

# WE BELIEVE

Articles of Faith for the  
Global Nazarene Family

Frank Moore, Editor



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# A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

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by Frank Moore



God created a wonderful thing when he brought the Nazarene family together from around the world. Believers form this family from a wide variety of global areas, cultures, and language groups. Many social and cultural features differentiate Nazarenes from one another. We worship God in an array of styles. We all unite together, however, around the Articles of Faith. Regardless of our continents or native languages, Nazarenes share a common vocabulary when it comes to the Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene.

At various times throughout our history, we have looked at the meaning and practical application of our Articles of Faith. This book follows in that tradition by offering a fresh review of our faith statements in the life of the faith community. The format of this review follows patterns of past books to a degree. However, this one has some important unique features. It offers a global perspective by listening to voices from every region of the Church of the Nazarene. It hears from an equal number of men and women. It gives careful attention to younger voices in the global church. And it illustrates that our Christian beliefs work in daily living whether you live in Memphis or Moscow, Buenos Aires or Bangkok. This book provides resources for personal enrichment and reflection as well as small group discussions.

It is essential that we get together often and discuss deeply the meaning and practical application of our Christian beliefs. Our world is currently floating in a sea of relativism that offers many options but few

certainties. The internet brings millions of options for belief and living to our smartphones, tablets, and computers with the touch of a few keys. This endless array of possibilities often leaves readers confused and insecure. Many people feel unsure of their beliefs and conclude that they should remain open to a wide selection of options. This is a dangerous choice because we always end up living out in our daily actions what we believe in our heads and hearts. That is why it is so important to know what we believe and why we believe it.

Every time I think about the connection between belief and living, I am reminded of the tragic example of a biblical figure who misunderstood the character of God. He confused the way God interacts with his people. He misinterpreted godly preparation for successful leadership. Jephthah, one of the judges of Israel (Judges 10:6–11:40), offers a haunting biblical example of why we need to have correct beliefs about God and live in relationship with God so he can lead us. Scripture reminds us through the example of Jephthah: *we live in our actions what we believe in our hearts.*

Following a period of disobedience, the Hebrew people turned to God for deliverance from their enemies (Judges 10:15). They selected Jephthah to lead them in their fight against the Ammonites. God empowered Jephthah with his Spirit, guaranteeing victory. Perhaps Jephthah did not realize the Lord assured his victory; I don't know. But, on the way into battle, he bargained with God and vowed a foolish promise: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD'S, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering" (11:30–31).

The Spirit of God worked through Jephthah; they triumphed over the Ammonites in battle. Upon his return home, Jephthah's only child, his precious daughter, came out the door of his home first to greet her father. Verse 39 offers one of the most tragic lines in Scripture, "he did to her as he had vowed." Such deal-making to ensure victory commonly occurred in the pagan religions that surrounded the Hebrew people. These religions even promoted human sacrifices. Not true for our God. Yet, somehow, the beliefs of these other faiths crept into

Jephthah's thinking. His understanding of our God and his ways became misinformed. Tragically, he acted on those wrong beliefs and created a lifetime of heartache for his family. Remember, *we live in our actions what we believe in our hearts.*

Believers often say to me, "I really don't have any interest in reading about theology. I'm too busy to spend time learning our Christian beliefs." That's a dangerous perspective. Theology simply means "God talk;" every time we speak of our relationship with the Lord or our understanding of him, we communicate theology. Believers who have gone before us for the past two thousand years have read their Bibles and devoted their best thinking to give us a clearer picture of who God is and how he relates to his children. Their insights greatly enhance our Christian faith. What we believe about God and his purpose for our lives translates into our daily conduct.

I lived across the street from a man in my early years as a pastor. We became good friends. I urged him and his wife to attend our church, but they kindly refused my invitations. Why? Because my neighbor believed he had committed the unpardonable sin as a soldier fighting in World War II. Nothing I said ever persuaded him to accept God's forgiveness for his sins and become as a child of God. He resisted the invitation of God's Spirit because of his misguided belief about our faith.

I have dear friends who love God and desire to serve God. Yet they live in daily defeat because they believe they are hopelessly trapped in sin's grip as long as they possess a human body and live on this earth. A cycle of sinning and repentance haunts them daily. They can't claim the victory Paul proclaims in Romans 8:1–2: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death." They refuse to accept John's admonition: "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin" (1 John 2:1a).

