

The Formula of Concord

Lesson Eight

On Christ's Descent into Hell

Introduction

[Jesus] "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven." (The Apostles' Creed)

[Jesus] "suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven." (The Athanasian Creed)

1. Take one minute to ponder (or write down) what goes through your mind when you confess the truth that Jesus descended into hell.

There has been some dispute regarding this article: when and in what manner the Lord Christ descended into hell, according to our simple Christian creed, and whether it took place before or after his death. Also, whether he descended only in his soul, or only in his deity, or with body and soul, bodily and spiritually. Also, whether this article of faith belongs to the suffering of Christ or to his glorious victory and triumph. (Epitome IX:1)

Historical Background

Non-Lutheran _____

- Some taught that Christ's descent into hell was by _____ only
- Some Reformed taught that the descent into hell was a _____ expression designating Christ's intense suffering
- Calvin interpreted it as Christ's suffering for sins _____ his death

Johannes Aepinus

Lutheran _____

- Taught that Jesus descended into hell to _____ for our sins
- Taught that while Jesus' body was in the grave, his _____ went to hell

Search the Scriptures

1 Peter 3:18,19 because Christ also suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in flesh but was made alive in spirit, 19 in which he also went and made an announcement to the spirits in prison.

1. True or False. Christ's descent into hell was part of his suffering.
2. How does John 19:30 support that answer?
3. True or False. Christ went to hell to give those people one last chance to come to faith.
4. How do these passages support that answer? (Hebrews 9:27; Luke 16:19-26)
5. True or False. Christ descended into hell in a state of exaltation. (1 Peter 3:18,19; Colossians 2:15)

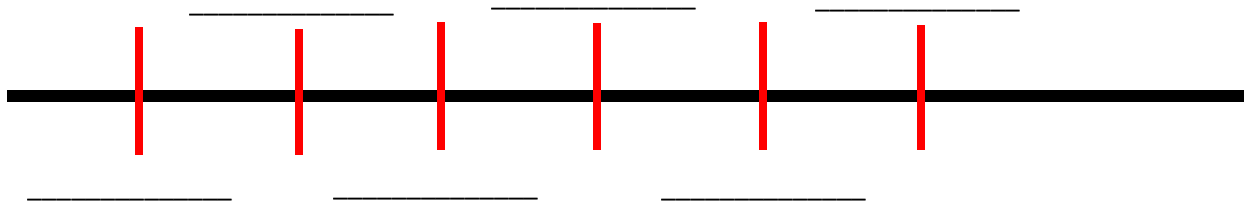
1 Peter 3:18-20 because Christ also suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in flesh but was made alive in spirit, 19 in which he also went and made an announcement to the spirits in prison. These spirits disobeyed long ago, when God's patience was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

Colossians 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

6. True or False. Christ descended to announce his triumph.
7. What light does this passage shed on this whole topic? (Luke 24:36)
8. Consider all the passages we have looked at. What do they leave unsaid about Christ's descent into hell?

Apostles' Creed

9. In the Apostles' Creed we confess that Jesus died, was buried, descended into hell, and then rose again from the dead. If Jesus "descended into hell" before he "rose from the dead," how can we say that he descended into hell with his new, glorified, resurrected body?



“A Timeline”

We believe simply that the entire person, God and human being, descended to hell after his burial, conquered the devil, destroyed the power of hell, and took from the devil all his power. (SD IX:2)

Application

This article, as is true of the previous article, cannot be comprehended by reason or understanding, but must be grasped alone by faith. (Epitome IX:2)

It is enough that we know that Christ descended into hell and destroyed hell for all believers and that he redeemed them from the power of death, the devil, and the eternal damnation of hellish retribution. How that happened we should save for the next world, where not only this matter but many others, which here we have simply believed and cannot comprehend with our blind reason, will be revealed. (Epitome IX:4)

1. This is easier said than done. Why do we feel like we need to know everything?

This article can only be believed; we can only hold to the Word. Thus, we retain the heart of this article and derive comfort from it, so that 'neither hell nor the devil can capture or harm us' and all who believe in Christ. (SD IX:3)

2. According to this quotation, what comfort does God offer to you in the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell?

