

The Apostles' Creed

The Resurrection of the Body

Selected Texts

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The Resurrection of the Body

Introduction

Today we conclude our series in *The Apostles' Creed*. I would like to examine what it means to believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Please listen as I recite the Apostles' Creed:

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

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand
of God the Father Almighty.
From there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

When I was a teenager, I *felt* immortal. I did not think much about death and eternity.

Then I went off to the Angolan Civil war. Friends were killed, and I quickly realized that I did not know when I would die.

So I began some serious study of death and eternity. That concern, in large part, was the tool God used to draw me to himself.

Lesson

Today we come to our last study in the *Apostles' Creed* in which we examine death and eternity. Today we want to examine our belief in the “*the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.*”

Let's examine the following topics:

1. Physical Death,
2. The Intermediate State,
3. The Second Coming of Christ,
4. The Resurrection of the Body,
5. The Last Judgment, and
6. The Final State.

I. Physical Death

First, let's look at physical death.

Physical death is variously represented in Scripture. It is spoken of as the death of the body, as distinguished from that of the soul. Matthew 10:28a says: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”

Death is spoken of as the termination of life. Luke 6:9 says, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?’”

Death is also spoken of as a separation of body and soul. Ecclesiastes 12:7 says, “. . . and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”

Based on this, Louis Berkhof defines physical death as “*a termination of physical life by the separation of body and soul.*”¹

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI; 1941), p. 668.

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Scripture teaches that death is the result of sin, and is in fact a punishment for sin (Genesis 2:17; 3:19; Romans 5:12, 17; 6:23).

Death is not something natural in our lives, but is an expression of divine anger (Psalm 90:7, 11), judgment (Romans 1:32), condemnation (Romans 5:16), and a curse (Galatians 3:13). Death fills our hearts with dread and fear.

Now, the Bible speaks of death as “the wages of sin” (Romans 6:23). Since believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are set free from the guilt of sin, the question naturally arises, “Why do Christians still die?”

It is clear that for Christians death cannot be a punishment, since we are no longer under condemnation. So why does God cause us to pass through the harrowing experiences of death?

The answer is that death is the culmination of the chastisements which God has ordained for our sanctification. The very thought of death, sorrow as a result of death, and the feeling that sickness and sufferings are harbingers of death all have a very beneficial effect on the people of God. These things serve to humble the proud, to mortify the flesh, to check worldliness, and to foster spiritual-mindedness.

II. The Intermediate State

Second, let's look at the intermediate state.

What happens to a person after he or she dies?

The bodies of all people, both believers and unbelievers alike, are subject to decay after death. They are buried or in some cases cremated (which, by the way, is an unbiblical practice), and their bodies decay. Their bodies await resurrection which will take place some time in the future. More about that in a moment. Our concern for the present has to do with the souls of believers and unbelievers.

The souls of believers *immediately* enter the glories of heaven when they die. Jesus said to the thief on the cross, “I tell

you the truth, *today* you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43 [emphasis mine]; cf. also Philippians 1:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:8).

The souls of unbelievers, on the other hand, *immediately* enter hell when they die. The Bible tells us that in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. The rich man found himself in hell, where he was in torment (16:23). His condition was fixed forever. He was conscious of his miserable plight, and sought relief from his pain and suffering. And he wanted to have his brothers warned so that they would not face a similar plight.

So, the bodies of all people—believers and unbelievers alike—decay in the ground after death. At the moment of death the souls of believers go to heaven and the souls of unbelievers go to hell. And there they await the second coming of Christ.

III. The Second Coming of Christ

Third, let’s look now at the second coming of Christ.

The New Testament clearly teaches us that the first coming of Christ will be followed by a second. Jesus referred to his return more than once. For example, Jesus said in Matthew 24:30-31: “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”

A. Events Preceding the Second Coming

According to Scripture several important events must precede the return of Christ.

First, the Gospel must be preached to all nations. We see this in Matthew 24:14. In answer to the disciples’ question about the sign of his coming and of the end of the age, Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a

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testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” This means that every people group on earth will have the gospel proclaimed to them before Jesus returns the second time.

Second, large numbers of Israelites must be converted. Romans 11:25-26a says: “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved. . . .” Some theologians take this passage to teach that Israel as whole—national Israel—will finally turn to the Lord and be saved. It is more likely, however, that the expression “all Israel” in Romans 11:26 simply refers to the full number of the elect out of the ancient covenant people. This passage does seem to imply that in the end large numbers of Israelites will turn to the Lord.

Third, there will be a great apostasy and a great tribulation. The Bible repeatedly teaches that at the end of time there will be a great falling away. Sin will increase, and the love of many for Christ will wax cold. Matthew 24:4-14 says:

Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Fourth, the Antichrist must come. The spirit of Antichrist was already in evidence in the apostolic age (1 John 4:3), and many an-

tichrists (or deceivers) had made their appearance (1 John 2:18). But the Bible leads us to expect that at the end of the age a single individual will stand out as the incarnation of all wickedness. We see this in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4: “Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.”

