

The Apostles' Creed

Part 13

Forgiveness, Resurrection and Life Everlasting

Isaiah 55:7; Acts 24:15, 16; John 5:24, 25

With Study Questions

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This morning we will discuss the portion in the Apostles' Creed addressing "**The Forgiveness of Sins, The Resurrection of the Body, And the Life Everlasting.**"

Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:7).

I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust.¹⁶ This *being* so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men (Acts 24:15, 16).

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.²⁵ Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live (John 5:24, 25).

Introduction

Years ago some friends and I were watching, if I remember correctly, the country music awards. A couple was on stage singing a song about how happy they were in the relationship they had with each other. Then from offstage another man walked in singing, "But what about me?" We all felt like someone had just force-fed us a ham sandwich. How self-involved! That's something a four-year-old says!

A best selling Christian book begins with the words, "It's not about you" then spends the next three hundred pages telling you just the opposite. As human beings, there is almost an unavoidable *What About Me*

sentiment occupying the first class section of our hearts. We have now come to the very *what about me* section of the Apostles' Creed.

The lion's share of the Creed speaks of God the Father, who He is and what's He's done; and Jesus – who He is and what He's done and will do; and the Spirit in relation to the church and community of the faithful. These are all central tenets of the Christian faith. These things are the flesh and bones of truth and hope. They are deep and profound articles of faith. Here, as if on the very top of this mighty theological structure, the Creed produces a couch of rest for the weary sinner.

We examine Father, Son and Spirit. And if our study has been even remotely accurate we lose ourselves (or more accurately abhor ourselves) by the surrounding glory. We cry out with the Psalmist,

What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him (Psalm 8:4)?

The Forgiveness of Sins

Here is the touch-point between a holy God and sinful man – “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.” This is very personal, existential if you will. We will praise God for all eternity, not because of the majesty of His creative genius – having made the heavens and the earth from the breath of His mouth (although it may include that) but on account of having been redeemed by the blood of Christ:

And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Revelation 5:9).

The commencement of man's relationship with God is one of forgiveness of sins. We often think of a sin as a violation of some abstract and impersonal law or standard, but it is much more intimate than that.

I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me (Ezekiel 20:38)

It is one thing for my children to cross lines in terms of rules and regulations, but it is an entirely more weighty infraction for them to do so in such a way as to disregard and disrespect their mother or father. Since all true law is an extension of the character and nature of God, all breaches of His law demonstrate personal contempt for Him.

And just in case we're unclear on this subject which has been muddied up by various theological systems prevalent in our culture, James teaches that **"There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy" (James 4:12)?** John helps us define sin, writing, **"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4).**

We live in times (certainly at some level all times have been this way) where right and wrong, sin and virtue have become liquid organisms — morphing to and fro via the impetus of political agendas and cultural norms. Guilt, shame and the need for forgiveness, it is proposed, are passé and should be dismissed as the war torn vestiges of some Victorian or puritan disease that once permeated our culture.

But dismissing or inventing ways to cope with guilt may be one of the greatest injustices a society can inflict upon its people. It's like teaching someone to merely mask the pain of a life-threatening disease when the real answer comes through healing. If the healing does not happen (by healing I'm speaking metaphorically — **"by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5)** — healed of sin) sinful man will stand before a holy God and the coping devices will be of no effect.

At the risk of being self-deprecating, I must say that I was not raised in a Christian home and as an unbeliever and even as a believer (having brought my bad habits and behaviors right into my new life) I know what it is like to be caught red-handed — to be openly guilty in the face of the offended party. It is a sickening experience. Think right now of your darkest moment — your greatest offense — and if it were to be announced right here, right now. There is probably not a person in the room who would not either shrink in their seat or storm out the door. But that is a trifle next to the judgment of God.

