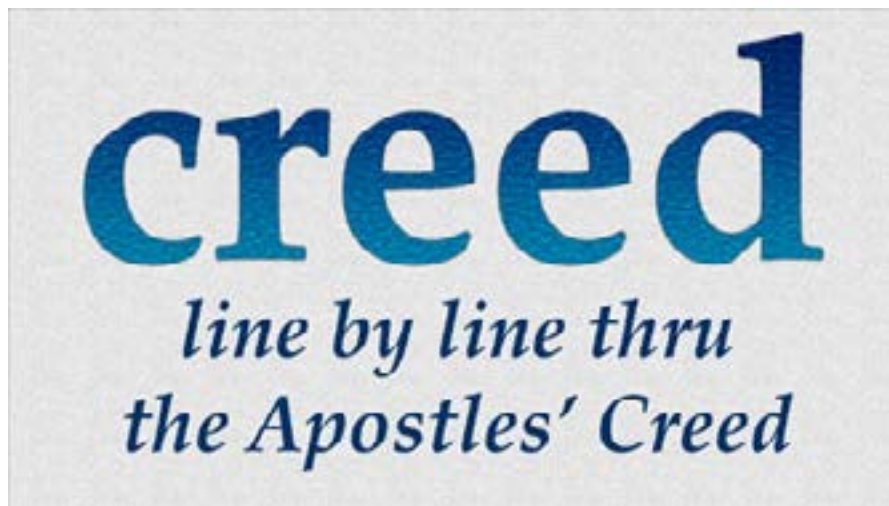
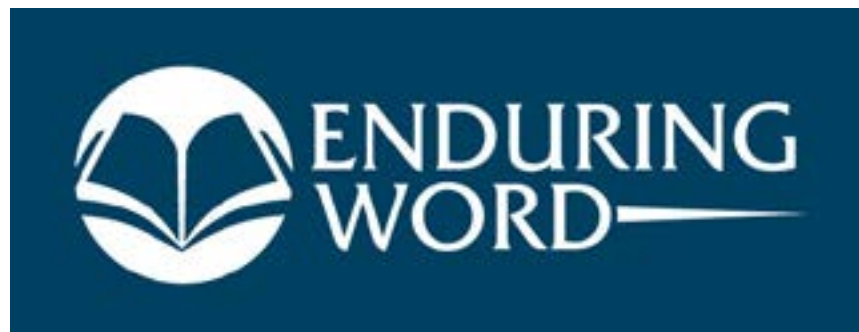


THOUGHTS ON THE  
APOSTLES'  
CREED



*by David Guzik*



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# THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord;  
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
Born of the Virgin Mary,  
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, dead, and buried;  
He descended into hades;  
The third day, He rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven, and sitteth  
On the right hand of God, the Father Almighty;  
From thence He shall come to judge  
The quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
The holy Christian church,  
The communion of the saints,  
The forgiveness of sins,  
The resurrection of the body,  
And the life everlasting.

Amen.



## BELIEVE THE CREED

*I believe in God the Father Almighty.*

Every person you have ever met, every person who will ever walk this earth, is a theologian. Of course, only a few people ever make formal theological studies their career. But whenever a person thinks about God, or even doesn't think about God, they show they are a theologian. "Theology" just means "the science or study of God." So everyone is a theologian – but not every one is a *good* theologian. Can you explain what you believe about God to someone else? Does it make sense, and is it consistent with the Bible?

One of the ways theology has been defined, taught, and defended through the centuries is through creeds. A creed is simply a statement of faith. The most ancient and honored creed among Christians is called "The Apostle's Creed." Despite some old legends, the Apostles didn't write it, but it does wonderfully express the essence of what the Apostles believed, taught, and died for in the New Testament.

The first line of the Apostle's Creed is simple enough: "*I believe in God the Father Almighty.*" Can you say it, and believe it? Most Americans believe God exists, but far fewer actually think and live as though God exists. You may not be a theological atheist, but you might be a practical atheist.

But it isn't enough to just say we believe in "God." Those three letters – G, and O, and D, might mean something very different to different people. That's why the creed is more specific, declaring belief not only in God, but in "God the Father Almighty."

The Bible tells us that God can be described as a Father, and God the Father is the first revealed person of the Trinity. God has a fatherly care and concern for us. For many, there is great power and healing in understanding what a wonderful and loving Father God is. Even if you weren't as blessed as I was to have a great father, you know instinctively how a loving father should care for his children. If you don't know it by experience, you know by instinct what a great father should be. That is how God is towards you and how He cares for you.

“Father” describes God, but it doesn't completely describe Him. He is more than a Father. He is the “Father Almighty.” God has all power and ability. Nothing can stop His determined will. I like the literal meaning of the word translated “Almighty” in the New Testament: “The One who has His hand on everything.” That describes the God we serve – He has His hand on everything.

For those in the midst of tragedy, that sometimes seems cruel. If God has His hand on everything, how could He perform – or at least allow – a particular tragedy? There is no single answer to this question; but one answer is what we learn in Romans 8:28: *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.* Taken in isolation, any one event may be unexplainable. Yet God promised to work *all things together for good*, not each thing in isolation. It is all part of the tapestry of His plan that He weaves with His almighty hand.

Will you let this encourage you today? Knowing that a loving Father has His hand on everything in your life? It can't encourage you if you don't believe it. In your heart, agree with the creed: “I believe in God the Father Almighty.”



## NOT A CHANCE

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.*

That line, the opening of the enduring Apostle's Creed, tells us several important things about God. First, that God is a loving and caring Father. Second, that He is a sovereign and Almighty God. Finally, it tells us that He is the "maker of heaven and earth." That's a basic place to begin. God is the Creator. He made heaven and earth and everything in it. And if God is the "maker of heaven and earth," then we must forever put away the idea that anything is made by chance. "Chance" merely describes the statistical probability of something happening. Chance itself can "do" or "make" nothing.

People who are genuinely intelligent often fall into the delusion of thinking "chance" can make something. Jacques Monod, a famous biochemist, wrote: "Chance alone is at the source of every innovation, of all creation in the biosphere. Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, at the very root of the stupen-

dous edifice of evolution.” Yet assigning such power to “chance” doesn’t make sense. Chance has no power. For example, when a coin is flipped, the chance it will land “heads” is 50%. However, “chance” does not *make* it land heads. Whether or not it lands heads or tails is due to the strength with which the coin is flipped, the power of air currents and air pressure as it flies through the air, where it is caught, and if it is flipped over once it is caught. Chance doesn’t “do” or “make” *anything*. It only describes probability.

