

# **Firm Foundation**

## **The Doctrine of Eschatology**

### **Prolog**

Eschatology, the study of last things, is a major preoccupation among many Christians. It is imperative that we be able to respond to people who are asking questions concerning this particular doctrine. The need for clear thinking on this issue, however, is not founded alone in our responsibility to the Christian who is simply searching for answers. The need for clear thinking is rooted more firmly in the close relationship of justification by faith and eschatology. Luther points out that "Justification by faith without the eschatological dimension is subjectivistic and individualistic self-hypnosis." George Forell has rightly said that ". . . eschatology becomes utopianism when it is not informed by justification by faith. And justification by faith apart from eschatology becomes a dry, rationalistic abstraction."

In its proper perspective, then, eschatology is part of everything that is taught in the Christian Church. The study of last things, however, is not a simple task. It is not simple because of the number and nature of the subjects that are listed under this category. Included in this doctrine are the topics of death, resurrection, judgment, eternal life, eternal damnation, and the kingdom of God.

In an effort to maintain order in this study the topics listed will be studied in the following order:

- 1 Temporal Death
- 2 The State of the Souls Between Temporal Death  
and the Resurrection
- 3 The Second Advent of Christ  
and Millennialism
- 4 The Resurrection of the Dead
- 5 The Final Judgment
- 6 The End of the World
- 7 Eternal Damnation
- 8 Eternal Life

Evangelism includes the discussion of sin and God's solution to sin. The most critical discussion in this study which impacts our success in evangelism is the discussion of Temporal and Eternal death. For one to embrace as fully as possible the Gospel of Christ one must embrace the cause of sin and death.

The most extensive discussion in this study will involve the third chapter regarding the millennium and its various understandings, the only basis for an intelligent discussion regarding this subject, and the historical/confessional perspective of the same.

## **1**

### **Temporal Death**

Its Nature: What is the nature of physical death according to Scripture? Luke 12:20

*A separation of body and soul but not annihilation.*

Matthew 27:50 and John 19:30 Christ's death was a separation of body and it was a real death as learned in the study of Christ.

What is its cause? Death is not due to the constitution of human nature. The Old and New Testament both know of no cause of death but sin (Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17; Rom 5:12). The idea that death prevailed prior to the fall and sin and is not seen as judgment has no biblical basis but rather an evolutionary basis rejecting the authority of the Word.

What should be said of those who attribute death to the nature of man instead of the guilt of sin?

a) They have not begun to understand an ever present, all important fact of sin's judgment and man's personal accountability for sin and are lacking in spiritual knowledge.

b) Not understanding sin, death, and decay, such people cannot grasp the meaning of the death of Christ which is the propitiation of sin for all mankind.

The Subject of Death: Who is effected? All people because sin, the cause of death, is found in all men (Rom 5:12). So how is it that people ignore this fact? (2 Tim 3:1-5)

What must first be confronted if immortality is to be had? The cause and that means Gen 1.

There is a question that is frequently asked at this point: "Why Christians, though they have remission of sins, still must die?" The fact of death has been used to attempt to prove that death cannot be the result of sin. But Scripture addresses the death of the Christian with two points:

a) Rom. 8:10; temporal death is a judgment that even the Christian must suffer unless he is alive at the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

b) The dying of Christians is not death in the full sense because it does not include what? (Rev. 20:14) the second death. In fact, the opposite is the case. In addition, the Christian is delivered from the thing that makes death terrible just as the Book of Concord says in the Tappert ed, p. 206, line 153.

## 2

### The State of Souls Between Death and Resurrection

Holy Scripture says very little of the state of souls between death and the resurrection. In speaking of last things, it directs our attention primarily to Judgment Day and the events clustering around it. (1 Corinthians 1:7; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff.; 2 Timothy 4:7-9; Titus 2:13) But this does not address the state of the souls between death and the resurrection.

According to 1 Peter 3:19-20 what is the state of the souls of the unbelievers? They are kept in prison, a place of punishment.

