

IX. The Apostles' Creed in Biblical Perspective

"I Believe..."

"He Descended Into Hell"

Ephesians 4:7–10

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First we will look at Ephesians 4, then Luke 16 and Psalm 16. This is God's Word, it's the truth. Ephesians 4:7–10 says [7] *But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. [8] Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men."* [9] *(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? [10] He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Our summer series is on the essentials of the faith that are distilled in the Apostles' Creed. Noting where the apostrophe is, this is not something that came from the Disciples but it came from those disciples from those disciples by the Apostles, about the 2nd century and then perfected in the 3rd century as a creed. Therefore its purpose is for worship, witness, protection against false teaching and for discipleship. All of which are very important. We are at the part in the creed that says 'He descended into hell' in this study and actually I couldn't wait to deal with this part. This creed is 100 words in Latin and 75 of them deal with the humiliation and exaltation of Christ in the second paragraph of this Trinitarian confession. It begins with essential truths of New Testament Christianity which explains the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises and prophecies.

The following is the Apostles' Creed;

I believe in God the Father Almighty, (first affirmation)

maker of heaven and earth;

I believe in Jesus Christ, h\His only Son, our Lord, (second affirmation)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;

He descended into hell.

On the third day He rose again;

He ascended into heaven,

is seated at the right hand of the Father,

and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, (third affirmation)

the holy catholic church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body

and the life everlasting. Amen

When that creed is examined and confessed you can almost be assured that I'm going to get a comment or question about two items in this creed. You might even know what they are.

There are those who tell me they can't say the part 'the holy catholic church' because the PCA is protestant. I will get to that but that will not be covered in this study. The other item is about the one we will cover in this study. Many will tell me they don't believe Christ descended into hell and wonder if I do. I do believe that. Now not all the essentials of Christianity are in this creed and a true Christian will believe more than what is in this creed but they won't believe less. So my question is what do you think it's saying that you don't believe? It is amazing the answers I get from that.

Some will say the creed is trying to accommodate this purgatory thing but there is a problem with that. The doctrine of purgatory in limbo did not come for another thousand years after that for that was in the 13th century and this was written in the 2nd and 3rd century. So they weren't trying to create cover for purgatory for there wasn't anything. That's an aberration in a middle aged church. It is doctrinal corruption. One might say 'I believe Jesus for my hell on the cross.' My response would be 'so you don't think the men who wrote this creed believe that.' Do you not believe these men knew about Mark 15:34 which says [34] *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* They understood that was the cry of dereliction and the outpouring of God's unmixed wrath for all the sins of all of His people for all of eternity upon Jesus so that He could endure that to save us.

So perhaps the question is, then why did they put it here? Are they saying what you think they are saying or are they saying something else that actually the Bible is saying? Some think this part should be taken out yet I'd like to encourage you that all the mainline theologically liberal churches agree with you for they have all taken this part out. Now the Reformers would not agree with you on this for they left it in. They also took time in the larger catechism to tell you why it's a part of Christ's humiliation. After that in the Great Awakening people like Whitfield, Wesley, Edwards, Owen, the Tennants, they embraced it. So over here are the people who don't agree with the Word of God and want to get rid of it and on the other side are the people that died because it was the Word of God and said it belongs.

I'm telling you this because that's the reason you ought to believe it but I am telling you because it ought to get your attention. You ought to see why these people gave everything for the inerrant Word of God, believed this creed was a faithful and important affirmation in an essentially faithful creed of the essential of the church. I do believe it and confess it and I confess it vigorously. I am praying to some degree that by the end of this study that those of you who love Jesus and the Bible are now going to say that you want to confess it vigorously. It is because I believe this is a glorious truth that is unbelievably effective for me in worship, evangelism and also in discipleship particularly when die for this has much to say to you.