The following chapters of this book offer information, stories, and illustrations both to encourage your faith and to clearly present beliefs of our Christian tradition as articulated in the Church of the Nazarene. We always want our God talk to be guided by the best thinking of the community of believers. Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience

work together to shed light on our pathway. I urge you to give careful attention to your beliefs because *we live in our actions what we believe in our hearts.*

I trust the chapters of this book will enlighten your understanding of our beliefs and encourage you in your walk with Christ.



# GOD THE ETERNAL, RELATIONAL CREATOR

by Kevin Mellish

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## I. The Triune God

**I. We believe in one eternally existent, infinite God, Sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the universe; that he only is God, holy in nature, attributes, and purpose. The God who is holy love and light is triune in essential being, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

(Genesis 1; Leviticus 19:2; Deuteronomy 6:4–5; Isaiah 5:16; 6:1–7; 40:18–31; Matthew 3:16–17; 28:19–20; John 14:6–27; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 4:4–6; Ephesians 2:13–18; 1 John 1:5; 4:8)

From the beginning, the Christian church has proclaimed its fundamental belief in the triune God. The theological doctrine of the Trinity states that God has appeared at various times in history as three distinct, independent persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—while simultaneously existing as a single, unified being. For most of us (myself included), this notion defies logic and exceeds our ability to comprehend it. Although the fundamental elements of this doctrine have been carefully stated by church leaders, teachers, and theologians throughout history, the question of how the Trinity operates or functions in reality remains a divine mystery. It is with a sense of awe and wonder, then, that we recall the words of the famous hymn by Reginald Heber:

*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God almighty  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity*

As we consider the topic of the triune God, we may wonder how it is possible for humans to understand what God is actually like. At its core, Christianity is a revealed faith. That is to say, all we know about God is what God imparts to us through revelation. Thankfully, God, through his abundant mercy and grace, has made himself known to humanity in various ways, such as creation.

The psalmist, for example, noted that, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge” (Psalm 19:1–2, NRSV).

In a similar way, the apostle Paul declared that, “God’s eternal power and character cannot be seen. But from the beginning of creation, God has shown what these are like by all he has made” (Romans 1:20, CEV).

God has communicated information about God’s character and being in other ways as well. God has shown us what he is like through events in history (such as the exodus or Pentecost); through God’s word or instruction (see Psalm 19:7–11); and, ultimately, through the person of Jesus Christ (see John 1:1, 14). As a result of divine revelation, we can discover a lot about God.

## **God: The Eternal Being**

From the time of the biblical writers until the present day, the people of God have repeatedly affirmed that God exists and that God is eternal in nature. These beliefs are clear from the opening statements of the Bible, which read, “In the beginning, God created . . .” (Genesis 1:1). The first words of Genesis indicate that God existed before time and creation began and that God’s existence is not dependent upon the natural, material world.

Thus, God has no beginning or starting point—God just *is*. Because God’s eternal existence was a fundamental belief for the biblical writers, atheism (the belief that God does not exist) was not an option. The psalmist forcefully asserted, “Fools say in their hearts, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 53:1a, NRSV).

Moreover, since God has no origins and exists independently of creation and time, God is also the creative source for all that has come into being. Furthermore, the church affirms the eternal nature of God. Just as God has no starting point or beginning, God also has no end. The biblical text highlights that God is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalms 41:13; 106:48, NRSV); that “he is the living God and the everlasting King” (Jeremiah 10:10, NRSV); and that he “shall not die” (Habakkuk 1:12, NRSV).

The various names for God in the Old Testament also indicate his eternal nature. God is called *El Olam*, meaning “the eternal or everlasting God” (Genesis 21:33, NIV and NRSV). God is also known by the name *Yahweh*. This name, which was revealed to Moses from the burning bush, is actually based on the Hebrew verb “to be,” the very word for existence. Thus, the divine name *Yahweh* implies God’s eternal being. When Moses wanted to know God’s identity, God simply referred to himself as “I AM” (Exodus 3:14).<sup>1</sup>

## God: The Creator of Heaven and Earth

The church also declares that the triune God is the Creator and Sustainer of this universe and all that is within it. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the biblical writers affirm God’s creative activity. The notion of God as Creator is so fundamental to God’s identity that it literally permeates all portions of Scripture. References to God’s role as Creator can be found, for example, in the Pentateuch (Genesis 1–3); the Prophets (Isaiah 40:12–28; Jonah 1:9); the Psalms (8; 74:12–17; 104); and the Wisdom Literature (Proverbs 8:22–30; Job 38–39).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul reinforced this idea: “This God made the world and everything in it. He is Lord of heaven and earth, and he doesn’t live in temples built by human hands. He doesn’t need help from anyone. He gives life, breath, and everything else to all people” (Acts 17:24–25, CEV). The doctrine of God as Creator is

1. God also identifies himself in this verse as “I AM WHO I AM” or “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE.”

integral to Christian theology and occupies a central role in the cardinal doctrines of the church.