What is the state of the soul of believers? We are told not only in general that they are in God's hands (Acts 7:59; Luke 23:46) but in particular that they dwell with Christ in Paradise (Phil. 1:23; Luke 23:43). These texts make it evident that departed souls of the believer are in a state of blessed enjoyment of God.

What of "Soul Sleep?" this is a theory which excludes a blessed enjoyment of God. The soul here, deteriorates with the body until the resurrection. This must be rejected simply on the basis of Phil 1:23

What of purgatory? This is a doctrine which consigns the souls of believers for the purpose of suffering temporal punishment still due. It is a pure invention of man. Why is that? Because by faith in Christ the believer, as Scripture teaches so clearly, possesses not purgatory but eternal life. This doctrine finds it's basis, not in justification by faith but rather by works. The Protestant Church has in some cases (Kahnis) supported the doctrine of purgatory on it's own terms, since many Christians still stand in need of a purgation. They are drawn to the cross but don't understand as much as others. Those who say this have lost sight of the total vicarious satisfaction of Christ. Paul would not escape under their judgment – Rom 7:23-24. ("O wretched man that I am.")

Finally, before leaving the subject of the souls departed, we record the following facts:

- 1) Departed souls do not return to this world. This is a standing rule of divine arrangement. (Luke 16:27-31)
- 2) There is no Scripture warrant for attributing to the souls of the departed a direct knowledge of particular things and happenings on earth. To invoke the departed is not only idolatry but foolishness.
- 3) Scripture offers no hope for the conversion of departed souls. Such wishful thinking rests entirely on human speculation. 1 Pet 3:18-19 is a preaching of judgment not a preaching of Gospel for the sake of salvation.

### 3

## The Second Advent of Christ

What does Matthew 25:31 teach regarding Jesus' second coming? Christ will return in divine majesty surrounded by the host of angels, visually. "It will be the office of angels not merely to accompany Christ and by registering the trumpet to manifest His second coming – but also to gather all men from all parts of the universe, where ever they may be, not only the risen dead but the surprised living." Matthew 24:21 and they will be surprised as the pre-flood population was surprised at the rising waters.

Acts 1:9,11 This will occur in the sight of all men.

Matthew 24:27,30 and Luke 17:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; Matthew 24:44; What do

these passages add to the discussion? It will not take forty days and nights. Unlike the flood, this next time will be instant, quickly, unusually.

Matthew 25:32 \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 9:26,28 \_\_\_\_\_

Luther remarks: "He will then not be bedded in the manger, nor ride on an ass, as He did in His first advent, but

burst forth from the clouds in great power and glory."

This return is to be maintained as a positive fact against both the direct denial of it by the scoffers who say: "When is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter 3:3-4) and the forgetfulness of the Christians who, according to their flesh, are very apt to fail to remember the return of Christ. (Mark 13:37 and Matthew 24 and 25.)

What does Matthew 24:36 say about this second advent? \_\_\_\_\_

Does this stop men from trying? \_\_\_\_\_ What does that show us concerning the 'saint

and sinner' understanding of man? *This shows us how deeply imbedded forbidden curiosity is rooted in the flesh of Christians.*

### **The Signs Revealed in Scripture of the End Times**

The following remarks are recorded by Luther.

The signs are abnormal conditions or disturbances (a) *the social world, hostility among nations, wars, pestilence, famine and persecution of the church (add the breakdown of the family and authority)*

(b) *realm of nature- earthquakes – stellar explosions. Having said this, Steven Austin, creation geologist, stated in a lecture in May of 2003 that the frequency of earthquakes is decreasing and not increasing as Hal Lindsey says in his sky is falling theology of fear. Frequency of earthquakes is not the issue, rather, the fact of earthquakes. And as Dr. Jeff Gibbs says concerning nature or any other issue we don't understand, "when in doubt, repent."*

(c) *Particularly in the church, false teachers, falling away from the Gospel, causes apostasy from Christ through talk. Christ warns of such in Rev. 1-3.*

Consider what happened at Christ's death: *disciples ran, earthquakes occurred, the Sun was covered, the saints rose from the dead, but the community cursed Christ.*

What happens at our own death? *One biologist, Gary Parker, recently described death as the victory of chemistry over biology. In other words, death is a breakdown of systems, the foreshadowing of which we receive our entire life.*

Luther states it as follows: "Heaven and earth will creak and crack like an old house ready to crash and collapse and act in every way as though they divined that the world is soon to an end and that The Day is close at hand."

