

# The Apostles' Creed

Lesson 6

Salvation

Manuscript



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# The Apostles' Creed

## Lesson Six

### Salvation

#### INTRODUCTION

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Throughout these lessons, we've mentioned that the *Apostles' Creed* began as a brief summary of the beliefs that early Christians confessed when they were baptized. In that context, it's easy to imagine that the most emotional part of their confession, for many, would have been the articles of the creed expressing faith in their personal salvation. And isn't that true for us, as well? We love our great God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And we value the church he's built. But our greatest joy is the good news that salvation is for *us*. We rejoice in the assurance that God loves *us*, that he forgives *our* sins, and that he has a wonderful destiny for us, both now and in the world to come.

This is the sixth lesson in our series on *The Apostles' Creed*, and we have entitled it, "Salvation." In this lesson, we'll look at the articles of faith in the *Apostles' Creed* that affirm belief in the good news of forgiveness and eternal life. In Scripture, the word "salvation" is used in a variety of ways, indicating that there are many facets to our salvation in Christ. When modern Christians use the word "salvation," we generally have in mind the reception of the blessings that Christ purchased by his atoning death, beginning with being born again and reconciled to God, continuing through life in a process of sanctification, and culminating in our ultimate glorification in the new heavens and earth. The *Apostles' Creed* speaks of this aspect of salvation with these words:

**I believe in ...  
The forgiveness of sins,  
The resurrection of the body,  
And the life everlasting.**

Now, these three ideas — forgiveness, resurrection and eternal life — do not exhaust the Bible's description of our salvation. But they are the primary statements in the *Apostles' Creed* that confess belief in particular aspects of what God does when he saves individual believers.

Our discussion of salvation in the *Apostles' Creed* will address each of these dimensions of our salvation. First, we'll talk about the forgiveness of sins. Second, we'll explore the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. And third, we'll consider the nature of everlasting life. Let's begin with the familiar subject of the forgiveness of sins.

#### FORGIVENESS

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To understand what the *Apostles' Creed* means by forgiveness, we'll touch on three closely related issues: first, the problem of sin that makes forgiveness necessary; second, the divine grace that makes forgiveness possible; and third, our individual

responsibility, the things we need to do to receive forgiveness. We'll look first at the problem of sin.

## PROBLEM OF SIN

Christians who believe in the Bible recognize that one of the main reasons Jesus died was to solve the problem created by our sin. Sin separates us from God's blessings, and places us under his curse. And there is no way we can overcome this problem by ourselves. This is what we mean when we talk about the problem of sin: Sin condemns us. And apart from Christ, we have no way to save ourselves from his presence or its consequences.

We'll investigate what the Scriptures teach about the problem of sin in three parts. First, we'll offer a biblical definition of sin. Second, we'll talk about the origin of sin in the human race. And third, we'll look at the consequences of sin. Let's start with a definition of sin.

### Definition of Sin

The Bible talks about sin in a variety of ways. It uses words like lawlessness, rebellion, transgression, offense, evil, missing the mark, and a variety of other words to describe things that are sinful. And each of these words adds something to our understanding of sin. But when Scripture speaks of sin abstractly — when it offers its own definition for sin — one word tends to rise above the others: lawlessness. In the Bible's vocabulary, sin is most fundamentally a violation of God's law. As the apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:4:

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4).

We see this same emphasis on sin as lawlessness in places like Romans 7:9-25, and 1 Corinthians 15:56. This basic concept of sin is also reflected in the theology of many different Christian traditions. As just one example, listen to the *Westminster Shorter Catechism's* question and answer number 14. In answer to the question:

**What is sin?**

The Catechism answers:

**Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.**

Notice that this answer identifies two general types of violations of God's law: want of conformity unto the law, and transgression of the law. On the one hand, want of conformity unto the law is failure to do what Scripture commands. This is often called "sin of omission" because we omit or neglect what we should be doing. On the other hand, transgression of the law is doing what Scripture forbids. This kind of lawbreaking

is often called “sin of commission” because we actively commit sin by thinking, feeling or doing something that Scripture forbids.

Now, when we talk about the law of God as the standard that defines sin, it’s important to point out that God’s law is not arbitrary or random. On the contrary, the law is a reflection of God’s perfect character. Listen to the way Paul described the law in Romans 7:12:

The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good  
(Romans 7:12).

As Paul said here, God’s commandments are always holy, righteous and good, just like God himself. God’s commands always accord with his nature. This is why Scripture teaches that if we love God, we’ll keep his commandments. If we love God, we will also love those things that reflect God, such as his law. We see this in Deuteronomy 5:10 and 6:5, 6; Matthew 22:37-40; John 14:15-24 and many other places. Listen to what John wrote in 1 John 5:3:

This is love for God: to obey his commands (1 John 5:3).

Love for God is manifested in obedience to his law. So, when we break his law, we are not acting in love for God. And therefore, we are sinning.

**There is in the Bible a very close connection between loving God and obeying God. I think the first thing that we have to clarify is that merely loving God is not a fulfillment of the command to love God. There can be a duty-oriented, obligatory drudgery that was never in mind when the Bible said “If you love me,” or Christ said, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” But if the love is there, if there is this voluntary self-giving rooted in a delight in God, then the most natural and validating manifestation of that will be a profound, willing and ready obedience because it’s rooted in a desire to be pleasing to this God whom you love and delight in; it’s rooted in the trust that this “God’s way” is as reliable and for your good as his own character.**

— Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

When we fail to act out of love for God, we sin by rebelling against him, by transgressing his law, by doing evil, by missing the mark, by offending his holy, righteous and good character. But when our love for God motivates us, we put his interests and demands above our own. And as a result, we can avoid many sins and their terrible consequences in our lives.

With this definition of sin as violation of God’s laws in mind, let’s turn to the origin of sin in the human race.

## Origin of Sin

Most of us are familiar with the events recorded in Genesis 3, the account of when our first parents Adam and Eve rebelled against God by eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. From a biblical point of view, this act was not an isolated event. It caused the entire human race to become guilty of sin, and to be corrupted by sin. Theologians commonly refer to this event as *humanity's* fall into sin, or simply the Fall.

Genesis 1:26-31 tells us that when God created humanity, we were very good. In this case, the word "good" means that we were precisely what God wanted us to be. Our first parents were morally pure images of God, perfectly suited to serve him by filling and ruling over the world God had created. As Paul indicated in Romans 5:12, sin had not entered humanity before the Fall. We had never committed sin, we were not inclined toward sin, we were not corrupted by sin, and we were not indwelt by sin.

But even in this sinless state, we did have both the *ability* and the *opportunity* to sin. When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, he revealed many things to them. But one command quickly moved to the foreground as a test of their willingness to serve God. In Genesis 2:16-17, we read that God permitted Adam and Eve to eat from any tree in the garden except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And the possibility of breaking this law presented an opportunity for Adam and Eve to sin.

Tragically, as we know from Genesis 3:1-6, the serpent deceived Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. Then Eve offered some of the fruit to Adam, and he ate it too. Adam and Eve violated God's righteous law and willfully chose to sin. Revelation 12:9 indicates that the serpent was actually Satan, and 1 Timothy 2:14 indicates that Eve was deceived. But neither Satan's temptations nor Eve's foolishness excused the sin of our first parents. They both were guilty of choosing evil instead of good.

In these events we see once again that sin is fundamentally a matter of violating God's law, his revealed will. Whenever we think, speak or act in ways that differ from God's revealed law, we are choosing evil instead of good. And even if we're deceived or tricked into sinning, God still holds us accountable for what we've done. That's why it's so helpful to hide God's word in our hearts — not just so that we know it, but also so that we love it. When we know God's law, it helps us recognize sin so that won't be deceived. And when we love God's law, it makes it easier to choose to obey him.

