

C⁺OMMON GROUND

SERMON NOTES

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These sermon notes are to be used in conjunction with *Common Ground: What All Christians Believe and Why It Matters* by Keith Drury (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2008).

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ABOUT THESE NOTES

Common Ground by Keith Drury serves as the text for this sermon series. With clarity and practicality, *Common Ground* helps us answer the questions of relevance and ultimate meaning many Christ-followers have. Drury draws us back to the ancient statement that has been the bedrock of Christian identity for nearly two thousand years: the Apostles' Creed.

Trust the Lord to enrich your life and the lives of your congregation as you explore the meaning of this creedal statement, showing its biblical foundation, historical framework, and relevance for life in postmodern times.



IN GOD WE TRUST

INTRODUCTION

Both the Apostles' Creed, which dates from the eighth century, and the Nicene Creed, formulated in AD 325, include statements of faith about God. The Apostles' Creed states, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." The Nicene Creed states, "We believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible."

Let's examine how each creed defines God and draw some practical applications from what we learn about the God we worship.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. God Is Our Father

A. How God Becomes Our Father

Specifically God is the Father of those who come to him through Jesus Christ (John 14:6). The teaching is false that insists God is everyone's Father. Jesus told the religious Pharisees they belonged to their "father, the devil" (John 8:44), and Paul wrote that before his readers became believers they "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:3 KJV).

B. How God Relates to Us as Our Father

Jesus taught us to address God as "Our Father which art in heaven" (Luke 11:2 KJV). In Galatians 4:4–6, the apostle Paul explained that God sent forth his Son Jesus to redeem us so we might become God's children. When we became his children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. From within our hearts the Spirit calls out, "Abba, Father." The equivalent of our English, "Daddy." Nothing could be more intimate than our new-birth relationship with our Father in heaven.

Our heavenly Father loves us, cares for us, protects us, provides for us, has compassion on us, and hears our prayers.

II. God Is Almighty

The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed rightly refer to God as "almighty." Nothing lies beyond his ability to accomplish.

A. His Almighty Power Demonstrated

Even a cursory scan of the Old Testament confirms the psalmist's words: "Who is like you LORD God Almighty? You, LORD, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them" (Ps. 89:8–9).

Here are just a few occasions when God demonstrated his almighty power in Bible times: He destroyed the earth with a flood; he overthrew Pharaoh's cavalry in the Red Sea but delivered the Hebrews; he leveled the walls of Jericho; he delivered the Israelites repeatedly from the hands of their enemies; he delivered Daniel's friend from the furnace of fire and Daniel from the lions' den.

Around the world today, numerous people worship false gods—idols that cannot see, hear, or speak. They are powerless. Our God stands in stark contrast to them, because he is all-powerful. Nothing is too hard for him (see Jer. 32:17).

B. His Almighty Power Is Available

Faith links us to our almighty God and to his unlimited power. By ourselves we are like a thin wire that can be twisted at will, but united to almighty God we are like a wire welded to steel. His unlimited strength secures us. Furthermore, we may call on him at any time and know he hears us and will answer us. What seems impossible to us is possible to him. The apostle Paul wrote, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Eph. 3:20–21).

God can solve any problem, lift any burden, forgive any sin, and knock down any barrier. Let's trust him to do what seems impossible!

III. God Is the Creator of All

A. Everything Was Created at His Command

God created everything simply by commanding it into existence (Heb. 11:3). The Latin term *ex nihilo* means "out of nothing." This is precisely what God did at creation—he brought everything out of nothing (see Gen. 1).

When God spoke to Job out of a whirlwind, he asked, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" (Job 38:4). God created without the help of angels or humans. As a matter of fact, he created both angels and humans.

B. Everything Was Created for Our Good and His Glory

Man was the last of God's creative wonders. He created our first parents, Adam and Eve, and gave them a beautiful home, the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8–15). In every respect, it was "home sweet home." Until Adam and Eve sinned, plants grew healthy and beautiful. Fertilizer and weed killer were unnecessary. Birds entertained the couple with melodious chirping. All the animals were friendly and tame. All the fish and creatures of the sea were playful. And food was delicious and plentiful. It never tasted bad, and food poisoning was impossible. Obviously, God created everything for our good, but course, sin has lessened the intended good.