I fear we underestimate forgiveness. When Jesus proclaimed forgiveness for the paralytic who had been lowered through the roof the scribes were incensed! **"Who can forgive sins but God alone" (Mark 2:6)?** A very counter-intuitive statement is made by the Psalmist in connection with one of the great passages of forgiveness in the Old Testament:

If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But *there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared (Psalm 130:3, 4).*

One would think that forgiveness would be the end of fear rather than its beginning. I take this in the same way I understand the apostles fearing the storm – but when Jesus calmed the sea we are told that they **“feared exceedingly, and said to one another, ‘Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him” (Mark 4:41)?**

When one begins to grasp the due consequences of sin – the storm or tidal wave of condemnation due sinners – it is an eye-opening, bone-chilling epiphany to fix our thoughts on the hand that stops the infinite wrath of God from landing on its target. To grasp sin and forgiveness is to fearfully ask “Who can this be, that even the tempest of God’s wrath is stayed by His grace?”

This is one reason repentance is always associated with forgiveness. To say one has embraced the forgiveness of God apart from a fear, reverence and turning from sin is a concept foreign to Scripture. Repentance doesn’t merit (earn) forgiveness but it always accompanies forgiveness. And repentance is not merely a turning from some sin. It is a changing of the mind about all sin because it is a changing of the mind about who God is, who we are, who our Master is and who our Savior is. A Christian may be an unprofitable servant (Luke 17:10), but he at least knows who His Master is.

Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:7).

The Resurrection

The Creed already spoke of Christ's resurrection, so the reference here is to the general resurrection. Both Jesus and Paul speak of the resurrection of the just and unjust (John 5:28, 29; Acts 24:15). Some clarification here is necessary due to today's prominent, popular opinion regarding this issue – that there are numerous resurrections. The idea of multiple resurrections is clearly presented by Charles Ryrie in his study Bible on page 1954 – which indicates “The Resurrections.”

Ryrie writes of resurrection at the rapture and a resurrection at the end of the tribulation (both of the just). He then writes of the resurrection of the unjust a thousand years later after the millennium (of the unjust). We haven't to address all that now other than to say that the resurrection of the just and unjust is routinely presented as a single event – which the Creed seems to acknowledge by its statement of *the* resurrection.

Jesus speaks of “**the hour**” when “**all who are in graves will hear His voice and come forth**” –both the good and evil (John 5:28, 29). Jesus taught that “**all the nations will be gather before Him,**” which includes the sheep (the just) and the goats (unjust). Wheat and tares grow together until the harvest (Matthew 13:30).

So much can be said of the resurrection but for now we will state the biblical facts. In death, as our bodies become dust, our spirits return to the God who made them (Ecclesiastes 12:7; 2 Corinthians 5:8) where they are made perfect – as Hebrews states “**to the spirits of just men made perfect (Hebrews 12:23)**”. At the final resurrection our bodies will be united to our souls (Romans 8:23) at which time our bodies will be incorruptible – no longer subject to sin and death.

...in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. ⁵⁴ So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “*Death is swallowed up in victory.*” ⁵⁵ “*O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory* (1 Corinthians 15:52-55)?

The Life Everlasting

The Creed closes with the most comforting words ever to grace the human ear – the life everlasting.

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.
²⁵ **Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live (John 5:24, 25).**

If there is anything the limits of the human cannot fully comprehend, it is the glory of true everlasting life. There are two components worthy of our meditation – everlasting and life.

We desire, and rightly so, long life. That we might ever contribute to the ones we love, be a redemptive influence to the nurturing of souls and the glory of God. But to exist in this sinful estate (with all the pains – physical, emotional, psychological, etc) forever would be more akin to hell than heaven. When it gets right down to it, everybody, the just and unjust, exist forever. But the promise is not eternal existence – it's eternal life.

When Jesus speaks of life, it is not *bios* (where we get the word biology) it is *zoe*. *Zoe* is the nobler word, expressing the highest and best – it is the fullness of life – life as God meant it to be, knowing and enjoying His presence without fear of interruption – no sin, no death, just peace and joy forever.

Questions for Study

1. What is the touch-point between sinful man and a holy God (page 3)?
2. Why will God be praised in all eternity (page 3)?
3. Discuss sin: What is it? What is the nature of sin's offense (pages 3, 4)?
4. What are some ways of coping with guilt? How can this be dangerous (page 4)?
5. How is the fear of God associated with forgiveness (pages 4, 5)?
6. Is there forgiveness without repentance? Does repentance merit (earn) forgiveness? Explain (page 5).
7. How many resurrections are there (page 6)?
8. What happens at the resurrection (page 6)?
9. Does eternal life merely we existing forever? Explain (page 7).