

XII. The Apostles' Creed in Biblical Perspective

"I Believe..."

"And Sits at the Right Hand of God, the Father Almighty"

Ephesians 4:7–10

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

August 23, 2020 • Sunday Sermon

We will be looking at two passages in this study and we'll start with Ephesians 4. We now turn in this affirmation in our study of God's Word using the apparatus of the Apostles' Creed that gives us the confession of essentials but doesn't contain all the essential. We use these essentials in worship, discipleship and to protect the church in order to make sure that we don't fall into false doctrine which is the right use of creeds and confessions. In this study we find ourselves at the affirmation that says 'is seated at the right hand of the Father Almighty.' So let's look at a Seminole passage on this from Ephesians 4:7–10 which 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.

There are a certain kind of children's books that I have found very helpful as an illustration to understand the Bible, in a post graduate theology course under Dr. Sinclair Ferguson. It's amazing what an illustration will do when you are dealing with complexities and yet the depth of God's Word. In this study we've been tracking with the Trinitarian flow of the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles' Creed is as follows;

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, (first affirmation/1st Person of the Trinity)
maker of heaven and earth;*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, (second affirmation/2nd Person of the Trinity)
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 hades.*

*On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father Almighty,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.*

I believe in the Holy Spirit, (third affirmation/3rd Person of the Trinity)

*the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

I believe, from another professor that challenged me, in that second section on Jesus Christ that this flow is what you will find in I Corinthians 15, Ephesians 1 and Philippians 2. I particularly love the Philippians 2:5–8 text which 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. On the third day, comes exaltation for He arose. How many of us are from churches that remember Ascension Sunday on the calendar? We remember Holy Week – the death, burial and resurrection, don't we? And rightly so for that is the very heart of the Gospel.

When I was kid, one Sunday in October my dad and mom would take us after church up to the Blue Ridge Mountains which would be about an hour and half drive. My dad would pull over on these beautiful outlooks on the parkway. On this one outlook as I looked out it just seemed like the whole world was underneath it. At 16, I was absolutely moved at the time as I looked out and said 'Dad, this is unbelievable.' My dad said 'Son, you haven't seen anything yet.' We get back in the car as he goes around a few more curves as we go up another 700 or 800 feet and then we get out on an overlook and the vista was just majestic and that's the way I think we should look at the exaltation of Christ.

We followed His humiliation to save us from our sins. He says 'It's finished.' Then He submits to the power of death with His body going to the grave and His soul to hades. Peter makes a big deal out of all of that when he preaches the Gospel in Acts 2. Acts 2:22–33 says [22] *"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know— [23] this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. [24] God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it. [25] For David says concerning Him, "I saw the Lord always before me,*

for He is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; [26] therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope.

[27] For you will not abandon My soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.

[28] You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

[29] *"Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. [30] Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, [31] he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. [32] This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. [33] Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.*

Stop and think about this for a moment. Up until about 2,000 years ago we have a Trinity – Father, Son and Spirit. What does the Bible say about God, who dwells as One God in Three Persons? It says God is a Spirit, that's first, second and third Person. When Jesus comes He is Spirit. Then He humbles Himself, conceived by the Holy Spirit to get a true body. I Corinthians 15:21 says [21] *For as by a Man came death, by a Man has come also the resurrection of the dead.* Jesus takes upon Himself a true body – the Word became flesh and dwelt among us as one of us (John 1:14). He had a true body and a true soul. He lives this perfect life and a rejected life. On that body He bore our sins and then He died. He submitted in his humiliation to the power of death for three days with a body in the grave and a soul that is in hades.

He isn't just anywhere in hades for there are two dimensions in hades – the intermediate state of abyss and torment for the fallen angels and unbelievers, then there is the intermediate state of blessing and paradise which is for the believer and this is where Jesus was for three days. This is why He said to the thief on the cross 'today I will be with you in paradise.' This is not the final state. Then Jesus is raised in victory and glory, but I believe this is the first overlook. I'm not downplaying the resurrection for I understand its importance in theology, but the resurrection sets up the ascension. Now with this glorified body He ascends.

Who is that ascends? Paul tells us in this Ephesians 4 text for the One who ascended is the One who descended. Jesus descended for a task. What was His work? He came to save His people from their sins. At the depth and Nader of His humiliation He says on the cross that, that work is finished. Through His humiliation and atoning death He has accomplished our salvation and then on the third day He is risen. God's announcement of the victory of the task that His Son has embraced – fully God, fully Man – to save us is done through the resurrection. Now after 40 days He ascends into heaven. Now He comes back in coronation and celebration and the picture doesn't register with us because we didn't live back then. They would have remembered this in their history as Jews and the nation of Israel, from Assyria, Babylon and now Rome.