Years ago, when the late scientist and atheist Carl Sagan asked the United States government for a grant to search for intelligent life in outer space, how did he hope to find it? He used a super sensitive instrument to pick up radio signals from distant space, and then he looked for *order* and *pattern* in the signals – which would demonstrate they were transmitted by intelligent life. In the same way, the order and pattern of the whole universe demonstrates that it was fashioned by intelligent life, not by “chance.” Scientists detect “chance” in the radio signals constantly (in the form of static with no order or pattern), but the static tells them nothing.

Therefore, when someone says the universe or anything else came about by chance, they are either extremely ignorant, superstitious, or (most likely) simply repeating a line they have heard before and have unthinkingly accepted. Only an intelligent designer could create a just-right universe, not “chance,” and our universe is a just-right universe.

- The universe has a just-right gravitational force. If it were larger, the stars would be too hot and would burn up too quickly and too unevenly to support life. If it were smaller, the stars would remain so cool, nuclear fusion would never ignite, and there would be no heat and light.
- The universe has a just-right speed of light. If it were larger, stars would send out too much light. If it were smaller, stars would not send out enough light.
- The universe has a just-right average distance between the stars. If it were larger, the heavy element density would be too thin for rocky planets to form, and there would only be gaseous planets. If it were smaller, planetary orbits would become destabilized.

- The universe has a just-right polarity of the water molecule. If it were greater, the heat of fusion and vaporization would be too great for life to exist. If it were smaller, the heat of fusion and vaporization would be too small for life's existence; liquid water would become too inferior a solvent for life chemistry to proceed, ice would not float, leading to a runaway freeze-up.

Could all this happen by accident? Not a chance! There is a God in heaven, and He is the "maker of heaven and earth." Do you believe the creed? Can you say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth"?



## THE ONLY ONE

*And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord.*

The Apostle's Creed is an ancient and reliable summary of basic Christian beliefs. It begins with God the Father: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." In the second paragraph, it speaks of Jesus Christ, God the Son.

It's possible that someone would object: "The creed never says that Jesus is God. It only says that He is 'His only Son, our Lord.'" Yet if we understand what it means to say that Jesus is "His only Son" and what it means that He is "our Lord," then we understand that Jesus is God.

First, notice that the creed says that Jesus Christ is *His only Son*. Of course, the "His" is God the Father – Jesus Christ is the "only Son" of God the Father. In this, the creed is clearly referring to passages like John 3:16, where Jesus is called the "only begotten Son" of God the Father. We are reminded that Jesus' position as the Son of God is different from the way that *we* are called children of God. Jesus' status as a Son is completely unique; in this sense He is the "only Son" of God, a Son by essential nature. We may be chil-



dren of God; but we are *adopted* sons and daughters of God, made children by a legal decree of God. Jesus is a Son of God because He shares the essential nature and being of God the Father, making Him as much God as the Father is. My sons and I are different; but in our essential nature and being we are both completely human. It's the same way in the relation between God the Son and God the Father.

Second, the creed says that Jesus Christ is “our Lord.” Here, the creed references back to majestic passages of Scripture like Philippians 2:9-11, which describe Jesus Christ as “Lord.” This also clearly states that Jesus is God by simply calling Him “*Lord*.” In the Bible the earliest Christians used – which was the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint – the word used to translate the holy name of God was “*kurios*.” When the Bible says that Jesus Christ is “Lord,” it uses the same word. It couldn't say it any more clearly or powerfully: “You read about this ‘Lord’ in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is this ‘Lord.’”

We also should not miss the significance that at a later time in the Roman Empire, all residents of the Empire were required to swear an oath of allegiance to the Emperor, declaring that “*Caesar is Lord*,” and had to burn a pinch of incense to an image of the emperor. Though the Roman government saw this only as a display of political allegiance, Christians rightly interpreted it as idolatry - and refused to participate, often paying with their lives. For them, there was only one Lord. Is it the same way for you? Can you say that you believe “in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord”?



## A MAN, BUT MORE THAN A MAN

*Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.*

The Apostle's Creed is old – but age hasn't diminished its truth or importance. As we make our way through the Creed, line by line, we now look at the statement regarding the Virgin Birth of Jesus. Simply put, the Creed affirms that Jesus had no earthly or human father, but was “conceived by the Holy Spirit.” It then declares that He was indeed born, but born by a woman (**Mary**) who never before had intimate relations with a man (“**the Virgin Mary**”). This says three important – indeed, absolutely essential – things about Jesus Christ.

First, it says that He is *God*, because His conception was absolutely and uniquely divine. Second, it says that Jesus is a *man*, because He was “**born of the Virgin Mary**” – just like any baby is born. Though His *conception* was absolutely unique, His *birth* was just like that of any baby. Third, it refers to a great truth theologians have called “The Incarnation.” It refers to the event

and the phenomenon of God becoming man. The New Testament teaches over and over again that Jesus is both fully God and fully man (John 1:1-2, 14; Romans 1:3-4; 8:3; 9:5; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:5-8; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:14-15). The *fact* of the incarnation is clearly stated; but the *meaning* of the incarnation is also important to understand.

First, we should understand what the incarnation isn't. It isn't that Jesus is part man and part God; He is fully man and fully God. It isn't that Jesus was God "on the inside" and human "on the outside." It isn't that Jesus was only human in His "flesh" and only God in His "spirit." The incarnation is not *subtraction*, but *addition*. Jesus did not empty Himself of the Divine nature or any Divine attribute, but He only emptied Himself of His status of equality with the Father, taking a subordinate position by an act of His will (Philippians 2:5-8). Though Jesus could let go of His *status*, He could never stop being God. Some have taught that Jesus "lost" His deity when taking our sin on the cross; but if Jesus could ever stop being God, He could have never been God to begin with.

So what is the incarnation? It is when the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, added humanity to His deity. He never became less God, but He added a human nature to His divine nature, and so became one person with two distinct natures, functioning together in perfect harmony. If it sounds strange to you, consider that in a sense, every human is one person with two natures, each inherited from their parents, and every child is "fully" the son or daughter of each parent.

We should also remember that the humanity that Jesus added to His Divine nature was not the sinful humanity we commonly know, but the perfect humanity of Adam and Eve. If you look at your own human nature and wonder how it could ever be joined with a divine nature, remember that Jesus' humanity was certainly more compatible with deity than ours.