On page 47 of *Common Ground*, Keith Drury states, “Creation is a loving act of grace. It is a gift of God to you, to me, and to us. It is a miracle of love.”

Although we live in a fallen, cursed world, it is still beautiful and reflects God’s power, wisdom, and love. If we look at nature or gaze at a starry sky, we will be amazed at the wonder of God’s creation, and we may echo the psalmist’s words, “LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens” (Ps. 8:1). We can see, if our eyes of faith are open, that God created everything for his glory and for his pleasure (Rev. 4:11).

CONCLUSION

Have you ever wondered what might happen if the sun were closer to our planet or farther from it? God has placed it at just the right distance to keep us from burning up or freezing to death.

Our almighty heavenly Father has done everything right. In spite of sin that has marred creation, our environment is beautiful and supports life well. Shouldn’t we thank and praise God more often and more lovingly?



NO ONE CAN COMPARE WITH JESUS

INTRODUCTION

The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed express faith in Jesus Christ as the virgin-born Son of God, who was crucified and buried but rose from the dead and is seated at the Father's right hand. Our faith rests in him as our preeminent Lord and Savior. No one can compare with him.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Jesus Christ Is God's Eternal Son

A. He Has Always Existed (John 1:1–2; Rev. 1:8)

Just as God the Father is eternal, so is God the Son. Identified as the Word in John 1:1, Jesus, God's Son, was with God "in the beginning." Furthermore, he is identified in verse 1 as God.

In John 8:58, Jesus declared, "Very truly I tell you . . . before Abraham was born, I am." When he appeared in his risen, glorified form to the apostle John at Patmos, Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8).

Although Jesus was born in Bethlehem, his life did not begin there, for he is eternal. At Bethlehem, the eternal Son of God, began the incarnate period of his life.

B. He Is the Agent of Creation (John 1:3; Heb. 1:2)

John 1:3 and Hebrews 1:2 makes it clear that all creation owes its existence to Jesus, God's Son. It is no wonder that during his ministry on earth he was able to command the angry wind and waves to be calm and use a boy's small lunch to feed a huge multitude to their complete satisfaction. Colossians 1:16–17 states that Jesus Christ created all things and holds the creation together. Just think: If he released his grip for an instant, our world would explode and disintegrate immediately.

II. Jesus Christ Is Our Perfect Redeemer

A. The Virgin-Born Son of Mary (Matt. 1:20–21)

Every person since Adam and Eve has been born with a sin nature with one exception: Jesus. Being born of a virgin, he did not inherit sin. Unlike all others, he never had to offer a sacrifice for sin or ask forgiveness. As the apostle Paul declared, "He knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21 KJV).

On page 70 of *Common Ground*, Keith Drury comments, “We do not favor Christ’s . . . humanity at the expense of his divinity. Jesus was equally born of the Holy Spirit *and* the Virgin Mary. The wording of earliest creeds actually said it that way. Christ is both divinity and humanity at once in perfect union.”

As the God-man, Jesus was the perfect representative of God and man to reconcile each to the other, and he did this by dying on the cross.

B. The Perfect Procurer of Our Redemption (Gal. 4:4–5; 1 Pet. 1:18–19)

On the cross, Jesus paid the full penalty of our sin and bore the full judgment of God against our sin. Thus, he redeemed us (Gal. 4:4–5). To redeem means to purchase out of the slave market. So Jesus, God’s spotless lamb, purchased us out of the slave market of sin. And the price of our redemption was his blood (1 Pet. 1:18–19).

Such love revealed at Calvary begets love in us. We love him, who first loved us. We join Paul in saying, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live. But Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

III. Jesus Christ Is Our Constant Intercessor

A. In Heaven Jesus Pleads Our Case (1 John 2:1)

The Devil is a slanderer. He accuses us before our heavenly Father, but our crucified, risen Savior is our defense attorney. He defends us before the Father. Since Jesus paid the penalty of our sin, we stand justified—cleared of all charges—in God’s sight (Rom. 5:1).

Let’s not drag past sins out of the closet and let them make us feel guilty and condemned. Jesus wiped our slates clean.

B. In Heaven Jesus Hears Our Prayers (Heb. 4:14–16)

No request is too slight or too demanding to present to Jesus, our High Priest. No burden is too light or too heavy to turn over to him. He stands ready to receive and answer every prayer, and even invites us to come confidently to his throne of grace (Heb. 4:14–16).