As we go through this you will need to do what the Bible calls gird up the loins of your mind. This particular sentence of the creed is not hard but it's not easy so I'm going to try and make it as easy as I can. So when it says 'He descended into hell' the first problem we have is that this is an English translation of a Latin creed. The Latin makes use of a Greek word known as hades so it would have originally read—He descended into hades—and when they translated all of creed into English the 100 words in Latin became I think 107 words in English. The English language is poverty stricken and it shows up right here.

In the Greek and Hebrew there are three words that are translated hell—ghenna, the lake of fire or the eternal place of torment. Gehenna is known as the valley of Hinnom. There are three valleys that run through Jerusalem and one was a trash heap that burned forever which Jesus pointed to as a metaphor for hell—the everlasting, bodily and spiritual—physical and

spiritual punishment of the unbeliever for rebellion and rejection of God's glory and grace. It is unending forever. It is an eternal state. There are two other words that are translated hell in the Bible because they wouldn't be in existence without sin and that is Sheol in the Old Testament and hades in the New Testament. So when they translated from Hebrew to Greek they would use hades in the place of Sheol. That is the context of the word hell in the Bible. So it would not have been 'He descended into Gehenna' but it would have been 'He descended into Sheol' which then would have been changed to hades. So what we have here to begin with is a translation problem.

I love the English language but it's poverty stricken. The best illustration I have on this is when I want to use the word *love* I'm utterly dependent on tone for the contents. If I'm speaking Greek tone is not an issue because I would have six words to choose from for the word love. Those Greek words for love are *Agápe* (love for everyone), *éros* (romantic, intimate, marital love), *philío* (brotherly/sibling love, friendship), *storgē* (family love), *philautía* (self-love) and *xenía* (guest-friendship love, hospitality). So in the English language when one of those meanings come up we only have one word to put in its place and that is love. So the way I say 'I love you' to my wife is different in tone to the way I say 'I love you' to a friend.

This is the issue here with the word hell in this creed. We have three words that translate into hell. One of them deals with the eternal state and the other two deal with the intermediate state—sheol and hades. The one they are using in the creed is the one for the intermediate state and it's crucial that you understand this. I believe it's also crucial that you embrace this for worship, witness, Biblical accuracy and also for your own comfort in life and death. Here is why I say this.

When we came into existence God created us with a five-fold estate. One is our first estate. We are in Adam and when Adam was created he was created physically and spiritually. His soul or spirit was in the image of God and physically our bodies come in the image of our parents. God made Adam physically from the dust of the ground but until God breathed life in him, he was just a corpse. Most of us were educated in a Greek concept of education whereby the plutonic view of life reigns so there is the physical (body) which is bad and the spiritual which good is in the body as a passenger. Death opens the door for the passenger to get out. This is not a Biblical world and life view. A Biblical world and life view is that God made Adam and therefore us in Adam from the dust of the ground physically and then He breathed into that body the breath of life. The better picture is that we are two threads woven together in one cloth rather than as a passenger in a body. Our body and soul were made to be immortal, inseparable, not death separation (Thanatos).

That's why I can't pray for someone to have a natural death because death is not natural—that's a Darwinian world and life view. For a Christian death is an enemy, an intruder. Now Jesus won the victory over it but it's still an enemy. Death is not found in Genesis 1 and 2 because it's not natural. Death is the result of sin. When Adam sinned we sinned therefore when we're born we're born with a sin record and a sin nature. So we not only have a first estate but a fallen estate. We are born under the dominion of death, darkness, and sin. Romans 6:23 says [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

There are three kinds of death that sin brings. First, is eternal death which means separation—Thanatos. When Christ says 'depart from Me you workers of lawlessness' He is referring to Gehenna, the place of everlasting torment and hell. We are all born headed that way because we're born spiritually dead separated from God. Our only hope is that God will be

gracious and we'll be born again. Secondly, is we all face physical death which is separation of the soul from the body.

