

Help Our Unbelief

The Apostles' Creed

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

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Part 11: “The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting”

I. Scripture: John 20:24-29

- What is it, specifically, that “doubting Thomas” doubted? What is it, specifically, that he experienced to eliminate those doubts? What does this have to do with the last line of the Creed?

II. What this doctrine does not mean:

- That we will be **Ghosts**.
 - Two-thirds of Americans who say they believe “in the resurrection of the body” also assume that they won’t have a body for eternity!
 - “They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have’” (Luke 24:37-39).
 - “I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27).
 - When Paul says we’ll have a “spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:44), he doesn’t mean it won’t have physicality. There’s no such thing as a body made of pure spirit; an “incorporeal body” is nonsense. For Paul, spirit fully clothes the natural body in our glorification.
- That we will exist outside of **Space**.
 - “Body” literally means a thing that has “extension”—that is, a being that occupies physical space. Philosophically and scientifically, a body is something that cannot occupy the same

space as another body. If I take another “body” into myself (for example, a pretzel, my digestive process, beginning with my saliva and teeth, are working to change that “body” in such a way that it can occupy space within my body. My body also “makes room” for the pretzel. This is also called “getting fat.”

- When God created the world itself, he was creating space and making room for creatures like us to be bodies that can extend ourselves into space. All of this “making room” for creatures to “fill,” God said, was “good” (Gen 1:28).
- The first two chapters, and the last two chapters of the Bible are “geography lessons”: they tell what spatiality was like before we were created; what it was like when we were created; and what it will be like in the New Creation.

- That we will exist outside of **Time**.

- Time is created. God says it’s “good” (Gen 1:14-19).
- The Bible sometimes uses “everlasting life” and sometimes “eternal life” to describe the Christian’s hope. Other times (e.g. in the Psalms) it’s “forever.”
- “Eternal life” means different things for us and for God.
 - God’s life has no beginning or end. God exists outside of time; he is lord *over* time (Rev 22:13, e.g).
 - We were created *in* time; we exist in time; and we will live forever in resurrected bodies that continue to exist, forever, in time.
 - Even though God exists outside of time, God the Son experiences the passing of time because of the incarnation, which itself continues forever, thanks to the resurrection. That means that in Christ, the God-man, we have a Lord who is both *over* time, and also *within* time. He is the eternal lord over time because of his divinity. He is the lord of time, from within time, because in the fullness of time, as man, he served and obeyed God fully, all the time; and so he was raised bodily and glorified--fit for everlasting bodily life.
 - In Christ, we share in God’s eternal life. The way we do this is by living in holy time without end, animated by the very life of the One who has no beginning or end.
- The synoptic Gospels (Matt 18:8-9, Mark 10:30, Luke 10:25ff) usually speak of our eternal life beginning later, when our bodies are resurrected on the day of Christ’s return. John’s Gospel talks about eternal life beginning for us spiritually when we trust in Christ (e.g., John 5:24). Both are true.

III. What this doctrine *does* mean:

- Our **Same, Physical Bodies** will be raised.
 - “If the resurrection meant the creation of a[n entirely] new body, then Christ’s original body would have remained in the tomb” (Alcorn).

- Jesus looked like a fairly normal person after the resurrection. Mary thought he was the gardener (John 20:11ff). The men on the Emmaus Road thought he was a normal traveler (Lk 24:13ff). Disciples thought he was a normal man by seashore (John 21:4).
 - “We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved” (Rom 8:23-24).
 - There is a fundamental and even organic **continuity** between the “seed” that is sown and dies, and the (implied) “fruit” that rises from the ground (2 Cor 15:35ff).
- Our bodies will be **Changed** and **Glorious!**
 - Our bodies will at last not “be unclothed but ... be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (1 Cor 5:4) because he “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil 3:21).
 - “Somewhere in my broken, paralyzed body is the seed of what I shall become. ... My atrophied, useless legs exchanged for splendid, resurrected legs” (Joni Eareckson Tada).
 - Glorification takes a resurrected body and fits it for a resurrected, glorified world. It will be spiritual, heavenly, powerful, imperishable (1 Cor 15:42-44).
 - Our glorified resurrection bodies will have some similarity to that of Jesus (1 John 3:2). Think of the instances of Jesus’ glorification in the Scriptures. They are not merely post-resurrection appearances, but glorified appearances.
 - At the transfiguration, the disciples are stunned by the radiance of Jesus appearing in according to his “heavenly” glory (e.g. Lk 9:28-36).
 - As Jesus appears to Paul on the Damascus Road. He calls himself “Jesus of *Nazareth*” (!!!) but he appears as “a light from heaven flashing” (Acts 9:3).
 - As Jesus appears to Stephen while he finished testifying to the Sanhedrin, before he was stoned. He saw heaven open, the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God’s right hand” (Acts 7:54ff).
 - There is a fundamental and supernatural **discontinuity** between the “seed” that is sown and dies, and the (implied) “fruit” that rises from the ground (2 Cor 15:35ff).
- That there is something worthwhile other than **Self-Indulgence**.
 - “If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor 15:32). But in view of the resurrection, the whole theme of this chapter, Paul concludes: “Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (15:58).

- That we will be **Judged** in our resurrected bodies for what we've **Done** in our bodies.
 - “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by **raising him from the dead**” (Acts 17:30-31; See also 2 Cor 5:10).
 - We who trust and obey Christ are raised “to the resurrection of life” (John 5).
- The entire **Creation** will be “raised” and renewed (Is 65:17; 66:22; Acts 3:21; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:3-5).
 - “The power of Christ’s resurrection is enough not only to remake us, but also to remake every inch of the universe: mountains, rivers, plants, animals, stars, nebulae, quasars, and galaxies” (Hoekema).
 - “Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection not only in books, but in every leaf in springtime” (Luther).
 - The significance of the Adam’s sin was not merely local, but cosmic. The significance of the Jesus’ righteousness, proclaimed in his resurrection from the dead (1 Tim 3:16).

IV. Discussion

- How does the biblical revelation of “the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting” surprise, confuse, encourage, correct, thrill, startle, or delight you, and challenge you to live differently?
- What (if any) roadblocks remain for you? How do you need the Lord to “help your unbelief”?