CONCLUSION

Samuel Stennett wrote about Jesus in the hymn “Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned.” See if you can offer a hearty amen to each of them:

No mortal can with him compare among the sons of men;
Fairer is he than all the fair who fill the heavenly train.

He saw me plunged in deep distress and flew to my relief;
For me he bore the shameful cross and carried all my grief.

To him I owe my life and breath and all the joys I have;
He makes me triumph over death and saves me from the grave.



THE COMFORTER HAS COME

INTRODUCTION

Although the Nicene Creed devotes more information about the Holy Spirit than the Apostles' Creed does, both creeds leave no doubt that the early Christian church believed in the Holy Spirit. Of course, we also should believe in the Holy Spirit, but what basic truths about him should we believe?

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Holy Spirit Is a Person

A. Scripture Refers to Him as a Person

The Holy Spirit is not an influence or a power; he is a person, the third person of the Trinity. We should always refer to him as “he.” Jesus said he would send another Counselor to his disciples (John 14:16). Because the word *another* means “one more in addition to the same kind,” we may conclude that the Holy Spirit is a person just as Jesus is a person.

As the Counselor, the Holy Spirit demonstrates personality by performing such acts as convincing, helping, guiding, inspiring, revealing, and testifying (see Luke 12:12; John 16:8; Acts 2:4; 8:29; 13:2; 16:6–7; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 2:10–11; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:21).

We may grieve the Spirit and also put out his fire (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). Obviously, he has attributes associated with emotion. That cannot be said of an influence or power. Do we appreciate the presence of this wonderful person in our lives?

B. Scripture Refers to Him as God

The Holy Spirit is referred to as God in Acts 5:3–4; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 12:4–6. Further, divine attributes are ascribed to him. We read about his love, holiness, eternality, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence (see Rom. 15:30; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 9:14; Luke 1:35; 1 Cor. 2:10; Ps. 139:7–10). Because he is God, we should worship and obey him.

II. The Holy Spirit Has a Varied Ministry

A. He Assisted in Creation

Genesis 1:2 states that the Holy Spirit “was hovering over the waters” of the primordial universe. Psalm 33:6 reports that God made the “starry host by the breath of his mouth.” Since the Hebrew word for “breath” is the same word for “Spirit,” we may assume this verse refers to the Holy Spirit’s role in creation. Also, Psalm 104:30 states, “When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.”

Have you marveled at the renewal of nature when springtime follows winter? We may attribute the renewal of life to the Holy Spirit, and give thanks for his faithfulness.

B. He Acts on Our Behalf

The Spirit inspired the Scriptures for our knowledge and spiritual well-being (2 Tim. 3:15–17). He brought about our new birth (Titus 3:5). He gifted us so we can help to edify our fellow believers (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:4–11, 28–31; Eph. 4:8–12). He dwells in us (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19). He empowers us (Acts 1:8). He fills us (Eph. 5:18). He guides us (Rom. 8:14). He enlightens us (1 John 2:20–27). He intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26–27). And he sanctifies us (Rom. 15:16; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 10:19; 1 Pet. 1:2).

Without the ministry of the Holy Spirit on our behalf, we would still be lost in our sins. He has regenerated us, and now he acts on our behalf to enable us to be and do all that God wants us to be and do. Let us welcome him as the guest in our hearts and yield to his control of our lives.

CONCLUSION

We Christians are on a pilgrimage to heaven, but the Holy Spirit has come alongside to guide us every step of the way until we reach our final destination. We need to heed his counsel, walk in the path he stretches before us, and avoid costly detours.

May our daily prayer be: “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground” (Ps. 143:10).



CHURCH INCLUDES YOU

INTRODUCTION

The Apostles' Creed asserts, "I believe in . . . the holy catholic Church." The Nicene Creed reads, "And we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church." What is the church mentioned in both creeds? Is it the Roman Catholic Church that claims to be the one, true church? Or does "church" mean something else? And what is your place in the church?

SERMON OUTLINE

I. What Is the Church?

A. Universal

The use of the word *catholic* in the creeds simply means "universal" or "comprehensive." On page 133 of *Common Ground*, Keith Drury writes:

We Christians believe in the unity of the church—meaning all believers everywhere and at all times. Unity is not the first thing that pops into our minds when we think of the church. Yet, in spite of the fact there are hundreds of denominations and many thousands of congregations, we affirm that the church is indeed one. . . . We mean that we are one against the Enemy and one in the purpose of the Great Commission. Belief in one church means there are no Wesleyans, Baptists, Presbyterians, or Roman Catholics in the real church; there are only members of Christ's kingdom. Christ is our one Head, and under him there is neither male nor female, slave nor free, Nazarene nor Methodist.