3. In modern society, why is what the Bible teaches about Christ's descent into hell so important?

4. Article IX defends the teaching of Jesus' descent into hell. How does this article preserve and protect the gospel and the teaching of God's grace?

Summary

Scripture teaches, and this article defends, the truth that...

- Christ descended into hell _____ and _____.
- He descended as a triumphant _____, not to complete _____.
- Jesus _____! Satan _____! All those who are connected to Jesus by faith _____!

During the Week

Read Article X of the Formula of Concord, Epitome.

X. OF CHURCH RITES

Which Are [Commonly] Called Adiaphora or Matters of Indifference.

1] Concerning ceremonies or church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word, but have been introduced into the Church for the sake of good order and propriety, a dissension has also occurred among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession.

STATUS CONTROVERSIAE.

Chief Controversy concerning This Article.

2] The chief question, however, has been, whether, in time of persecution and in case of confession, even if the enemies of the Gospel have not reached an agreement with us in doctrine, some abrogated ceremonies, which in themselves are matters of indifference and are neither commanded nor forbidden by God, may nevertheless, upon the pressure and demand of the adversaries, be reestablished without violence to conscience, and we may thus [rightly] have conformity with them in such ceremonies and adiaphora. To this the one side has said Yea, the other, Nay.

AFFIRMATIVA.

The Correct and True Doctrine and Confession concerning This Article.

3] 1. For settling also this controversy we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that the ceremonies or church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word, but have been instituted alone for the sake of propriety and good order, are in and of themselves no divine worship, nor even a part of it. Matt. 15, 9: *In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

4] 2. We believe, teach, and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has the power, according to its circumstances, to change such ceremonies in such manner as may be most useful and edifying to the congregation of God.

5] 3. Nevertheless, that herein all frivolity and offense should be avoided, and special care should be taken to exercise forbearance towards the weak in faith. 1 Cor. 8, 9; Rom. 14, 13.

6] 4. We believe, teach, and confess that in time of persecution, when a plain [and steadfast] confession is required of us, we should not yield to the enemies in regard to such adiaphora, as the apostle has written Gal. 5, 1: *Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage.* Also 2 Cor. 6, 14: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, etc. For what concord hath light with darkness?* Also Gal. 2, 5: *To whom we gave place, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might remain with you.* For in such a case it is no longer a question concerning

adiaphora, but concerning the truth of the Gospel, concerning [preserving] Christian liberty, and concerning sanctioning open idolatry, as also concerning the prevention of offense to the weak in the faith [how care should be taken lest idolatry be openly sanctioned and the weak in faith be offended]; in which we have nothing to concede, but should plainly confess and suffer on that account what God sends, and what He allows the enemies of His Word to inflict upon us.

7] 5. We believe, teach, and confess also that no Church should condemn another because one has less or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other, if otherwise there is agreement among them in doctrine and all its articles, as also in the right use of the holy Sacraments, according to the well-known saying: *Dissonantia ieiunii non dissolvit consonantiam fidei*, Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in faith.

NEGATIVA.

False Doctrine concerning This Article.

8] Accordingly, we reject and condemn as wrong and contrary to God's Word when it is taught:

9] 1. That human ordinances and institutions in the church should be regarded as in themselves a divine worship or part of it.

10] 2. When such ceremonies, ordinances, and institutions are violently forced upon the congregation of God as necessary, contrary to its Christian liberty which it has in external things.

11] 3. Also, that in time of persecution and public confession [when a clear confession is required] we may yield to the enemies of the Gospel in such adiaphora and ceremonies, or may come to an agreement with them (which causes injury to the truth).

12] 4. Also, when these external ceremonies and adiaphora are abrogated in such a manner as though it were not free to the congregation of God to employ one or more [this or that] in Christian liberty, according to its circumstances, as may be most useful at any time to the Church [for edification].