

Redeemer OPC, Hawaii

Adult Sunday School

The Apostles' Creed (7)

“Sixth Article - Christ's Ascension and Session”

- I. Introduction. Review: We have considered the fifth article of the Apostles' Creed dealing with Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead on the third day of His time in the estate of death. We looked at the significance of the fact that it took place on the third day. We also looked at the reality of Christ's resurrection and the most straightforward affirmations that stand against and disprove the objections that have been raised over the centuries. Then we reviewed several matters of the nature of Christ's resurrection and added that it is the life, hope, and glory of His people. Now, we look into the sixth article of the Apostles' Creed, “He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”
- II. The Ascension of Christ. We can say at the same time that this is the second step in God's exalting His Son, and the second part of His estate of exaltation.
 - A. Ascending into Heaven. Exaltation was the reward that the Father bestowed on Christ for accomplishing the salvation of the elect during His estate of humiliation, and for stooping into the estate of humiliation in the first place. Phil. 2:5-11 makes this clear when it shows that Christ entered into humiliation by His incarnation and fulfilled its purpose by His death on the cross. Vs. 9 begins with “therefore” that indicates God exalted Christ *because*, and thus as a reward for, His humbling of Himself voluntarily to save the elect but unworthy sinners that His people are. As we have seen, Christ's resurrection from the dead in His glorified body was the first step in His exaltation. It was followed by His ascension into heavenly glory. Acts 1 records His ascension as His apostles looked on. “A cloud received Him out of their sight,” it says. As He transitioned from earth and this physical universe into

heaven, it was not a weather cloud that received Him, but a cloud of glory as, for a moment, the portal that God opened showed a bit of the glory of heaven shining through. Many places in Scripture associate the presence of God with clouds, and it always refers in some manner to the glory that attends God in judgment, salvation, and His exalted Being. The tabernacle was filled with the cloud of God's glory when it was completed in the wilderness. A cloud overshadowed the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration when the glory of Christ was revealed for a little while. So, His ascension into heavenly glory was the answer to His petition during His high priestly prayer, "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:4-5). Because He was rewarded with the ascension, among the other aspects of His exaltation, for the work He did on behalf of elect sinners in saving them, and as their Surety and Representative, we, too, will be caused to ascend into heavenly glory to participate in the fruits of His reward.

- B. Ascending the Throne. There was another ascension that took place when Christ ascended into heaven. This is a particular way of looking at the second part of His estate of exaltation, during which He carries out the rest of God's plan. Because He is both Lord and Christ, as Peter pointed out in Acts 2, He was intended to rule as God's King after He arose from the dead, as the risen God/Man and Mediator between God and men. From the point of His conception onward He was not only the Second Person of the Trinity, but both the Second Person of the Trinity and fully man in His one Person. Having completed His saving work and arisen from the dead, He was to take up the place of authority at the right hand of God in that same Divine/human Person. The Father had promised that He would be His King to rule

(Ps. 2). So, upon ascending into heaven, He was also to ascend the throne of David and throne of God and Head over all things to His church. Rev. 5 is most particularly the coronation chapter, as it were, that shows the risen Christ as “a Lamb standing as if slain.” No one stands when he is killed unless he is then risen from the dead. Then, He takes the scroll from the hand of Him who sits on the throne, and is the only one qualified to open its seals. This is a highly figurative way of saying that God entrusted the carrying out of His plan into the hands of Christ, whom He crowned as King and who then took up the rule that was always intended for Him upon His exaltation. The picture is of Christ ascending the throne.

III. The Session of Christ.

A. The Meaning of the Term “Session.” This is a term that theologians use to refer to Christ’s sitting at the right hand of God. It is connected with His sovereign rule over all things as the risen God/Man-Mediator who ascended into heaven to take up His throne and take over the rule of all things and the administration of God’s decree in providence (Rev. 5:6-10; Isa. 53:10; Ps. 2:6-8; Acts 2:34-35; Heb. 1:3). As He does so, He “sits,” or occupies, His authoritative position not only as Savior of His people but also as King and Judge over all things. So, the term “session” pictures the King in His throne room with His court surrounding Him, and the Judge in His court. As long as Jesus Christ is in heaven fulfilling His ruling function over His kingdom and judging function over all events, until the day He returns to complete the judgment, His court is “in session.”

