

The Apostles' Creed: The resurrection of the body (16)

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

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord

*Who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell*

The third day He rose again from the dead

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty

He will come again to judge the living and the dead

I believe in the Holy Spirit

The holy catholic Church; the communion of saints

The forgiveness of sins

The resurrection of the body

And the life everlasting

- Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587), one of the principle authors of the *Heidelberg Catechism* wrote, “The last two articles of the Creed contain the consummation of the benefits of Christ, namely, that blessed life that in soul and body we will live in the kingdom of our heavenly **Father**—fully united with **Christ** our Head and fully regenerated and transformed into His image and glory [the work of the **Spirit**].”¹
- Indeed, the resurrection of the body is arguably the most important, practical doctrine of the Christian Faith. That is, if the salvation that Christ procured for us did not include and provide for the resurrection of our bodies, as Paul says, “*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.*” (1 Cor. 15:32). Because as Paul says, *If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.* (1 Cor. 15:19).
- The reason why the resurrection is so important is because death is the ultimate enemy of mankind (cf. 1 Cor. 15:26, 56). So, as should be expected, when we talk about the resurrection the reaction has always been, as it was among those who Paul preached to almost two-thousand years ago, ridicule, mocking, and disdain: *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked.* (Acts 17:32), *Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind!”* (Acts 26:24).
- Therefore, we need to understand that the resurrection is not something that we can understand and come to embrace based upon human intellect and reason, but a truth—a mysterious truth—that we know from the Word of God alone. In other words, it is only by a work of the Holy Spirit convincing us of and comforting us with this glorious promise that we come to believe it and look forward to it. Books such as *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* or *The Case for the Resurrection* are excellent books for strengthening a believer’s faith and for helping us give a reason for the hope that is within us, but they will never convince an unbeliever to believe. In fact, the resurrection is both the message of (cf. Acts 4:2, 33; 17:18, etc.) and argument for the Christian Faith (Acts 17:31). Thus one must have faith in order to accept it.
- Though related to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are here specifically dealing with the resurrection of everyone else. And the Bible is clear that there will be a general resurrection, which all mankind will be raised in, to stand in judgment for the deeds done in the body: *And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt* (Dan. 12:2), *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.* (2 Cor. 5:10), *Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment* (Jn. 5:28, 29).
- The previous passages make it clear that when we talk about resurrection, we are talking about our same bodies being raised up...not being given another, different body, though our present body will then be invested with new properties and characteristics: *So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown*

¹ *An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed*, p. 136

is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:42-44).

- The resurrection of the body is not a New Testament doctrine, but was spoken of in the Old Testament, and also follows from the very character of God. In fact it is Jesus who turns our minds back to the OT to understand the resurrection when He says: “*And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.*” (Matt. 22:31-32, cf. Ex. 3:6; Lk. 20:38).
- Job, in quite possibly the earliest book we have in the Scriptures, says, *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!* (Job 19:25-27). In Isaiah 26:19 we read, *Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.* And in the Psalms we read David saying, *Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption* (Ps. 16:9-10).
- There are simply too many NT proofs to reproduce here, but you can consult the following list given by Herman Witsius (1636-1708): Luke 14:14; John 5:28-29, 6:39-40, 44, 54, 11:24-26, 14:19; Acts 4:2, 17:18, 26:8; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; 2 Cor. 1:9, 4:14; 1 Thess. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 6:2; 1 Cor. 15:1ff; etc.
- In fact, to show that this is a doctrine neither of merely the OT or NT, Witsius has argued for the resurrection of the body based upon the character and attributes of God; namely His power, wisdom, goodness, and justice.²
- God’s **power** is a proof for the resurrection of the body since He is both willing and able to raise the dead. In fact this was Jesus’ argument against the Sadducees (Matt. 22:29), “*You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor **the power of God.***” And Paul, in like manner argues (Acts 26:8; cf. Phil. 3:22), *Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?*
- God’s **wisdom** is proof of the resurrection from the fact that in all His works (wherein His wisdom is shown) things either remain entire or they cease to exist. In other words, animals die and their whole being ceases to exist; their bodies do not rise and their souls do not keep on living. How then could it be that mankind, whose soul continues on for eternity (because of the purpose, promise, and power of God), would go bodiless for eternity separated from the body? Because man was created body and soul, he is not complete without either part. Thus, according to the pattern we see in God’s works, man either continues on forever in both body and soul, or both cease to exist.
- God’s **goodness** and **justice** ultimately lead us to the same conclusion because virtue and vice “belong to the whole man, and not merely to one part of our nature.” The point being therefore that either punishment or reward (those things which flow from the goodness and justice of God) must be meted out to the whole man in both body and soul, and specifically to the same soul/body combination that did the deeds, either evil or good (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10)
- Finally, since our resurrection is patterned after the likeness of the resurrection of Christ, we know that we will be raised again in the self-same bodies, just as He was: *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep* (1 Cor. 15:20). *For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His* (Rom. 6:5), *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself* (Phil. 3:21-22).
- Indeed, it is only because of the hope of the resurrection of the body that we can sing: *I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name **forever and ever.** Every day I will bless you and praise your name **forever and ever*** (Ps. 145:1-2).

² Witsius, *Sacred Dissertations on the Apostles’ Creed*, Vol. II, p. 414ff