The universal church is invisible, but it is founded on Christ as the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets as the foundation (Eph. 2:19–21). It is referred to as "one new humanity . . . one body" (vv. 15–16) and "a holy temple" (v. 21). The Holy Spirit has baptized all believers into the universal church, Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:13).

B. Local

Visible representations of the invisible, universal church exist throughout the world as local churches: bodies of believers who edify one another, worship the Lord, study the Scriptures, observe the Lord's Supper, baptize believers, pray, and reach out to the lost with the gospel.

We read in the New Testament about the church that met at Jerusalem (Acts 2:42–47), but other churches soon sprang up as the gospel reached their communities. The apostle Paul wrote letters to local churches. We read in the New Testament about the churches at Antioch, Ephesus, Galatia, Colossi, Philippi, and Thessalonica. And the risen Lord dictated letters to seven churches of Asia Minor.

Our church is one of many local churches that exists to honor God and minister to others. Hebrews 10:25 exhorts us not to give up meeting together.

II. Who Is in the Church?

A. Christ Is the Head of the Church

Who is the head of the church? Is it a pope, a cardinal, an archbishop, a priest, a pastor, a district superintendent, an elder, a deacon, or a trustee? It is none of these. It is Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:23). He loved the church and gave himself for it (v. 25). We ought to submit gladly to his headship and seek to honor him in all that we do.

B. Believers Are Members of the Church

When the first local church came into existence at Jerusalem, it was composed of believers. We read that those who gladly received what Peter proclaimed about Jesus were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41). When Paul addressed churches in his inspired letters, he described his readers as “called to belong to Jesus Christ . . . called to be his holy people” (Rom. 1:6–7), “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:2), “brothers and sisters” (Gal. 1:11), “faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1), and “the church . . . in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 1:1).

Most churches that believe the Bible try to determine if applicants for church membership are truly believers. It would not take many unbelieving church members to draw a church from sound doctrine and practice.

III. Will the Church Endure?

A. Its Assailants

Jesus assured us “the gates of Hades will not overcome” the church (Matt. 16:18). The Devil and his evil forces try to destroy believers in order to ruin the church (Eph. 6:10–12). History, from the first century to today, is full of accounts of persecution against the church. But will the church’s assailants win the battle?

B. Its Indestructibility

Jesus promised that the church is indestructible (Matt. 16:18). Someday the Devil and his followers will suffer defeat once and for all (Rev. 19:11—20:3, 7–15).

We are on the right side, and Jesus is the victor!

CONCLUSION

Let’s recognize the church needs you to be faithful and zealous in the Lord’s service!



FREELY FORGIVEN

INTRODUCTION

Both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed express belief in forgiveness. More importantly, however, is the fact that the Bible teaches forgiveness. Those who have been forgiven should never forget the extraordinary cost God paid for our forgiveness and the extraordinary difference forgiveness has made in our lives.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Forgiveness Comes from a Person

A. He Lives Forever (Rev. 1:5)

"Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus' critics asked after he forgave the sins of the paralytic whose friends had lowered him to Jesus through a roof (Mark 2:7). Good question. But of course Jesus was God incarnate, and throughout his earthly ministry he forgave sins. Even on the cross, he prayed that the Father would forgive those who were crucifying him (Luke 23:34).

But Jesus did not stay dead in the tomb; he arose on the third day. Near the end of the first century, he appeared to the elderly apostle John on the Isle of Patmos. Writing about that experience, John identified Jesus as "the firstborn from the dead" (Rev. 1:5).

A dead savior is no savior, but our Savior is alive forever, and he is still forgiving those who turn to him in repentance and faith. Have you believed on the Savior who lives forever?

B. He Loves Fully

Romans 8:39 assures us that nothing is "able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This promise ought to encourage us when the Devil assaults us or trials bombard us. Such trying times do not mean Jesus has stopped loving us or loves us less than when he saved us. Instead of doubting his love, we ought to believe the promise that nothing is able to separate us from his love. We may experience the fullness of his love in our darkest hours.

