

The Apostles' Creed

Lesson 6

Salvation

Forum



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The Apostles' Creed

Lesson Six: Salvation

Forum

With

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Question 1:

Why do fallen human beings need a Savior?

The gift of salvation is one of the greatest joys of the Christian life. Many Christians even remember the day and time they were saved. And we acknowledge our salvation in the Apostles' Creed when we confess our belief in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. But some people outside the church don't recognize their need for salvation. They argue that as long as we're good people, and as long as we don't do anything really terrible, we don't need a Savior. So, why is salvation so important? Why do fallen human beings need a Savior?

Dr. Thomas Nettles

The Fall brought man into a condition, not only of condemnation so that we need forgiveness of sins, but this condemnation is something that comes to us as a result of a single act of disobedience, as Paul said in Romans 5. Therefore, no matter what we do, if, say, if we were to obey the law from this time forward in our lives, we could never achieve a righteousness because we already are sinners. We've already broken God's law. There is no way that we can come back to the standard of righteousness. The one that does the law shall live by them. But we already are law-breakers. And so, from the fact that the law has been broken and we are under condemnation, we need a Redeemer. There is an absolute righteousness that is needed, and so one must come who can fulfill God's requirement of an absolute righteousness. But also, even if we could, say, achieve some degree of righteousness by our present obedience, there's still the necessity of someone paying for the sins of our past. There's someone that must pay for the law breaking that we have already done. God will not violate his law, and he said that if we break the law, that we will die, that we are under a curse. Everyone that continues not in all things written in the book of the Law to do them are under a curse. So, we are cursed, even if we obeyed all of God's law right now.

So, someone must pay for the curse, but we cannot pay it ourselves in such a way to gain forgiveness. It would simply be a just punishment that must continue forever. So, for someone to pay — in order for forgiveness actually to come — there must be a uniquely qualified redeemer to do this.

And a third thing that is involved in this, if I may continue with it, is that there must be such an authority and such a glory in the redeemer, that God is fully satisfied with the honor that is shown him by the obedience of this person. And Anselm, who was a theologian of the Middle Ages, talks about this particular aspect of the atonement, that Christ, who was God himself, could not gain anything by himself by his obedience because he already had equal honor with God and therefore, his obedience must be given to others. And God is infinitely satisfied with this obedience because the person obeying also has the kind of honor that God requires. So, this honor that is given to God is another part of the redemption. And the granting of the Holy Spirit — he is the one who can grant the Holy Spirit so that indwelling corruption we have also is gradually removed in the process of sanctification. So, for all of these reasons and perhaps more, we stand in need of someone outside of us to be our redeemer. We're helpless and hopeless without that kind of help.

Dr. Stephen Blakemore

Human beings need a Redeemer, and indeed need God to be their Redeemer for this reason: the nature of sin against God. God is not some impersonal force that launched the universe into existence. God is personal being — the doctrine of the Trinity, God is Father, Son, Holy Spirit. God is intimately, profoundly personal. And therefore, our sin is against God personally. Our sin is like a betrayal of our Creator more than it is like anything else, as I understand what the Scripture is trying to tell us. And therefore, since our sin is like a betrayal, there's nothing we can do to fix it. Betrayal is the sort of thing that only the betrayed party can ever do anything about. And so, only if God provides us redemption, only if God takes the brokenness of the relationship and fixes it, can we be redeemed. But we also need a Redeemer because of what sin has done to the human condition. It has trapped us. As we turn away from God and turn in on ourselves, it's trapped us in a kind of gravitational pull that apart from God's graciousness to allow us to escape and be able, once again, to have our hearts and lives turn toward God, apart from that we could not escape from our own sins. And so only a Redeemer who can first of all make things right with God can save us. And also, only a Redeemer who can reach into our sinful situation and undo the power of sin can save us.

Question 2:

Why did Adam's fall into sin have such terrible consequences for humanity and creation?

All fallen human beings need a Savior. But humanity wasn't always trapped in sin and condemnation. When God created the world, Adam and Eve were sinless. But

when Adam chose to disobey God, all humanity — in fact, all creation — fell under God's curse. But why? Why did Adam's fall into sin have such terrible consequences for humanity and creation?

Dr. John McKinley

The consequences for humanity's fall into sin, not just for us but for the whole creation, are severe because of what humanity was created to be and do. Genesis 1 tells us humanity has created to have dominion over all the orders of creation. When we misrule, when we mislead, all of creation is misled and taken away and cut off from God in a lot of ways. So, the consequence in our lives is that we bring self-destruction into ourselves, but it doesn't stop with us. It happens to the entire race of human beings and everybody is now born into the situation of being separated from God. But then it's not limited to humans because it goes to everything as well. We are created from the dirt because we're bonded to creation in some sense so that the destiny of creation is bound up, wrapped up with what we do morally. It's supposed to function that we lead creation in harmony with God and bring his order to bear on how everything functions together. But how it actually works is — given great responsibility, great power — great consequences fall from that, and we have turned creation into self-destruction. Paul returns to this in Romans 8 when he says, the sufferings going on in the world — that can be natural disasters, that can be sickness that we have — these things are all related to creation being subjected to futility, having been put into our hands, and we then basically forfeited it under a whole sinful regime.

Dr. Stephen Chan (translation)

The worst consequence of the fall, and that of sin, should not be understood from the viewpoint of our cultural moral standards. As wrong as sins are, sin itself is being unable to reach God's standard. Adam and Eve's temptation was to be like God and be equal to him, and thus, this was the greatest betrayal and rebellion a creation could attempt on its Creator — rejecting God's authority and the boundaries God put there for our survival. There's no greater betrayal humans could have done than that of trying to usurp God's place. To use an analogy, it's like the administrator of some nation's government department trying to overthrow his president. This betrayal resulted in the eternal separation of humans from God.

Question 3:

What problem has sin created in our relationship with God?

God's curse against Adam's sin didn't just subject humanity to death and decay. It also devastated our relationship with God. But what is the precise nature of this devastation? What problem has sin created in our relationship with God?

Dr. David Bauer

The question of the problem that sin created for humanity in our relationship with God is that sin broke relationship with God, or better put, I think, sin is broken relationship with God. The ethos, the culture of the Bible is, I think, ultimately relational. Reality is understood in relational, or inter-relational, or interpersonal terms. And so, sin I think should not be understood as some *thing*, but rather as broken relationship. Sins are, in fact, broken relationship in expression whereas, the life of righteousness, the life of obedience, is right relationship in expression. So that the Law, for example, the Old Testament Law was meant to present what right relationship with God, what reconciliation with God, what covenant with God looked like, how it expressed itself. And the New Testament understands the Christian life — that is to say, the life of righteousness, of virtue and all this kind of thing — as being right relationship with God in expression.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

It's important to recognize the personal nature of sin. When we rebel against our Creator we're saying, "I know better. I know better than you about what's right and what's wrong. I will determine truth and falsity." And so, we shake our fists in God's face, and he rightly responds with wrath and judgment to that sort of rebellion. And so, what we have is a massive break in our relationship with God, who rightly judges us. And this causes devastating implications to all our other relationships, our relationships with other people who now become competition for the things that we want in life. And it also causes a break between us and our relationship with the creation itself, as the curse affects everything God has made.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

It's hard to exaggerate, and it's impossible for us to even understand the full consequence of sin. But our sin is a revolt against the Creator. It is an effort to rob him of his glory. It is breaking his law. It is falling short of his glory. It is, in every way, setting ourselves as God's enemies. Sin disrupts our relationship with God because God is holy. He cannot look upon sin. As a consequence of his holiness, he must pour out his wrath upon sin. So, when you look at human sinfulness, it is everything we need to know about our problem. It's everything we need to know about ourselves. Sin is the short, three-letter psychology that helps us to understand what we see in the mirror, and what we know ourselves to be. It also reminds us that there is no way that we can rescue ourselves from this predicament. Only God can do that, and he does so in Christ.

Question 4:**Why is Jesus the only one that can save us?**

When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, humanity and creation were corrupted, and our relationship to God was badly damaged. Because of Adam's sin, all people are now born under a curse that leads to adversity, suffering, and ultimately death.

And God's solution to this problem was to send his Son to save us. But why can't someone else save us, like Buddha or Mohammed or Moses? And why can't we save ourselves? Why is Jesus the only one that can save us?

