

We believe...

THE CREED OF THE NEW APOSTOLIC CHURCH

JUNE 2020

Session 1: Pentecost Discussion

Session 2: Future Events

Session 3: Wordly Authorities

Session 1 – Pentecost Discussion

Session 2 – The Creed: Future Events

Welcome! Today, we're going to focus on future events, my favorite topic, as outlined in the ninth Article of Faith. In fact, the way we look at the future and God's plan of salvation in our Church is what caught my attention already in the first divine service I attended over 40 years ago.

While we don't know everything that will transpire in the future, the Bible provides a tremendous amount of insights and promises that reveal a plan of great glory and much joy for all those who love the Lord and desire to experience eternal life with Him in His kingdom.

The ninth Article of Faith is packed with a lot of details, demonstrating the great priority future events are assigned in our New Apostolic faith. We'll look at this in three major parts. The first part is about the return of Christ, where it states: **I believe that the Lord Jesus will return as surely as He ascended into heaven and that He will take to Himself the firstfruits of the dead and living who have hoped for and were prepared for His coming...**

The expectation of the return of Jesus is foundational to our faith. Jesus Himself talked about going to prepare a place for us, where He then stated, *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also* (John 14:3).

Later, after His resurrection and when Jesus had ascended to heaven, two angels came and spoke to the disciples, reminding them of His promise to return, where they said, *This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven* (Acts 1:11). In other words, Jesus is coming again!

Now, the "firstfruits of the dead and living" refers to all those – living and dead – who have become God's own through the rebirth of water and spirit, have prepared for the return of Christ, and have kept the expectation of this event at the forefront of their lives.

Interestingly, when Jesus returns for His own, also known as the rapture, He will give them a resurrected body, like the one He was clothed with at His resurrection. This is an amazing body that can't be hurt and will allow us to move between different places seamlessly, like Jesus did (1 John 3:2).

Let's now look at the next part of the ninth Article of Faith: **...that after the marriage in heaven He will return to earth with them to establish His kingdom of peace, and that they will reign with Him as a royal priesthood...**

The image of the "marriage in heaven" marks the beginning of a direct fellowship between Jesus and His bride, also known as the firstfruits. But the length of this period is of limited duration. When it is completed, Jesus Christ, along with His bride, will direct attention to all human beings who did not partake in this event.

This is when Jesus will visibly appear on earth and establish His "kingdom of peace" (Revelation 20:6). And His first order of business will be to bind Satan, so that he can no longer tempt anyone to sin. Nevertheless, human beings will continue to be sinners. During this time period, we believe people will continue to be born and to die, as death and suffering will still exist to some degree.

Now, as a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2: 9; Revelation 20: 6), the bridal congregation will share in the rule of Christ. The gospel will be proclaimed to all human beings, both the living and the dead, which includes all people who have ever lived since the beginning of time.

A note of interest here. When we say the “bridal congregation,” we are referring to the figurative number of 144,000 that’s referenced in Revelation 14. This suggests the bridal congregation is a sizable number, yet not that big when compared to the billions of souls who have ever lived. Whatever the size of this group, the task ahead of proclaiming the gospel to everyone is enormous!

Now to the last part of the ninth article: **...After the conclusion of the kingdom of peace, He will hold the Last Judgment. Then God will create a new heaven and a new earth and dwell with His people.**

Many Christians talk about, and fear, judgment day. But, we can see here that it is only “after the conclusion of the kingdom of peace” that Jesus will “hold the Last Judgment.”

In fact, the kingdom of peace will come to an end when Satan is released for a brief period and given one last opportunity to tempt mankind. This is when Jesus will see who really chooses to follow Him, and who does not. After Satan’s ultimate defeat, he will be condemned and *cast into the lake of fire* (Revelation 20: 7-10). Evil and all its manifestations will finally have been rendered powerless forever.

What then follows is the resurrection of the dead, meaning all those in yonder world, for judgment (Revelation 20: 11-15). Christ will then judge all human beings who did not take part in the first resurrection. It is at this point that it will be made known to all of creation that Jesus Christ is the righteous Judge from whom nothing is concealed (John 5: 22, 26-27).

The concluding sentence of the ninth Article of Faith provides an outlook into God's future creation, where it says, “Then God will create a new heaven and a new earth and dwell with His people.” Among other things, Revelation chapters 21 and 22 refer to the new creation. This is the domain of the perfect presence of God. When it says that God will dwell with His people, this refers to a completely new existence with God, namely the “life everlasting” that is mentioned at the end of the third Article of Faith.