What is the cause of man's failure to recognize the abnormalities as signs of the approaching

advent of Christ? *This is caused by the "astounding stupor" dulling our eyes, ears, minds, and heart since the Fall. "We are living in more than Egyptian Darkness."*

When we recognize through the Revealed Word what God had in mind for mankind, we can begin to identify

some of the conflicts and incongruities caused by sin which undermines any and all relationships in creation. Let's identify some of those conflicts which are "normal."

- 1) Since people were created for mutual love and service it is a horrible abnormality that interests clash – and in fact wage bloody war.
- 2) Man is to replenish the earth and earth is to nourish and support man, yet there are epidemics and famines.
- 3) the world hates Christ and His body, the Church, which is to save mankind from damnation.

How, according to Christ, are we to regard these events? As signs of the eminent collapse of the world.

Another sign is recorded in Matthew 24:5. What is it and why? The rise of false teachers. The most important message to be delivered is the vicarious satisfaction of Christ without detracting or adding to it. Yet, denial in many forms of the vicarious satisfaction exists among Christians.

In Matthew 24:42 what is Christ connecting to the end of the world? We don't know when the end is to come and we are to watch. Liturgically we reminded of this at Advent.

To what extent have these signs been fulfilled? The old dogmaticians tell us to speak guardedly on this point but we must say that the greater part of these are fulfilled. The signs are designed to purposely in order to make an exact time of Christ's return impossible. In the days of the Apostle's it could be said that the signs were fulfilled, even the preaching of the word. Dr. Jeff Gibbs tells us that "there are no signs." By this he means that all of the signs have been fulfilled and yet not the end. The fact is, Jesus is going to return and we don't know when but, as Luther says, "The old house is creaking." Refer to Steve Austin on Page 5 at the top concerning earthquakes.

Matthew 24:42 also makes another point regarding the second coming of Christ. What is that?

Watch because you don't even know the day of His return, neither the day of your death.

What is God accomplishing through this purposeful ambiguity? We have issues to deal with such as trust, faith, fear. It's a law/gospel thing.

### **Fictitious Signs of Judgment Day**

The first of these is the millenarian kingdom, still lying in the future, in which Christ, together with His Christians, particularly the risen martyrs, is to rule visibly here on earth. The idea of such a kingdom of Christ on earth took root very early in the Christian Church and was given the name chiliasm and is more commonly known today as millennialism. There are many varieties of millennialism today. We will define only three views which seem to, in a very wide sense, identify the basic issues.

a) Very Extreme: both spiritual and physical- physical pleasures, earned delights, in the future millennial kingdom.

b) Extreme: a future "golden-age" and era of peace for the church on earth in which the church, after a universal conversion of the Jews and the fall of the anti-Christ, will reign over the world for a thousand years

and control all secular affairs. This teaches two visible returns of Christ and two resurrections of man (if you died before his first visible return.)

c) Subtle: eliminates two returns and two resurrections and simply "hopes for a better time."

Individual teachers of millennialism manifest various differences even in the fundamental ideas.

Now that the term has been defined we can break it down even further. There are different categories to be assigned for the above definitions.

1) Premillennialism: Christ will return before the establishment of the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth.

2) Postmillennialism: Christ will return after the establishment of the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth.

3) Amillennialism: no concept of a millennial reign of Christ on earth.