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Jesus is the only Savior because Jesus is the only person who's ever lived who's fully God and fully man. Jesus needs to be fully God to be able to take on the sins of the world and atone for an offense against an infinite God. He also needs to be fully man to truly represent us in his life of righteousness and his perfect death on the cross. Jesus' being fully God and fully man is what's necessary for him to be the true Redeemer of the world.

Dr. Robert Lister

There are not other redeemers than God the Son. 1 Timothy 2:5, for example, tells us that there's one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. And there were in the Old Testament other mediators — Abraham, Moses, Noah, Adam, for example — but what all of them fell short in, or where they all fell short, was in the limitations of their own sin. And what Jesus accomplishes as a mediator, that is different from all of the ways that those mediators anticipated Jesus's ministry, is he brings both a divine nature, so he's the incarnate Son of God, and he is sinless. In that way he is able to fulfill the ministry that all of the Old Testament mediators pointed forward to but were unable to fulfill in themselves on account of their own limitations as sinners. So, the short answer is, no, there are no other mediators aside from Jesus the Messiah.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

Jesus is the only one who can save us. He is the only one who does save us. We cannot save ourselves. No human being can atone for his own sins much less the sins of the world. No one can resolve the problem of sin. No human being can even come close to attempting. As a matter of fact, as the apostle Paul helps us to understand, the more we try to solve our problem, the deeper we find ourselves in our problem. We try to dig ourselves out of a hole only to dig the hole deeper and deeper and deeper. The only one who can save us is the one who the Father himself would send, whose perfect life would fulfill all, would indeed fulfill his righteousness. He would die in our place. He would do what we could not do. If I died a thousand deaths, it would not atone for my own sin, but this one death of the only begotten Son of God could atone for the deaths of every sinner who would come to Christ through faith. Without Jesus Christ there is no atonement for sins. Only Jesus could die for our sins. But that is not where the story ended, or we would still be, as Paul says, of all people, most to be pitied, still dead in our trespasses and sins. Jesus not only died for our sins, He was raised by the power of God. He is the firstfruit of the resurrection that is promised now to us as well. Only Jesus could save. Only Jesus does save.

Question 5:

Is Jesus the loving God who saves us from the Father's wrath?

Jesus is the Savior of the world. And because of this, many people see Jesus as loving, gentle, and kind. But oddly enough, some of these same people view God the Father as angry, intolerant, and vengeful. Where did this idea come from? And is it true? Is Jesus the loving God who saves us from the Father's wrath?

Dr. Glen Scorgie

There's an issue that comes up so often, that perceives God the Father as a rather bloodthirsty, demanding, certainly off-putting deity, and the Son, the friendly one, the one who loves us. It's a tragedy when the Father and the Son are played off against one another as differentiated beings, as though one is, in a sense, the "good" deity, Jesus, and the Father is the demanding and punitive and, in a sense, "bad" God. Some people who have misconstrued the nature of God have even gone so far as to suggest that the Father is the abusive parent and the Son is the victimized child on the cross. This is a travesty; this is a horrible, blasphemous misunderstanding of the true nature of God. Sometimes we need to come back to recognize that we believe in one God, manifested in three distinct persons, who are in a relationship where the heart of the Father is identical to the heart of the Son. And the Bible brings together the unity of the heart of the Father and the heart of the Son when it tells us that it was God who was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. There's one other thing that I think can be helpful here. It's that when the Bible speaks of the wrath of God we struggle to understand how that can be a good thing because the only kind of wrath we're acquainted with is sinful wrath, the vindictive, the drywall-punching kind of wrath that so often causes pain and is regretted afterwards. The wrath of God is analogous language to try to express God's absolute opposition to evil. Because evil is what harms the creatures he loves. And so, we must understand that when the Bible speaks of the wrath of God, it is referring to the intensity of God's hatred for that which harms his beloved creatures. And the wrath of the Father is transcended by the love of the Father. But the love, this holy love, this burning love of the Father, is imbedded in the heart of Christ, no less than the Father. And the love of the Father and the Son is equal.

Dr. Simon Vibert

It is sometimes caricatured that the Father is the angry God who sent his Son into the world as the one who loves us and therefore saved us. But, I mean, there are a number of ways in which one would want to respond to that, not least the fact that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit operated together in order to save and rescue the world. I mean, also we know, this is like John 3:16, so well, that God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son, into this world, and that the Father and Son, therefore, operating together. There's sort of a little catch phrase that's sometimes used at this idea of "cosmic child abuse," that the Father should treat his Son in such a way that we are to expect no parent to treat their son now. But that's to misunderstand, I think, the fact that it was in great love that God gave up his one and

only Son in order to rescue this world. And he didn't come reluctantly; he wanted to come to fulfill the Father's will. And I think we should see the Trinity working together in love to rescue this world in love, all three of the persons, showing great love in order to bring us to saving knowledge of God.

Dr. Mark Strauss

Some people have this idea that God the Father is an angry God based on the Old Testament testimony where we see God commanding what looks like genocide of people and so forth. And then we get to the New Testament, and we see Jesus saying to turn the other cheek and Jesus saying to love your enemies. And they think, well, this God of the Old Testament is an angry, stern, mean God. And the God of the New Testament is kind of a loving, grandfather figure. But that's really much of a distortion of the biblical record of God. In the Old Testament, God is a loving God who reaches out and offers grace to those who turn to him in repentance. We see the same God in the New Testament. And we also see a stern God, a judgmental God in the New Testament as well as the Old. Jesus, more than anyone else in the Bible, talks about God's final judgment, and talks about the fact that sin must be paid for, and talks about eternal judgment and separation from God. Really, if you look closely you see that there is one true God, a God who is absolutely loving, absolutely merciful, offering his grace to sinners who turn to him. But a God who must also be just and must judge sin and those who reject him — must turn away from them and allow them to be separate. By their own choice, allow them to be separate from him. The early Gnostic, the early church Gnostic — eventually identified correctly as a heretic — Marcion, believed this idea that this God of the Old Testament was an evil and angry God, and the God of the New Testament was a loving God. And so, his solution to that was to throw out the Old Testament. He decided that this was not an authentic revelation of God. This was a different god, a god that Gnostics view as an inferior god that eventually arose from the one true God. And he cut and pasted the New Testament where he removed many portions of the New Testament and chose those that he felt like presented the true God, the loving God. What Marcion missed was the very fact that, in fact, God is a God of love, and God is a God of justice in both the Old and New Testaments. The same presentation of God appears in both Testaments.

Question 6:

Were people saved the same way in both the Old Testament and the New Testament?

Evangelicals understand that God is the same God in both the Old and New Testaments. He is not a God of curses and punishment in one Testament, and a God of mercy and forgiveness in the other. Instead, in both Testaments, he is a God of justice and love. But despite this fact, some Christians still think that the Old and New Testaments teach different gospels, that God had different requirements for

salvation before and after Jesus. But did he? Or were people saved the same way in both the Old Testament and the New Testament?

Dr. John Oswalt

One of the issues that is so important for Christians to come to grips with is how the two Testaments fit together. Tragically, some branches of the church, at least tragically in my view, some branches of the church have all but taught that the New Testament has replaced the Old. I don't think that's true at all. In fact, they are complimentary, they fit together with each one connecting to the other, the Old Testament providing the base upon which the New Testament builds. The Old Testament teaches from start to finish that the only basis for our redemption is grace. There are those who would argue that the Old Testament believer was intended to be saved by obedience. I don't think that's correct. I think that just as Paul deals with Abraham in the book of Galatians and says, you know, grace preceded Torah; grace preceded the Sinai covenant with its restrictions. I think that's even true in Exodus. I've often said to people, "Did God say to the Hebrew people in Egypt, 'Here's my Torah; keep that perfectly for about four hundred years, and I'll come and deliver you'?" If he had, they would still be in Egypt. But no, he delivered them by grace. Then comes the Torah — "Would you like to be my people? Would you like to walk with me? Well, here's what that would mean..." So, I think just as the New Testament epistles in particular speak about people who have come into the covenant by grace, and now Paul says, now here's what the implications are for your life. I think the Old Testament is doing the same thing; that it is saying, the only way anybody comes into a relationship with God is by God's grace. And having come in, then there is some implications from that.