So we have a first estate and then there is a first estate, now what is our present estate? You are either saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (born again) or you're lost under the judgement of God. I'm pleading with you to come to Christ before that day, while it is this day, the day of salvation. There is no in-between. So what about the saved when they die? They go to an intermediate state. What about the lost when they die? They go to an intermediate state. In the intermediate state, first the body goes back to the dust. 'Dust to dust, you shall return' (Genesis 3:19). The soul goes to the intermediate state. In the Old Testament it is called Sheol and in the New Testament it's called hades.

There are five things to know about this intermediate state. Number one, is that it is an intermediate state and not the final state. Number two, it is a temporary state. Number three, it is a bifurcated state. In other words, Sheol/hades has two regions/realms. One realm is the departed souls of the saved and the other is the departed souls of the lost. The saved realm is also called paradise or Abraham's bosom or place of comfort. The judgment side for the lost (lost realm) is called torment, the place of torment. One comforts the believer and the other torments the unbeliever. Number four, the bifurcated state is a spiritual existence. There is nothing about the body in it because the body is in the grave, has returned to dust. It's a fixed position. There is no second chance, no evangelism there and there is a chasm between those two realms. Number five, there is a final state and that is the new heavens and the new earth for believers or Gehenna, the lake of fire, for those apart from Christ.

Now let's return to the creed when it says 'He descended into hell (hades).' Is this Biblical? If it's not then don't believe it but if it is, then you better confess it. It has an implication and an application. So let's see if what I have said about the intermediate state bears up under the examination of Scripture. First let's look at Luke 16 which some teach as a parable but it doesn't bear the mark of a parable. It bears the mark of a historical event revealed by Jesus to us. It is known as the rich man and Lazarus.

Luke 16:19–25 says [19] *"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. [20] And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, [21] who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. [22] The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side (bosom/paradise). The rich man also died and was buried (body in the grave), [23] and in Hades, being in torment (his soul is in torment/body in the grave), (notice there are two sides—a place of comfort and a place of torment) he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. [24] And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'* [25] *But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.*

While they are using bodily parts for explanation, we know the body is already buried but the explanations are used for our understanding of what is going on spiritually. This also should show you that there is no repentance in hell based on the anguish that is happening to the rich man in the intermediate state of torment and he is blaming God that he is in that state as he also thinks that Lazarus should be there to serve him. So we see the depth of our depravity as we see the rich man's response to his torment. As an unbeliever the rich man got the things of this

world for that is what he lived for and Lazarus was granted belief in God and to suffer for His sake which is what Lazarus received in the world. Now what happens?

Luke 16:26–31 says [26] *And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed (two realms), in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.* (There is no evangelism in this intermediate state.) [27] *And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— [28] for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'* [29] *But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'* [30] *And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'* [31] *He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'*” This historical event takes us to the place of the departed souls, the intermediate state, in which we see the five things about the state I talked about previously.

Now what about Jesus? In Ephesians 4 we are told that Jesus in victory is ascending back to the third heavens. We see in the Bible that at times heaven is referred to in the plural as the heavens. There is the created heavens that is all around you. Then there is another heaven for the invisible which is the place for the departed souls and for the angels. Then there is the third heavens which is the dwelling place of God where Paul got caught up to and where Jesus came from when He descended.

Philippians 2:5–8 says [5] *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* This takes on His incarnation, conception and His death on earth where Jesus becomes a Man.

He who ascended with the victory of His redeemed captives (those who used to be His enemies), first Ephesians says descended all the way to the lower regions. Now we arrive at the full humiliation of Christ. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, with a perfect life, rejected, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified for cursed is He who hangs on a tree, an atoning death, dead, buried and that's where His body went. So where did His soul go? Are you going to leave that out? Jesus is a true Son of God, Son of Man and as the Son of Man He has a true human soul and a true human body. He has come to take our place therefore in His humiliation He has to go where we go to redeem us from our fallen estate. So He comes from the womb, all the way into life, all the way to an atoning cross for us, then by taking on all our judgment He encounters physical death and what is physical death? It is separation of the soul from the body. That's what happened when He died. His body went in the tomb/grave and His soul descended into hades.

