

Finally, what does the Creed teach us about the Resurrection of the Body?

Take another look at the Nicene Creed (read it together) and talk a bit about what it says about life everlasting.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

About the cover art: “Saint Thomas Aquinas” by Bernardino Mei. c. 1660. Oil on canvas. From the Chigi-Saracini Collection, Sienna, Italy. It is featured on the cover of one of the sources for this study, *The Great Theologians*....

Christianity: The Essentials

This six-session discipleship series has been drawn from several sources in addition to Scripture:

Christopher Hall. *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*. Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002.

Gerald McDermott. *The Great Theologians: A Brief Guide*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.

The Nicene Creed. Wiki article showing several English versions available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_versions_of_the_Nicene_Creed_in_current_use

© 2020 Chris Alford

Study Guide for *Christianity: The Essentials* Learning from Scripture, the Creeds, and the Fathers **Session Six**



A six-session discipleship series for **Epiclesis...** **An Ancient-Future Faith Community**

The content of this workbook was drawn primarily and in large measure from Christopher Hall's wonderful book *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*, which we gratefully acknowledge and highly recommend.

Epiclesis does not claim authorship or copyright.



Christianity: The Essentials

*Learning from Scripture, the Creed,
and the Fathers*

Session Six

The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting.
The question of the resurrection. What does Scripture say?
What did the Apostolic Fathers say and do?

No doctrine of the Christian Faith is so vehemently and so obstinately opposed as the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh.
-Augustine

What happens after death? The early church was keenly interested in the answer to that question, even from the very beginning— and for good reason. Believers wondered if Christ would come again before their own deaths and, when fellow Christians began to pass away or were cruelly martyred, the question became even more urgent.



Paul, of course, addressed the issue in 1 Thessalonians 4: (“...we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve as others do who have no hope”).

But listen closely to the particular concerns that the Church Fathers Athenagoras (pronounced Athen-AGG-arus) and Augustine addressed about death and resurrection:

“[The power of Christ] can reunite what is dissolved, and raise up what is prostrate, and restore the dead to life again, and put the corruptible into a state of incorruption. And [He can] separate that which has been broken up and distributed among a multitude of animals.... [He can] separate this, I say, and unite it again with the proper members and parts of members, whether it has passed into...one of those animals, or into many, or thence into others, or, after being dissolved along with these, has been carried back again to the original elements.”

-Athenagoras

Three examples of Augustine’s reasoning:

Why should we believe in a future resurrection? Augustine believed that future blessing or punishment required some sort of resurrected body: “By the lips of another prophet we are told what God has said to him: ‘...And many of those who sleep in the dust...of the earth will rise up, some to go to eternal life, while others go to reproach and eternal shame’” (See Dan 12:2).

A future resurrection is indeed mysterious because we “have never observed” anything like it. Yet we’ve experienced one miracle: We fleshly humans have souls, what Augustine calls “the interweaving of material with immaterial substance.” If that has already occurred, he says, then the future “conjunction of the material with the immaterial”— the combining of an earthly body with a heavenly one— is no problem.

And what will the nature of our resurrected bodies be, and what will we “do” in them? Augustine freely admits, “To tell the truth, I do not know what will be the nature of that activity....” Only God knows the nature and characteristics of the peace that awaits us.

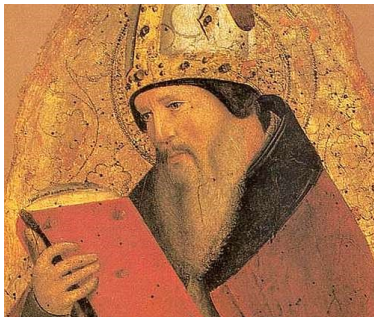
Then he beautifully concludes: “It is indeed most probable, that we shall then see the physical bodies of the new heaven and the new earth in such a fashion as to observe God in utter clarity and distinctness, seeing him present everywhere and governing the whole material scheme of things by means of the bodies we shall then inhabit and the bodies we shall see wherever we turn our eyes. It will not be as it is now, when the invisible realities of God are apprehended and observed through the material things of his creation, and are partially apprehended by means of a puzzling reflection in a mirror. Rather in that new age, the faith by which we believe, will have a greater reality for us than the appearance of material things which we see with our bodily eyes” (See Rom 1:20; 1 Jn 3:2; 1 Cor 13:12).

For Church Father Athenagoras (c.133-190), a philosopher from Athens and convert to Christianity, these issues were no problem for God because of His omniscience and omnipotence: He knows all things, and He knows the location of every human body, intact or not, and He knows the nature and composition of the human body. And, furthermore, if God managed to create us from nothing, then the re-creation of us, no matter the state, is no problem for an all-powerful God: "It is impossible for God...to be ignorant of the nature of our bodies which are destined to arise.... As to power, the creation of our bodies shows that God's power suffices for their resurrection."