The Nicene Creed, for instance, affirms this belief in its opening statement: “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.”<sup>2</sup>

As Creator, then, God rules as the sovereign Lord over everything he has brought into existence. All of creation belongs to him. Therefore, all creation is called upon to ascribe to the Lord praise and honor (Psalm 148:3–10). Since God created everything for his glory, honor, and purpose, all of creation finds its deepest fulfillment and meaning in its Maker.

### **God: The Relational Being**

In addition to being eternal and Creator, God is also relational in nature. God desires a personal relationship with creation. Even though God is holy and transcendent, morally pure and righteous, perfect in wisdom and purpose, God covets fellowship with us humans beset by frailties, weaknesses, and disobedience. From the very beginning, God has shown his intentions to be intimately involved with us and with the world he brought into existence. In Genesis 2–3, for example, God created the man and woman, walked with them in the garden, and enjoyed regular communion with them.

God also entered into covenant relationships with his people at various times throughout history. In Hebrew, the word for “covenant” is *berith*. This term implies a binding or solemn agreement or oath made between two parties. It helped define the roles of the parties involved, thereby setting the parameters and guidelines for the relationship. God established this kind of relationship with Abraham, the father of the Israelite people (Genesis 15, 17), and with the people of Israel as well (Exodus 20–24).

God, in his mercy and grace, not only initiated covenant and called people into relationship with him, but he also provided the means by which the covenant relationship could be maintained. For the people of

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2. Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville: Nelson, 1995), 102.

Israel, God provided instruction so they would know how to live in a way that was pleasing to him. God also commanded the people to construct the tabernacle, which symbolized the place where God's presence dwelled among the community and where offerings and sacrifices could be made (Exodus 26:30–37). Finally, God established the priesthood. The priests functioned as mediators, serving as the communicative link between God and the people of Israel as they represented the people before God and God before the people (Exodus 28–29; 39).

The metaphors that the Bible uses at times to describe God also imply God's intimate relationship with humanity. God is portrayed as a loving parent who taught his child to walk and as one who lifts an infant to his cheeks (Hosea 11:3–4). The Bible also refers to the people of Israel as God's son (Hosea 11:1). On other occasions, the intimacy between God and God's people is depicted as a marital relationship (Hosea 2). Familial language and metaphors extend into the New Testament, when the believer who is adopted as a child of God refers to God with the endearing term "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

It is the relational nature of God, therefore, and God's intense desire to have fellowship with us that made it necessary for God to reveal himself later as a human being in the form of Jesus Christ and as spirit in the form of the Holy Spirit. By choosing to take on the form of human and spirit, God could relate to us in more personal and intimate ways.

## Questions for Reflection or Discussion

Think about the material you have read in chapter I and consider your responses to the following questions. Use scriptural references to strengthen your answers whenever possible.

1. How old were you when you had your first awareness of God?
2. What promoted God's awareness to you?
3. What role does the world of nature play in giving you clues about God?
4. What role does the animal kingdom play in giving you clues about God?
5. What role does the beauty and mystery of outer space play in giving you clues about God?
6. What role do the intricacies and incredible complexity of our bodies play in giving you clues about God?
7. What role do the events in the natural world (weather patterns, seasons, etc.) play in giving you clues about God?
8. What role do the circumstances, cycles, and seasons of your life play in giving you clues about God?
9. What role does Jesus Christ play in informing you about God?
10. What role does the Bible play in informing you about God?
11. Considering the various aspects and sources named in questions 3–10, list as many attributes, characteristics, and qualities of God as you can.
12. Why does the Church of the Nazarene speak so often about God's attributes of holiness and love?
13. What does the Bible mean when it describes God as eternal?
14. What does the Bible mean when it says God has no origin and exists independently of creation and time?
15. What do you learn about God by studying the various names used in the Bible to identify God?

16. Why does God reveal God's self to us so clearly?
17. Compare God's desire for relationship with us to the loving relationship between parents and children.
18. How is our relationship with God like the relationship between a married couple?
19. Think about or discuss how we know and relate to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
20. Create an analogy or a diagram to explain the concept of the Trinity to a friend.