Fifth, there will be signs and wonders. The Bible also teaches that several signs will mark the beginning of the end. Scripture speaks of wars, famines and earthquakes as the beginning of the end and of the new universe (Matthew 24:6-8). It also speaks of the heavens shaking. Luke 21:25-26 says: “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

B. The Second Coming Itself

After these signs the Lord Jesus will return to earth. Notice the following points regarding the second coming itself.

First, the time of the second coming of Christ. No one, except the Father, knows the exact time of the Lord’s return. In fact, Jesus himself did not know the time of his return. Jesus said in Matthew 24:36, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” The events mentioned above must precede the return of Christ, and yet from God’s perspective the return of Christ is always near. Peter says that “the end of all things is near” (1 Peter 4:7).

Second, the manner of the second coming of Christ. The Lord Jesus will return bodily in exactly the same way he left this world (Acts 1:11). Though several signs must precede his coming, yet his coming will be unexpected and take people by surprise (Matthew

24:37-44). Moreover, it will be a glorious and triumphant coming. The clouds of heaven will be his chariot (Matthew 24:30), the angels his bodyguard (2 Thessalonians 1:7), the archangels his herald (1 Thessalonians 4:16), and the saints his retinue (1 Thessalonians 3:13).

Third, the purpose of the second coming of Christ. Christ will return at the end of the world for the purpose of introducing the future age, the eternal state of things, and he will do this by inaugurating and completing two mighty events, namely, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment (cf. John 5:25-29; Acts 17:31; Romans 2:3-16; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 20:11-15; 22:12).

These, then, are the events that surround the second coming of Christ. But now we must answer the question of what happens to our bodies at the return of Christ.

IV. The Resurrection of the Body

Fourth, let's look at the resurrection of the body.

Scripture teaches us that at the return of Christ the dead will be raised up. One passage that teaches us this is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (cf. also 1 Corinthians 15).

A. The Character of the Resurrection of the Body

Scripture teaches us to look forward to a *bodily* resurrection, similar to the resurrection of Christ (Romans 8:11; 1 Corinthians 15). This resurrection will include all people, both believers and non-believers.

B. The Time of the Resurrection of the Body

According to Scripture, the resurrection of the body will coincide with the return of Christ and the end of the world, and will immediately precede the final judgment.

Premillennialists speak of a double resurrection: the first (of believers) at the return of Christ, and another (of unbelievers) a thousand years later, at the end of the world.

But the Bible speaks of the resurrection of both believers and non-believers in a single breath. See, for example, John 5:28-29: “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (cf. also Daniel 12:2; Acts 24:15).

So, when Jesus returns at the second coming all the dead bodies of both believers and unbelievers are raised up.

V. The Last Judgment

Fifth, let’s talk about the last judgment.

The doctrine of the resurrection leads right on to that of the last judgment. The Bible speaks of the coming of a final judgment in no uncertain terms. For example, 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (cf. also Psalm 96:13; Matthew 25:31-46).

A. The Judge and His Assistants

God the Father has given the responsibility of judgment to Christ. So Christ will be the Judge (John 5:27). This honor was conferred on Christ for the successful accomplishment of his atoning work. The angels will assist Christ (Matthew 13: 41-42), and

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believers will also have some share in his judicial work (Revelation 20:4).

B. The Parties that Will Be Judged

It is perfectly evident from Scripture that every individual of the human race will have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:10a says, "For we must *all* appear before the judgment seat of Christ. . . ."

C. The Time of the Judgment

The time of the judgment will naturally be at the end of the world, and will follow immediately after the resurrection of the dead (John 5:28-29).

D. The Standard of Judgment

The standard by which all people will be judged is the law of God (Romans 2:12).

VI. The Final State

And sixth, let's conclude by looking at the final state.

The last judgment serves the purpose of setting forth clearly the final destiny of each person.

A. The Final State of Non-Believers in Jesus Christ

Non-believers are sentenced to the place of punishment called "hell."

In hell, non-believers will be totally deprived of God's favor, will experience an endless disturbance of life, will suffer positive pains in body and soul, and will be subject to pangs of conscience,

anguish and despair for all eternity. Jesus said hell was a place of “torment” (Luke 16:23; Matthew 8:12-13; Mark 9:43, 48).

B. The Final State of Believers in Jesus Christ

The final state of believers will be preceded by the passing of this present world and the establishment of a new creation. This will not be an entirely new creation, but rather a renewal of the present creation (Psalm 102:26; Hebrews 12:26-28). Scripture talks of a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1). This will be the eternal dwelling place of believers (John 14:2). And so the reward of believers is described as eternal life, that is, life in all its fullness, without any of the imperfections and sin of this present life (Revelation 21:4).

Conclusion

And so we affirm our faith in “*the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.*” It is important to note that only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone will spend eternity with him.

My friend, are you trusting in Jesus Christ alone? If you are not, and you should die, I must warn you that you face an eternal hell.

But if you are trusting in Christ alone, I can assure you on the basis of God’s Word that you face an eternal heaven with Christ.

My prayer is that today you are trusting in Christ alone. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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