He told us this on the cross for while He was still alive on the cross He said to the thief “*today you will be with Me in paradise*” (Luke 23:43). Paradise is not the new heavens and the new earth for it is the intermediate state of blessing in Sheol and hades. “I'll meet you in paradise or Abraham's bosom or the place of comfort.” So when He dies on the cross His soul goes to hades/paradise for three days as His body goes to the tomb. When Christ says in three days He would rise again, He is not just talking about His body but His soul as well. The language in the Old Testament of descending into Sheol is the language of humiliation.

I can't wait to get to the next part of the creed that says, “*On the third day He rose again; He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father.*” The reason that ascension is glorious is because His descent was full—all the way to death, a grave and hades. So when it

says He arose on the third day it means His body came out of the grave and His soul came out of hades and reunited on the Lord's Day, the day of resurrection. Most of the songs we sing mainly focus on the physical part of the resurrection but there was a spiritual resurrection where His soul came from hades. The Bible not only says this through Jesus (to the thief on the cross) but it also says it in the Messianic Psalms. Here is what the Lord, the Messiah, says to the Lord, His Father in Psalm 16.

Psalm 16:9 says [9] *Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure.* Here is the Messianic triumph of the glorified body and life of the Messiah ascended is in that verse. How did the ascended Savior get there from His humiliation? Here is what was promised in Psalm 16:10 which says [10] *For you (God) will not abandon my soul (the Messiah) to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.* So here we see that His soul goes to hades/Sheol. This promise is given that the Messiah will not be abandoned so the One who was abandoned on the cross as He suffered Gehenna/hell for us, when He goes to this hades He will not be abandoned to it, but on the contrary He will be raised from it. What about His body? It will not see corruption for on the third day the body comes forth and the soul comes forth from Sheol. This is what the writers of the Apostles' Creed are reminding us of – we have a full human Jesus with a true body and a true soul that is separated when He dies as His soul goes to the realm of blessing in Sheol.

By the way, all the Old Testament saints which include Abraham that were anticipating the Messiah were there in there in the realm of blessing in Sheol, as well as the thief on the cross. Lazarus is there and I hope one day you are there. If you are a believer you are headed there and I hope you are not headed where the rich man was headed. When you get there as a believer you will have not gone to a place that Jesus hasn't been there and gone before you as He won the victory and assured your victory.

I labor at this every time there is a funeral of a believer. As we stand beside that grave and lay the body aside, I tell them 'ultimately this corruption will put on incorruption, this mortality will put on immortality and they aren't here but in the intermediate state of blessing.' Absent from the body is the soul at the place of Sheol, in the realm of paradise of comfort and Jesus says 'absent from the body present with the Lord.' We already see in Psalm 139:8b, [8b] *If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!* And that's just temporary. As the funeral goes on I say 'God isn't finished yet for this body will come out of that grave and the dust will be collected just like it was when Adam was created as this person will be raised incorruptible in body and soul.'

Revelation 20:13–15 says [13] *And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. [14] Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. [15] And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.* So all the dead will be raised again and in the next judgment, final judgment comes as we see in verse 15 that one is not temporary but eternal. If your name is in the Book of Life it's not spiritual for eternity is not just some kind of soulish existence, floating on a cloud, strumming a harp. You will have a glorified body and a glorified soul in a new heavens and new earth, with that new body and perfected soul. The assurance of it is that Jesus has already been there for you and is now making the final estate for you.

Here is the takeaway. In this affirmation 'He descended into hell,' the creed is declaring Christ's full humiliation as He came to earth as a Man – born, suffered, died, buried, descended into hell (the realm of paradise) which is where His soul went for three days and then His body

comes from the grave, is united with His soul as both are raised, has 40 days of ministry and He says ‘don’t hold onto Me for I haven’t yet ascended.’ He hadn’t ascended when He died on that cross and He is yet to ascend to the third heavens until after that 40 days. When He returns by virtue of what He had done you legally return with Him. When He ascended He led captive a host of captives – you are His and He is yours and you are in Christ, therefore your life is assured of salvation.