Dr. Simon Vibert

I think there's a common misunderstanding about, namely, that people in the Old Testament were saved by works and that in the New Testament they're saved by grace. Whereas, in fact, a careful reading of the Bible shows that people in both the Old and the New Testament are saved by grace through faith, and that it was always the expectation that God would provide a perfect sacrifice for sin, and that it is through trusting in that sacrifice and believing in it that God gives us the ability to grasp by faith the benefit of Christ's sacrifice, that we are saved. And that was always the expectation in the Old Testament, looking forward in anticipation to the coming of Christ. And that is the expectation of the New Testament writers, that we're saved by grace through faith. So, it is a consistent message that runs all the way through the Bible.

Dr. Mark Strauss

There's a misconception by some people that the Old and the New Testaments teach different gospels, and it usually goes like this: they say the Old Testament teaches a gospel by works. You keep the Law and you're saved. The New Testament is a gospel of grace where you, by faith, you believe in God's gift of grace. But really that's a complete misconception of salvation. Salvation in the Old Testament was by faith, by faith in God, and especially faith in God's promise to provide a provision,

God's promise to provide a sacrifice, an ultimate sacrifice for sins. And of course, it was looking forward to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul talks about this a lot. He talks about it in Galatians. He talks about it in even more detail in Romans 4. He refers to Abraham, the father of the Jewish faith, the father of the Jewish nation. And he points out that Abraham was not saved by works, he was not saved by keeping the Law. The Law hadn't even been instituted at that time. Abraham was saved by faith, by trusting in God, by believing in God's promise to provide a Savior. So ultimately, salvation comes through faith, faith and trust in God's grace, God's gift of his Son who paid the penalty for our sins so that we can have an eternal relationship with him.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

How were people saved in the Old Testament? Were the rules different? Were God's requirements altered in the Old Testament? I've often thought, when we read in Hebrews 11 the list of the great heroes of the faith, some of them, most of them prior to the New Testament would all have flunked a basic quiz on Christology or the atoning death of Christ. So, if they were intellectually in the dark about the plan of salvation, how could they be saved? Well, I think that we need to break down our answer into two key parts. One is, what was the basis for their salvation? And secondly, what did they need to know in order to access that basis of salvation? And we seem to be able to stand on solid ground in affirming that Jesus Christ's atoning death and resurrection is the basis for the salvation of every human being who will be or ever was saved. In the case of saints like Moses and David and Abraham, they are, in a sense, in Christ, saved by Christ as the merits of Christ's death are retroactively applied to their account. They are saved on the basis of Christ's death, even before Christ died in the chronological sequence of history. Christ is the Savior of all people past, present, and future. But what did they need to know in order to access that? It seems to be that as we read the Scriptures, their willingness to trust God, trust his promises made to them, and trust in God's as yet undisclosed provision for their neediness, their moral inadequacy. That faith that God would supply, embodied in the words of Abraham as he takes his son Isaac to the altar in that hideous test of faith, "the Lord will provide" is what prompts the generous heart of God to apply the saving merits of Christ to the account of all these people who have not yet seen what we have been privileged to see in Christ.

Question 7:

What benefits do we receive as a result of God's forgiveness?

When we sincerely turn to God for salvation in Christ, God happily forgives us. In fact, Scripture tells us that God delights in showing us mercy. So, how does he express this delight in our lives? What benefits do we receive as a result of God's forgiveness?

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

When we're forgiven by God, we are restored to a status that allows us to have fellowship with God. The most important thing we need to understand is that sin is this great insurmountable obstacle between ourselves and our Creator. The forgiveness of sins explains why we are restored to a relationship with him, why indeed we come before him and we are no longer his enemies, but we are now his children. And to come before a father, as a child, is the way we can come before our heavenly Father, as a believer, with our sins forgiven. With our sins unforgiven, he would have to close the door, turn himself from us, and treat us merely as the sinners that we are — as his enemies. Instead, he receives us as his children.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

When we're forgiven by God, God takes our sin and throws it as far as the East is from the West. The Bible tells us he forgives wickedness, rebellion, and sin — this Old Testament way of saying he forgives sin extensively, comprehensively, and holistically. There aren't certain kinds of sin God doesn't forgive. Whether it's something we've done in our past or something we think is particularly heinous, God forgives sin exhaustively. God loves to forgive sin, and this restores our relationship with him. We go from being enemies of God, to friends of God again.

Dr. Mark Strauss

The benefits we receive by being forgiven by God? The one we always focus on, I think, and especially when we're sharing Christ with others is eternal life. Absolutely, that's a great benefit — that fact that we will live forever. I think more important than that is that fact that we will live forever with God, that we have been reconciled to our Creator. We were created by God to be in relationship with him. That's our very essence, created in God's image to be in a relationship with him. We are, when that relationship is broken, we are incomplete people. And so, to be restored in that relationship, to be reconciled to God, is the greatest thing that could possibly happen to us. So, the ultimate gift of forgiveness is to be back in the relationship with the God who created us, and then to have that relationship for all eternity in his presence.

Question 8:**If we can be forgiven just because we ask, does that cheapen grace?**

In the Old Testament, God's people were required to bring sacrifices to atone for their sins. But Jesus' sacrifice made this unnecessary. Now we receive forgiveness simply by asking sincerely for it. Still, this raises an interesting question about the value of forgiveness: If we can be forgiven just because we ask, does that cheapen grace?

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

You know, it's a fundamental mistake that we can be forgiven simply because we ask for forgiveness. We need to remember that something comes before that, and that is the atonement of Christ that purchases our forgiveness. So, we are actually forgiven,

because once we are in Christ, he has paid all that is necessary, and done all that is necessary that our sins be forgiven. We are told nonetheless that we are to confess our sins and ask for forgiveness. “When we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” But he is not waiting. The Father is not waiting to decide if he will forgive us our sins. That is already decided in Christ. Those sins are already forgiven. But it is absolutely necessary that we confess our sins, that we repent of our sins and ask for God’s forgiveness of our sins. It would be cheap grace to think that we merely ask for God to forgive our sins, and God, like some indulgent grandfather says, “It was no big deal. Don’t worry about it.” That’s the furthest thing from the Christian gospel we can imagine. When we confess our sins we are doing so in the shadow of the cross, knowing that the infinite price was paid for the forgiveness of our sins. It is not cheap grace. And anyone who would live by sinning, believing that forgiveness is cheap, is living in denial of the gospel itself.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

Some people believe that we can be forgiven just by asking for God’s forgiveness. And of course, the rebuttal to that is, doesn’t that make God’s grace cheap? Well, first of all, the provision of forgiveness may come to us freely but it did not come without cost. And the reminder that what we receive, apparently so freely, cost so much should certainly give us pause in the first place. But there’s something else that I think needs to be understood and that is that the request for forgiveness that brings to us the rich merits of Christ, decisively erases not only our guilt, but our shame, is a request we place in a Spirit of true repentance. And without repentance, our request is ineffectual. It is insincere. It is not saving. Because the request that saves, the request for forgiveness that saves is a request that comes from a heart that is open to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, to live in the way that rejects those things for which we are asking forgiveness, and wills, and with a heart that is now in sync with the heart of a holy God, that that will no longer be the way I chose to walk, that it is no longer my desire to heap up and accumulate more of the very things I am presently asking forgiveness for. The gift of forgiveness brings with it the implantation in the soul of the Holy Spirit. As Martin Luther once said, and I paraphrase generously, the one who receives this grace of forgiveness also has the Holy Spirit now implanted in their souls. And where the Holy Spirit resides he will not permit a soul to be idle and to continue on in the old ways, but stirs them up from within toward goodness, toward charity, toward good works, toward the progressive restoration of the very image of Christ.

Question 9:

Are there any benefits to modern Christians if we regularly repent of and confess our sins?

The Bible says that Jesus died to make us holy and blameless. And some people think this means that we shouldn’t confess or repent of sins we commit after our initial conversion. They think that the forgiveness we received when we came to

faith continues to apply to all the sins we commit throughout our lives, so that we don't need to repent of additional sins. But are they right? Or are there any benefits to modern Christians if we regularly repent of and confess our sins?