Having considered sin's definition and origin, we're ready to look at the consequences of sin.

## Consequences

Scripture indicates that after Adam and Eve sinned, God judged and cursed the entire human race. This curse affected every aspect of their being. It immediately resulted in the spiritual death that is spoken of throughout Scripture, as in John 5:24-25, Ephesians 2:1-5, and Colossians 2:13, 14. It also produced corruption in our beings, both body and soul, as we see in Jeremiah 17:9 and Romans 7:18-8:11. And it ultimately led to physical

death, as we read in Genesis 3:19 and Romans 5:12. Finally, sin earned humanity eternal suffering under God's judgment in hell, as we learn from passages like Matthew 5:29-30. The well-known pastor Charles Spurgeon, who lived from 1834 to 1892, spoke of God's curse on Adam and Eve in his sermon *The Curse Removed*. Listen to what he said:

**What does that curse include? It involves death, the death of this body ... It includes spiritual death, a death of that inner life which Adam had — the life of the spirit, which hath now fled, and can only be restored by [the] Holy Spirit ... And it includes, last of all, and worst of all, that death eternal ... all that can be gathered in that terrible, that awful ... word “hell.”**

What's worse, the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin also spread to the entire human race — to everyone who descended from them through natural generation. We see the universal extent of sin in passages like 1 Kings 8:46, Romans 3:9-12, Galatians 3:22, and Ephesians 2:3. Listen to the way Paul talked about Adam's sin in Romans 5:12-19:

Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned ... [Through] the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners (Romans 5:12, 19).

As we saw in an earlier lesson, Adam was the covenant head of the entire human race. And Paul taught that because of this, Adam's sin was credited to all his descendants. And as a result, we are sinners by nature. We come into the world spiritually dead, subject to pain and hardship, and destined for physical death.

**It's hard to exaggerate; it's impossible for us even to 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 also 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 we can rescue ourselves from this predicament. Only God can do that, and he does so in Christ.**

— Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

The problem of sin is truly dire. All humanity is utterly lost and condemned. We have no way to redeem ourselves. We are perpetually doomed to suffer under God's judgment. There is no way for us to earn back his favor, or to make amends for our sin.



Apart from God's gracious forgiveness, there is absolutely no hope of salvation.

Having looked at the problem of sin, we should turn our discussion of the forgiveness of sins toward the divine grace that makes forgiveness possible.

## DIVINE GRACE

In his mercy, God was not willing to let the entire human race remain under the curse of sin. He still planned for humanity to fill and rule over the earth, and to turn it into a kingdom worthy of his presence. So, he sent a Redeemer to solve the problem of sin. And that Redeemer was his Son, Jesus Christ. As Redeemer, Jesus saves us from our guilt and corruption; he reconciles us to himself; he restores our ability to turn the world into his earthly kingdom. God's plan does not rely on the ability of mere human beings to merit our own salvation. It relies on God's grace, his unmerited favor, granted to us through our special representative: the Lord Jesus Christ. As we read in Romans 3:23-24:

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23-24).

As a work of divine grace, forgiveness involves all three persons of the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And it began with the Father.

### Father

**Salvation is Trinitarian at heart: the Father who initiates, the Son who accomplishes, the Spirit who applies. When we think of the Father-Son relationship we should think of... When we think of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all three persons are involved in the planning of our salvation. All three persons are acting in grace and in love and in mercy as well as upholding wrath and righteousness and judgment. So, when the Father is seen as initiator, he's not doing that independent of the Son and the Holy Spirit.**

— Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

Forgiveness began with the Father because he was the one that planned it. The New Testament explicitly teaches that the Father sent the Son into the world and appointed him as the Redeemer. We see this in John 3:16-18, Acts 2:34-36, and Hebrews 3:1, 2. The New Testament also teaches that the father authorized Jesus' empowerment as the Redeemer of his people, and promised to accept Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as payment for sin. We read about these roles of the Father in passages like John 10:14-18, Colossians 1:18-20 and Hebrews 2:10. In fact, Romans 3:25 says that it was the Father who offered up Jesus as a sacrifice. Listen to what Paul wrote there:

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement (Romans 3:25).

The Father is the great architect of redemption. It's his gracious plan and merciful desire to forgive our sins and to bless us. And it's his authority that makes salvation both possible and certain.

**The idea that at the cross, that Jesus is trying to turn away the anger of his heavenly Father against his people in such a way that Jesus is loving and that the Father is not, is actually a very serious misconstrual of what is happening in the atoning work of Jesus Christ... Jesus' work on the cross is actually the expression of the Father's prior love for his people. Think how often in the New Testament it is stressed that Jesus' coming into this world and his bearing of the cross is in fact the result of the Father's love. The verse that most of us memorize perhaps first in our Christian life, John 3:16, emphasizes "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..." Now, whose love is being emphasized in that verse? I don't mean in any way to take away from the love of Jesus, but it's the love of the heavenly Father in the giving of the Son, that is being emphasized in that passage.**

— Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III

The divine grace that accomplishes our forgiveness also involved the Son, who is our Redeemer.

## Son

In fulfillment of the Father's promise, the Son was sent into the world, becoming incarnate as Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, in order to atone for human sin. We find this teaching in many places like Romans 3:25-26, and Hebrews 2:14-17, and 10:5-10. Jesus atoned for sin by dying on the cross in place of sinners. He received the divine curse that had been warranted by our sin. And his perfect righteousness was credited to our account, so that we would be counted not as sinners, but as obedient children of God. To list just a few of the places this theme appears, we find it in John 10:14-18, Galatians 2:20, 2 Corinthians 5:21, and Hebrews 10:9-14. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:7:

*In [Jesus Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace (Ephesians 1:7).*

Our sins are forgiven not because God ignores them, but because he has punished them in Christ. And that's why Scripture encourages us to have such confidence in our salvation.

Besides depending on these works of the Father and Son, forgiveness is also the result of divine grace from the Holy Spirit.

## Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity who actually applies forgiveness to our lives. The Father laid the plans and the Son accomplished the atonement. But our sins are not actually forgiven until the Holy Spirit does his work. When we first come to faith, the Spirit reconciles us to God by forgiving all the sins we have committed up to that point. He also gives us new spiritual life by regenerating our spirits, as Jesus talked about in John 3:5-8. Acts 11:18 speaks of this experience as “repentance unto life” because regeneration and faith will always involve sorrow and confession of our sinfulness. This idea is confirmed in many passages, such as 1 Corinthians 6:11. And the Spirit continues to apply forgiveness to us throughout our lives. He is the one that maintains our faith, that leads us to daily repentance, and that continually applies forgiveness to us. We see this in places like Romans 8:1-16 and Galatians 5:5. As just one example, listen to what Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:13:

**God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13).**

Here, Paul wrote that believers are saved by the works of the Spirit that cleanse us from sin and unrighteousness, that is, the works of the Spirit that apply forgiveness to us. And the Spirit continues to apply forgiveness to us as we continue to believe in the truth.

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit all demonstrate saving grace toward us. And this has at least three implications for our lives. First, when we sin and appeal to God for forgiveness and other aspects of salvation, we are right to make our petitions known to all three divine persons. Second, when we receive these blessings, we should give thanks to all three persons of God. And third, we can take great confidence in our salvation, knowing that all three persons of the Trinity love us and work to ensure our redemption. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all working together, for our benefit, to solve the problem of sin.

Having looked at the forgiveness of sins from the perspectives of the problem of sin and divine grace, we're ready to talk about the role individual responsibility plays in forgiveness.

## INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Scripture clearly teaches that God does not forgive the sins of every person. Some people are forgiven, and some are not. Why is this true? From a human perspective, the reason is that the process of forgiveness ordinarily involves an element of individual responsibility. Generally speaking, those people that fulfill these responsibilities are forgiven, but those that shirk these responsibilities are not.

Our discussion of the role of individual responsibility will divide into two parts. First, we'll mention some conditions that Scripture identifies as ordinary requirements for forgiveness. And second, we'll talk about the means of receiving forgiveness. Let's begin with the conditions that Scripture associates with forgiveness.

## Conditions

Scripture speaks of two primary conditions for forgiveness. First, it speaks of faith in God as a prerequisite for forgiveness. In Scripture, faith is a multifaceted concept. But in this context, when we speak of faith in God, we have in mind: acknowledgement of God's divine sovereignty, loyal submission to him, and trust that he will show us mercy for the sake of our redeemer, Jesus Christ. Although it may sound strange to modern ears, Scripture often refers to this type of faith as the "fear of God." For example, Psalm 103:8-13 describes the conditional nature of forgiveness in this way:

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him (Psalm 103:8-13).

Notice that it's those who fear the Lord that receive his forgiveness, whose transgressions are removed. This same idea is found throughout the Bible. For instance, in 2 Chronicles 30:18, 19, the Lord is said to pardon the people who set their hearts on seeking him. In Mark 4:12, Jesus indicated that only those who perceive and understand the Lord can turn to him for forgiveness. And in Acts 26:17, forgiveness can only be had by those whose eyes have been opened to the truth of the Lord's glory and power.

The second ordinary condition of forgiveness found in Scripture is brokenness. Brokenness is genuine sorrow over sin; true regret over violating God's law. It's not simply sorrow over being caught or punished, but agreement that the Lord's requirements are holy, and broken-heartedness over having failed to honor him.

**In terms of contrition, we are meant, you and I, to sense the guilt of our sin. I think of David after he had sinned with Bathsheba. Yes, he had sinned against Bathsheba, and he had sinned against Bathsheba's husband. He had sinned against the church of the Old Testament, but ultimately "against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight." And you sense something of the contrition of his heart. The modern term, I think, is "brokenness," and we need the word, by the Spirit, to break us, to break us in the presence of God.**

— Dr. Derek Thomas

For example, in 2 Samuel 11, David showed no remorse when he committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then arranged for the death of her husband Uriah in order to hide her pregnancy. He lived without sorrow for his actions for the entire time of Bathsheba's pregnancy, until after his child was born. At that time, the prophet Nathan confronted David over his sin, as we learn in 2 Samuel 12. Only then did David admit his

crime and feel deep conviction over it. Then, in a spirit of true brokenness, he wrote Psalm 51, his great psalm of repentance, to express the depth of his sorrow and regret. Listen to what David wrote in Psalm 51:6, 17:

Surely you desire truth in the inner parts ... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Psalm 51:6, 17).

David recognized that in order to receive God's forgiveness, he needed to share God's perspective on his sin. He needed to hate what he had done, and to be truly sorry for it.

We see this same emphasis on brokenness in Psalm 32:1, 2, where forgiveness comes to those who have no deceit in them. We find it in Isaiah 55:7, where God's mercy is given to those who forsake their sin. And we hear it in Jeremiah 5:3, where forgiveness is denied to those whose hearts are hard with regard to their sin.

**I think we cultivate contrition, which is the heart of repentance, by focusing our minds on the holiness of God. We can do that by contemplating what the Bible says from Genesis to Revelation about the God who cannot fellowship with disobedient people, but who judges disobedience, brings retribution on those who transgress. That is God's holiness in its very essence. And as we brood on God's holiness, let's then look back to the track record of our own lives and review just some of the ways in which we have transgressed, disobeyed, wandered off in disregard of what God has said, made a mess of our lives in a way that dishonors him. And then think back, now all the retribution that was due to me for that has actually fallen on Christ's shoulders and been endured by him. And that tells me just how grievous my own sins were, that they could only be atoned for by the death of the incarnate Son of God for me. And as I realize how grievous my sins are in light of the holiness of God and what was demanded to put them away, so my sense of the grievousness of sin will be made more acute, my contrition will be deepened, and out of that will come an honest attempt all over again, again and again and again, to commit myself to God for holiness, to tell him how much I regret and indeed hate the sins that made the atonement necessary.**

— Dr. J. I. Packer

The conditions of faith and brokenness are important to the life of every person, whether or not we are believers. For those who have not received Christ as Lord and savior, these conditions are opportunities for them to come to God to have their sins forgiven, and to begin new life in Christ. For those of us who already belong to the Lord, they are reminders that we need to live lives of constant faith, and to be truly sorry for the sins we continue to commit, so that we can continue to receive forgiveness and cleansing on a daily basis.

Now that we've seen that the conditions for forgiveness normally include God working faith and brokenness in our hearts, let's look at the ordinary means by which we can receive forgiveness.

## Means

Sometimes, Christians fail to distinguish between a means of grace and a basis of grace. As a result, they mistakenly think that a means of grace can be used to earn grace, or even to force God to be gracious to us. So, it's important to distinguish clearly between a means and a basis. To help us see this distinction, imagine that a person needs physical therapy to recover from an injury. The therapy is expensive, and is paid for by a donor. We might say that the means by which the person fully recovers is the therapy. But the financial basis for this recovery would be the donation. We might summarize these differences by saying that a basis is the ground or merit on which an action or consequence is based, whereas a means is a tool or mechanism for bringing that action or consequence to pass.

When it comes to receiving forgiveness and grace from God, the *basis* is always the merit of Christ, which he earned by his obedient life and sacrificial death on the cross. We see this in places like Matthew 26:28, Colossians 1:13, 14, and 1 John 2:12. Forgiveness is always earned. But it's earned by Christ, not by us. And the fundamental means by which all grace is applied to our lives is faith. Whether expressed directly to God, or through means of grace, faith is the primary tool through which God applies grace and other blessings to our lives. Scripture mentions several means through which faith normally works. For our purposes in this lesson, we can summarize these other means in two general categories, beginning with prayer.

Throughout Scripture, prayer is presented as an ordinary means for appealing to God for grace and forgiveness. For instance, the Bible commonly speaks of prayers of confession and repentance as expressions of faith through which the Holy Spirit applies forgiveness to us. The effectiveness of these prayers is taught in 1 Kings 8:29-40, Psalm 32:1-11, Acts 8:22, 1 John 1:9, and many other places. For those who have just come to know the Lord, faithful prayers of confession and repentance are the means through which the Holy Spirit initially applies forgiveness and salvation to their lives. This is why the church referred to conversion as "repentance unto life" in Acts 11:18. And for all believers, prayers of confession and repentance continue to be important means of receiving God's grace in our lives. As we read in 1 John 1:9:

If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

The wonderful news of the gospel is that God freely forgives our sins on the basis of what Christ has done for us. And we can receive this forgiveness simply by asking for it in faith.

**You know, a lot of folks think that if you teach that God will forgive sinners simply by their coming to him and saying, "Forgive me,**

heavenly Father,” that that will cheapen the grace of God. But the fact of the matter is it exalts the grace of God, not because our repentance saves us, or is the basis on which God forgives us, but because God has himself provided the basis of our forgiveness and reconciliation in the infinitely valuable and incalculably costly death of his only begotten son.

— Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III

The fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity came to earth and spent thirty years in humility and servanthood and then suffered and died on the cross — took on the eternal debt of sin on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. That’s an eternal price, that’s an eternal cost, an enormous cost, an infinite cost for our sins. So, this is not cheap grace at all. This is the most expensive grace ever achieved. We receive it as a free gift, but only because Jesus gave his all for us.

— Dr. Mark L. Strauss

All who come to him and simply say, “Forgive me, Lord,” are forgiven. Not because their request for forgiveness was so noble, not because their repentance was so good, but because Jesus has done everything that is necessary for us to be reunited in fellowship with our heavenly Father.

— Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III

Now, we should pause to mention that in addition to prayers of confession and repentance, which function as ordinary means of forgiveness, prayers of intercession sometimes function as extraordinary or unusual means of forgiveness. Intercession can be defined as: mediation; or petition or prayer on behalf of another.

Scripture records many biblical examples of people offering effective intercessory prayers. We see this in Numbers 14:19-20, where the Lord forgave the sin of Israel in response to Moses’ intercessory prayer. We find it in 2 Chronicles 30:18-20, where the Lord forgave the people who had not properly prepared for Passover in response to Hezekiah’s intercession. We see it in Job 1:5, where we learn that Job regularly offered effective intercessory sacrifices for his children. And we see it in James 5:14, 15, where James taught that the elders of the church can obtain forgiveness for those who have sinned. God does not always apply forgiveness in response to the intercessory prayers of the faithful. But there are many times when he does.

And beyond these types of human intercession, both the Son and the Holy Spirit intercede for people. The intercession Jesus offers is mentioned in places like Isaiah 53:12, Romans 8:34, and Hebrews 7:25. And the Spirit’s intercession is taught in Romans 8:26, 27.

The second general category of means of forgiveness is the sacraments, or what many modern Protestant churches call the “ordinances,” namely baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Now, when we use the term “sacrament,” we need to be clear that we are not talking about the view of the Lord’s Supper and baptism found in the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, the word “sacrament” has historically been used by many Protestant denominations to refer to the Lord’s Supper and baptism. These ceremonies are special, holy ordinances that God provided to the church as means of expressing our faith and receiving his blessing. Protestant traditions differ over the details of the workings of these ordinances. But they all agree that they are special in some way.

Sometimes Christians feel suspicious when they hear others talk about the Lord’s Supper and baptism as means of forgiveness. So, it’s important to emphasize that we are not saying that these ordinances have any merit in themselves that make them effective. They are not the *basis* of forgiveness. At the same time, the Bible teaches that when we express our faith through the Lord’s Supper and baptism, the Holy Spirit uses these ordinances to apply forgiveness to our lives.

Baptism is spoken of as a means of grace in passages like Mark 1:4, Acts 2:38, Romans 6:1-7, and Colossians 2:12-14. As just one example, listen to Ananias’ words to Paul in Acts 22:16:

And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name (Acts 22:16).

In these instructions, Ananias indicated that Paul’s sins would be forgiven or “washed away” through baptism. Now, of course, baptism is not a necessary means of forgiveness. We can be forgiven in other ways as well. For example, the thief who came to faith while being crucified with Jesus was never baptized. Nevertheless, Luke 23:43 indicates that he was forgiven and saved. So, we should not make the mistake of thinking that forgiveness and salvation are only available to those who have been baptized. Still, Scripture makes it abundantly clear that baptism ordinarily functions as a means of applying forgiveness to our lives. And the same is true of the Lord’s Supper. Paul explicitly taught that partaking of the Lord’s Supper is a means of receiving the benefits of Christ’s death, such as forgiveness. Listen to what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:16:

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16).

These were rhetorical questions. Everyone reading Paul’s letter knew that the answers were, “Yes, of course.” By partaking of the Lord’s Supper in faith, we are united to Christ.

Forgiveness of sins is a great blessing of salvation that we experience throughout our Christian lives. Whether we are new converts, or lifelong believers, forgiveness is a continual aspect of our walk with Christ. And it results in many other blessings as well. John Wesley, a founder of the Methodist church who lived from about 1703 to 1791, spoke about forgiveness in his *Sermon 26*, in which he expounded the Sermon on the



Mount. Listen to what he said there:

**As soon as ... we receive forgiveness of sins, we receive likewise a lot among those who are sanctified, by faith which is in him. Sin has lost its power: It has no dominion over those who are under grace, that is, in favor with God. As there is now no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus, so they are freed from sin as well as from guilt. The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in them, and they walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.**

**I think the forgiveness of sins is, in some ways, the most precious reality we have as Christians. Fundamentally what it means to be forgiven of our sins is to be in a right relationship with God, with our Creator. When we look at the world today, we see that people are longing for meaning, for significance, for purpose. And there's so much confusion in our culture. What is life all about? What is the reason for living? Why am I here? And so people try all sorts of things to find meaning and significance — whether they pursue their job or sexuality or drugs. I mean there are all kinds of venues and paths where people are trying to find happiness and joy. But the gospel tells us our fundamental need as human beings is to be in a right relationship with our Creator, with the one who made us... The gospel says that God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to atone for our sins, to absorb the wrath of God. God out of his love sent his Son so that our sins could be forgiven, so that if we put our trust in him we can be forgiven of our sins. And when we come to that experience, when we turn to Jesus Christ for such forgiveness there is an incredible sense of peace, a sense of rightness with the world because it truly is a rightness with the world. We suddenly realize this is what we are created for. We are created to be in right relationship with God. We recognize at that moment.**

— Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner

Now that we've explored the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, we're ready to consider our next article of faith: the resurrection of the body.

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## RESURRECTION

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Recall these words from the *Apostles' Creed*:

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

We need to be clear at this point, that the creed is not talking about the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus' own resurrection appears earlier in the creed when it says that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. When the creed speaks of "the resurrection of the body" it has in mind the general resurrection — the resurrection of all people when Christ returns in glory.

We'll consider the general resurrection of the body in three steps. First, we'll look at the curse that results in death for our bodies. Second, we'll explain that the Christian gospel offers life for our bodies. And third, we'll look at the way our bodies will eventually experience redemption. Let's begin with the curse that causes our bodies to die.

## CURSE

As we saw in an earlier lesson, God created human beings to consist of physical bodies and non-physical souls. Based on Hebrews 4:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23, some traditions have maintained that each human being also possesses a spirit in addition to a soul. But there are approximately 200 verses in which one or the other of these terms is used to refer to all the inner, non-physical aspects of our being as a whole. So, most Christian traditions have concluded that the words "soul" and "spirit" both refer to the same underlying reality, and that human beings consist of only two main parts: body and soul.

Before our fall into sin, our bodies and our souls were unaffected by sin and its corrupting powers. But when Adam and Eve fell into sin, sin corrupted not only their souls, but also their bodies. And this corruption of their bodies ultimately resulted in their physical death. Listen to God's curse on Adam in Genesis 3:19:

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return (Genesis 3:19).

When Adam and Eve sinned against God, he cursed them both. And part of his curse was that they would be mortal. They would eventually die and return to dust. And because all human beings descend from Adam and Eve, we are all born with similar corruption. As Paul wrote in Romans 5:12:

Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).

Sin affected Adam and Eve in both spiritual and physical ways. And because we are their natural descendants, we bear the same curse. Our souls come into the world in a state that the Bible describes as spiritual death. We are under God's judgment, and have lost all ability to please him. We read about this in passages like Romans 5:12-19 and 8:1-8.

And just like Adam and Eve, our bodies are also corrupted by sin. This corruption results in physical hardship, sickness, and eventually death. Paul talked about this in Romans 6:12-19, and 7:4-25. Sin corrupts all that we are — our entire being, body and soul. But the wonderful promise of God is that salvation in Christ redeems both our souls and our bodies.