Finally, we must remember that Jesus remains "incarnated" eternally (Acts 7:55-56; 1 Timothy 2:5). He did not relinquish His human nature when He ascended into heaven. Now He is still fully God and fully man, but a man in a resurrection body, as we will one day have.

Why is it important? Because if Jesus were not fully man, He could not be a substitute for the punishment man deserves. If He were not fully God, His sacrifice would be insufficient. If Jesus is not fully God and fully man, we are lost in sin.

The incarnation says that man really is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) and that perfect humanity is more compatible with deity than we usually imagine. The incarnation says that our problem is not our humanity, but our fallenness. To say "I'm only human" is wrong, because Jesus was fully human yet perfect. It is more accurate to say "I'm only fallen." The incarnation is important because it tells us of His great love and compassion for man. We could understand why man would want to be God, but we cannot understand why God would ever want to be man. The incarnation means there is a God in heaven who knows what we go through - not only in theory, but in actual practice, He knows. It means that God does not ask of us what He has not done Himself.



## THE HANDS ARE STILL STAINED

*Suffered under Pontius Pilate.*

The Apostles' Creed is probably the most well-known – and agreed to – statement of belief among Christians that doesn't come straight from one Biblical passage. For centuries, Christians have united around this simple statement of the essentials of the faith. In the earliest church, the creed was a statement of faith required for those who would be baptized. Before they could express a public devotion to Jesus, they had to demonstrate their understanding and agreement with the truths of the Apostles' Creed.

Some people think that this line – “suffered under Pontius Pilate” – is the strangest line in the Apostles' Creed. Why should this be an essential of the faith? Why would understanding this statement and agreeing to it be required of a true Christian?

The Bible makes it clear Pontius Pilate was the Roman official that supervised and approved the torture and crucifixion of Jesus. Each one of the Gospel writers refers to this: Matthew (27:24), Mark (15:15), Luke (23:24), and John (19:15-16). The fact was noted in the preaching of Peter (Acts 3:13) and Paul (Acts 13:28). To say, “I believe Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate” is just another way of saying, “I believe the Bible is true and historically accurate.” Sadly, some people don’t believe the Bible is historically accurate, but this is essential for a genuine Christian. We don’t believe in fairy-tale stories, but in a real God who acts in real human history.

Of course, the Bible stands up in its credentials as a historical document despite the doubts of the skeptics. Names, places, dates, empires, and events described by the Bible have time and again been found to be true. At one time it was thought that archaeology would disprove the Bible; now many or most archaeologists agree that their field has shown the Bible to be an accurate historical record. After all, the center of Christianity is what Jesus did for us on the cross. If history never saw a real Jesus, a real cross, a real empty tomb and a real Pontius Pilate, then the center of Christianity is simply a lie. But it isn’t a lie. When Pilate served in Judea, his headquarters were in the city of Caesarea. In that city, archaeologists discovered a stone from a building inscribed with the name Pontus Pilate. He really lived, he really ruled, and he really sentenced Jesus to suffering and death.

Pilate is one of the most fascinating and complex characters of the New Testament – but also one of the most tragic. Matthew 27:24 describes a memorable scene: *When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.”* Pilate tried to wash his hands of the responsibility of rejecting Jesus Christ, yet he couldn’t do it. He could not avoid this responsibility and his guilt is forever echoed in the Apostles’ Creed. For centuries Christians have declared that Pontius Pilate’s hands are still stained.



## FAITH FOUNDED ON FACT

*Was crucified, dead, and buried.*

The Apostle's Creed is an ancient statement of faith, agreed to universally among Christians. It contains the essentials of Christian belief, and in ancient times was used as a baptismal creed to make sure that new converts knew the basic truths of the faith. There may not be a more important line in the creed than what we consider here: that Jesus **was crucified, dead, and buried**. Clearly, the creed drew on Paul's description of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

Crucifixion began with a whipping known as scourging, tearing open the victim's back. Jesus was clothed in some way after the scourging (Matthew 27:26-31), but the wounds on His back were traumatized again when those clothes were removed at the place of crucifixion. Then, when Jesus was thrown on the ground to nail His hands to the crossbeam, the wounds were

again torn open and contaminated with dirt. Each breath on the cross further aggravated the painful back wounds scrapping against the rough wood of the upright beam.

When the nail was pounded through the wrists, it severed the large median nerve. This stimulated nerve produced excruciating bolts of fiery pain in both arms, and often resulted in a claw-like grip in the victim's hands.

Beyond the pain, the major effect of crucifixion was to restrict normal breathing. The weight of the body pulled down on the arms and shoulders, making it easier to breathe in than to breathe out. Because the victim couldn't breathe properly, the muscles began to cramp and this made it even harder to get a good breath. To get a good breath, one had to push from the feet - but this was also terribly painful. Lifting the body for a breath also painfully scraped the back against the rough wooden post. Each effort to get a proper breath was agonizing, exhausting, and led to a sooner death.

Death from crucifixion might have several different medical causes: acute shock from blood loss, exhaustion induced respiratory failure, dehydration, stress-induced heart attack, or congestive heart failure leading to a heart rupture. If the victim did not die quickly enough, the legs were broken, and the victim was soon unable to breathe at all. [Click here for more on the medical aspects of crucifixion.](#)

The creed also points out that Jesus was **buried**. We don't often think of the burial of Jesus as important, but it is. It was proof positive that He really died, because you don't bury someone unless they are really dead and Jesus' death was confirmed at the cross before He was taken down to be buried (John 19:31-37). Jesus' burial is also important because it fulfilled the Scriptures which declared, "And they made His grave with the wicked; but with the rich at His death" (Isaiah 53:9).

It's important to notice that this core statement of Christian belief regards things that happened - actual, real, historical events. The gospel isn't a matter of religious opinions, platitudes, or fairy tales, but about real historical events. On a real day at a real place among real people, Jesus of Nazareth was **crucified, dead, and buried**. We have a faith founded on facts.





## NO FORGOTTEN ONES

*He descended into hades.*

The Apostles' Creed is an ancient, worthy, and wonderful summary of basic Christian belief. Many think it came to be as a statement of faith for new Christians to understand and affirm before baptism. Of all the statements in the Creed, these four words might be the hardest to understand. What does it mean to say, "I believe that Jesus descended into Hades"?