One other point from Athenagoras: Not only is God all-knowing, and not only is He all-powerful, but He is also a just God who works purposefully: "We have put our confidence in an infallible security, the will of our Creator.... We full well know that he would not have formed such an animal and adorned him with all that contributes to permanence if he did not want this creature to be permanent. The Creator...made man that he might participate in rational life and, after contemplating God's majesty and universal wisdom, make them the object of his eternal contemplation, in accordance with the divine will and the nature allotted to him. The reason then for man's creation guarantees his eternal survival, and his survival guarantees his resurrection...."

In what is perhaps his most famous work, "The City of God," Augustine gave believers what Christopher Hall calls a "roadmap" through the countless questions surrounding the resurrection. It seems that believers then, as do believers now, wondered about things like rewards and punishment, what kind of body would be resurrected, what would happen to aborted children, and the relationship between resurrected people.



"And if the martyrs have had any limbs cut off, any parts removed, they will not lack those parts at the resurrection.... But if it will be right that in that new age the marks of glorious wounds should remain in those immortal bodies, for all to see, then the scars of the blows or the cuts will also be visible...."

-Augustine

Biblical basics on the resurrection...

Before we jump into the thoughts of the early writers, let's see a few key places in Scripture:

It is an essential doctrine: "[I]f the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (1 Cor 15:13-18).



Jesus himself clearly taught about resurrection (Matt 20:19; Mark 9:9; 14:28; Luke 18:33; John 2:19-22). On the day of Pentecost Peter argued the necessity of Christ's resurrection (Acts 2:24-28).

All humans will rise again, the dead in Christ first (Acts 24:15; 1 Cor 15:22, John 5:25-29, 1 Thess 4:16-17).

Resurrected bodies will be...

...transformed (cf. 1 Cor 15:35-44, 1 John 3:2).

...patterned after the body of Jesus Christ (Phil 3:20, 21; 1 Cor 15:47-49; 1 John 3:2; Luke 24:36-43).

...imperishable (1 Cor 15:42, 50, 52-54; cf. Rom 8:11).

...glorified and powerful (1 Cor 15:43).

...spiritual (1 Cor 15:44; cf. 1 Cor 15:39, 40; Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:50; Luke 24:39).

The Bible seems to teach two resurrections (some suggest three):

1. The first resurrection ("of life"- John 5:29) and the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10):

- The “first fruits”, that is, Christ (1 Cor 15:20-23).
- The dead in Christ, then those alive at his coming (1 Thess 4:16-17; Rev 20:4-5).

2. The second resurrection (“of judgment”- John 5:29) and the White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15).

Can you think of other Scriptures that have to do with bodily resurrection?

Resurrection in the Apostolic Fathers and other writers

As we mentioned earlier, the topic of resurrection was an important one from the very beginning.

The Apostolic Father, bishop and martyr Polycarp (69-155), in his letter to the Philippians, addressed two growing concerns in the early church: Why did Jesus seem to be delayed in His coming again and, also, was His resurrection a spiritual one, or a physical one? Polycarp insisted on the resurrection of “both soul and body.” “Serve God in fear and truth; give up empty vain discussion and the error of the crowd; believe ‘him who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and gave him glory’ and a throne at his right hand.... And ‘he who raised him’ from the dead ‘will also raise us’ if we do his will and walk in his commandments.”



Ignatius (c.50-c.120), another Apostolic Father and early second century martyr, linked Christ’s conquering of death and His resurrection to the arrival of the age to come. In his letter to the Ephesian Christians, he compares Jesus’ resurrection to a rallying banner, an “ensign”, signaling that our own resurrection is assured: “He was truly raised from the dead, when his Father raised him up, as in similar fashion his Father will raise up in Christ Jesus us who believe him— without whom we have no life.”

Clement of Rome (c.30-c.100), yet another first century father and martyr, wrote that one of the “benefits” of Christ’s incarnation is that we “taste immortal knowledge”— a knowledge tested and proved by the resurrection of Jesus. “The apostles,” he wrote, “went out in the conviction of the Holy Spirit preaching the good news...in full assurance by reason of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.”



The apologist Theophilus of Antioch (c.?-c.185) focused his resurrection argumentation on trust— trust that God has the power to raise the dead. Notice, too, that he beautifully links the wonder of conception to the possibility of a future resurrection: “If the farmer trusts the earth and the sailor the ship and the sick man the physician, do you not want to entrust yourself to God, when you received so many pledges from him? The first pledge is that he created you, bringing you from non-existence to existence.... He formed you out of a small, moist matter and a tiny drop.... It was God who brought you into this life. Second, you believe that statues made by men are gods and works miracles. Then do you not believe that the God who made you can later make you over again?”



A closer look at Athenagoras and Augustine...

We started this session with a couple of quotes from Athenagoras and Augustine. *Let’s look a bit more closely.*

The Roman mind, in particular, had an unusually difficult time with the topic of resurrection, and even more so the notion of the resurrection of a *physical body*. And what of destroyed or decomposed bodies? The question had to have been on the minds of believers, especially given the brutal persecutions and deaths inflicted upon them by all kinds of cruel means.