

**God the Son: His Ascension and Present Activity<sup>i</sup>**  
**Colossians 1:15-20**  
**Week 8**

**Opening**

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot.

*God of ages, you have called us to this place at this time with these people to look more closely at ancient words of faith. As we encounter this creed, send your Holy Spirit to guide our discussions. Give us a humble eagerness and imaginative thoughtfulness that our eyes might be opened anew to the power of the faith we profess. We pray in the name of the One whose resurrection we celebrate this Eastertide, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

It may be a good practice to recite the Creed together each week as we are taking a closer look at each line. This week, we'll discuss the line **"I believe... he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead."**

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only 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 on 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 holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.*

**Check-in question**

Christians think a lot about what Jesus has done (dying and rising for us) and what he will do (return in glory). Why do we spend less time considering what Jesus is doing now in his ascended position at the Father's right hand?

Do you feel that Jesus is more involved in some areas of your life than other areas? What are the areas you feel he is less involved in, and why?

### **Jesus Christ's Ascension**

Jesus came to earth from heaven in great humility; he returned to heaven in triumph and glory, having accomplished all that was necessary for salvation. Yet in no way does the ascension of Christ mean that he is now absent from his world. Through the resurrection, Christ broke down the barriers of time and space, allowing himself to be available to all. The ascended Christ lives in believers through the Holy Spirit. We must not allow the limitations of our reason and imagination to impose restrictions on what the risen and exalted Christ can do.

The doctrine of the ascension assures us that Christ has been exalted and glorified, and that his power and glory can be revealed and reflected in our lives. The creed states that Jesus now sits at the right hand of God. This suggests special favor and status, and it suggests that Jesus has the Father's ear.

Thinking about the ascension helps us recall that our destiny does not lie on this earth but with the ascended Christ, who has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us. He is waiting for us now. This gives us a new perspective on the chores of everyday life. It sets before us a vision that keeps us going. It is like an oasis in the desert – vital refreshment in the heat of life.

### **Christ's Judgment**

Many people find the idea of judgment deeply threatening. Three points may be helpful. First, *we are judged by someone who knows us totally*. We need not fear a superficial judgment based on inadequate knowledge of us and our situation. We can be honest about ourselves with God in a way that is impossible with other people. Second, *we are judged by someone who is passionately committed to us*. The cross reveals God's love for us as well as his judgment on us. Jesus himself was condemned by biased judges, hostile crowds, and an indifferent public prosecutor; we, on the other hand, will be judged by one who cares deeply for us and is sympathetic toward us. Third, *we are judged by someone we know and trust*. We are already judged by our attitudes toward Jesus. Thus we are not judged on the basis of something unknown but on the basis of our response to Jesus Christ. We have already been judged and know the outcome of that judgment; what remains is the confirmation and enactment of that judgment. Only God can save – yet, on account of his divinity, Jesus saves. In the same way, only God can judge us – yet, on account of his divinity, Jesus judges us.

### **Read Colossians 1:15-20**

## Initial Reactions

1. What from these passages confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? What questions or curiosities do you have about this passage?
2. What does this story tell us about God? What does this story tell us about humanity?
3. Were there any images, stories or insights that stuck out to you from Sunday's sermon?

## Going Deeper

4. How many times does the word *all* occur in this passage? What do the various uses of *all* say to you about Christ?
5. The creed states that Jesus "will come again to judge the quick and the dead." Based on what you read in Colossians 1:15-20, what qualifies Jesus to judge humanity?
6. What thoughts and feelings come to you when you think about the fact that Christ will return?
7. What is Christ's relationship with the church – that is, those who believe in him (v.18)?

## So What Questions

8. We may sometimes feel that the world or even our own lives are falling apart. What difference does it make to know that in Christ "all things hold together" (v.17)?
9. How will this study affect you the next time you worship, whether publicly or privately?
10. Where would you like to deepen your understanding of the beliefs expressed in the creed?

## Heidelberg Catechism Question

Each week, a question from the Heidelberg Catechism will be included with this study guide. The hope is that COB folks would take time to reflect on this question during the week as it gives more framework for the Creed as we study together.

*Question 49.*

*How does Christ's ascension to heaven benefit us?*

*Answer:*

*First, he is our advocate in heaven in the presence of his Father. Second, we have our own flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that Christ our head will also take us, his members, up to himself. Third, he sends his Spirit to us on earth as a corresponding pledge. By the Spirit's power we seek not earthly things but the things above, where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand.*

## Now or Later

- Study Jesus' words about judgment in John 5:19-30
- The creed states that Jesus "is seated at the right hand of the Father." Study the scriptural basis for this statement:
  - o Psalm 110:1 quoted by Jesus in Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44; quoted by Peter in Acts 2:33-36; and quoted by the write of Hebrews in Hebrews 1:13

- Matthew 26:63-66 and Mark 14:61-64, where Jesus applies Psalm 110:1 to himself, sealing the charge of blasphemy
- Ephesians 1:18-23

### **Closing**

Check in if you haven't already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary. Close with prayer.

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<sup>i</sup> McGrath, Allister. *Life Guide Bible Studies: Apostles' Creed*. Intersity Press, 2016.