Whenever the king would leave to go do battle he would leave the heights of his palace, descend into the valley and if he wins the victory he would become a warrior king as he comes back. His chariot is full of the plunder and the reward of the victory and tied to the chariot are the captives. This would have happened with Nebuchadnezzar as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would have been tied to his chariot after defeating them. So with Jesus the King has come and He had down battle with sin, Satan, hell and the world – for while we were yet enemies Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). When He ascends He has the reward of His victory and He has us. Romans, Colossians, and Galatians tell us that when He ascended, we ascended positionally with Him. We are joint heirs with Him but not yet is it in its fullness but now we have ascended with Him. We are the captives that He has led into His ascension and to His coronation and celebration. There He sits at the right hand of the Father giving gifts.

The Ephesians text said to each one a measure of grace was given according to Christ's gift. If you have grace it's because the ascended Christ poured forth the gift of the Holy Spirit. So having accomplished our redemption, has now ascended seated at the right hand of the Father. Remember God doesn't have a right hand for that's baby talk for us but the right hand means power. That's how shaking hands got started which was a showing of affection with the right hand open and extended means that I don't have a weapon in my strong arm. So the right hand was the place of honor and power. Now as Jesus is the ascended, coronated, risen Christ in bodily form that we will be able to see for all eternity at the right hand of the Father, from that throne He gives gifts to men. They all come from Pentecost so after 40 days teaching He ascends 10 days later and at Pentecost the Gift comes. The Gift is poured out upon His people.

Jesus will stay there until He fills all things with His Spirit through His people. He fills us. He fills the world with the Gospel. He is filling the world with the Kingdom as the Gospel goes to all the nations as nations tremble and sinners surrender. When that Gospel has filled the earth and all of His people has been brought to the Father, then Jesus rises from the seat and He comes in consummation to judge the living and the dead. One of the ways that makes this easier to understand is how God has unfolded this in the Bible from the Old Testament to the New Testament but we have to kind of understand it rightly.

I love the way Dr. Ferguson helped us, post graduate theological students understand this. This is where the children's books come in. He showed us the children's pop-up book where on one page as you opened it something would pop up to teach you something and then the next page that same thing would pop up but also something else would pop up to teach you another

thing. Then as you get to the end everything pops up and everything is labeled to tell you what it is. That is how the Bible is. The Old Testament is your pop-up book.

Here is Abraham who is given a promise and he is to sacrifice his only son but knowing that when his son is sacrificed he would be raised from the dead, he tells his servants that they would be back. As they get to the top his son asks 'where is the sacrifice' as Abraham takes his son and lays him on the alter and God says 'wait Abraham, for you have displayed your love for Me through your obedience and here is a ram in a thicket.' That's a pop-up. There is a Father who will give His only Son as a sacrifice but there won't be a lamb caught in the thicket for He'll be the Lamb to save us from our sins.

In the book of Exodus there is plague after plague after plague and you get to the plague of death which is the death of the first born. Then He says to His people who have this meal to eat it in haste but don't leave any left over. Then take the blood from the slain lamb and put it over the doorposts and when I see that blood I'll pass over you. That's a pop-up. There's a Lamb who will die for us so that we might live in Him and for Him and the judgment of God on the Judgement Day will pass over us because it fell on Him.

Perhaps the pop-up I love more than any is the tabernacle, the temple, where they come out of Egypt and God tells them to build this tabernacle. He gives the design and later is the Solomonic temple laid out in a design. If you lived there in Israel during that time, dwelling in Jerusalem you got a visual lesson, a pop-up book every single day from the design that was laid out in the Scripture. Pop-up page one was the temple with the 15 steps and to this day they are still there those 15 steps. Then there is the court of the Gentiles, the court of the women and the court of Israel. Then behind the curtain is the dwelling place of God, where God will dwell and bring people to Him from the Gentiles, male, female, for God is teaching us.

