

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God the Father, Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth:
And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten 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 at 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 (universal) holy catholic church:
The communion of saints:
The forgiveness of sins:
The resurrection of the body:
And the life everlasting.
Amen

“He descended into hell...”

1. Option 1-remove this line from the Creed

-There are two main reasons people choose to take this line out of the Creed. The first reason simply has to do with a desire to shy away from controversy. This line is the most controversial line in the Creed, and some will simply remove it from the Creed to avoid creating a stir or not wanting to “rock the boat.” The second reason some take this phrase out of the Creed is because they do not think that it is _____ (this is a better reason than the first). Some look at the testimony of sacred writ and come to the conclusion that this line cannot be supported by Scripture.

2. Option 2-Jesus, after dying, literally went into the place known as Hell

-There are a few different options to this view. Some believe that Christ went to the place where the wicked souls of men were being held and some hold that Jesus went to the “bottomless pit” where the wicked angels are being held until the day of final judgment. Both views see Jesus going to this place to _____ His victory to those that were punished because of their unbelief before the actual coming of Christ.

-This view would take the word “descended” very literally as His going down into the place of judgement for a period of three days (while His body lay in the tomb).

3. Option 3-The word “hell” here should be translated as “hades”

-Some believe that the word “hell” should be replaced with the word “hades.” Some believe there is just grounds for this, while others switch out these words to help make the Creed more palatable. Seeing the focus of this line as being about “hades” instead of “hell” brings a whole new shade of meaning. Hades is a term in the Scriptures that refers to the region of death-the disembodiment of the soul. So, for those who take this approach they see this line of the Creed simply as re-affirming

the _____ of Christ (since in the line before already mentioned that He was “crucified, *dead*, and buried”).

-Some in this view see the word “descended” in a very literal way-that the body of Christ literally went down into the _____ (in the tomb).

-This is the view that J.I. Packer takes (though differing on what “descended” means) in his helpful little book “Affirming the Apostle’s Creed.” Here are some quotes from him to support this view:

-“The English is misleading, for ‘hell’ has changed its sense since the English form of the Creed was fixed. Originally ‘hell’ meant the place of the _____ as such, corresponding to the Greek *Hades* and the Hebrew *Sheol*. That is what it means here.” (86)

-“The language of descent is used because Hades, being the place of the disembodied, is lower in _____ and dignity than is life on earth, where body and soul are together and humanity is in that sense whole.” (87)

-“He descended into hell (Hades), the place where all the departed go, is said to make the point that life left His body and He _____ as really, truly, and completely as you and I must expect in due course to do.” (20)

-Again, this view emphasizes that Christ’s soul really was separated from His body. He endured a full and _____ death. This helps us remember that “Christ leads me through no darker rooms than He went through before.” (line from a hymn from Richard Baxter-c.1650)

4. Option 4-Jesus Christ descended into hell on the cross

-This view keeps the word “hell” in the Creed because it sees it as a very important theological truth. Hell is the experiencing of the _____ wrath of God. Hell is the experience of having all grace of God removed and being laid bare under the crushing wrath of the God of Infinite Justice. Hell is more than the suffering of the physical body it also involves the suffering of the soul.

-This view does not try to lighten or soften the Creed at this point but boldly declares the horrible sufferings of Christ that He endured to save a sinner like me, like you. We must understand that the worst part of the Cross was not the humiliation and embarrassment, nor was it the physical torture and agony. The worst part of the suffering of Christ was the torment of His _____.

-“He bore all the punishments [evildoers] ought to have sustained with only one exception, that those torments could not keep hold of him forever. He suffered the death that God in his wrath had inflicted upon the wicked...Not only that Christ’s body was given as the price of our redemption, but that he paid a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul the terrible torments of a _____ and forsaken man...Surely no more terrible abyss can be conceived than to feel yourself forsaken and estranged from God; and when you call upon him, not to be heard. It is as if God himself had plotted your ruin...There is no rupture in the Trinity here. Though Christ experienced God’s wrath, yet we do not suggest that God was ever inimical or angry toward him... How could Christ by his intercession appease the Father toward others, if he were himself hateful to God?... ontologically, there was no alienation. Perhaps we could go so far as to say that Father never loved and admired his Son more than when he was dying to save us. Of course, the Father continued in his love for his Son, but on the cross Jesus lost all sense and experience and any practical possession of it. He felt like a soul in hell.”-*excerpt from article, “CALVIN ON “HE DESCENDED INTO HELL” BY TIM KELLER*