The Bible tells us that when Jesus died, and was laid in the tomb, he went to the place of the dead - known in the Bible as "Hades" or "Sheol." Peter, preaching in Acts 2:31, declared that an Old Testament prophet *spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.* So perhaps the most important fact about Jesus and Hades is that *He didn't stay there!* Still, He certainly did visit Hades as His body lay in the tomb.

If Jesus went to Hades, what did He do there? First, we should say what He did not do. He did not go to Hades as a victim or prisoner of Satan and somehow perform more payment for our sins after His work on the cross. Satan isn't the master of Hades or hell, and Jesus finished His work of paying for our debt of sin at the cross. When Jesus said, *It is finished* (John 19:30), He meant it. So our question still remains: what did Jesus do in Hades?

Here's how many think it worked. Before the finished work of Jesus on the cross, the debt of sin was not truly paid. For this reason, the righteous dead before the time of Jesus could not go to heaven, because their debt of sin had not been completely paid. It had been covered with an IOU, so to speak. The righteous dead went to Hades, the abode of the dead - and they waited in a place of blessing and comfort until the finished work of Jesus (Luke 16:19-31). When Jesus paid for all of those IOUs at the cross, He then led all of the righteous, waiting dead into heaven, because the price had been paid. This work of Jesus in Hades is described in passages like Ephesians 4:8-9, Isaiah 61:1, and Hebrews 11:39-40. But that isn't all Jesus did in Hades. He also had something to say to those who were in this abode of the dead, but not in the place of blessing and comfort.

1 Peter 3:18-19 also tells us that Jesus preached in Hades: *“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison.”*

Apparently, this work was done in the period after Jesus' death, but before His first resurrection appearance to the disciples. Jesus went to Hades - the abode of the dead - and preached to the spirits there. But why would Jesus preach to these imprisoned spirits? In all probability, this was “preaching” (the proclamation of God's message) but not “evangelism” (the proclamation of good news). Jesus probably preached judgment to these disobedient spirits. The Bible says that even those *under the earth* must acknowledge Jesus' ultimate Lordship. Jesus went to Hades and announced this truth: *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth.* (Philippians 2:10)

Those in Hades were the forgotten ones of this earth. They had passed from this life long before; but God didn't forget them. An important - though obscure - part of Jesus' ministry was to minister to these forgotten ones. Take it as encouragement today – that you are never, ever a forgotten one before God.



## JUST LIKE HE SAID HE WOULD

*The third day, He rose again from the dead.*

It can only be one person the Apostles' Creed speaks of with this sentence. It can't be Mohammed, or Buddha, or even Moses. It can be no other religious leader who walked this earth. Only of Jesus Christ can it be said, **The third day, He rose again from the dead.** Later we will consider more of what it means that Jesus **rose again from the dead.** Right now, we will focus on why it is important to emphasize it happened **the third day.**

There are many different passages of Scripture that the Apostles' Creed may be referring to. On many occasions, Jesus said He would rise again the third day (Matthew 16:21, Mark 9:31, Luke 9:22, John 2:19). However, the Creed may have in mind Paul's stating of the essence of the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, where he wrote, *He rose again the third day.* The constant emphasis shows the fact that Jesus rose again the third day is part of the Gospel. It is important for at least three reasons.

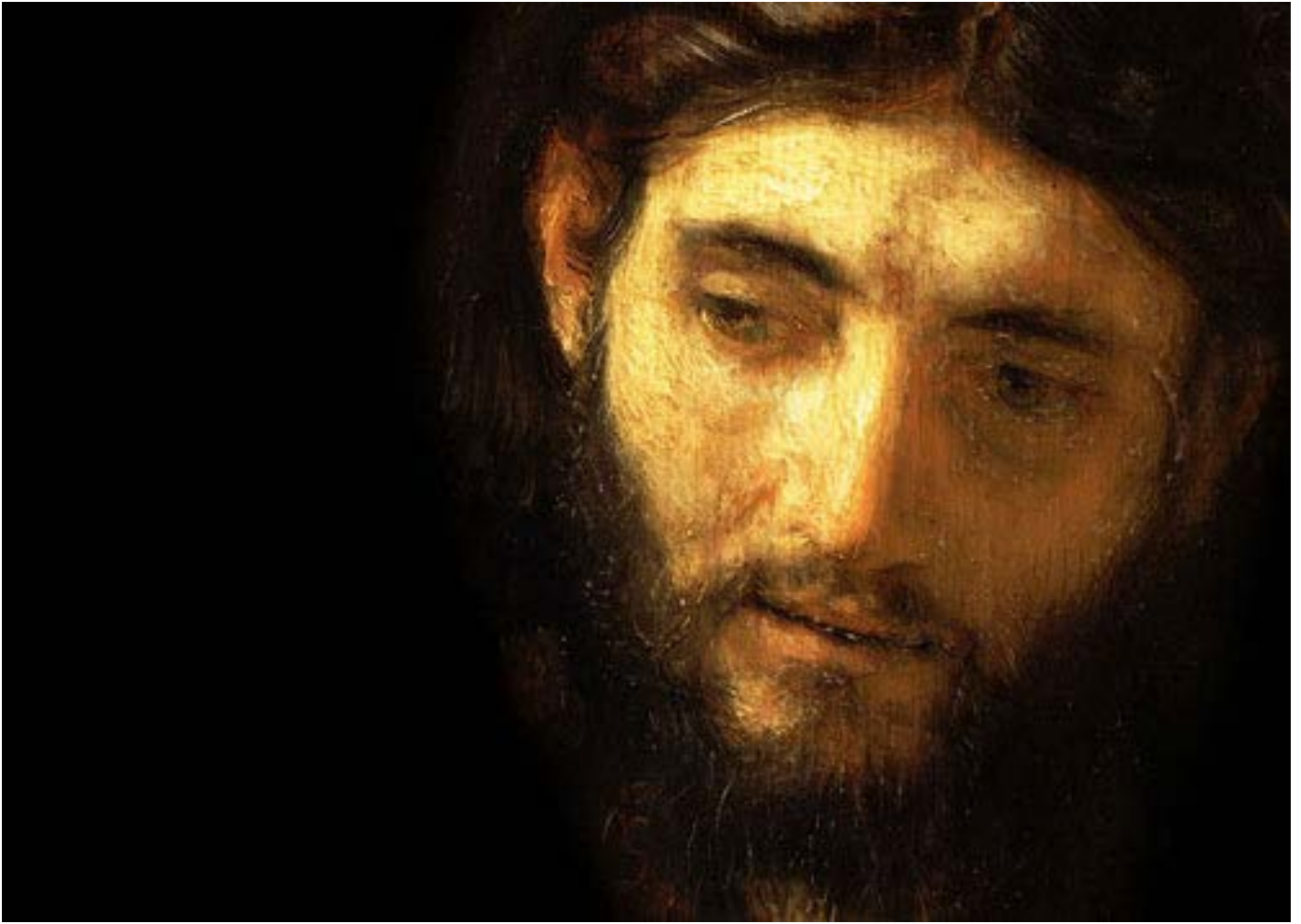
First, it shows Jesus was a unique case. He did not or will not rise at some general resurrection of the dead. Instead, He rose the third day after His death. The resurrection of Jesus was a special, unique event.