**Christians should never view human death as something that's normal. We often use in our language, or convey that kind of idea. Sometimes at funerals we can say of someone, "Well, they lived a good long life." And it's only at, maybe, the death of a young child or the death of someone maybe in their twenties or thirties that we say, "Oh, this is terrible." No, this is really not a proper Christian view of human death. A Christian view of human death views all death as that which is abnormal. We were made to live from the very beginning forever. You think of how, even in the creation account on the seventh day, God rests. He would enter into full enjoyment with his creation. We would then live to his glory and carry out the creation mandate. We were not ever made to die. But instead, the wages of sin, the entrance of sin into this world, Genesis 3, the wages of sin the apostle Paul says, and spoken of in Genesis 2, is death. Death, which is physical; death which is also spiritual.**

— Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

In some sense, physical death is a blessing to believers because we are taken directly into the presence of Christ. But in a more fundamental sense, physical death is tragic. It's a universal human experience, but it's also horribly *unnatural*. God did not create humanity for death; he created us for life. And our salvation won't be complete until Christ returns and redeems our bodies.

Having looked at the curse that results in death for our bodies, let's turn to the aspects of the gospel that ensure our resurrection.

## GOSPEL

How many of us know Christians who believe that they will spend eternity in heaven as disembodied spirits? Probably more than a few. As odd as it may sound, the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is almost completely unknown in some modern churches. And one reason for this is that Christians often fail to understand the significance of our human bodies. But Scripture clearly teaches the good news that not only our souls, but also our bodies, will be glorified when Christ returns.

We'll explore the idea that bodily resurrection is part of the gospel by considering three issues. First, we'll mention the Old Testament background of this doctrine. Second, we'll see that it's clearly proclaimed in the New Testament. And third, we'll talk about the relationship between the resurrection of believers and the resurrection of Jesus. Let's start with the Old Testament.

## Old Testament

Many modern Christians don't realize this, but the word gospel, which means good news, actually comes from the Old Testament. In particular, we find it in Isaiah 52:7 and 61:1, and Nahum 1:15. As just one example, listen to Isaiah 52:7:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7).

In the Old Testament, the "good news" or "gospel" was that God would save his people by defeating his enemies and theirs. In a narrow sense, this was the good news that God would rescue his people from the oppression of their earthly enemies. But in a broader sense, it was the good news that God would reverse all the curses that resulted from Adam and Eve's fall into sin. He would extend his glorious heavenly reign over the entire earth, and ultimately bless everyone who had faith in him.

Of course, the salvation God provided in the Old Testament was based on Christ's future victory. Although Christ had not yet come to die for sin, he had already promised to die on behalf of his people. And that promise was sufficient to secure their salvation. In fact, every hope of salvation in the Old Testament pointed to Christ and what he would accomplish. Listen to the way Hebrews 10:1-5 describes the Old Testament sacrifices:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming — not the realities themselves... [I]t is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me." (Hebrews 10:1-5).

The author of Hebrews indicated that the Old Testament sacrifices were only shadows of the reality that was later realized in Christ. Animal sacrifices could never perfectly atone for sin because God required that human sin be punished with human death. But they could and did point to Jesus, whose fully human death was a perfectly sufficient and effective atonement for sin.

As part of the gospel in the Old Testament, God's people were taught that a day was coming when God would raise all the dead of humanity, and judge them for their deeds. Those who had lived righteously, having faith in God, would be everlastingly blessed. But those who rebelled against God would be condemned to a perpetual future of punishment. Both of these sets of consequences would continue forever in bodily form. Christian theologians commonly refer to this event as the last judgment. As we saw in a prior lesson, the *Apostles' Creed* refers to the last judgment in the line:

**From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Perhaps the clearest statement of the idea that the last judgment involves bodily

resurrection can be found in Daniel 12, where an angelic messenger revealed to Daniel that in the future God would deliver his people from oppression. Listen to what Daniel was told in Daniel 12:1-2:

At that time your people — everyone whose name is found written in the book — will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:1-2).

Daniel specifically referred to bodily resurrection when he spoke of those who sleep in the dust of the earth. Souls do not sleep in the dust of earth; bodies do. And it's those bodies that will be raised at the final judgment. Isaiah also spoke of a day of judgment that included a general resurrection. Listen to what he wrote in Isaiah 26:19-21:

Your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy... [T]he earth will give birth to her dead... See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins (Isaiah 26:19-21).

Once again, we see that the dead, those who dwell in the dust, will rise from their graves with new life, as if the earth were giving birth to them. And this will occur in the context of judgment, as the Lord comes to punish the people of the earth for their sins.

The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is also implied in several Old Testament passages that speak of deliverance from Sheol in the context of final judgment and recompense, such as Psalm 49:7-15, and Psalm 73:24-28. And in Job 19:25-27, Job confidently expressed his belief that he would be resurrected to see God on the day the Lord came to stand upon the earth — the day of judgment.

**The future resurrection and judgment isn't as clear in the Old Testament as it is in the New. But certainly, there are indications in the Old Testament that this is going to take place. Isaiah, for example, speaks of a time in which dead people will live, come out of their graves. Daniel speaks similarly of a time when the dead will come forth, the righteous and the wicked to final judgment. And so, this is something that, this is a belief that sprang up, at least among some of the Jews, not all of them. The Pharisees of Jesus' time believed in the resurrection. The Sadducees did not. But Jesus himself, when the Sadducees come and ask him whether there is such a thing, and they give him a trick question to make it look ridiculous, Jesus actually quotes the passage when God says: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Jesus says, "[God] is not the God of the dead, but of the living." So, Abraham, when God forms a relationship, a covenant relationship with somebody, it really is a personal relationship with that individual and if Abraham was just going to lie in the ground, and was never going to waken again, doesn't make a whole lot of sense to say that God is in a covenant**

**relationship forever with Abraham. So, that means that the New Testament is, of course, irrevocably committed to the doctrine of resurrection. And, of course, the resurrection of Jesus puts the final seal on that.**

— **Dr. John M. Frame**

Having seen that the general resurrection was part of the gospel in the Old Testament, let's look at the fact that it's also part of the gospel message in the New Testament.

## **New Testament**

The biggest difference between the Old Testament and New Testament gospel proclamations is that in the New Testament, the redeemer had finally come. He had finally been revealed in history as Jesus of Nazareth. God was now reigning through his Son, Jesus. This is why the New Testament so often emphasizes that Jesus is Lord, meaning that he is the reigning king. We see this in places like Luke 2:11; Acts 2:36; Romans 10:9; and 1 Corinthians 12:3.

**Salvation comes the same way in the Old and New Testaments, by faith in the promise of God's provision. What's different about faith in the Old Testament and faith in the New is not faith towards God, but the specificity with which the promise is given. Faith in the Old Testament is fundamentally forward looking in a promise yet to be fulfilled... Faith in the New Testament forward is retrospective looking back at the cross, at a promise that has been fulfilled. So, they both involve faith directed towards God for a provision that he will make and we cannot supply.**

— **Dr. Robert G. Lister**

In Jesus, all the Old Testament promises of salvation are being fulfilled. As we saw in Hebrews 10:1-5, his death is the reality to which the Old Testament sacrifices pointed. And in Romans 15:8-13, and Galatians 3:16, Paul taught that Jesus' gospel fulfills the promises made to the Old Testament patriarchs. In these and many other ways, the New Testament affirms the Old Testament gospel — the good news that the divine king has finally come to bring salvation to his people by grace through faith.