These ideas, except for a proper understanding of amillennialism, have no basis in Scripture, for Scripture itself explains that passages to which millennialism appeals as speaking of the spiritual glory of the New Testament Church, which dawned with the coming of Christ into the flesh and the preaching of the Gospel in the world. Much of the remainder of this chapter will be involved in studying the following passages: Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:6-9; Zechariah 9:9-10; Joel 2:23ff.; 3:18ff.; Micah 4:1-4; and especially Revelation 20.

Before that task is taken-up let us re-establish the proper use of Scripture. The question to be answered is what is the purpose of Scripture and how is it to be approached? (Notice the correlation to the Great Commission.)

1) It is a revelation of God for our salvation (Luke 16:27-29; 31; 2 Tim 3:16)

2) It is the means of God to create and preserve in us a saving faith (Luke 16:31)

3) It is instruction to a God-pleasing way of life (Ps 119:9, 105)

It would be a terrible mistake to use God's Word without remembering why He gave it to us. In fact, many fail to use the Bible properly, either mistakenly or knowingly, and, as a result, they miss the main teaching of Scripture, namely, to make us wise unto salvation.

In addition to this three-fold purpose of Scripture, a few points should be added concerning interpretation for the sake of those who are not acquainted with Revelation.

1) The first thing to be established about any Bible passage is what it meant to the original readers- to see it in light of their contemporary history and culture.

2) The book of Revelation belongs to a particular type of literature namely apocalyptic. It is poetic and visionary, expressing meaning through symbols and images. To take this picture language literalistically or to treat the book as a logical treatise or timetable may go against the very character of the apocalyptic genre.

3) Always remember that Scripture interprets Scripture. In other words, difficult and hard to understand passages are always understood in light of the clear word of Scripture. It is never the other way around.

These points will be restated as appropriate in the course of this study.

Let us begin by looking up Isaiah 2:2-3. What is it saying? *This clearly teaches that all nations will come to Mt. Zion – the prophecy runs through the entire Old Testament.*

Hebrews 12:22: *This is a New Testament concept as well.*

When reading verse 4 of Isaiah 2 what do we learn to be the nature of life on Mount

Zion? *An abundance of peace will reign. The same promise is made (rejoicing and peace in the nations) in Is 9:5 although in different words. Is. 11:6-9; Zech 9:10; Micah 4:1-14 repeats Is. 2:2. The millennialist admonishes us rightfully so, to accept these statements as to the great peace ruling Zion to be “full, and actual value.” This peace is real.*

We must not forget the rest of Scripture. What did the angels proclaim at the birth of Christ?

What does Jesus say in John 14:27?

John 16:33

What does Paul call the Gospel? (Ephesians 6:15; Philippians 4:7)

In other words, what these Old Testament texts prophesy of a future peace in the world is realized in its "full, actual value" not in a still future millennium, but in the appearance of the Son of God in the flesh, in the reconciliation of the world to God, in the proclamation of this news in the world, and in the sending of the Holy Spirit, who through this message works faith in people's hearts, thus creating children of peace in the whole world and among all nations. **By faith in the Gospel the Christian Church on earth possesses a peerless state of peace.** We are partakers of the eschatological banquet with all of the trimmings (that is peace, assurance, comfort, joy, etc.) even as we live in faith.

Look up Matthew 10:34. What does this mean? *There is not going to be a worldly or external peace of the nature that we have been discussing. This peace will be different in kind than that which the world has to offer or which we conceive.*

With what then are these Old Testament passages of peace connected? *Is 9:2-5; 11:6-9 The shoot of Jesse*

In addition to this what does the Old Testament teach regarding the nations coming to

Mount Zion? Hosea 1:10 *It is not a physical or local coming but through faith in Christ and His work on the cross, the gentile and the “remnant” of Israel come to Zion without leaving home.*

The Old Testament prophesy says that there will be an abundant spiritual knowledge in Zion (e.g., Isaiah 11:9; Joel 2:28ff.).