Second, it confirms Jesus' credibility, because He proclaimed He would rise three days after His death (see again passages such as Matthew 16:21, 17:23 or 20:19).

Third, it fulfills what Jesus called *the sign of the prophet Jonah*. In Matthew 12:40 He told some who sought a sign that this would be the only sign they would get – the sign of a resurrected Jesus. *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* Along those lines, it's interesting to see the similarities between Jonah and Jesus. When he volunteered to be thrown into the sea from the ship, Jonah gave his life to appease the wrath of God coming upon others. So did Jesus. Death did not hold Jonah; after three days and nights of imprisonment, he was alive and free. It was the same with Jesus! In Jonah, we find a wonderful picture of Jesus in an unexpected place.

Because of the reference to **the third day**, and because in Matthew 12:40 Jesus refers to *three days and three nights*, some have thought that Jesus had to spend at least 72 hours in the grave. This upsets most chronologies of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and is unnecessary - because it doesn't take into account the use of ancient figures of speech. Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah (around the year 100 AD) explained this way of speaking when he wrote: "A day and a night make a whole day, and a portion of a whole day is reckoned as a whole day." This demonstrates how among the Jews of Jesus' time, the phrase "three days and three nights" did not necessarily mean a 72-hour period, but a period including at least the *portions* of three days and three nights.

If Jesus would have risen from the dead on the first day or on the fifth day, one could say, "Jesus was a liar and a false prophet. He said He would rise again on the third day, but He got it wrong." But Jesus didn't get it wrong. He never does. You can trust Him for anything and everything, because He always keeps His word.



## PROOF OF PAYMENT

*He rose again from the dead.*

In the mind of almost everybody, the universal symbol of Christianity is a cross, not an empty tomb. Paul called his gospel *the message of the cross* (1 Corinthians 1:18). Paul said he preached Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23). With such an emphasis with what Jesus did on the cross, why is it really all that important that **He rose again from the dead** as the Apostles' Creed states?

Jesus on the cross bore the wrath of God that we deserved, as if He were a guilty sinner, guilty of all our sin, even being *made* sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). In all that, Jesus Himself did not become a sinner. Even the act of taking our sin was an act of holy, giving love for us – so that Jesus did not

become a sinner, even though He bore the full penalty of our sin. This is the gospel message; that Jesus took our punishment for sin on the cross, and yet remained a perfect Savior through the whole ordeal, and this is proved by His resurrection. For this reason He remained the *Holy One*, even in His death (Acts 2:27, 2:31-32). Since it was incomprehensible that God's Holy One could be bound by death, the resurrection was absolutely inevitable.

Therefore, the resurrection of Jesus is not something added to a more important work on the cross. If the cross is the payment for our sins, the empty tomb is the receipt, showing that the perfect Son of God made perfect payment for our sins. The payment itself is of little good without the receipt. This is why the resurrection of Jesus was such a prominent theme in the evangelistic preaching of the early church (see Acts 2:24, 3:15, 4:10, and 13:30-39).

The resurrection was a demonstration of great power. As Ephesians 1:19-20 speaks of "*His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.*" We might say that though the cross was the ultimate demonstration of love, then we might likewise say that the resurrection and the empty tomb are the ultimate demonstration of power. The love of God means little unless it also has the *power* to accomplish what love desires. The resurrection assures us that God's love has the power to carry through every intention.

The cross was a time of victorious death, a triumph to be certain, but in a negative sense. Sin was defeated; but nothing positive was put in its place until the resurrection. The resurrection showed that Jesus did not succumb to the inevitable result of sin. The resurrection is proof of His conquest. God loved you enough to give you more than just a payment for sins. He also gave you the receipt. The next time the guilt of your sin presses upon you, remember the payment at the cross – and hold on tight to the proof of the payment given at the empty tomb of Jesus.



## UP TO HEAVEN

*He ascended into heaven.*

After Jesus rose from the dead, He met with His disciples many times. Eventually, after forty days, Jesus left this earth and - as the Apostles' Creed says - **He ascended into heaven.** Why should this event in the life of Jesus deserve mention in this enduring statement of faith, the Apostles' Creed?

The Ascension of Jesus is important because of *how* it happened. On a hill outside Jerusalem, called the Mount of Olives, Jesus met with His disciples one last time on this earth. He gave them final instructions, essentially saying: "Receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and then reach the whole world with the message of who I am and what I have done for each person." Then, something remarkable happened. Jesus started to rise, and rise, and He kept rising. As He slowly disappeared into the sky, surrounded by a cloud, the disciples continued to gaze upward, looking, looking, and straining to see, until Jesus



could no longer be seen. There's no doubt that this was a dramatic exit. After His resurrection, Jesus didn't always leave His disciples this way. Sometimes He just vanished - they looked, and He was gone (as in Luke 24:31).

So why did Jesus ascend this way? He certainly could have simply vanished to the Father's presence in a secret sort of way. So with this ascension into heaven slowly rising until they could no longer see Him, Jesus showed His disciples that *He was gone for good*. He showed them that this was not like the previous times when He might appear, disappear, and reappear during the forty days after the resurrection.

Remember Jesus' words to His disciples in John 16:7: *It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.* Now the disciples could know that that promise would be fulfilled. Jesus was gone. It was time for the Holy Spirit to come.

There is one more aspect of **He ascended into heaven** that is precious. Luke 24:50 says, "*And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.*" When Jesus left this earth, He left blessing His people. His hands were raised in the position of a priestly blessing, and He spoke words of strength, comfort, and blessing as He was parted from them. His words continued as He went higher and higher, until the disciples could no longer hear them. The last words they heard from Jesus were words of blessing. He could have been critical, He could have been harsh, or He could have corrected them. But He wanted words of blessing to stay in their ears.