Dr. Peter Walker

Every Christian, I think, is called to a lifestyle of regular repentance and to confessing our sins and coming clean before the Lord. Jesus himself says we need to take up our cross daily, which is a hint, surely, that we're not just supposed to be prepared to suffer, but that we're meant to go the way of the cross, which is dying to our sins and seeking God's forgiveness. The cross is all about that. And so although, yes, there's great truth that when someone comes to the Lord for the first time and confesses their sins, yes, they are a new person and they are washed clean — and those are great truths which we need to hold on to — yet, frankly, we all dirty our clothes on a pretty daily basis, and if we want to be washed white we need to come back for cleansing, for renewal. And the clear verses in the Old Testament which say, you know, there are great blessings for those who repent and come back to the Lord, who are not cherishing iniquity or hiding it in their heart, or Psalm 32, you know, blessed is the person who the Lord does not hold them accountable for their sins. And you see in that Psalm, you know, great joy as the person actually finds forgiveness. And that's an experience that Christians day by day can have, the joy of sins forgiven. So, incredible blessings as we pursue that discipline, repentance leading to new life.

Dr. Peter Chow (translation)

Repentance and confession are very important because we need to keep a clean conscience before God. We must become clean vessels, suitable for God. Not only that, but when we have guilty consciences, God will discipline us, and that can be difficult and painful. So, don't ask for trouble, but hurry before the cross. Confess and repent of your sins so that you can be covered by the precious blood of the Lord. That way we can experience the peace and joy of life and become precious vessels, useful to the Lord.

Dr. Simon Vibert

In our worship services, we're encouraged to begin by repenting of our sins, and that's not because we think we need to become Christians all over again, but there is a sense in which, in becoming a Christian, you believe for the first time, the direction of your life changes. But repentance means change of mind leading to change of conduct. And in a sense, we regularly need to do that because all of us continue to be sinful, and all of us need to continue to repent of our sins. So, ongoingly we say sorry to God for our sins as we repent daily of the things that we do wrong.

Question 10:

What will our glorified bodies be like?

One of the most misunderstood aspects of salvation mentioned in the Apostles' Creed is "the resurrection of the body." Many Christians mistakenly believe that we will spend eternity as disembodied spirits. But Scripture insists that we will

ultimately be resurrected in physical bodies. So, what will our glorified bodies be like?

Dr. Stephen Blakemore

We've grown up to think about heaven as a place where you go when you die. Somehow your soul goes to be there. We forget that the image of the Scripture is that somehow redemption is just as much physical as it is spiritual, that our bodies will be resurrected. Even as our souls are renewed and made perfect in Christ, our bodies will be redeemed. So, the new heaven, the new earth will be similar to this heaven or this earth in the sense that we're going to have a physical kind of existence. It's going to be physical just as much as Jesus's resurrected body is physical. I don't think it means there are going to be literally streets of gold necessarily, or gates made of pearl. That sort of imagery is given to us to say it's so beautiful, whatever we can say beautifully about it, it's going to be that and more. But it's going to be a physical kind of redemption. That means we ought to take our physical bodies and all of creation very seriously. That's important to God. How will it be different? It will be different in this sense. If you take Jesus's resurrected body for instance as an example, that resurrected body can do things as a human physical body that I can't do or even Jesus prior to resurrection could not do. He could not walk through walls or appear. He didn't ascend into heaven bodily until after the resurrection. So, our physical existence will have a different component to it, but what will be most different about the new earth will be this: God will be absolutely, unavoidably, and unmistakably the Lord over all things. He will be there present in a personal way that we can't even imagine now. I think that's the beauty of it all. Not how wonderful it'll be, not how suffering will be undone, but we will be there in the presence of God perfectly.

Dr. Frank Thielman

Our bodies will be similar to the bodies we have now. There'll be continuity between our physical bodies now and our physical bodies then. They'll be different. Those bodies will be immortal, Paul says, and they will be able to live an immortal existence. So they won't be subject to death and corruption. That's the way Jesus's body was when he rose from the dead in the Gospels' accounts of Jesus's resurrection. And the way his body functioned and appeared tell us a bit about what our life will be like one day when we too are raised physically from the dead. That has a very important theological ramification, or implication that goes along with it. If our bodies, our physical bodies are important and will exist eternally, then we need to be very careful what we do with our bodies now. And Paul makes that point very clear to the Corinthians who are not using their bodies in ways that glorify God. And so, one of the things Paul wants to do when he answers the Corinthians' questions about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, is to describe to them that our raised bodies, the eternal nature of our bodies, means that we need to be careful how we live in our bodies now.

Rev. Dr. Stephen Tong (translation)

Physical matter is created and can be destroyed. It is not eternal. But God can change physical matter into something new, something permanent. Our bodies will die, but

the corruptible will become the incorruptible; the weak will become strong; the earthly will become heavenly; the shameful will become honorable; those belonging to the dust will become holy. This kind of renewal is God's revelation of his great power over all physical matter, such that the arrival of the new heavens and new earth replaces the old, and the change in the heavens and the earth is the completion of God's promise. I believe there will be continuity between the two.

Dr. Dan Doriani

The book of Revelation conveys the idea that everything that's good in this world will be present in heaven, except better — the new heavens and new earth. It's sometimes called "the way of eminence," so there will be light all the time, and life all the time, and purity and joy all the time. Everything we have here, more and always. And then there's "the way of negation." That is to say, everything that is not good will be gone. There'll be no more tears, no more pain, no more death, no more crying. All those things will be gone. Now, continuity? Well, we'll have bodies, for example. Hard to conceive exactly how that'll work. Certainly no one would always be the age they were when they died. For a long time, people have guessed that maybe everybody will always be 30 years old, at the height of their powers, bodies not breaking down, minds not failing us in any way, and yet maybe old enough to have a little experience. And so, people make guesses as to what that would allow us to do. One of the things we know will still be in heaven is food and stomachs, not the stomach as the instrument of overindulgence or deranged desires, but the stomach as that which enjoys feasts and meals and festivity with friends.

Somebody once asked this question — it was a four-year-old boy. He asked his mother this question — it's a true question: "Mommy, will there be pears in heaven?" He liked pears obviously. And the mother wisely said, "Son, if you want pears, there will be pears," meaning that not only will everything there be good, but everything that we want will be a good desire. Let me say it a different way. A student of mine once asked me — he was a very talented and gifted volleyball player and he loved the game — and he said to me, "Dr. Doriani, will there be volleyball in heaven?" I said, "Well, that's a great question. I think there will be physical activity in heaven. But what would a volleyball game be like? Let's see, it would start since we have perfect bodies with a perfect jump serve screaming low over the net into the corner. But of course, the defense is perfect, too, and so someone dives and digs and then a magnificent set and a thunderous spike, which of course is blocked by the perfect defense, and would be trickling just over the net for a sure winner, but somebody else dives and digs and spikes again. And then after about 714 years, the players say, 'Man, that was a good point.'" Now the idea is there'll be continuity with everything that's good and blessed and yet heightened. This continuity, harder to understand except that all sin, all brokenness, all failed desires, all egotism, all those things will be gone, because we'll have the light of God, the light of the Lamb, and purified desires as well as heart and mind and body.

Question 11:**When our souls are in heaven and our bodies are in the grave, are we in two places at the same time?**

The Bible clearly indicates that in the general resurrection we'll receive glorified physical bodies. But until that time, after we die our bodies remain in the ground, subject to decay and ruin. Our souls, however, go immediately into God's presence. So, when our souls are in heaven and our bodies are in the grave, are we in two places at the same time?