Jesus taught that the general resurrection will take place at the last judgment. For instance, in Matthew 22:23-32 and Luke 20:27-38, he refuted the Sadducees' denial of the general resurrection. In Luke 14:13-14, he encouraged believers to do good works on the basis that they would be rewarded in the resurrection. And in John 11:24-26, he confirmed the doctrine in his talks with Martha, the sister of Lazarus. Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 20:37:

In the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise (Luke 20:37).

Here, Jesus insisted that the doctrine of the general resurrection had already been revealed in the Old Testament. And this same idea is confirmed throughout the rest of the New Testament. Unfortunately, in many branches of the church, the bodily resurrection of the dead is largely ignored. Many Christians believe that we will remain disembodied spirits for all eternity. But in Hebrews 6:1, 2, the resurrection of the dead is described as one of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. And in Hebrews 11:35, believers' resurrection is held out as a motivation for doing good works. In fact, the Apostles regularly pointed out that Christians believed in the Old Testament promises of resurrection. For instance, Peter and John did this in Acts 4:1, 2. And Paul did it in Acts 23:6-8 and 24:14-21. As just one example, listen to how Paul defended his ministry in Acts 24:14-15:

I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (Acts 24:14-15).

Here, Paul pointed out that the Christian hope in the general resurrection at the last judgment was precisely the same as the Jewish hope. The difference was that the Christians believed this resurrection would be accomplished through Christ.

It's important for us to understand that God's plan of salvation has always been the same. He didn't appoint one way for ancient Israel to be saved, and another way for us to be saved. He didn't appoint one way of salvation for the Jews, and another for the Gentiles. The Old and the New Testaments are united in their teaching. And that's part of the reason that Christians treasure the Old Testament as God's word for their lives. God's people have always been saved by grace, through faith, and in Christ. Christians are part of a long history of the mercy and redemption God has always provided for his faithful people. And the whole Bible — both Testaments — teaches us about this wonderful truth.

Now that we've seen that in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the gospel included the good news that there would be a resurrection of the dead, let's take a look at the relationship between the resurrection of believers and the resurrection of Jesus.

## **Resurrection of Jesus**

The New Testament teaches that there are at least two very important connections between the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of believers. First, we'll be resurrected to blessed life specifically because we are united to Jesus in his resurrection. As Paul wrote in Romans 6:4-5:

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order

that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection (Romans 6:4-5).

Paul taught that through faith, baptism unites us to Christ's death, resulting in the payment of the debt we incur by our sin. But it also unites us to his resurrection, resulting in the regeneration of our spirits in the present life, and the resurrection of our physical bodies at a future time. Our union with Jesus' resurrection is also taught in places like 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22, Philippians 3:10-12, and Colossians 2:12.

As a result of the fact that we are united to Jesus in his resurrection, our own resurrection is guaranteed. Listen to what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23:

Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man... But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

Here, Paul referred to Jesus' resurrection as the firstfruits of a harvest that includes all those who belong to him. In the Old Testament, God required Israel to bring him an offering of the firstfruits of the harvest. We see this, for example, in Leviticus 23:17. These firstfruits were just the first part of the whole harvest, and they represented the entire harvest. They were a form of guarantee — by giving the Lord the first part of the harvest, the Israelites expressed faith that they themselves would receive the rest of the harvest. By giving us Jesus' resurrection, God demonstrated his full intention to resurrect us in the same way. So, as believers, we can have great confidence in our own future resurrection, knowing that God has sealed us for that day by the resurrection of Christ.

So far in our study of the resurrection of the body, we've looked at the curse that results in death for our bodies, and at the gospel that offers life for our bodies. At this point, we're ready to consider the way our bodies actually experience redemption.

## REDEMPTION

We'll consider the redemption of our bodies in three stages: First, the things believers experience during our present life on earth. Second, the intermediate state of our bodies that begins with our physical death. And third, the new life of resurrection itself, which will begin when Christ returns. Let's start with our present life.

### Present Life

Although Christians normally talk about the redemption of our bodies in terms of our resurrection on the last day, the Bible actually teaches that the salvation of our bodies



begins with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit when we first come to faith. This indwelling is mentioned, for example, in Romans 8:9-11. Although it does not result in our immediate bodily resurrection, it does seal us with the guarantee of the full redemption of our bodies in the future, as Paul taught in Ephesians 1:13, 14.

And our bodies continue to benefit from the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence throughout our lives, especially through the process of sanctification. The sanctification of our bodies is similar to the sanctification of our souls. The Holy Spirit sets us apart for God and purifies us. He continues to sanctify us throughout our lives, as he forgives the sins we commit with our bodies, and ensures that we use our bodies in ways that honor the Lord. Ideally, this results in us honoring God with our bodies, as Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 6:20, and giving our bodies to God as living sacrifices, as we read in Romans 12:1.

After the beginning of the redemption of our bodies in the present life of believers, the process continues during our physical death.

## Intermediate State

When we die, our bodies are temporarily separated from our souls. This stage is often called the intermediate state — the state between our lives on earth now, and the lives we'll have in the resurrection. During the intermediate state, our souls dwell with Christ in heaven. Scripture talks about this in places like Matthew 17:3 and 2 Corinthians 5:6-8. But while our souls are in heaven, our bodies remain on earth. Our bodies are still corrupted by sin, as proven by the fact that they decay. But the sin that corrupts them can no longer influence us to commit sin. For one thing, death frees us from sin's mastery, as Paul taught in Romans 6:2-11. For another, our bodies lie in the grave in an unconscious state, being incapable of any thought, action or feeling, whether good or bad.

But even though our bodies and souls are temporarily separated at death, the Bible never says that our bodies cease to be part of us. Whether they are buried, or cremated, or seemingly lost, our bodies continue to be part of us. There are dozens of examples of this in the Bible. For instance, 1 Samuel 25:1 says that Samuel was buried at his home in Ramah. 1 Kings 2:10 says that David was buried in Jerusalem, the City of David. And the regular refrain throughout 1 and 2 Kings, as well as 2 Chronicles, is that the kings of Judah are buried in the city of the forefather David. Their bodies still belong to them, and are still part of their persons. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* describes our death in this way in question and answer number 37. In answer to the question:

**Q: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?**

The Catechism answers:

**A: The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves, till the resurrection.**

Here, the Catechism says that believers have two fates at death — one for their souls, and one for their bodies. Our souls pass into glory in heaven, but our bodies, being

still united to Christ, rest in their graves — they lie dormant, waiting for new life in the resurrection.

**I think it is true to say that when our soul is in heaven and our body is in the grave, yes, we're in two places at the same time. That requires some explanation, and one answer in the shorter catechism is very good at this point. "The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory. And their bodies being still united to Christ, rest in their graves until the resurrection." The first part of that about the soul departing from the body is the subject of 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. Paul speaks of his present mortal body as an earthly tent and he doesn't relish the prospect of death because his soul will then be separated from his body, which is an unnatural state.**

— Dr. Knox Chamblin

This tension between being in two places at one time is felt even in heaven. There is no doubt that heaven will be wonderful beyond our expectations. But it's also true that even in heaven our salvation will not yet be complete because our bodies will not yet have been resurrected. Listen to how Paul talked about bodily resurrection in Romans 8:23:

We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23).

Here, Paul said that we groan in this life because we don't have our resurrected bodies. But the souls in heaven are still waiting for their new bodies, too. So, it makes sense to think that they are also groaning, in some sense, as they wait for the redemption of their 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.**

— Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

With our present life and our physical death in mind, we're ready to see how the redemption of our bodies is completed in new life.