Know this: He left the earth blessing His people, and He hasn't stopped blessing them, even from heaven. Jesus wants to bless you today.



## SEATED IN HEAVEN

*He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty.*

Jesus ascended into heaven, showing His disciples that this departure was permanent. During the weeks after His resurrection Jesus appeared and disappeared, visiting the disciples and others often. That time came to an end. It was time for Jesus to permanently ascend to heaven so that He could send the Holy Spirit and begin His work on behalf of His people in heaven.

The Bible says (and the Creed declares) that when Jesus ascended into heaven that He *sat down* at the right hand of God the Father (Hebrews 10:12). This fact - that He is seated at the right hand of God the Father - is important enough to be repeated no less than 12 times in the New Testament. But why is it so important?

It is important because of *where* Jesus is seated. **The right hand** was the place of status and favor. This is because in the thinking of ancient cultures - most

people being right handed - the right hand was the hand of power, skill, and strength. So to be at someone's right hand was more prestigious than being at his or her left hand. Jesus is at the place of status and honor in heaven, seated at the right hand of God the Father.

It is also important because of Jesus' *posture* - He is seated. This shows that Jesus' work is finished. The Bible describes all sorts of furniture to be made for both the Old Testament tabernacle and temple, but never any *chairs* for the priests. This was because under the Old Covenant the priests had to stand continually in their work. Their work continued daily and sacrifices had to be repeatedly offered. The priests could never sit down; but Jesus *sat down at the right hand of God* (Hebrews 10:12), having finished His work of sacrifice for sin.

There is one notable exception to the New Testament descriptions of Jesus seated at the right hand of God the Father. In Acts 7:56 it says that Stephen, even as the stones from his executioners pummeled his body, saw *Jesus standing at the right hand of God*. Jesus made a special standing for Stephen for at least two reasons. First, Jesus stood in solidarity with Stephen at this moment of crisis. He cared about Stephen's crisis, and stood to show His concern. Second, we might also consider that Jesus stood to give a "standing ovation" to Stephen, whose fate made him unique - he was the first of all martyrs among the followers of Jesus.

Though Jesus is seated, He isn't lazy in heaven. He sits, but He isn't laying back on a comfortable recliner chair. He is seated, but continues His ministry in heaven - He has a ministry of prayer for His people. Yet that ministry flows from His completed work, so Jesus can take a posture of rest - *He sat down at the right hand of God*. But never forget it; Jesus still serves you from heaven by praying for you. Today, *Jesus prayed for you*. Have you thanked Him for it?



## HE SHALL RETURN

*From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

Line by line, the Apostles' Creed sets out some essential truths of Christian belief. The Creed was used as a statement of faith, especially for new converts who were about to be baptized. It begins by describing a basic belief in God the Father, then in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. This is the last line in the Creed that speaks of Jesus' work. It describes His return from heaven, **from where He shall come to judge the living and the dead.**

There is a lot of debate among Christians regarding the how and when of the return of Jesus, but all true Christians agree on the *fact* of His return. The differences of opinion regarding how and when are important to study and understand, but they are less important than the great fact agreed upon: Jesus ascended into heaven, and **from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.**

For some, the idea of Jesus returning to this earth reminds them of an old homeless man walking down the street with a sign that reads, "The End is Near." Others remember the dozens of examples of foolish predictions of a certain day of Jesus' return. All in all, it's almost enough to make someone give up on the idea that Jesus will ever return - *almost*. Yet not enough, for one simple reason: despite all the crazies through the centuries who have miss-taken and miss-applied the words of Jesus, His words still stand:

*"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."* (John 14:1-3)

*"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."* (Matthew 24:30)

We can know that Jesus will come from heaven to judge the living and the dead simply because He said that He would. In the Second World War, when an enemy army overran the Philippines, the retreating United States General Douglas MacArthur famously said: "I shall return." Most people took him at his word, and MacArthur did indeed return to the Philippines - as a victor. It makes sense that we should trust Jesus less than we would trust a general.

There's no doubt about His return. The only question is our readiness. If He came back today, would you be ready? If you believe this part of the Apostles' Creed, it will show in your life. Can others see that you are ready?

*"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."* (Matthew 24:42)



## COMING TO JUDGE

*From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

Most of us know more about judges and courtrooms from television and movies than by personal experience. Most of us would like to keep distance from courts, trials, and judges - these are serious people and places. We realize that in some way or another, a judge holds human destiny in his or her hands. It's a sobering thing to realize that a judge is coming and that you have to stand before the judge.

This brief line from the Apostles' Creed - **From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead** - says that our Judge is Jesus, and He is coming.

- It tells us *where He comes from* - **from thence**, from heaven, where He ascended after His resurrection
- It tells us *what Jesus will do* - He **shall come**, that is, He shall return to this earth
- It tells us *what He is coming to do*: **to judge**

- It tells us *who He will judge*: **the quick** (the living) **and the dead**

When we think of Jesus as He walked this earth, and as His life was recorded in the gospels, it is sometimes hard to think of Him as a judge. Yet the loving nature and ministry of Jesus qualifies Him to be the best judge. However, there is something else in Jesus' ministry that makes Him even more qualified to be the judge of all people. If anything qualifies Jesus to be our judge, it is that *Jesus knows what it is like to be the target of judgment*. As He hung on the cross for our sins, God the Father poured out on God the Son the righteous judgment we deserved. Jesus, though He was sinless, put Himself in the place of guilty sinners.

One day Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. Jesus said, "*For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son.*" (John 5:22) And when He does, every defendant before the court of God will look into the face of the One who still shows the wounds from standing in the place of judgment. Every guilty defendant will know that their Judge could have been their Savior, if they would only have turned their trust away from themselves and onto Him.

So it is true: the Judge is coming. But He only comes as a judge because He first came as a Savior. Those who receive Him as He came first (as Savior) will have no trouble when He comes the second time, when **He shall come to judge the wicked and the dead.**



## THE SPOTLIGHT ON JESUS

*I believe in the Holy Spirit.*

The Apostles' Creed is an ancient and honored statement of faith, with a basic creed that is common to all Christians. It begins by acknowledging God the Father, and then has an extended section on God the Son. Now, we see in the Creed a reference to God the Holy Spirit.

For many people, the Holy Spirit is the silent or forgotten member of the Godhead. They look at Him as the least of the Trinity, and pay little attention to the Holy Spirit. But the Apostles' Creed won't let us do that. In a simple, straightforward statement it says, "I believe in the Holy Spirit."