Dr. Stephen Wellum

The Bible teaches that at death, what we call the "intermediate state," the period before Christ comes again, and we die and then he comes again, what happens to us during that period, the Bible teaches that we as human beings are both body and soul, that we have an immaterial and material part to us. We are not just physical things. So that at death there is a separation, an abnormal separation of body and soul. So that our bodies go into the grave, our souls we have on the basis of, think of the thief on the cross, "you'll be with me today in paradise." Or Paul can say, "absent from the body, present with the Lord." On that basis we say that our souls go on to be in the presence of the Lord, with a conscious fellowship that is there as we await the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the finality to all things where the great resurrection takes place. In one sense, some people will say that we are sort of in two different places. Well, we are personally, as Christians, in the presence of the Lord. If we want to say that our bodies are that which is in the grave, then that is a kind of second place, then we could certainly speak like that. But I think it's better to say that, no, we are present with the Lord; we are in a situation that is temporary, that we await the final end. We are, our great hope is not that intermediate state; our great hope is the new heavens and the new earth. The consummation, where then in the great resurrection, we will be reunited both soul and body to live forever in a glorified state, which is transformed, patterned after Christ's glorious resurrection, glorious resurrection body, so that, that intermediate state gives us hope that we do not just disappear when we die, we are with the Lord. Yet, we long for the time where we will be reunited, body and soul, in a glorified state. That is ultimately our Christian hope.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

You know one of the great mysteries is when we die, where are we? For, we know that our bodies go into the ground, dust returns to dust, earthlings go back to what we were manufactured from, and we await the resurrection. Where are we? There's a difference of opinion among believers on this matter of just how conscious our existence is while we await the resurrection of our bodies. Some people think that the bodies we will receive are just convenient earth suits, optional equipment, that we are absolutely content and quite happy to be disembodied. That seems to be just a little more platonic than biblical. So, what is it like to be in this intermediate state between your personal death and the promised resurrection from the dead? What is it like? We have not been given photographic reportage of that. We have not been given detailed

descriptions of that. But the answer we are given from Scripture is very assuring, and it's highly relational. We will be with the Lord. There will be a dynamic to this mysterious period in our existence, that we'll be intimate, that we'll be secure, that we'll be feeling like we have come home. And we are asked to take the hand of God, who does not disclose the furniture or the arrangement or the details of this destination ahead, but says, "I will be with you. And through the valley of the shadow of death, I will never leave you or forsake you." That is the consolation of the Christian, and in the end, what could we ask for that would be better than that?

Question 12:

Did the Old Testament saints believe in a future resurrection?

Jesus, in his earthly ministry, preached about the future resurrection and judgment. And the rest of the New Testament upholds Jesus' teaching on this subject. But was this idea also present in the Old Testament? Did the Old Testament saints believe in a future resurrection?

Dr. John Oswalt

The question of the Old Testament's understanding of heaven, resurrection, those kinds of things, is another of these that is a bit open. I don't think you can find clear, irrefutable evidence that the Old Testament believers believed in bodily resurrection. Part of the reason for this is the Old Testament emphasis. I think it's very difficult for us to understand how radically different the Israelite religion was from all the religions around it. The religions around it tended to say, this world is just a shadow reflecting the invisible reality out there; and therefore, this world, really, in the end doesn't matter that much. Well, the Old Testament is saying, no, no, no, this is a real world. Our God made it, and our choices here will have long-term consequences. Get that through your heads; this is a real world. This is another of those areas where we need the New Testament then. The New Testament says, you got that point — this is a real world? Right. Now, let us tell you there's even more to reality. Heaven doesn't diminish this world's reality. It, in fact, expands it. So, I think we should not be surprised if we don't find a lot of discussion in the Old Testament about the other world. They're trying to get this one straight. That being said though, it's clear that the Old Testament believers have this intimation. There's got to be something more. If God is faithful, it's clear that all rewards, all recompense don't come here now. We do see faithful people dying in tragic circumstances. We do see righteous people who are not rewarded for their righteousness. There's got to be something more. So, for instance, I think of Psalm 23, "...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Well, if in fact, my death is the end of that forever that leaves a lot of questions unanswered. And that's one of the things the Psalmists struggle with. How can I praise you in the grave? And yet I'm called to praise you. Does that suggest there is something beyond the grave? So, I think you see the intimations there that the New Testament then can pick up on and say, yes, what they were seeing is in fact, in reality.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

One of the questions we ponder when we look at the Bible as a whole is, did those Old Testament saints anticipate a resurrection of the dead? Did they anticipate a judgment to come? Did they anticipate eternal life as Christ made plain? We should expect. This is a good question. And to respond to it I would say that undergirding our understanding of the canon of Scripture, the long play of history from Genesis to Revelation, we see operating a dynamic that some people have described as “progressive revelation,” where the full truth of God is unfolded gradually over time as the capacity of people is gradually enlarged and able to understand the fullness of what comes finally to light in the revelation of Jesus Christ and his apostles. And so one of the things that surprises us is that some of the Old Testament saints did not have yet a very clear understanding that there was a resurrection of the dead, that there was a life to come and the hope of eternal fellowship with God. But even before this truth finally comes to clear light in the New Testament, there are embedded in the Old Testament certain intriguing hints of this, glimmers of insight, provocative suggestions of this. And we find them embedded sometimes in the most unlikely places, in the book of Job or Psalms or in one of the later prophets, preparing the way for light and life and our eternal destiny to come into brilliant focus when the light of life comes and becomes Emmanuel, “God with us.”

Question 13: **What is eternal life?**

After affirming the forgiveness of sins and bodily resurrection, the Apostles' Creed concludes with the wonderful aspect of salvation referred to as “life everlasting.” The concept of everlasting life, often called eternal life, is very familiar to most Christians. But what does it really mean to live eternally? What is eternal life?

Dr. Simon Vibert

Eternal life is a concept that John seems to love talking about. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life,” — life everlasting. And life is not so much a quantity, but is a quality in John’s gospel. Jesus said, I have come that you might have life and have it in all its fullness, in all its abundance. So, for sure, the confidence a believer has is that when they die they will spend eternity with God, but John seems to also speak about it as being a quality — life that we can enjoy because we know the one who said, “I am the way, the truth and the life,” life of being reborn again, able to live the life that we should do in right relationship with God. So, it’s something that is a great celebratory note in John’s gospel. Eternal life is what Jesus came to give us and it begins even now.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

You know, the words that come together as “eternal life” come to us so easily because we encounter them so often in Scripture. We know that one of the gifts of our

salvation through Christ is eternal life. But, you know, we are chronological creatures. That's just the way we think. We think in terms of seconds and minutes and hours and days and months and years, and so it's easy for us to think that eternal life is the life we know now, just with a longer calendar, a calendar that never ends. That's not actually the biblical notion of eternal life. The first meaning of eternal life in Scripture is that it is life in God — it is God who is eternal — that one of the contrasts between God and we who are his human creatures is that, we are very temporal. We feel time. But God is timeless. And by the atonement that Christ has achieved for us, those who are in Christ enter into the eternal life of God. And so, eternal life means we are alive in Christ with God forever. It's not just a calendar that never runs out of pages. It's a state of existence, which is grounded in God himself, and in the fact that he is eternal. But, you know, the second word there in that couplet is really important, the word "life," because in the Scripture there's a contrast between life and death. And after the judgment, there's a contrast between eternal life and the second death. So, eternal life also is an affirmation that in Christ, those whose sins are forgiven, we know life with God and Christ forever. We are forever in the presence of God. We enter into a state of existence which is timeless, eternal, that is all about the glory of God and the comfort and joy and exhilaration of being in God's presence and praising him forever. The contrast of that is hell, defined as a second death. So, what we're talking about here with eternal life is not just length in eternity. It's the richness of being with Christ and having fellowship with God, rather than spending eternity in hell.

Question 14: **When does eternal life begin?**

Eternity can be a confusing concept, and theologians have explained it in different ways. But regardless of the precise way we define eternity, Scripture assures us that our eternal or everlasting life will be spent in a loving relationship with God. But does this mean that we won't enter that relationship until our bodies die? Or does it start sooner than that? When does eternal life begin?

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

On one hand you could say that eternal life begins from the foundation of the earth as God chooses people to be saved and inherit eternal life. For the individual's subjective attainment of eternal life, we see in the Bible that the believer attains eternal life when he trusts Christ and puts his faith in him for eternal life.

Dr. J. I. Packer

Eternal life begins when we come into personal contact with the Lord Jesus and the form of the personal contact is acceptance of him as our Savior, as our Lord, and as our friend. We accept him as the one who commits himself to us in love on the basis of his cross, to be all of that to us, and to be all of that for all eternity. And we respond out of gratitude. Love on his part awakens love in our hearts and that love is

expressed in our life of response. And thus, the reality of eternal life begins for us. And we learn that in the course of that transaction the Spirit of God has come to dwell in our hearts. We have passed from death into life; we have become new creatures in Christ. We have been born again of the Spirit, and we live the rest of our life exploring what that new creation, that new form of existence means for us. So, the Christian life is that sort of an adventure and in fact beyond this world in all eternity, the adventure will go on.

