

DEATH AND RESURRECTION AS EXPRESSED IN THE GREAT REFORMED CONFESSIONS

THE SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, written by Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger in 1562 and revised in 1564, was for a time the most broadly accepted belief statement of the early Reformed churches in many European countries. Chapter XXVI, “Of the Burial of the Faithful, and of the Care to Be Shown for the Dead; of Purgatory, and the Appearing of Spirits”:

- **The Burial Of Bodies.** As the bodies of the faithful are the temples of the Holy Spirit which we truly believe will rise again at the Last Day, Scriptures command that they be honorably and without superstition committed to the earth, and also that honorable mention be made of those saints who have fallen asleep in the Lord, and that all duties of familial piety be shown to those left behind, their widows and orphans. We do not teach that any other care be taken for the dead. Therefore, we greatly disapprove of the Cynics, who neglected the bodies of the dead or most carelessly and disdainfully cast them into the earth, never saying a good word about the deceased, or caring a bit about those whom they left behind them.
- **The Care For The Dead.** On the other hand, we do not approve of those who are overly and absurdly attentive to the deceased; who, like the heathen, bewail their dead (although we do not blame that moderate mourning which the apostle permits in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, judging it to be inhuman not to grieve at all); and who sacrifice for the dead, and mumble certain prayers for pay, in order by such ceremonies to deliver their loved ones from the torments in which they are immersed by death, and then think they are able to liberate them by such incantations.
- **The State Of The Soul Departed From The Body.** For we believe that the faithful, after bodily death, go directly to Christ, and, therefore, do not need the eulogies and prayers

of the living for the dead and their services. Likewise we believe that unbelievers are immediately cast into hell from which no exit is opened for the wicked by any services of the living.

URSINUS’ LARGER CATECHISM. One of the most influential of the Reformed catechisms, and one of the *Three Forms of Unity* in the historically Reformed churches, was the *Heidelberg Catechism* published in in 1563. Its principal author was Zecharias Ursinus, who also wrote his own larger catechism. The following questions appear in Ursinus’ larger catechism:

- **Question 128:** What “resurrection of the body” do you confess? **Answer:** That, when Christ returns to judge, all those who have died since the beginning of the world will receive their same bodies which they had in this life, only immortal and imperishable, and those who are living on earth at that time will be renewed by a sudden change – the godly to happiness and glory, the ungodly to torments and eternal disgrace.
- **Question 129:** What is this “life everlasting” of which you speak? **Answer:** It is a clear knowledge and praise of God, an eternal joy in him, and the fullness of all good.
- **Question 130:** What does it mean to believe in “the resurrection of the body”? **Answer:** It means to be firmly convinced that on the last day our bodies, which we now have, will be completely restored, and our souls will be returned to them through the power of Christ so that we may enjoy with Christ, both in body and soul, eternal life and glory.
- **Question 131:** What does it mean to believe in “the life everlasting”? **Answer:** It means already now to feel in our hearts the beginnings of eternal life, and to hold on to this comfort with all our might – that after this life we will enjoy it more fully, and, after our bodies have also been raised through Christ, we will enjoy it perfectly.

THE BELGIC CONFESSION, one of the *Three Forms of Unity* along with the *Heidelberg Catechism* and *Canons of Dort*, was written primarily by Dutch reformer and martyr, Guido de Brès, in 1562 and revised in 1618-19 during the great Calvinism-Arminian controversy of that time. It is still the accepted doctrinal summary of many Reformed churches. Article XXXVII. “The Last Judgment”:

- **Finally, we believe, according to the Word of God**, when the time appointed by the Lord (which is unknown to all creatures) is come and the number of the elect complete, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly, as He ascended, with great glory and majesty to declare Himself Judge of the living and the dead, burning this old world with fire and flame to cleanse it.
- **Then all men will personally appear before this great Judge**, both men and women and children, that have been from the beginning of the world to the end thereof, being summoned by the voice of the archangel, and by the sound of the trump of God. For all the dead shall be raised out of the earth, and their souls joined and united with their proper bodies in which they formerly lived. As for those who shall then be living, they shall not die as the others, but be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and from corruptible become incorruptible. Then the books (that is to say, the consciences) shall be opened, and the dead judged according to what they shall have done in this world, whether it be good or evil. Nay, all men shall give account of every idle word they have spoken, which the world only counts amusement and jest; and then the secrets and hypocrisy of men shall be disclosed and laid open before all.
- **And therefore the consideration of this judgment** is justly terrible and dreadful to the wicked and ungodly, but most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and elect; because then their full deliverance shall be perfected, and there they shall receive the fruits of their labor and trouble which they have borne.

THE WESTMINSTER, SAVOY AND 1689 LONDON BAPTIST CONFESSIONS. The *Second London Baptist confession* of 1689 was the Baptist version of the *Westminster confession* (Presbyterian), completed in 1646, and the *Savoy Declaration* (Congregationalist), written in 1658. Slightly revised and published as the *Philadelphia confession* in 1742, it became the accepted doctrinal statement for most Baptist churches in America. It covers the subject of the afterlife in Chapter 31, “Of the State of Man after Death and of the Resurrection of the Dead.” It follows the same wording as the Westminster and Savoy confessions.

- **1.** The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption (*Gen. 3:19 Acts 13:36*) but their souls, which neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. (*Ecc. 12:7*) The souls of the righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, where they are with Christ, and behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies; (*Lu. 23:43 2 Cor. 5:1,6,8 Php. 1:23 Heb. 12:23*) and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell; where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day; (*Jude 6-7 1Pet. 3:19 Lu. 16:23-24*) besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledge none.
- **2.** At the last day, such of the saints as are found alive, shall not sleep, but be changed; (*1 Cor. 15:51-52 1Th. 4:17*) and all the dead shall be raised up with the selfsame bodies, and none other; (*Job 19:26-27*) although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls for ever. (*1 Cor. 15:42-43*)
- **3.** The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonour; the bodies of the just, by his Spirit, unto honour, and be made conformable to his own glorious body. (*Acts 24:15 Jn. 5:28-29 Php. 3:21*)