To get there you have to have a Mediator so God puts a High Priest who is supposed to teach, do mercy from the storehouse of mercy, to bring people for the prayer of all of the nations and to bring sacrifices as the people gather to worship the Lord. On behalf of the people, He then goes into the Holy of Holies for them. Do you see what God is doing? He gives another pop-up page in that temple called Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement. On that day the High Priest receives the scapegoat and he takes symbolically the sins of the all the people for that is how God has designed his dress. Then he lays his hands upon the scapegoat and send the scapegoat off of temple mount, out into the wilderness (expiation) to take away the sins of the people. Then he takes a lamb. These priests would have been covered with blood, guts and gore due to the thousands of sacrifices for God has a pop-up book where sin costs. The wages of sin is death, Romans 6:23. Look at the deaths, look at the sins, is there possibly a way for us to be saved? The Bible says the blood of the Kedron Brook would run red from the blood flowing out of temple mount on that day.

Then the high priest would take the lamb, already having done the scapegoat, we look at propitiation – how can our sins be paid for? It is through a substitutionary sacrifice. The people see the priest process from one court to the next court and hear him because of the bells on the hem of his clothing. But then they no longer see him but praise God they can still hear him as the bells ring. This is crucial because now he is in the presence of God. The Bible says that no man can be in His presence and live. Now this priest as the mediator is bearing all the sins before the throne of God and the wages of sin is death and God will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.

Then there is another pop-up page which is that they are right back there to do it again in the next year, and the next year and the next etc. What does this tell us? God is teaching us something, but what is there doesn't work. If it worked we wouldn't have to come back. The how is working – a mediator and a substitutionary sacrifice, but the who and what are not

working. That mediator needs his own mediator and that sacrifice cannot remove the sins of men and women. God made you to have a relationship with Him and to have a personal relationship with Him to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever we have to be saved from our sins. Secondly, we can't save ourselves from our sins. God is holy and just and cannot abide with sin but we can't save ourselves from our sins. Thirdly, when there was no way God made a way and that way is His Son Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

God knows what He is going to do from the very foundation of the world. God has ordained His work to alleviate what we authored in our sin and He is now going to author our salvation by grace which is greater than our sin. He is going to do that through His Son. His Son is both the who and the what – He is the Mediator and the Sacrifice. So He is the One who will do it for us and in our place. So God in the Old Testament gives you the pop-ups. Then God takes His Son and fulfills it and the New Testament is the layover to explain it all. Jesus is the temple, the tabernacle, the sacrifice, the Prophet, the Priest, the King, the offering, the ark for all of those pop-ups find 'yes and amen' in Jesus.

Let's now look at Hebrews 10. I hope I'll be able to start the series on Romans pretty soon and then I hope God will let me preach through Hebrews before I go to heaven. I love Hebrews for Hebrews explains the pop-ups for it's glorious to see how the second explains the first. Hebrews 10:1–7 says *[1] For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. [2] Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? [3] But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. [4] For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

[5] Consequently, when Christ came into the world, He said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; [6] in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. [7] Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"

The Messiah is basically saying here that He is not coming to bring sacrifices and offerings. In other words, Jesus is coming as the Mediator, but He is not bringing another lamb, bull or goat for they can't do it. He is bringing Himself – a body you have prepared for Me. He will bear their sins, not symbolically, but actually in His own body. II Corinthians 5:21 says *[21] For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.* Those sacrifices teach us things that need to be done but they can't do it. Jesus is the One who can pay for all of our sins. Let's continue in Hebrews 10.

Hebrews 10:8–14 says *[8] When He said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), [9] then He added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. [10] And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

[11] And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. [12] But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God, [13] waiting from that time until His enemies should be made a footstool for His feet. [14] For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

The pop-up is over, the page is done and the sacrifice is pointed to Jesus. He is the Lamb of God. The priest pointed to Jesus for Jesus is the Priest. This God has taken upon Himself true humanity and there is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. He has taken your place. Now see the Priest walk in, hear the bell, see the Priest again. Jesus goes to the

cross. We don't hear the bell for three days. Then it rings and we see Him, now it's done, it is finished. We are not coming back to Calvary again and He ascends, the King victorious. He has done only what God could do and that is to save us from our sins through His Son who is Mediator and Sacrifice. When He did it we don't get another pop-up. He had fulfilled it and it doesn't have to be repeated. It's done once and for all. That's why He ascends and sits.

He doesn't sit in passivity. He now has another task. He has finished the task of our redemption and salvation at the cross. His next task is to work on the redeemed, to bring them from every nation by the power of the Spirit of God whom He pours out from the throne. When that has happened and all things are filled then He arises and comes again and then we have victory.