## New Life

Our bodies will receive new, perfect life when they are restored to life in the general resurrection. In the resurrection, the consequences of sin will finally and forever be completely put away from us. We read about this in Romans 8:23, 1 Corinthians 15:12-57, and Philippians 3:11. Theologians often refer to this stage of salvation as glorification, because it results in us being made into glorious, perfected human beings. Scripture does not give us many details regarding our glorification. But Paul did briefly compare our glorified bodies to our existing bodies in 1 Corinthians 15. Listen to what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44:

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised 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 (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

We can't be sure of the precise continuities and discontinuities between the bodies we have now and the bodies we'll have in the resurrection. Just as Christ's body underwent changes in his resurrection, our bodies will also be changed. They will be renewed and perfected. They will be immortal, glorious, powerful and spiritual. But they will also be entirely human. In our resurrection, we will finally become the people God has always planned for us to be.

Our bodies die as a consequence of sin; physical death is God's judgment against humanity's wickedness in the Fall. But the good news is that the gospel proclaims the restoration of our bodies. It tells us that Jesus came to redeem us as whole persons, body and soul. And this redemption is glorious. It's a cause for great joy and celebration. With the resurrection of our bodies, we will finally be able to declare victory over death. We will finally be prepared to inherit all the blessings God has in store for us in the new heavens and new earth. And we will finally be able to see with our own eyes the victory of Jesus Christ.

So far in our discussion of salvation, we've talked about the articles of faith in the *Apostles' Creed* that deal with the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body. At this point, we are ready to turn to our last topic: everlasting life.

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## EVERLASTING LIFE

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The *Apostles' Creed* mentions everlasting life in its last article of faith:

**I believe in ...  
The life everlasting.**

At this point, the creed has in view the everlasting life, often called eternal life,

that follows the resurrection of our bodies. The creed affirms the belief that all God's faithful people will ultimately be rewarded with perfect, blessed, incorruptible, never-ending life.

Although there are many things we might say about everlasting life, we'll focus on three issues in this lesson: First, we'll mention the timing of everlasting life. When does it begin? Second, we'll talk about the quality of everlasting life. How does it differ from other kinds of life? And third, we'll mention the location where we will live forever. Let's begin with the timing of our everlasting life.

## TIMING

**When does eternal life begin? Christ said that he's come that we might have life and have it abundantly. Certainly, he's suggesting that to be in Christ, to be a disciple of Christ, introduces us to a qualitatively superior way of living, but is that eternal life? Does eternal life begin when we pass from this sphere of mortal existence to the life beyond? Is that when eternal life begins? Well, in a sense, yes. But there's, in another sense, the new life, the resurrection life of Christ that will carry us through the grave and propel us on into eternity, an unending eternity with God, is a life that has been planted as a seed within us now. So that the life that will never end is beginning now, and it's important to understand that this eternal life is not just a life defined by endless duration, but a life defined qualitatively as a life that is now Christ-centered and God-centered and is moving toward the full restoration of all that was intended for human beings. And we get to participate in that now, even while we were still embedded in a painful, struggling, broken world.**

— Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

Scripture often says that believers already possess everlasting life as a present reality. We see this in John 10:28, 1 Timothy 6:12, 1 John 5:11-13, and many other places. As just one example of this, listen to what Jesus said in John 5:24:

*I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (John 5:24).*

Jesus and the writers of the New Testament sometimes talked about eternal or everlasting life as a present reality that results from our union with Christ. And, of course, this is true. Our souls will never die, even though our bodies will. The spiritual life we possess now is the same life we'll have forever. On the other hand, Scripture talks even more frequently about the fact that we will be given everlasting life as our inheritance at the last judgment. We see this in places like Matthew 25:46, Mark 10:29, 30, John 12:25, Romans 2:5-7, and Jude 21. As just one example, listen to what John wrote in 6:40 of his

gospel:

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:40).

As John did here, Scripture often associates our full reception of eternal life with the resurrection of our bodies. When our bodies are made alive, we will live forever, body and soul, as fully redeemed and fully restored human beings.

**I think it's helpful to describe what we receive in Christ, through our union with Christ, is that which is both "already" and "not yet." And by that, I mean that the benefits of Christ, which includes eternal life, are ours "already" when we receive Christ, when we put our faith in Christ. They are ours — we have eternal life. Yet at same time, it's "not yet" in this sense, that, of course, even after we receive Christ many of us will grow old, many of us will get sick, many of us will experience death if Christ does not return before. And in that sense, then the "not yet" of eternal life awaits us still. So, the "already, not yet," I think helps us understand, yes, we do have an eternal life, and yet at same time, eternal life awaits us in the new heavens and new earth.**

— Dr. Jeffrey K. Jue

There's a sense in which it's fair to say that eternal life for our souls begins in this life when we are regenerated. But we won't be completely alive until our bodies are raised at the last judgment. Only then will our entire being live before God. Before then, we have a foretaste of everlasting life through the redemption of our souls. But only when our bodies have also been given new life will we really live as God intended.

With this understanding of the timing of everlasting life in mind, let's look at its quality.

## QUALITY

In the Bible, everlasting life is not simply a matter of having our existence and consciousness continue forever. After all, even people who are under the eternal judgment of God have continued existence and consciousness. Rather, the key quality of eternal life is that we will live forever in the blessings of God. In this sense, to have life is to receive God's favor and blessing. And by contrast, to suffer death is to fall under his wrath and curse. Both eternal life and eternal death involve continued existence. The difference between them is the quality of that existence. As Jesus prayed in John 17:3:

This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent (John 17:3).

Here, Jesus taught that eternal life is equivalent to knowing God and Jesus. In this context, the idea of knowing implies a loving relationship. Jesus' point was that eternal life is not defined merely in terms of existence or consciousness, but in terms of the experience of God's love. Or consider the way Paul talked about life and death in Romans 7:9-11, where he wrote this:

Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death (Romans 7:9-11).

During the entire period that Paul described here, he was physically and mentally alive. He existed as a conscious, rational being. Even so, he claimed first to have been alive, and then to have died, to have been put to death. And the difference was his standing before God. Before the law condemned him, he was alive. But once the law put him under God's curse, Paul was dead. Later, when he came to Christ and the curse was lifted, he could be described as having new life. We see this same idea in places like John 5:24, and 1 John 3:14.

Think about it this way: On the last day, all the dead will be raised in the general resurrection. Our immortal souls will be reunited with our resurrected bodies. According to John 5:28-29, those who have done good will rise to be rewarded, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. Both will live conscious lives in their resurrected bodies forever. But the Bible calls the fate of the righteous "life," and the fate of the wicked "death." The difference is not whether or not they will exist or think or have experiences. The difference is their relationship to God. If we are under God's blessing, the Bible says we are alive. If we are under his curse, it says we are dead. So, everlasting life is continued conscious existence in a blessed relationship with God. But what are these blessings? What does blessed life look like?

