

Continuation of *The Beginning, the Middle, and the Last Things*:

Raised to new life with Christ, the believer looks forward to being raised on the Last Day from the dust of the earth (p.455). Isaiah 26:19, Ezekiel 37:11,6,12. This is the ground of our hope. Not, dying and going to heaven. When the emphasis in my life is on being a baptized child of God, along with my fellow baptized, since it is not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18 and the outstretched arms of the Body of Christ), then though I look forward to rest in heaven, I look forward all the more to being raised with the Church to the life and work we will have in the New Creation, as we live in a perfectly restored relationship with our Creator.

By Baptism we have been freed from exile in a way that the Old Israel never was. We are a new creation in Christ for telling of God's love in Christ, His mercy and His justice, for being good stewards of God's creation, and for being a helpmeet to one another. Raised with Christ, we walk with Him in relationship, used by Him to bring His redemption to the nations. This is an "out look," not a "gazing up" into heaven. It is not a wish to escape this mess either by dying and going to heaven or by being raptured. It is an outlook that believes God will not trash His creation on the Last Day but will restore it. It interprets 2Peter 3:10-13 in the light of Romans 8:21. It believes that the liberation of the creation for glorious freedom

"cannot have a double meaning: blessed eternal glory for the children of God, annihilation for the creation. To call the latter a liberation is an odd use of language. It has been well said that not the cosmos itself will pass away but only the form of this present world (1Cor.7:31). The fire mentioned in 2Peter 3 must be the fire of purification. The new heavens and new earth are not new in the sense of never having existed before, but in contrast with the old, different from what heaven and earth formerly were. Rev. 21 states that the present separation of the Holy City from the earth shall end in a union of both. God's plans are never defeated. He does not replace but restore." (Lenski, p.538)

This enables us to not seek some theology that promises us an escape from the mess that is this world. No more do we need to escape or retreat or use the excuse that the world is too far gone and there's nothing we can do. The promise of the resurrection of the body and the restoring of the creation on the Last Day enables a return to the clear words of Paul. We don't need to escape. We can "stand firm,

knowing that our labor” for the proclamation of the Gospel, the extending of mercy, the resistance of evil, the standing up for justice in this world “is not in vain,” not merely toil (1Cor.15:58), even if we suffer for it (2Cor.4, 2Cor. 12, Phil.3 – in these passages Paul speaks of his suffering for proclaiming and teaching the Gospel – see especially 2Corinthians 4:7-12, 2Corinthians 12:7-10, and Philippians 3:10-11).

All of this world’s history is moving toward the day when God’s will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. This serves as a word of caution to Christians. We should not get too attached to this world. This may be what Paul is talking about in 1Corinthians 7:29-31. Earlier in the chapter he advises against marriage but directs husbands and wives to fulfill their marital duties. Here in these verses where he *appears* to contradict himself, Paul may well have been addressing the famine and hardship that were occurring in that part of the world at that time. In that present distress, it was better not to be engaged in domestic projects. But behind that present distress, Paul saw the larger truth. The present world, with all of its natural life including marriage and reproduction, was due to be replaced by the new creation. Christians should be careful not to live as though they were attached to this world. This same promise of the new creation also “fosters a defiance (“defiant hope”) of evil and the assurance that the people of God can move through life on the solid ground of the love Christ revealed on the cross.” (Kolb, p.459)

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.” (Phil.3:20-21)

So far in our study of the last things we have established the following:

1. We cannot begin to study and understand the last things until we see how they are connected to the creation of the world in the beginning.
2. We cannot begin to to study and understand the last things until we see how they are connected to Jesus’ death and resurrection.
3. Creation/new creation and exile/return are recurring themes and events in the Bible. These two themes help us understand the last things.

The Last Things, Part II: The Solid Ground of Our Hope

In this part of the study, we will cover the following topics:

- Death and immortality
- The state of the soul between death and resurrection and purgatory
- The Second Coming of Jesus, the tribulation, and the rapture
- The resurrection of the dead
- The final judgment
- The end of the world
- Eternal damnation
- Eternal life

1. Death and Immortality

What one hears and reads at funerals these days reveal a misunderstanding of death and immortality. Poems written from the point of view of the deceased urge us not to weep. He or she is not dead. Death is nothing at all, or perhaps it is a friend or even a victory. Or you overhear someone saying near the casket, "That's not really him. It's just his body. He's really in heaven." At the same casket a child comments, "Grandpa is sleeping." Which one of them has the more Biblical view of death and immortality? What do the following passages say about death being nothing at all? Matthew 27:50, John 19:30, 1Corinthians 15:26. Was separation of body and soul God's original intent? Genesis 2:17, 3:17-19, Romans 5:12, 6:23. Is the soul the good, immortal part of man? 1Timothy 6:16. Then, what does Matthew 10:28 mean? What do John 5:24 and 28 mean? What do these passages say about death as a victory? 1Corinthians 15:51-54, John 6:39, John 11:24.

2. The State of the Soul between Death and Resurrection and Purgatory

“Holy Writ reveals but little of the state of the souls between death and the resurrection. In speaking of the last things, it directs our gaze primarily to Judgment Day and the events clustering around it.” (Francis Pieper, Pieper’s Dogmatics) What do the following passages tell us about the state of the soul between death and the resurrection? Daniel 12:2, Matthew 9:24, John 11:11, Philippians 1:21,23, 1Thessalonians 4:13, Hebrews 4:11, 1Peter 3:19-20, Revelation 14:13.

Do the following passages actually speak of heaven? John 14:1-3, Galatians 4:26, Philippians 3:20-21, Colossians 3:1-2.