Dr. Knox Chamblin

Jesus says in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly." This life by its very nature is abundant and extraordinarily rich. Again, John 3:16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." That phrase "eternal life" includes the adjective, "eternal" — in Greek, *aionios*. That's the life that belongs to the age to come. The Greek noun for age is *aion*. So, in the *aion* to come, we have *aionios zoe* or eternal life. And since Jesus in his first coming inaugurated the age to come, eternal life, he tells his disciples, it's a present reality. In John 5:25, Jesus says, "Do not marvel at this for an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live." The hour is coming and it has now come. But then you come to verse 28 of chapter 5. "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all [those] who are in the tombs will hear [the voice of the Son of God] and those who hear will live." In verses 28 and 29 he doesn't say, "and is now here." He's talking about the consummation of his saving work in his glorious second advent, so it's a present reality. It's inaugurated now, but it will be consummated at the return of Christ. And then in John 11:25-26, sort of underscoring the truth of John 5:25-29, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who lives, who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." Though he die, yet shall he live. The mortal body must be replaced by the immortal but, everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. So, eternal life is not interrupted when a believer dies and goes to be with Christ. And just one other thing, John 3:1-21 make it plain that eternal life is related in the most immediate and closest way to the new birth achieved by the Holy Spirit, to the atoning sacrifice of Christ. So, in verse 14, Jesus says, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up." And so, in verse 16, when Jesus says, "Thus God loved the world," he's harking back to the sacrifice of verse 14. So, he gave his only Son in incarnation, but supremely in death. And then obviously, as we've said already, you cannot have eternal life unless you're united with Christ who is himself the life.

Question 15:

What's the difference between everlasting life and eternal existence?

Modern people tend to equate life with "existence." But this isn't how the Bible always used the term "life." Frequently, life meant more than existence. After all,

we already exist. But then we receive eternal life when we come to faith. And we possess eternal life now. It's not something that will start after we die; we've already begun to live it. So then, what's the difference between everlasting life and eternal existence?

Dr. John Frame

Eternal existence is something that both the righteous and the wicked have, both faithful and unfaithful people have, throughout time. The wicked are going to spend their eternal life in judgment and suffering. The righteous will spend their everlasting existence in fellowship with God. But eternal life has a different connotation from eternal existence. "Life" is a value term. When Adam was created, God breathed into him the breath of life, which is not only existence. I mean, he had existence as a lifeless body before that, but he entered into a kind of fellowship with God, and life in Scripture is always a value term. Life is the opposite of death. Death is the wages of sin. Life is the gift of God, the grace of God, taking us out of sin and giving us personal relationship with him and friendship. So that's the eternal life that's going to continue. It begins here on earth when a person comes to faith in Christ. Jesus says that those who believe in him have everlasting life right now, and so as we enter into our relationship with Jesus as our Lord and as our Savior and as our Friend, that is eternal life, and we're going to see that grow and expand and deepen throughout all the ages of time, and that's the wonderful promise of the gospel.

Question 16:

What kinds of blessings do we receive as a result of Jesus' resurrection?

Our everlasting life is made possible in part by Jesus' resurrection from the dead, because our union with him in his new life results in new life for us, too. But Scripture indicates that the blessings we receive from Jesus' resurrection even go beyond this. What kinds of blessings do we receive as a result of Jesus' resurrection?

Dr. Frank Thielman

People sometimes wonder what sort of blessings or benefits we receive from Jesus' resurrection. We're often familiar with the benefit, great benefit and benefits we receive from Jesus' death. When he died on the cross, he atoned for our sins, and so we're forgiven and at peace with God. But I think people are, sometimes well, they're confused about the benefits that we receive from Jesus' resurrection. Was the resurrection just a confirmation that, yes, God has indeed forgiven us by Christ's death on the cross? And that's certainly true; that's part of it. But the resurrection of Jesus is a very rich concept in the New Testament. There are multiple benefits that we have as believers from it. The first and most important of which Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15 — and it's also described in other places — and that is Jesus' victory over death in the resurrection means that we too have victory over death and that our bodies will one day be raised, will be physically raised.

Another benefit of the resurrection that sometimes people don't think about is that when we're raised together with Christ, we are seated together with Christ, Paul says in Ephesians 2:6, "in heavenly places." Paul says we are made together alive with him, we are raised together with him, and we are seated together with Christ. Now, the seating of Christ with God in heaven means that Christ has been victorious over all the enemies of God and his people. And particularly in the book of Ephesians where Paul says this in chapter 2, the enemies that Paul's talking about are the cosmic enemies of the universe, the rulers and authorities of this present darkness. Those forces have been conquered by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and Christ is seated at God's right hand. And the wonderful good news is that we are seated also at God's right hand. So, as Christians we too have victory over all the demonic and evil forces of the universe. We do not need to fear the invisible powers that some people claim have power over us. We do not need to fear those because Christ has conquered them, and we are victorious together with him. So, that's another element, another blessing, of our resurrection together with Christ.

Paul also says in Romans 6 and in Colossians 3, that our resurrection together with Christ has huge implications for the way we live our lives. We're no longer under slavery to sin, but we are instead, according to Romans 6, enslaved to righteousness. Because Christ has been raised from the dead, we have been buried with him, with his death in baptism. When we become Christians, we are buried with him, and we are raised now, just as he was raised to newness of life. And so, Paul says in Romans 6 that that means the way we used to live, before we became Christians, our old way of life that did not honor and please God, has now been, has now started to be, set aside, and we are beginning to live a new resurrection life just as Jesus was raised from the dead. Colossians 3 also makes that point. Paul's very careful though, here, to say that we have not yet been raised from the dead in that final eschatological sense. There is a sense in which we have been raised with Christ, but there is more yet to come, and so we live in a time of tension, understanding that we need to live in a way that shows our resurrection life is united with Christ on one hand, but on the other hand, understanding also that there will sometimes be failures, and we will need to turn to Christ constantly for forgiveness for sin, and that we will never be completely sinless until that final day when we are finally raised from the dead and occupy our resurrection bodies.

Dr. Thomas Nettles

We focus much on the death of Christ because it is true that it is in his own body on the tree that he bore our sin, and that God is pouring out his wrath. And it's true that at the end of that time of suffering, which was exquisite, Jesus said, "It is finished." But then we know that the story doesn't stop there. God still has work to do to show us that it was finished, that the atonement has been made, that it has been complete, that he is perfectly satisfied with it. And so, after our Redeemer does experience the grave — he experiences the deadness of death in his body — he was raised from the dead by the power of the Father, by the glory of the Father. He was raised from the

dead according to the Spirit of Holiness. He was raised from the dead by his own power resident within him. He says, "I have power to give my life; I have power to take it again." So, the resurrection is a demonstration that the triune God is happy with the atonement that Christ has made, is fully satisfied with this. So, one of the blessings that we have is the assurance that, indeed, when we go to God that Christ's death has been sufficient.

It also lets us know that Christ is, even now, at the right hand of God, interceding for us, this continued blessing, that if any man sinned we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. It also shows us that death, indeed, has been conquered. He has released from this fear those who all their lives were fearful of death, and he has destroyed him that has the power of death, and he's shown this by the resurrection. If the atoning work had not been satisfactory, then he would not have been raised from the dead, but since he has been raised from the dead, we know that it's satisfactory. The Scripture also tells us that when he was raised from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and he gave gifts to men. All of the gifts that we have come as a result of this work being completed, and he, as it were, the Psalm says, he enters into glory — "Who is the King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." And so, he has won this victory, and he gives gifts to men.

So, all the gifts that we have in the church, the gifts of teaching, the gifts of preaching, the gift of the Spirit to sanctify us, all of these have been given by Christ in his resurrection, so we are utterly dependent upon this. Paul says, "if Christ be not raised, then we're of all men most miserable. God lays it all out there and says all of this is true because of the resurrection, and Jesus said, "You'll know that I'm the one I claim to be when I'm raised from the dead." So, our entire confidence and all the gifts that we have are at least indicated to us, and then given to us, by the resurrection of Christ.

Question 17:

What might our life in heaven be like?