**I think we ought not to conceive of our eternal life with God as just floating on clouds, so to speak. But we'll have new resurrected bodies; bodies that are not touched by sin and disease and death. We will be immortal; we will never die. And we'll live on a new earth. Now, details elude us—what will that involve? We don't know all the details, but we know that we will have some responsibility. We will reign with Christ. And I take it, since it's a new universe that we will interact with the cosmos that God has created. So, there'll be specific things, I take it, for us to do. But fundamentally, what the New Testament emphasizes, is not what we'll do, as interesting as that is, and I'm sure it will be fascinating and fulfilling. But what the New Testament emphasizes is that God will be with us. We will see his face. Fellowship with him will be our all-satisfying joy.**

— Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner

The famous theologian Louis Berkhof, who lived from 1873 to 1957, described the final state of everlasting life in part 6, chapter 5 of his book, *Systematic Theology*. Listen to how he put it:

**The fulness of this life is enjoyed in communion with God ... They will see God in Jesus Christ face to face, will find full satisfaction in Him, will rejoice in Him, and will glorify Him... There will be recognition and social intercourse on an elevated plane... [T]he joy of each individual will be perfect and full.**

In some ways, it may seem strange that the Bible doesn't talk about the nature of eternal life very often. After all, eternal life is the great reward the gospel offers to those who repent and have saving faith in Christ. But the reality is that Scripture tends to talk about eternal life in fairly general terms. Revelation 21:3, 4 tell us that God will dwell with his people, and there will be no death or sadness. We will have new bodies, and we will be completely free from the presence, corruption and influence of sin. But what about the details? The truth is that the Bible says very little about them. Instead, it mostly encourages us to trust that God is good, and not to speculate too much about the wonders he has in store for us. Listen to what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4:

I know a man in Christ who ... was caught up to the third heaven... caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

Notice what Paul said about this experience. The things heard were inexpressible — they could not be sufficiently expressed in human language. Moreover, man is not permitted to tell what this third heaven contained. It is so wonderful that God is keeping it secret for now. And this was only heaven — the intermediate state before our resurrection. If the secrets of heaven can't be revealed, how much more the secrets of our final state? Who can possibly imagine how wondrous life will be when Christ returns? The Bible tells us that there will be no more sorrow, suffering, disappointment, or death. These things are wonderful and true, but the Bible simply doesn't tell us very many details about them.

Now that we have considered the timing and quality of everlasting life, let's turn to our final topic: the location where we will live forever.

## LOCATION

Scripture often speaks of the location where we will live eternally as the new heaven and new earth. We find this language in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, 2 Peter 3:13, and Revelation 21:1. This recreation of the heavens and earth brings the overarching storyline of the Bible to full completion. History began in Genesis 1:1 when God created the heavens and the earth. But then it was corrupted by humanity's fall into sin, making it unfit for God to inhabit. The rest of the Bible tells the story of how both humanity and

creation are being redeemed. And once Jesus returns, the ultimate result will be that the heavens and the earth will be redeemed and renewed, so that God will finally dwell on earth with his resurrected people. This is the goal Jesus had in mind in Matthew 6:9-10, when he taught us to pray these words:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9-10).

The goal was always for God's kingdom to be fully manifested in both the heavens, where the angels and the souls of the departed saints live, as well as on earth, where we live. This is why Jesus taught us to petition God to bring his kingdom to earth, and to cause his will to be obeyed on earth as fully as it is in heaven.

Although Scripture does not often speak of this new creation, when it does it makes it clear that the ultimate destination of redeemed human beings will not be in the heavens, but on the renewed earth. For instance, in Isaiah 65:17-19, we learn that God's people will dwell in the renewed holy city of Jerusalem. And in Revelation 21:2, we find that this new Jerusalem will exist on the new earth. Listen to what John wrote in Revelation 21:1-5:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth ... I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God ... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." ... He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:1-5).

Here we see that God is preparing the New Jerusalem in heaven. And when the new earth is ready, he will bring the New Jerusalem to earth as his holy dwelling among his people, who will also inhabit the new earth. If God's plan were simply to take us to heaven for eternity, there would be no need for a new earth. But as we read here, God is making everything new, including the world itself for our eternal home. The early church father Augustine, the famous bishop of Hippo who lived from A.D. 354 to 430, wrote about the new earth in this way in his famous work *The City of God*, book 20, chapter 16:

**As the world itself is renewed to some better thing, it is fitly accommodated to men, themselves renewed in their flesh to some better thing.**

**There is a day coming when God will renew all things. We can see this especially in the beautiful words that Jesus taught us, his disciples, to pray when he said, "Our Father, who is in heaven, let your name be sanctified, let your kingdom come, and let your will be done on this earth even as it now is in heaven." That crucial, central, foundational Christian idea is that we are now living in a time awaiting for the heavenly realities to become earthly realities — that the way things are done in heaven when God is hallowed, when all things are right,**



**and righteousness and glory and truth and love reigns. Our hope as Christians, our sure hope, is that those realities of heaven will become earthly realities, and this is what the scriptures promise and hope as the new creation, our eternal home.**

— Dr. Jonathan T. Pennington

If we lose sight of the fact that the new earth is to be our final home, it can be easy for us to detach ourselves from the physical aspects of reality, and to think that bodily existence on the earth is a hardship rather than a blessing. But when we recognize that the earth itself is to be our permanent home, we can see this present world as a blessing and a foretaste of the beauty and blessing that God has in store for us in the world to come.

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## CONCLUSION

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In this lesson on the *Apostles' Creed*, we have focused on the topic of salvation. We have talked about the forgiveness of sins in terms of the problem of sin, the gift of divine grace, and the role of human responsibility. We have explored the doctrine of the resurrection of the body by looking at the curse of death, the gospel of life, and redemption in Christ. And we have considered the nature of everlasting life, including its timing, quality and location.

In this lesson on salvation, we've seen that the *Apostles' Creed* focuses on the essential elements of our common Christian confession that the church has maintained throughout the millennia. If we keep these common doctrines in mind when we talk to Christians from other traditions and denominations, we'll find that we have a solid basis for pursuing unity with those that affirm the *Apostles' Creed*, and for correcting those that don't. Moreover, as we focus on these essential doctrines of salvation, it will help us to see the big picture of what God is doing in this world, and to find more and more reasons to praise him for his love and grace.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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## GLOSSARY

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**Augustine** – (A.D. 354 - 430) Bishop of Hippo who believed in the Scriptures as our final authority in doctrine and considered the creeds of the church to be helpful summaries of scriptural teaching; wrote numerous works that continue to influence the church today

**Berkhof, Louis** – (1873-1957) Influential Reformed theologian who wrote *Systematic Theology* in 1932

**brokenness** – Genuine sorrow over sin; true regret over violating God's law

**eternal life** – To know God and live forever in the full blessing of God

**faith** – In reference to God, acknowledgement of God's divine sovereignty, loyal submission to him, and trust that he will show us mercy for the sake of our redeemer Jesus Christ

**general resurrection** – The resurrection of all people in order to face God's final judgment when Christ returns in glory

**glorification** – The final stage of our salvation, when we receive a perfect eternal body and fully become what we were meant to be, having complete victory over sin and death

**gospel** – Literally, "good news"; announcement that God's kingdom came to earth through the person and work of Jesus and that it expands toward its great consummation as God grants salvation to those who receive and trust in Jesus as the Messiah

**grace** – God's unmerited favor

**intercession** – Mediation or petition through prayer on behalf of another

**intermediate state** – The state between our lives on earth now and the lives we will have in the resurrection

**ordinances** – Practices established by God that are a means of expressing our faith and receiving God's blessing; namely baptism and the Lord's Supper

**Sadducees** – Jewish sect at the time of Christ that only adhered to the five books written by Moses (Genesis–Deuteronomy) and did not believe in angels, spirits, or the resurrection of the dead

**salvation** – Deliverance from the tyranny of evil and from God's judgment against sin through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

**sheol** – Hebrew term (transliteration) used in the Old Testament to refer to the place of departed spirits, both the righteous and the wicked

**sin** – Lawlessness; any lack of conformity to or violation of God's law

**Spurgeon, Charles** – (1834-1892) 19<sup>th</sup> century British pastor and writer; often called the "Prince of Preachers"

**Wesley, John** – (1703-1791) Anglican minister and theologian; one of the founders of the Methodist Church

**Westminster Shorter Catechism** – A traditional Protestant summary of Christian teaching, originally published in 1647