Is it good or bad that many Christians forget about the Holy Spirit?

In one way it is good, because the Holy Spirit loves to work with the spotlight on Jesus, not Himself. Jesus said this about the ministry of the Spirit:



*But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me* (John 15:26). The Holy Spirit's whole purpose is to draw us to Jesus, and to testify of Jesus. He is happy to be in the background, just as long as the focus is on Jesus. People who really listen to the Holy Spirit will always have a wonderful focus on Jesus.

In another way it is bad, because forgetting about the Holy Spirit may be an indication that we are dead or asleep to spiritual things. For many Christians, their walk with God is no longer a supernatural thing; it is all too natural. It isn't that we expect a strange, dramatic supernatural encounter every hour. Yet if there is little or no evidence of the Spirit of God moving in and around our life, something is missing.

As in many things, we are faced with a balance in regard to the Holy Spirit. Yes, we want to remember His presence, His work, and His constant desire to move in us and through us to supernaturally meet the needs of a hurting world. And yes, we do this without an over-emphasis on the Holy Spirit Himself, who longs more than anything to tell us about Jesus and to lead us to Jesus.

It's important to remember that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each share the same divine nature. They are all the same kind of Being. It isn't as if each of them has widely different personalities. Jesus could say, *When you see Me, you have seen the Father.* (John 14:9) The same could be said of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus. Where the Holy Spirit is really working, it will look a lot like Jesus.

Some people think that spiritual living is all about having more of the Holy Spirit. In reality, it is all about the Holy Spirit having more of us. Is there some thing or some matter you should yield to Him today?



## LOVING WHAT JESUS LOVES

*I believe . . . in the holy Christian Church.*

I imagine there are some who read the Apostles' Creed, this ancient and great statement of essential Christian belief, and have an easy time up to this point. It isn't hard to picture someone having a hard time saying the words **I believe . . . in the holy Christian Church**. They might have no trouble affirming their belief in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. But why make a statement of faith in support of the church? Hasn't the church disappointed too many people to deserve such a high place in this great creed?

Through the centuries, the church has often punished good and rewarded evil. At times it has encouraged sin and discouraged godliness. Sometimes the church has seemed to be on an dedicated mission to hide Jesus and His Word. By and large, the history of the church teaches us more about what *not* to do than what *to* do. Then why is it important for every Christian to say, **I believe . . . in the holy Christian Church**?

First, we should love and value the church because Jesus does. Are you an expert in the sins and shortcomings of the church? Jesus knows about them better than you do, yet He loves the church. He regards the company of God's people as His precious bride, cherished and loved. When we choose a bad attitude against the church, it offends Jesus. We **believe in the holy Christian Church** because Jesus does.

Second, we should love and value the church because Jesus commands us to. There are many passages from the Bible that speak to this, but an impressive one is in John 13 where Jesus washed the disciple's feet. After that amazing display of humble, serving love, Jesus didn't demand that the disciples come and wash His feet. Instead, He said: *If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.* (John 13:14) In a strange way, our love for Jesus is not measured by our love for Jesus directly. In truth, our love for Jesus is measured by our love for the people who make up His church.

There is something in this last phrase that I prefer in other renderings of the Apostle's Creed. Our rendering of the Creed has **I believe . . . in the holy Christian Church**. I prefer the more traditional rendering *I believe . . . in the holy catholic Church*. I prefer it because when we understand what the word *catholic* means, it is a beautiful and meaningful statement to proclaim, *I believe . . . in the holy catholic Church*. Most of us associate the word *catholic* with the *Roman Catholic Church*; but the word *catholic* in itself – in its original meaning – has nothing to do with Rome and popes. The word “catholic” simple means “universal.” Therefore, with this correct understanding, when I say, “I believe in the holy catholic Church,” I declare the essential unity of the church throughout all ages. I'm saying that there is really only one spiritual and invisible church that all who are genuinely born of God belong to. It says that I go to church with Peter and Paul and Polycarp and Francis of Assisi and Hus and Wycliffe and Luther and Calvin and Whitefield and Wesley and Edwards and Spurgeon and Schaeffer and Graham. I like going to that church.

If it's hard for you to say, **I believe in . . . the holy Christian Church**, then do one simple thing: Ask Jesus to give you the same heart *He* has for the church. Jesus believes in His Church, and I think we should also. He knows all our sins and shortcomings, and works on them - but His love never leaves.



## SHARED LIVES AND SHINING LIGHTS

*I believe in . . . the communion of the saints.*

This line, towards the end of the great and ancient statement of faith known as the Apostles' Creed, sounds pretty spiritual. A phrase like the **communion of the saints** doesn't come from the street, the office, or the shopping mall. It's the kind of thing you only hear in church. So what does it mean? Look at it piece by piece.

**Communion** is one of the great words of the New Testament, the ancient Greek word *koinonia*. That word has the idea of association, communion, fellowship, giving, and participation; it means to *share* in something. Christians share together the same Lord Jesus, we share the same guide for life, we share the same love for God, we share the same desire to worship Him, we share the same struggles, we share the same victories, we share the same job of living for Him, and we share the same joy of communicating that gospel to others. The real Christian life is always lived in community, and when a follower of Jesus doesn't value the communion of the saints, it shows something isn't right.

The word **saints** is another great one from the pages of the New Testament. In the New Testament idea, **saints** are not a few dead, elite, super-Christians. Instead, the title *saint* is given to every true follower of Jesus Christ. The ancient word means *holy one* or *separated one*, and part of being a follower of Jesus is being separated away from things of this world, and separated unto Jesus. The idea is of someone who is different from the world around them because of Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian then you *are* different - you just have to *live out* that difference.

We really all can be saints. Look at what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:2: “*To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.*” Everyone who comes to Jesus and follows Him today can be part of this group of saints.

Therefore, we should go out and live like saints. It doesn't mean perfection, but it does mean showing Jesus. Think of an old cathedral with beautiful stained-glass windows displaying great saints of former days. Even as the light streams through the stained-glass pictures of saints, saints are people through whom the light of God shines. If we turn our face towards His light today, we can let it shine through us.