So here is the takeaway. The purposes of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ is simply yet profoundly to save us from our sins and now He is exalted so that the One who has accomplished our salvation is now sending forth His Spirit to apply that salvation to all the world. He has done this to have a personal relationship with those whom He has saved with the God of glory and majesty by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Your baptism doesn't add to it but it declares it. Your good works, giving and worship, none of that adds to this work of salvation but it evidences the work of salvation and the presence of the Spirit of God in your life. He has sat down and secured with Himself and His own sacrifice bearing our sins, we're forgiven and that's why He came.

So nations lift up your doors and tremble at His Word for there is a Savior but He alone is Savior, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Then when His Word comes it removes all trembling because I am assured of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. America you can put the cultural elite to do all that you desire but God's people have a King and God's people have the Spirit of Christ from that King. We are ambassadors of Christ and we go with the authority of the King. When we go with the authority of the King we don't go looking for your permission, although we're grateful for it and it's a good idea for you to open the gates for the King of glory to come in, but we come with a message – our King is enthroned, He has sent us and He is filling the whole world as He fills us with His Spirit to take that Gospel to all the nations.

What's the Gospel? Sinners are saved from the penalty of sin, the guilt of sin, the shame of sin, the persuasion of sin, the power of sin and they are being saved from the practice of sin. One day when He comes we'll be saved from the presence of sin. That's our message. Jesus did not come to be an entertainer for our amusement. Jesus did not come as a consultant for your business success. Jesus did not come as a therapist so how you could get along in this world to manage other people and manage all the things of this world. Jesus came to save you from your sins. He may give you a business in His providence. He will certainly teach you how to honor Him in it. He may give you not the fleeting world's applause of self-esteem, but the majestic work of self-respect because of the blood of Jesus and the glory of self-denial. We don't look for entertainment but we rejoice not in amusement, but that we have been counted saved.

That's what happens to the Disciples. Jesus tells them it would be better for them if He goes away and they say 'oh no Jesus, it would be better if You stay.' Then He goes to the cross and after three days is His resurrection, then 40 days teaching and when He ascends the Bible says they went back from the Mount of Olives rejoicing. Luke 24:50–53 records this for us; [50] *And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. [51] While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. [52] And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, [53] and were continually in the temple blessing God.* There was no more self-pity, but rejoicing why? It is because our King has won the victory. When He ascended we ascended with Him.

Our King is going to send forth the Spirit of God and ten day later there came the Spirit of God. Our King is going to send us into all the world and we can live and die for Jesus for whether by life or death Christ be exalted. Our King is going to fill all things and turn the world upside down. Our King is there and when we sin, then confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9). That's why they rejoiced and that's why we rejoice.

I love our advent celebrations and we always end with the Hallelujah Chorus and as that Chorus is sung by the end I'm just ready to be taken up into glory, hallelujah! Then out of that orchestra comes the trumpet and we do it again except three octaves higher and that's the way I feel when we get to this point in the Apostles' Creed – He ascended and sits at the right hand of the Father, therefore I can stand in His presence and He is with me until the end which is the beginning of forever. He came, now He fills us and the Spirit says to you, 'come' and the church says to you 'come' and I plead with you 'come.' There are no other books for this is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

God has laid this out over 1600 years in this Bible and His Son now reigns. Come to Him. He came for you by the Spirit who has come and says to you 'just as I am I come.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Perhaps you have not yet come to Jesus but God brought you to this today and Jesus spoke to you today. I'm praising God I don't live in the shadows, types and promises anymore for I now live in the fulfillment of what is finished and I want Him to finish His work in me. Jesus I come. If you would like to pray with someone or talk with someone about this decision to follow Jesus please call us at (205) 776-5200 and together we'll call upon the Lord and go to the Lord who came for you. Jesus, please fill us with the presence of Your power through the Holy Spirit so that we may declare to the world that our Savior has come, King Jesus. He has ascended and enthroned. His redeeming work has made a propitiation and an expiation of our sins and you are now satisfied with Him our Mediator, our Redeemer and with Him who is our Sacrifice. May we take that message to a world that is looking everywhere for an answer and then Jesus when we take it in the power of the Spirit please allow them to have eyes to see and ears to hear. We rejoice in the cross and the crown of King Jesus, Amen.

Power Point

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The purpose of the Humiliation and Exaltation of Christ is simply, yet profoundly to save sinners from their sins into a personal relationship with the God of glory and Majesty by Grace alone, through Faith alone, in Christ alone.

*No more shadows–symbols–promises–prophecies
It is Finished – Once and for all*