Jesus' death and resurrection made it possible for us to spend eternity with God. And as Christians, we joyfully look forward to our future fellowship with Christ. But the Bible doesn't give us a lot of details about what our life in heaven will be like. Some people think it will be like the Garden of Eden before the Fall — what theologians call "pre-lapsarian life." Others picture streets of gold and pearly gates. So, what might our life in heaven be like?

Dr. Steve Harper

All of us, at one time, or another, wonder what our lives are going to be like in heaven. I think that there are a lot of transferable concepts, even from the life we live here. There are dimensions that we have enjoyed and benefited from, and so it is at least logical to assume that those same kinds of blessings and benefits are going to be

part of our life in heaven. Sometimes people will ask, "Is it going to be like going back to Eden?" And again, I think there are probably some transferable concepts. When you read Genesis 1 and 2, up to the Fall, there are some wonderful things happening between God, Adam, and Eve and the rest of creation. And we can assume that when the Bible talks about a new heaven and a new earth, that some of those things will be there as well. But, I think it is a mistake to limit our understanding of life in heaven to either life on earth, or what life might have been in Eden, because it's a different dimension of life. Over the years I have tried to illustrate it to students, by saying, "What if we could talk to a baby, in its mother's womb? And say to that baby, 'You know that when you are sixteen years old, you are going to get a set of keys, and a car, and a driver's license. You are going to be able to drive around town on your own.'" That baby wouldn't have any idea what we were talking about because it's another dimension of life. Now, that baby would understand peace, and quietness, and being fed. The baby would understand all that from life in the womb. But a set of car keys and a driver's license? They wouldn't even know what we were talking about. I think heaven is the same way. There are things that we do have in our human life here on earth that we can extrapolate about heaven. But there are parts about it that are going to be beyond our imagination.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

We need to understand that the heavenly reality is even better than what we had in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were free from the state of sin that we're in now, and we'll be free from the state of sin in heaven. But Adam and Eve didn't have the righteousness of Christ given to them. They weren't inheritors of all the heavenly blessings because of Jesus that we will have in heaven. And so, our standing before God is taken to a different level. We now have the basis for the worship that will take place around the throne of God, which is focused on the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world. As wonderful as it will be to be free from the encumbrances of sin and have blessings and eternal life, the centerpiece of the glee and the joy and the glory of heaven will be God himself.

Question 18:

What will the new heavens and new earth be like?

Although we can't know exactly what our lives in heaven will be like, Scripture promises that in the final resurrection we'll receive glorified bodies, and God will redeem everything in creation. The current heaven isn't our final destination. Instead, after the resurrection of our bodies, we'll spend eternity in the new heavens and the new earth. But what will the new heavens and the new earth be like?

Dr. Jonathan Pennington

Many Christians think of our eternal state as a heavenly disembodied existence, maybe floating on the clouds with angels, but this is not at all what the Scriptures teach. The Scriptures are very clear that God cares for and values the physical

creation he's made, both the world and us as the apex of that creation. He has poured himself, in fact his own image and identity, into us as his creatures. He cares about us and he cares about the world he has made. The resurrection of Jesus is one of the witnesses to the reality that God cares about the physical state and its resurrected and renewed form. Our hope, and what the Scriptures teach, is that we, in our final home, will be in a new creation — a new heaven, and a new earth, the Scriptures call it — which is a physical embodied existence. We can't know the details because that of which the Scriptures speak on this matter must be necessarily imaginative language. It must be poetic imagery because it speaks of something, which is wholly other than what we can know and experience now. But we do know that it will be a life that is fully human and fully satisfying. It will be a life that is what we were meant to live for. It will be a life that is what we are longing for in our hearts. Every moment of brokenness, every moment of disappointment, every good thing that comes to an end, are witnesses, are crying out to us that this world is not our home, or at least this state of the world is not our home. The great hope that is given to us is that God will raise us even as he raised Jesus and will renew the whole earth itself.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

You know, one of the most important pictures held before us in Scripture, one of the greatest pictures of promise is that we're told there's going to be a new heaven and a new earth. And we look at that and we say, "Wow. We kind of like this one." We see the sunsets, we see the mountains, we see the oceans, we see the beauty of it and we say, "This one looks pretty good." But the Bible tells us that this world, as beautiful as it is, as magnificent as it is, is telling the story of human sinfulness as well as of the glory of God. We need a new heaven and a new earth because in the new heaven and the new earth there will be the undiluted presentation of the glory of God. If we think we've seen a sunset now, just wait until we see a sunset unclouded by the evidence of human sin. Just wait until we see the mountains in all their majesty, untainted by human sin. So, we know that the new heaven and the new earth is not just going to be Eden. It's not just going to be a reversion to Eden. It's going to be a "better than" because we're going to know God there not only as the Creator, but also as the Redeemer.

But, you know, there're some pictures embedded in Scripture that are really important, and I'll tell you what my favorite one is. My favorite one is the picture of the lamb who will now lay with the lion. You know, G. K. Chesterton, I believe it was, who said that the lamb and the lion may lay together now, and yet the lamb's not going to get much sleep. But in the new heaven and the new earth, they will be in no danger. There will be no carnivores. The lion and the lamb will safely be together because there will be absolutely nothing that will be the evidence of sin. There will be no catastrophe; there will be no murder; there will be no carnivores; there will be no viruses. It will be a world that will be visible to us in its similarity and continuity with this heaven and this earth as we know it, but it's going to be remarkably different. The lion and the lamb will lie together. And they will do so safely to the glory of God.

Dr. Knox Chamblin

I think about this sort of thing more at the age of 73 than I used to, what blessings we will receive in everlasting life and how that compares to life that Adam and Eve had in Genesis 2. I would want to begin with Revelation 21–22, which is sort of a mirror image of Genesis 1 and 2. And there, God promises his people life on a transformed earth. So, chapter 21 begins, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” This new earth will be fully as material as the Garden of Eden, a fitting setting for resurrected bodies. In his book, *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis says that life in the new world is more solid than life in the old world, whereas hell is less solid than this life. So, in the New Jerusalem, not only is paradise regained, it is surpassed. As one of the hymns puts it, “In Christ, the sons of Adam boast more blessings than their Father lost.” In that transformed world we will live under the authority of Jesus, the second Adam, and we will live fully productive lives in the City of God. Another thing at the heart of this everlasting life is an ever-deeper fellowship with the Holy Trinity. At the beginning of John 14, Jesus says, “In my Father’s house are many rooms... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again to receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” We read in 1 John 4:8 that God is love, which witnesses to the joyous fellowship within the Godhead, because his love is by nature outgoing. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit love one another. And in the new Jerusalem we will be drawn into the joyous fellowship, the great dance of the Holy Trinity.

And then, another aspect of this is alluded to there in John 14, “In my Father’s house are many rooms...” That is, all the people of God are going to be living together, and in that reunion in heaven, we will enter into an experience of the communion of saints that was quite impossible and even inconceivable in this life. And Christians with whom we’ve had difficulty getting along, we will enter into a reunion that will cause this bitterness and this resentment and this alienation to be cleansed away and we will enter into an unprecedented experience of the communion of saints. And we read in 1 Corinthians 13:13, “Now abide faith, hope and love...” I believe that Paul is saying that in the New Jerusalem, all three of those abide. We will always believe in the Holy Trinity, we will always have hope for a deeper understanding of the Holy Trinity, and we will grow in love for the Trinity and for one another.

Question 19:**How should we respond to God’s gift of salvation?**

Christians have been given the greatest gift possible: salvation. We’ve been saved from sin and death by the God of the universe. And because of this, we get to spend eternity with him and his Son in the glorious new heavens and new earth. This is such a wonderful gift that it deserves the greatest gratitude imaginable. But what should that look like? How should we respond to God’s gift of salvation?