II. Forgiveness Brings Freedom

On page 146 of *Common Ground*, Keith Drury comments: “We need to start by stating there is such a thing as sin before we go on to speak of forgiveness. . . . Today it is harder to get people to believe in sin than in forgiveness. They might admit they are sinners, but when asked to specify, they really cannot list a single thing. . . . Can there be forgiveness if there is no sin? Of what would we be forgiven—bad taste?”

A. The Price of Our Freedom (Rev. 1:5)

A hymn writer asked, “What can wash away my sin?” He correctly answered this question, “Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” All the religious good works, humanitarian deeds, and charitable gifts in human history would not begin to procure our freedom from sin. Only the blood of Jesus sufficed.

B. The Purpose of Our Freedom (Rev. 1:6)

1. To Serve God

Freedom from eternal punishment is not the only benefit of Jesus’ redemption. He died not only to save us from sin and its penalty but also to free us to serve God. Are we actively serving him or sitting back and letting others serve him?

2. To Praise God

Contemplating the freedom Jesus procured for us by his blood, the apostle John burst into praise. We owe an eternal debt of gratitude for what Jesus did to free us from our sin. Let us express our gratitude in ceaseless praise!

CONCLUSION

It has been estimated that the average depth of the world’s oceans is more than eleven thousand feet. The deepest point is the Nero Deep, near Guam. Its depth is more than thirty-one thousand feet. Micah 7:18–19 lauds the completeness of our forgiveness by saying God hurls “all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.” What amazing forgiveness is ours in Christ!



THE BEST IS YET TO BE

INTRODUCTION

William Carey, called the father of modern missions, experienced hardships in India, but his faith and hope remained strong. He is known to have said, “The future is as bright as the promises of God.” We need this kind of attitude in today’s world that holds so much crime, chaos, conflict, and corruption. For us Christians the best is yet to be.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Our Future Home

This world is not our home; we are traveling to a perfect home in heaven.

A. It Brings Us Comfort (John 14:1–2)

When Jesus said farewell to his disciples prior to his crucifixion, he spoke words of comfort. He encouraged the disciples to have faith in him and the Father. He was leaving them, but he assured them many dwelling places existed in the Father’s house. The prospect of spending eternity in the Father’s house—heaven—should comfort us. It is our eternal home.

B. It Is Under Construction (John 14:3)

The Carpenter of Nazareth is preparing a place for us in heaven. Even the most luxurious house on earth cannot compare to our future home. It will never require a new roof or a paint job. Nothing will destroy it, and utility bills and property taxes will be things of the past.

II. Our Future Hope

Jesus instilled hope in his disciples’ hearts and in ours by promising to return and take us to be with him.

A. Reunion (John 14:3)

We cannot predict the date and time of Jesus’ return, but we can say with certainty that he is coming again. When he returns, we will be with him and the entire family of believers forever (John 14:3; 1 Thess. 4:17).

On page 183 of *Common Ground*, Keith Drury reflects on the perfection of heaven: “Heaven is the climax of salvation; it is more than a reward for God’s faithful. Heaven is what being a Christian is all about. In heaven, we will become what we were meant to be—fully human, fully holy, fully loving, fully in communion with God and others.”

B. Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:51–54)

As we age, our bodies show signs of wear and tear. Our eyesight may worsen, our hearing may become dull, arthritis may grip us, cancer or some other disease may strike us, and eventually we all will die. But the news isn't all bad. When Jesus returns, he will raise the bodies of departed believers and transform the bodies of living believers. Resurrected bodies will become incorruptible, and transformed bodies will become immortal. All believers will enjoy bodies that are impervious to pain, suffering, and death. It will be like Jesus' glorified body (Phil. 3:21).

The Apostles' Creed affirms, "I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." Similarly, the Nicene Creed states, "We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." Can you say amen to these creedal statements?

CONCLUSION

We sometimes hear people say with a sigh, "What's this world coming to?" For unbelievers, the answer is pessimistic. It is coming to judgment. The Prince of Darkness and the evil world system is doomed. But the answer for believers is optimism: someday the King of glory will reveal himself and we will see his majesty. Furthermore, we will enjoy the glories of heaven forever. So our future is bright.

Which future is yours? If it is bleak, you need to trust in Christ as your Savior. He will save you and give you his promise of a bright future.