Where is the fulfillment of this to be found? Acts 2:16ff. The first Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

What is said of the raising up of the tabernacle of David and of the fruitfulness of the land of Canaan--so that seedtime and harvest occur simultaneously, the mountains drop sweet wine, and all the hills flow with milk (Amos 9:11f.; Joel 3:18ff.) is mentioned as being fulfilled in Acts 15:13ff.

James, at the council of the Apostles, declared it so by the entry of the Gentiles into the Christian Church.

What issue do these things address? They address a future millennium. All interpretations which pertain to a still future millennium instead of to the Christian Church of the New Testament and its consummation in eternity set aside the explicit exegesis of Scripture itself.

Turning to Revelation 20, we find that this passage, aside from all other points, cannot be used to prove a millennial reign of Christ on earth because the "reigning with Christ a thousand years" (vv. 4,6) takes place in heaven.

What does this passage (v. 4) say of the souls of believers? It reports that the souls of the believers rule with Christ in heaven. Just as surely as Christ rules the universe, the souls of the believers in heaven and on earth since the believers concur in all that Christ does. All this is accomplished in faith, 1 Cor 3:21ff. We are not only "priests" but we are also "kings" Rev. 1:6; 1 Pet 2:9.

Compare Psalm 2 with Revelation 2:26-27. Psalm 2 says only of Christ but Rev 2:26-27, Christ Himself ascribes to all that are His.:

It is true that the reign of believers over the world will become manifest only on Judgment Day.

But what of the meantime? The reigning of believers is a fact, though to all appearances, they are the oppressed, the dying, the slain. We are, as we live in faith in the Gospel, part of the eschatological banquet today and look forward to the final consummation of the bride and groom.

On the true meaning of the "binding of Satan for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:2), Scripture gives all needed information. It teaches that all mankind is in the power of Satan because of its burden of guilt. But Christ by His propitiatory death has put an end to this lordship of Satan. Read John 12:31; 16:11. How does Christ put it?

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When does the reign of Satan end in the individual? It ends and Satan is accordingly bound, the very moment that man is converted through faith in the Gospel, Christ's work offered as payment for our sin and accepted as such in the resurrection.

Scripture declares this to be the case. Read Acts 26:17ff. To the Colossians Paul writes that all who believe the

redemption through Christ's blood, even the forgiveness of sins, are delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Co. 1:13-14).

There are no other means of freeing men from the power of the devil than the preaching of the Gospel and faith in the Gospel. Such factors as science and education, recognition and world-wide influence of the Church since the days of Constantine, are in themselves no means of binding Satan. In fact, it was the harassed and persecuted Church which through its faith in the Gospel overcame Satan and the world.

Since it is certain that Satan is chained for believers only through faith in the Gospel, what must we say regarding the beginning of the "thousand years?"

This began when the Gospel began to be preached to mankind to convert it from darkness to light.

In Revelation 20 what is joined to the "thousand years?" "the little season."

What immediately follows this? General judgment of the world, 9-10. What is the

"little season?" This is when Satan is loosed – it cannot be computed exactly, any more than Doomsday. This season is characterized as a period of assault. Dr. Louis Brighton says these days will be terrible awful days.

On what is this assault? The Christian Church. There is no reference to secular wars. In general this is opposition to the doctrine of Justification. This is the foundational doctrine of the church.

Our general conviction is that we are now in the "little season." Why does that make sense?

Because of the wide spread opposition to the doctrine of justification.

What of Gog and Magog? These are the antithesis to the "Classic " approach of atonement – what makes up this camp? Not only R.C. but many Protestant churches as well as all those in the religious category of "law." In other words, it includes all who undermine the foundation of faith alone. The attempts to identify Gog and Magog as certain nations are folly. The predicate makes it clear who is meant by Gog and Magog, for it speaks of a battle against the Christian Church fought around the globe: "And they went up on the breadth of the earth and compassed the camp of the saints about" Rev. 20:9. Gog and Magog, therefore, are all powers in the whole world which are at war again the Christian faith that the incarnate Son of God by His substitutional satisfaction has reconciled God and men and that men are saved from hell for heaven solely by faith in the accomplished reconciliation.