Dr. Stephen Blakemore

The final redemption that we are going to receive through Jesus is so unbelievably beautiful and glorious that our response has to be a sort of total response of our entire being to what God has done and promises to do for us in Jesus Christ. That's what I understand I John 3 to be saying when John says, "...we're now the children of God, but it does not yet appear to us what we shall be, but we know this, when he is revealed, we shall be like him. So, anyone who has this hope in him purifies himself as he is pure." If the goal of God's redemption is to transform us into the image of Jesus Christ, if the goal of God's redemption in our lives is to bring us into a perfect union with him, a perfect relationship of loving trust and obedience, if the goal of God's redemption is to fill us with his love and his Spirit so that forever we are not just enjoying heaven, but forever heaven is living in us, then our response now can be only one thing: "Lord make me as much like Jesus in this life as a human being can possibly be. I don't know what that looks like; I don't know how it works, but Lord, make me into all that you can make out of me. I give you my all, I give you my life, I surrender all that I am to you. I don't want to live for anything else, anything less than your perfect and complete redemption at work in my life now."

Dr. Ivan Bespalov (translation)

The redemption Jesus gives us is a priceless gift we receive without compensation, without any efforts on our part. Because when he redeemed us and applied salvation to our lives, we were sinners and struggled against God. And as we receive salvation, our natural response follows: how do we live when we have this salvation, when we have this redemption, this redemption? First of all, our lives are to be lives of gratitude. We have received this precious gift, and we don't want to defile it. Suppose all of our life we've been clothed in rags, and now we've been presented with a Versace suit. It is not likely that we'll dust furniture, or wipe dirty hands with it, or blow our nose into its sleeve. We'd try to be worthy of the garment we have on. And Jesus has given us much more than a Versace suit. He has given us his righteousness, the snow-white clothes we'll have on when we enter heaven. Are we going to defile these garments with sinful actions, thoughts, or words? Of course not. We'll try to live appropriately to this redemption. And second, after we've received this redemption, wouldn't we like to share it with our children? Wouldn't we like to tell them about salvation so they, too, would have these white clothes in which they, too, could enter heaven? We buy them school uniforms, clothes for parties, see to it that they learn a trade, but their salvation is much more important, much more precious. Why don't we tell them about it? Attend to their salvation? We should care about the salvation of our relatives and friends and neighbors. This is what life in Christ is like — a life worthy of salvation.

Dr. Steve Douglass

The fact of the matter is that Jesus redeems us. That has lots of meaning, but one of the most basic responses that we should have is to be grateful. My goodness! What he's done for us and what therefore we should do in response for him. A lot of what we do for God is because we are so grateful for the fact that Jesus has redeemed us.

Now the second response is to encourage people to take advantage of that redemption. Yes, we know Jesus, but there are a lot of people around us who do not, and oftentimes we have, well, I'll call it "interesting opportunities" to share with people and make the issue clear. One time I was in Moscow — in the former Soviet Union, Russia — and we were on a project with Josh McDowell, the famous author, and we had 300 people there, but we were organized by bus groups, so my group was 30 people. And I remember in our first time together as our bus group, we were talking about our backgrounds and why we were there. And there was a fellow named Jim who I judged to be about 70 years old who stood up and said, "Well, I'm really here because of my daughter. She invited me to come. I'm actually not a believer, but I'm here in support of her and because I wanted to go to Russia." And I remember thinking to myself, well, sometime in the next week I hope Jim and I have a chance to talk. Well, the week went by, and we got busy, and I never had talked to him, until the last day, and I was sitting on the aisle seat in the bus, and Jim was across the aisle from me in the bus, and his daughter was at the window seat. So, I could see framed over his shoulder his daughter's face. I knew what she was saying: "Please share with my father." I was already planning to anyway, but that just gave me a little added incentive.

So, I talked to Jim, and I shared what we would tend to share in our ministry, the four spiritual laws, the content of the gospel, and at the end I said, "Jim, would you like to ask Jesus into your heart," just hoping that he would say, "yes." And he said, "No. No." Well you should have seen his daughter's face. Once more her father had eluded the Holy Spirit. I was not going to give up. I said, God give me some fresh approach that penetrates this incredible barrier that this man has to the gospel. And all of a sudden, God gave me an idea.

So, I said, "Jim, you're retired, aren't you?"

"Yes, yes I am."

I said, "I'm impressed, actually, that you have the money and the time and everything to come on a trip like this. I mean, you must have planned well; you must have worked hard; you must have been careful with your money to be able to do this kind of thing." And I could tell I was sort of getting on his positive side. I said, "You just impress me as a man who thinks ahead."

He said, "Well, yeah, I do. I do."

I said, "Well, in light of that, Jim, I guess I'd like to explain to you a little bit about what comes next." He didn't know where I was headed, and I said, "Do you think, Jim, at some point you will die?"

He said, "Well, of course, I'm going to die."

"Well, Jim, what will happen when you die?" Well, he was just kind of almost offended that I asked the question, and his daughter had this big question mark on her face like, "Where are you going with this? I'm hopeful my dad will respond someday."

He said, "I don't know." I said, "Well, therefore, let me clarify for you, Jim, and I'm going to put it in terms you understand since you understand retirement. Really, after death there are only two retirement plans. One is called heaven and the other is called hell. Now Jim, I only have one more question, and I'll just stop all this. It's a

curiosity question. Frankly, in light of what I know about you, Jim, what is it about hell that you prefer?" And then I just stayed quiet. His daughter, she was just about perishing. I mean, she was, "Oh, man, you have terribly offended my father!" So, I just looked at him in the face and didn't say a word.

And after a full minute, which is a long time, okay, in that context, he said, "Nothing. I'm ready to pray and ask Jesus Christ into my life." And he did. And his daughter is like she swallowed a light bulb.

You see? Nobody made it so plain to him. We're talking about redemption from hell. What is it about that that doesn't make sense? And so, when we appreciate what Christ has done for us and then share that clearly with other people, I think we could be very excited about how those people will respond.

Dr. David Garner

The entire New Testament, and I think especially in the letters of the apostle Paul, we see this structure in the way in which he writes of what we describe as the indicative and imperative relationship. Paul recognizes that the heart of the gospel, as he articulates in 1 Corinthians 15, is that, according to the Scriptures, Jesus died, was buried, and on the third day, according to the Scriptures, he raised from the dead. And so, what we find in the New Testament is that the events of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ take center stage. But in keeping with the way in which Paul writes as well as the other New Testament writers, we find that resting in that indicative, those historical events that Paul describes, is a deeply rooted, necessarily related responsibility that comes with that. There is the gift of faith that God gives us, Paul describes in Ephesians 2:8-10. But in that gift of faith, Paul describes it as a faith that works through love — Galatians 5. And then when you come back to 1 Corinthians 15, that I mentioned earlier, he describes an extraordinary reality of the realization of the eternal kingdom even now through our being conjoined to Jesus Christ and his resurrection. And Paul is explicit about that. He describes in chapter 15:42 through about 48 or so that Jesus Christ, and explicitly in verse 45, is the life-giving Spirit as the resurrected Son of God, that there is flowing from him by our union with him, the reality of new kingdom ethic, new kingdom power, new kingdom glory that is ours by virtue of us being united to him by faith through the Holy Spirit.

So, what are the implications for us as we consider the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Well, Paul says that his resurrection is our resurrection. In fact, he will argue it the other way around. He will say that if we are not resurrected, then Jesus wasn't resurrected either. So sure is he about our solidarity with Jesus Christ, he will say that Christ's resurrection power is actually in our possession right now. The implications are astounding, because what we now have at our disposal by virtue of our union with Jesus Christ is the power, actually, to say yes to Christ, to say yes to God's expectations upon us. No longer is the law merely something that condemns, but by the outpouring of the Spirit and fulfillment of the new covenant realized in the resurrected Christ who is the life-giving Spirit, we are empowered, we are enabled, we are motivated now to respond in obedience to God in Christ. So, our union with Christ actually fleshes itself out in the way in which we walk in a delighted

obedience, and knowing that when we sin, we have an advocate with the Father who stands and lives ever to intercede for us. But in that reality, in that repentance, as we enjoy that forgiveness, we are compelled once again to live in the dynamic of resurrection power because Jesus Christ is raised, and we are raised with him.

Our salvation came at a great price. Jesus, the holy, anointed Son of God, had to suffer and die on a Roman cross, taking all our sins on himself, and then be raised to life. And the writers of the Apostles' Creed understood how important it was for Christians to appreciate and proclaim this salvation. When we recite the Apostles' Creed, we aren't just echoing ancient words. We're confessing anew that we trust in a God who loves us perfectly. And we're expressing our personal gratitude for his abundant and overflowing blessings.

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