His full humiliation as the Son of Man not only assures us of our full salvation, it also instructs us as to our past. My sins are forgiven, why? Jesus took Gehenna hell on the cross as He said “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” which means, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?*” ‘Forsaken’ is eternal judgment—the unmixed wrath of God for all the sins of all of His people fell on Him so my sins are gone. I’m forgiven and there is no condemnation. My present is that I’m saved by grace. I’m not only delivered from the penalty of sin and liberated from the power of sin but I can start leaving the practice of sin. In my future, I’m going to an intermediate place temporarily—absent from the body present with the Lord in Abraham’s bosom, in paradise.

Then He is going to blow that trumpet one day and the body and soul will come out and be reunited. Then after the judgment as my name is in the Book of Life, then comes the new heavens and the new earth. I hope to see you in paradise. I think we will recognize one another. Seems like they recognized Abraham but I don’t know how you do that spiritually but that seems to be the deal and then I hope to be with you in a new heavens and a new earth. There is only one way we can do that and that is to come to Jesus, because of His perfect righteousness and perfect atoning death.

If you know Jesus your soul will go to hades/paradise and be present with the Lord, but that’s only temporary. There is no second chance there so if you go there lost then you stay lost. Today is the day of salvation. Then if you know Jesus you will go into eternity because Jesus has endured our judgment. When I was saved God saved me from many sins and one of those was a very profane, vulgar, immoral, course vocabulary which He did immediately when I got saved. I thank God for that yet amazingly that same mouth gets to teach the Bible. I think God has this wonderful, Divine sense of humor and what’s more ironic is I get paid to do it.

But I remember thinking through my language and years ago I quit saying something I used to say as a course of conversation. I used to use the phrase ‘hell on earth’ and I never say that anymore. I think you have unwanted consequences of sin on earth but I don’t ever want to give anyone any false comfort to think that if God did this ‘hell on earth’ then maybe you could handle the one to come – No! Hell on earth has only been here one time and that was over 2,000 years ago and that hell (Gehenna hell, lake of fire hell, judgment hell, unmixed wrath of God hell) fell on Jesus so that you can miss it and be with Him in a new heavens and a new earth. He has already taken care of the intermediate for your soul will not be abandoned in Sheol/hades and your body will one day be incorruptible because He has risen in soul and body and so will you. He descended into hell but He didn’t stay there. He came forth and therefore one day when I go to the place of the departed souls, the believer’s paradise, I won’t stay there.

I have another place and He is preparing it—in a new heavens and a new earth. Join me. Come to Him who came and descended for you that you can ascend with Him. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word and with those who are seeking You today. So I ask Holy Spirit that You would go way beyond my inadequacies and speak to

their hearts in these few moments of silence. Lord, if there is someone reading this today that has not yet come to You may they hear very clearly from me, yet they may reject it that the wages of sin is death—eternal, physical, and spiritual—but they may also hear Good News that while our destination is the judgment of God, God sent His Son to take that judgment for His people and that is all who put their trust in Him. So today may they turn from the sin for [27] it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27) and there is a Savior who has won the victory over, sin, death, hell, and the grave so we are no longer subject to the slavery of the fear of death and we will not be abandoned but brought to glory because of that victory. Lord, may they flee to Jesus who came for them and invites them as He says ‘Come and I will give you rest,’ in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

HE DESCENDED INTO HELL

Sheol – Hades – Gehenna

OUR FIVE-FOLD ESTATE

First Estate – Fallen Estate – Saved/Lost Estate – Intermediate Estate – Final Estate

LIFE TAKEAWAY

In this affirmation, the Creed is declaring that Christ’s full humiliation in His full humanity as the Son of Man not only assures us of our full salvation, but also instructs as to our Past, Present and Future life in and for Christ.