What are the marks by which we recognize millennialism as being anti-Scriptural?

1) Millennialism teaches a two-fold visible return of Christ. 1) to establish a millennium 2) to judge the world. Heb 9:28

2) It teaches two resurrections of the Dead: 1) a resurrection of Martyrs and real pious type Christians; 2) after the millennial reign the second, not so pious Christians and others will be raised for Judgment. Look up John 6:40 (nothing wrong with piety but in the context of justification and judgment, finally Christ's piety is all that matters. Our piety brings Him glory, not us salvation and rapture.)

3) Millennialism perverts the Scripture teaching on Christian hope by centering on an earthly reign. So the question is what do the Millennialists focus upon? This old house, (world) That is second best because of sin.

death and decay. Acts 12:22 ff, this is reality. Rest and Reward follow only in heaven, Mat 5:3 etc. Paul also in Phil 3:20-21. We need to cling to the clear passages of Scripture.

What is the real harm and danger of premillennial theology? It misdirects the Christians hope. It turns the heart away from the invisible spiritual glory of the assurance of forgiveness and all the peace and comfort the issue from this truth and exchanges it with, not only second best and the mundane of this world, but even fear and no rest. John 14:27; John 16:33; Luke 17:21

Trailing thoughts: At this point the teacher may have some personal insights and applications that have not had to opportunity to be revealed. This may be an appropriate time to tie up some of those loose ends.

## 4

### The Resurrection of the Dead

*This is a doctrine that even the Christian Church is, at best, not emphasizing or pointing out well in classes, sermons, and funerals. De. Jeff Gibbs correctly points out that this needs attention in our systematic theology and practical applications.*

How does human reason deal with the resurrection of the dead?

1 Corinthians 15:35 it doubts it. Acts 17:32 it ridicules resurrection though it will embrace reincarnation in it's macro-evolutionary presuppositions. What does that tell us? That there is a realization of a spiritual world beyond the physical but refuse to embrace truth.

How important is it for the Christian to confess the resurrection of the dead? Scripture clearly teaches that the doctrine of the resurrection is basic to faith – in fact, without this doctrine and confession true faith in the Living God is impossible.

Whose work is this? 2 Corinthians 1:9; Romans 4:25 It is never the world of man. It is the work of the Triune God. The Son also ascribes this work to Himself as is seen in Christology on the basis of John 5:21

Who rises? John 5:28 All that are in the graves. Acts 24:15 the just and the unjust alike. All men, not only the believers, but also the unbelievers. This is denied by many because of John 5:25, but this is a call to believe the Gospel and it is resistible. Bottom line? All people will rise physically.

What rises? Whatever of man is “in the graves” The Greek word (αναστασις) denotes the raising again of what previously stood and had fallen. All will be identifiable. 1 Cor 15:51-52, Objection refer to Matthew 22:29.

What of the risen bodies of the faithful? 1 Cor 15:44, What a spiritual, glorified physical body is is only speculation. But we do know this, v. 42,43. All will be healed.

What of Christ's Wounds? They will remain in my humble opinion in that they are marks of grace and mercy to be celebrated

## 5

### The Final Judgment

To what is the visible return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead closely associated?

Judgment Mat 25:31

Who are the subjects of Judgments? All men, pious and wicked, 2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10 the dead and the living Acts 10:42; also the evil angels 2 Pet 2:4

What is going to be the basis for judgment? 2 Corinthians 5:10 “According to what has been done whether good or bad. Mt 25:35-40; 42-45. The righteous are judged of their good works because these works are proof of their faith in Christ.

What of the evil works of the believer? Micah 7:19; Matt 25:34-40; no evil works mentioned and aren't an issue because of the vicarious satisfaction of Jesus. What a comfort to know that He remembers our sin no more. However, we do have a memory and I believe at judgment day we (even the most pious among us) will have a picture of our nature and realize the contrast of our sin to His Holiness in one awful moment, then the bliss and the peace of seeing Jesus only and His glory and light will be ours forever.