I know there is a lot we covered here. But now is a great time to dig into this and explore the incredible future the Lord has promised for those who love Him and are prepared for His return!

Join us next week, where we’ll look at the tenth Article of Faith.

Session 3 – The Creed: Worldly Authorities

Welcome to our last small group session for June and the conclusion of our study on our Creed. We hope that you’ve not only enjoyed this study, but that over the past few months, you have grown in your understanding of the main tenets of our faith.

The tenth article stands out from the preceding nine. The articles that we’ve studied so far have focused on God’s creatorship, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the church, the Church’s ministries, the sacraments, and in our last session, our future. The tenth article completes our Creed by teaching how our faith deals with the Christian’s relationship to the government.

The tenth article reads: **I believe that I am obliged to obey the worldly authorities provided no godly laws are thereby transgressed.**

It’s clear from this article that Christian life does not occur outside the framework of civic and societal reality. It demonstrates that the Christian faith has a generally positive relationship to the government, the “worldly authorities.” As followers of Jesus Christ, Christians are first citizens of the kingdom of God. We should always keep in mind that our citizenship is in heaven, and while we live on earth today, we are to magnify and glorify our Lord in all we do. This includes obeying the natural authorities.

The relationship between the Christian church and the political authorities was already highlighted in the New Testament. In Matthew 22, Jesus is being questioned by the Pharisees, who are seeking to entangle and embarrass Him. They ask the Lord, *Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?* (v.17). This was a challenging question because the Jewish people believed that paying any tax to a pagan ruler went against God's lordship over His people. After identifying that the image on the coin was Caesar's, Jesus ends His response with, *Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's* (v.21). Jesus wasn't in the midst of setting up a new political kingdom that would oppose the Roman empire, so paying taxes and obeying civil laws was something the Jewish people were expected to do. He was teaching His followers to accept the government that was allowed by God, be obedient to its rules, and give it the proper respect.

Paul connects with this response from Jesus when he wrote the following in Romans 13:6-7, *For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.* Just as Jesus taught, Paul is encouraging the new Christian believers to fulfill their duty by paying the taxes imposed by the Roman authorities. Those who find themselves in authoritative roles naturally are always subject to God, who has authority over all things. It is because we honor God and recognize that He is always in control that we willingly submit to the civil authorities of our time. God has allowed the creation of civil governments and laws because without them, there would be anarchy and evil would run rampant. Believers are to obey their leaders even if they personally disagree with them because God has allowed them to govern with their free will and imperfection for a time. Remember, when we respect the worldly authorities, we are honoring God.

The apostles, in experiences recorded for us in the book of Acts, show us how to stand up for godly laws when authorities attempt to prevent us from fulfilling what God has called us to do. For example, prior to His ascension, Jesus told His apostles that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. And that's what Peter and John were doing in Acts 4 and 5, and as a result, they found themselves arrested, on trial, and ordered not to teach in the name of Jesus. We can read their response to the religious authorities in Acts 5:29, *But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."* When any authority forbids what God has commanded or commands what God has forbidden, a Christian must obey the Author of all authority, who is God Himself. As the apostles experienced, we may be punished for fulfilling the commands of God, but let us do so with a joyful heart, knowing that we are doing what God has called us to do.

Peter also adds to this teaching in his first letter to the believers. He encourages them to demonstrate obedient and respectful behavior toward the government in order to silence the unreasonable slander of unbelievers. Peter writes, *For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves* (1 Peter 2:15-16 NIV). For sure, our relationship with Jesus Christ sets us free, but that freedom doesn't give us a license to sin. Our freedom in Christ must be used wisely. Let us use our freedom to engage in all things that are good, including respect and reverence for the laws of our land, so that we can be an example to our neighbors, silence our opponents, and magnify our Lord. We are to live as *God's slaves*. Not slaves of oppression, but slaves to the love of God, using the freedom He has given us to love Him above all things and our neighbor as ourselves.

While it may not always make us happy, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we should resolve ourselves to respect the laws of our country, our states, counties, and our towns. It is our responsibility to obey the law of the land unless it is against the will of God. Always keep in mind that our God is over and above all earthly authorities, and in respecting them, we honor Him. We are citizens of God's kingdom already today, and we demonstrate that by honoring all people, loving our fellow Christians, fearing God, and respecting authorities (ref. 1 Peter 2:17).