## FORGIVEN

*I believe in . . . the forgiveness of sins.*

In an old Clint Eastwood movie, he played a retired gunfighter who returned to kill for a large reward. A young man who claimed to have killed many men joined the old gunfighter, but as the young man pulled the trigger to end the life of one of the men with the bounty on his head, the young man was traumatized. After the killing, he nervously spoke with the old gunfighter, trying to assure and justify himself. “I guess he had it coming, didn’t he, Will?” After a knowing pause, the old gunfighter said, “Kid, we’ve all got it coming.” This exchange was important to the writer of the movie, because the film was titled *Unforgiven*.

Unforgiven. If we understand what it means, we might say that there is no more terrible word. Any honest heart will acknowledge its debt of sin before a righteous God. If that sin will not be forgiven, we take the guilt and stain of it from this life into the next, where it must be paid for eternally. Yet as Christians, as those who agree with this creed, we proclaim: **I believe in . . . the forgiveness of sins.** But what forgives our sins?

Some people think that God’s *kindness* forgives sin. God sees our sin, and He knows it well – but is just kind to His children and excuses their bad behav-

ior. This thinking goes against the Biblical understanding of who God is. He is kind; but He is also just. A too-nice judge who excuses every criminal isn't a good judge at all, and God is good in everything He does.

Some people think that *time* forgives sin. They think, "I know that I sinned in some terrible ways, but that was a long time ago." Yet God is the God of eternity. Our sin is ever before Him. What seems like a long time ago to us is half the blink of an eye to our God. Time may make us forget our sin, but it doesn't make God forgive it.

Some people think that we earn forgiveness through our *good and religious works*. "I know I had a wild Saturday night, but I'll go to church on Sunday." But the Bible teaches that we can't atone for our own sin. Even our good works are not acceptable to God as payment for our bad works. Isaiah 64:6 says, *But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags*. It's good when we do good things, but it doesn't cover up bad we have done.

The Bible tells us only one way we are forgiven: through the work of Jesus on the cross for us. The guilt and punishment we deserve was put upon Jesus in a real, powerful spiritual transaction, glorious and horrific all at the same time. Jesus stood in our place, and God the Father treated Him as if He were a guilty sinner. He took the punishment we deserved, and we are invited to believe, receive, and trust in what He did for us instead of what we can do for ourselves.

In this simple way we are transformed from *Unforgiven* to *Forgiven*. Thank Jesus for His great forgiveness today, and ask Him to empower you by the Holy Spirit to live as a radically forgiven person.





## MORE THAN ONLY THE SPIRIT

*I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body.*

The Apostles' Creed deals with the highest themes regarding the nature and work of God. It discusses each member of the Trinity one by one, and at the end it states several other important subjects of Christian belief. Here - almost at the end - it proclaims a truth not held in high regard by many Christians. It simply says, **I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body.**

Ancient Greek philosophy divided the world into the material and the spiritual. Many of them thought that spirit was good and the material was bad. In their thinking, to be really spiritual you dealt only with things of the spirit. The material was unconnected to the spiritual.

To people who thought this way, the declaration of the Apostles' Creed, **I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body** was strange - perhaps even offensive. There is nothing more material than these bodies we live in. It was easy for someone from that culture to think that God had no plan for the body,

and that He was only concerned about the salvation of our spirits, not our bodies.

But God *is* concerned about our bodies. Some people are so “spiritual” that they think anything “material” is of no interest to God. But look at what the Lord says about our bodies in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* God is interested in the whole person. Not just the spirit; not just the soul; but spirit, soul, and body all together. God has made provision for the salvation of every aspect of our being, and the ultimate salvation for our bodies is called *resurrection*. That’s why the creed proclaims, **I believe in the resurrection of the body.**

We also understand that this is God’s final answer for the problems of our human bodies. We know that God does wonderful, miraculous healings today. Yet many go unhealed, and bodily suffering usually just gets worse and worse as we get older and older. Yet God’s ultimate plan isn’t to keep patching up these old tents we call bodies. His ultimate plan is to resurrect these frail tents into glorious mansions.

So the body matters. It matters now - Paul says that bodily exercise does profit, even if it is just a little (1 Timothy 4:8). It will also matter *then*, on the day when Jesus takes these bodies and transforms them into something glorious.

By the way, some people have taken this obvious interest God has in our physical bodies, along with the understanding of ancient pagan burial customs, and have concluded that cremation is wrong for Christians. They feel it is a desecration of this body that God will one day resurrect. We can understand this perspective, and respect the wishes of any Christian who does not want to be cremated. At the same time, we recognize that cremation does to the body in ten minutes what ten years in the ground does all on its own. No matter what state the atoms of our body are in when that moment of resurrection comes, God will know how to assemble those atoms into a glorious resurrection body. We should all be able to say, **I believe in the resurrection of the body.**



## LIFE EVERLASTING AMEN

*I believe in . . . the life everlasting. Amen.*

There are many things - perhaps too many things - that Christians disagree on. But there are also many things that Christians do, or at least should, agree on. One of the most basic statements of faith found in Christian history is known as *The Apostles' Creed*. It isn't called *Apostles'* because the Apostles wrote it, but because it is an accurate, brief summary of what the New Testament Apostles taught.

Here, at the end of the Apostles' Creed, we look at the last line: **I believe in . . . the life everlasting. Amen.** A Christian believes not only in the resurrection of the body, but also that the resurrected body will enjoy **life everlasting**. The New Testament brings out two interesting points on this idea.

First, there is a sense in which **life everlasting** is totally unique to the Christian experience. We understand this from passages like John 3:16: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" The *everlasting life* Jesus spoke of is not simply the unending life of eternity. It speaks of a *quality* of life. Some scholars even translate the idea of the words *everlasting life* into "life from heaven" or "life from above." It means that we believe God gives His kind of

life to us, and that is part of what we mean when we say, **I believe in . . . the life everlasting**. The wonderful thing about this is that we can start living and enjoying the God-kind of life right now. You don't have to wait until you die to live **the life everlasting**. He wants to put that life into right now.

Second, there is a sense in which **life everlasting** is not unique to the Christian at all. Jesus said in John 5:28-29: "*Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.*" Every one of us will live forever. Just as those who are righteous in Jesus will receive a body specially made for the glories of heaven, so the others will receive a body specially made for the agonies of hell. We deal with serious business on this earth, because what we do here matters in **the life everlasting**.

This should also make us more sensitive and appreciative of each other. Every day, we come into contact with a few eternal things:

- God Himself is eternal
- God's Word is eternal
- People are eternal

We must spend more time investing ourselves in eternal things, and less in everything else that will pass away. Every person you meet, everyday, has an eternal destiny in **the life everlasting**. Can you make a difference for their eternity?



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