B. The Functions Christ Fulfills in His Session.

1. Christ rules all things. The Bible speaks about different aspects of the reign of Christ. He is the absolute ruler over all things in the universe (Ps. 103:19; 2:8-9; etc.). He rules over all people, saved and unsaved, over all living

creatures, over all events, over all great machinations of civilizations and societies, over the smallest details one can imagine (Job 42:2; Ps. 135:6; Dan. 4:34-35; Heb. 1:3). This is usually called God's sovereignty, and most Christians explain this as God's control of all things. It takes place because of God's decree and His omnipotence, which is His all-powerfulness to carry out all that He decrees by His own most holy will (Eph. 1:11). This is connected to His administration of God's providence (more on it below). He also rules in a special way over His subjects in His kingdom; i.e., those whom He has redeemed at the cross and whom the Spirit has been pleased to convert to Christ so far. "For [God] delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13-14). In converting us, the Spirit of Christ has dethroned the sinful self from the redeemed sinner's heart, and established Christ as the ruler of His subject's personal life. He does so by the Spirit's indwelling and His law written on His subject's heart in the effectual way of having given him a love of righteousness and of God's law, and the capacity and desire to obey it. He has also been enthroned as King on the throne of David over His united people, the church, united to Him and to one another by faith in their effectual calling by the Spirit. So, He rules in His church through the offices, especially of elder, and also deacon. He leads His church by His Spirit and Word through the process of corporate sanctification in doctrine and conduct/life over the course of centuries. He leads His church and works through her in the ministry to call His people, edify them, and glorify God.

2. Christ administers God's providence. Christ, as the risen God/Man-Mediator

who has been exalted after His estate of humiliation, has been given charge of the eternal plan of God, known as His decree, which He determined before the foundation of the world. He now fulfills the decree (secret will) of God by His almighty divine power (Heb. 1:3; etc.). In so doing, He manifests His sovereignty over all things and controls every detail of all the universe; yet, He does not commit evil, nor is He to be held responsible for the evil nature or actions of evil men. God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all (1 Jn. 1:5b). This is how He is able to overrule the evil in the actions of evil men and bring about good from them in His good plan.

3. Christ intercedes for His people. He is our great High Priest who once offered up Himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice on behalf of His people, and reconcile us to God; and who now makes continual intercession for us at God's right hand. It has been said in many ways, but Christ constantly pleads the merits of His atonement for our sins as our Mediator between God and men that we may have constant forgiveness for them as we live out our imperfect lives in the progress of time. God is not bound by time, but we are, and we experience the need for forgiveness as an ongoing matter, though we can rest assured that we have forgiveness for every sin—past, present, and future—precisely because God is not tied to time, and Christ once for all paid for them. Christ also intercedes by the merits of His atonement in bringing our prayers to God cleansed of all imperfection.
4. Christ fulfills the redemptive purpose of God. This is also a function of God's providence, but needs its own explanation. The risen, enthroned God/Man-Mediator has been given charge of completing God's redemptive purpose that He accomplished in His saving Person and work: His sinless

life, sacrificial death, and resurrection from the dead. It is His function/ministry to ensure that all of the elect whom He redeemed by His work are then called, justified, sanctified, and brought to glory. He will raise up all His people at the last day to eternal glory in the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells. In this, He executes the office of Prophet, as He also executes the offices of King and Priest in His estate of exaltation. The WSC Q. 24 asks and answers, “How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet? Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.” The WCF 8.1 gives clear teaching on this: “It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Saviour of his church; the Heir of all things; and Judge of the world; unto whom he did from all eternity give a people, to be his seed, *and to be by him in time called, justified, sanctified, and glorified*” (emphasis mine).