the dead. And then, when he gives a divine blessing to the people, he gives it to them not simply from God, not simply from God the Father, but from God the Father and our Lord Jesus the Messiah. In other words, Paul is affirming that Jesus is divine. Jesus is the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, He is the eternally begotten, the only begotten Son of the Father. And this, among other things, points to the deity of Jesus Christ.

When we say, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son," we are affirming the fullness of the deity of Jesus Christ. And that's absolutely essential. About 1680 years ago, a belief had become widespread in the Christian Church, that had never been widespread before. A very articulate theologian had begun to teach that Jesus was not divine. This teaching was so cleverly put, and had such excellent music put with it to foster it in the churches, that people began to embrace it. There were people literally rioting in the streets of Alexandria, Egypt, chanting a hit Christian song. The lyrics went like this: "There was a time when the Word was not." In other words, it was an affirmation that Jesus was not the eternal Word of God; that God created Him. He's the first of all created things, but He's not equal with God. He doesn't share the same essence with God. He's not fully divine. The Church was in a turmoil. A council was called, and a great theologian made his mark in arguing against this teaching. He wrote a book, *On the Incarnation*, and here is the thesis of Athanasius' book: If Jesus is not fully divine, then you are still in your sins. If Jesus is not truly the unique, the eternal Son of God, coequal with His Father and the Holy spirit, then our salvation is compromised and lost. Because His divinity is necessary for our salvation. How else can He pay for the sins of the world? How can He offer a sacrifice of infinite value if He is less than divine?

Athanasius was right. The deity of Christ is the hinge on which Christianity turns. And that's why our *Confession* focuses on Jesus Christ in chapter 8, the longest chapter in the *Confession* up to this point, and says, "The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance, so that two, whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion, which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man." That's a mouthful. You could spend a whole term at Seminary studying that one paragraph. You could spend a lifetime studying it, and you'd never see to the bottom of it, yet we sing about it every Christmas. "Who is He in yonder stall, at

whose feet the shepherds fall? 'Tis the King, the Lord of Glory." That's the One whom we sing about. The One about whom we say, "That the Creator of heaven and earth was contracted to a span, in the incarnation." Jesus is rightly identified as the eternal Word and son, and it was necessary for Him to do this, for us to be saved, to imbue His labors and His mediation with the limitless value necessary to save us from our sins, to accomplish our everlasting salvation. Don't ever let someone tell you that the doctrine of the divinity of Christ isn't important. Without it, every thing is lost.

The doctrine of the divinity of Christ is so important that the New Testament actually gives multiple way that that very doctrine is confirmed. Let me suggest five ways in which the New Testament confirms the deity of Christ, so that you can check it out for yourself.

The New Testament, on at least nine occasions, directly and explicitly asserts the divinity of Jesus Christ. Second, the New Testament teaches that Jesus is Christ, by ascribing the attributes of God to Jesus. Thirdly, the New Testament argues for the deity of Christ by applying the names of God in the Old Testament, to Jesus Christ. Fourthly, the New Testament shows that Jesus is divine by applying the works and activities that the Old Testament says are only the works and activities of God, to Jesus Christ. Finally, the New Testament shows us that Jesus is God by showing, over and over, that nice Jewish boys who knew that you didn't worship anything that wasn't God, fell down on their faces and worshipped Jesus Christ—John and Peter and Paul, who had been reared on the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me," and never did it ever enter their minds that they were in the slightest way breaking the first commandment, but rather fulfilling it to its fullness. In all these ways the New Testament makes it clear that Jesus is divine.

IV. Jesus is Lord and Savior.

But there's another thing that we are affirming when we say that we believe in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord. We are affirming the Lordship of Christ; Jesus is Master and God. You remember the confession of the disciple, "My Lord and my God." That is an essential Christian confession. Jesus is Lord and Savior. There are many Christians who would like to think of Jesus as Savior but not as Lord, or who think that first you accept Jesus as Savior and then some other time later on down the line, you accept Him as Lord. That's not how Paul thinks.

Notice how Paul describes himself as "a bondservant of Jesus Christ" in verse 1. Jesus is his Lord. Paul is His slave. But notice, this isn't something just unique to Paul. Don't think, "Oh yea, but Paul was a super Christian. He had accepted Jesus as Savior and then at some point he accepted Him as Lord." No. Paul says that Jesus Christ is our Lord, not just my Lord, and that the gospel was designed

to produce the obedience of faith from the Gentiles so that Jesus our Lord would get glory.

And then, of course, the blessing He pronounces on all the Roman Christians is from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul makes it clear that if Jesus is the divine Messiah King, then it is obvious and necessary that He must be Lord. And denials of that are serious. You see, the fundamental confession of faith for the Christian in the New Testament *is not* Jesus is Savior, though His name means Jesus saves. The fundamental Christian confession is: Jesus is Lord. Don't believe me? Turn to Romans 10:9. The Apostle Paul is speaking. Now, ask yourself this question as you get ready to read the verse: "On what basis is a man saved?" Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." The confession of the Lordship of Christ is the fundamental Christian confession. This is confirmed by looking at Acts chapter 8. Steadily throughout the New Testament the confession of Jesus as Lord is at the heart of Christianity.

Notice that it is not our practical obedience to the Lordship of Christ that makes us Christians. If that were the case, our salvation would be by works. We are not saved *by* our obedience to the Lordship of Christ, we are saved *to* our obedience to the Lordship of Christ. Paul even makes it clear here. You believe on Jesus as Lord. You believe and confess Jesus as Lord and then it leads you to a life of willing submission to the Lord.

But before you can truly say, however, "Our Lord" in the Apostles' Creed, you have to say "my Lord" in your heart. May God grant that all of us today would confess Him as "my Lord" and "our Lord" together. Let's pray.

Our God and our Lord, we thank you for your Word and we thank you for this beautiful, short summary statement of essential truths about Jesus Christ that we have meditated upon this day. Grant that the realities contained in Your word about Your Son would be realities to us that we embrace and live out in Jesus' name. Amen.

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