## 6

### The End of the World

What does Luke 21:33 say regarding creation? All that which was created will pass away. It is temporal. The Word will not change neither will it pass away.

But while heaven and earth pass away and are changed, God will continue forever, and so will the words of Christ. (Luke 21:33)

How should this passing away be described? Should it be a total annihilation or is it simply a transformation. This is not an article of faith but consider the discussion of the way sin is dealt with in the sinner. The parallel is not insignificant. 2 Pet 3:10

Luther: "In short, whatever belongs to the nature of these temporal goods, whatever constitutes this transitory life, and activity, shall all cease."

## 7

### Eternal Damnation

In a measure the conscience of natural man still convinces him that damnation awaits men after this life because of their sins. This knowledge belongs to the sphere of the Law, and the Law is still active in natural man not only as a curb, but also as condemning judge (accuser).

Romans 2:15 As a result of this fact, belief in Hell or Hades is prevalent among the unbelievers

Holy Scripture teaches the truth of an eternal damnation so clearly and emphatically that one cannot deny it

without at the same time rejecting the authority of Scripture.

If we lay claim to the existence of heaven, what are we then compelled to do in order to maintain consistency?  
To be consistent we must acknowledge the existence of Hell.

Matthew 25:46; John 3:36: Scripture parallels the eternal salvation of the believer and the eternal damnation of the unbeliever. Whoever done must deny the other.

There are places in the Bible in which the term "eternity" is used in the sense of limited

duration. Exodus 12:14, 24; 21:6: Study in terms of context, usage and meaning must be engaged, however, this limited duration understanding of the term is inapplicable to this discussion.

We must, however, take the predicate "eternal" in its proper, or strict, sense, in the sense of forever, in all Scripture texts which use it to describe the duration of the penalties of the wicked in the 'life' to come.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 everlasting destruction Matthew 18:8 everlasting fire.

Mark 3:29 eternal damnation Matt 26:41 & 46

The Apology also understands it as such. Apology Article XVII, (p. 224)\_\_\_\_\_

Also see the Augsburg Confession Article XVII, (p. 38)\_\_\_\_\_

Are objections to this understandable? Indeed they are. The thought of a never ending agony of rational beings fully realizing their distressing plight, is so appalling that it exceeds comprehension.

What are these objections based upon? False principles according to human sentiments and judgments of God's essence, nature and activity.

What are some of the false objections? Some teach total annihilation, others teach there is no hell and that all will be saved apart from faith in Christ and other teach there is nothing after death.

One systematition wrote the following observation on this subject:

*By eternity of the punishments of hell, our old theologians understood an uninterrupted continuation of punishments in intensity as well as duration and an everlasting confinement of the damned in the eternally unchangeable place of torment . . . . The numerous criticisms of this ecclesiastical conception, however, induced more recent theologians to assume the possibility and probability of an improvement of the damned and with it an improvement of their state. They drop the absolute eternity of infernal punishments and either assume a conditional eternity, that is, if the damned would never reform, hence declare the punishments eternal only in the case of such as will never let the punishments improve them; or they regard them as only relatively eternal, that is, in this respect eternal, that the damned forever lag behind the perfection and blessedness of the pious, even though they reform and become happier, so that, because of their irremovable retardation in virtue and bliss, they always feel the eternity of their punishment.*

How are we, as believers, to respond to such objections and false concepts? We must maintain that God's essence, attributes and action exceed our comprehensions. 1 Tim 6:16; Rom 11:33-34, therefore we cannot know other than from God's Word what agrees and conflicts with God's essence, Attributes and Actions.

### THE NATURE OF ETERNAL DAMNATION

What is its nature? Matthew 25:41; 8:12: Eternal banishment from the presence of God or, in other words, in being forever excluded from communion with God. It is being forsaken as Christ was on the Cross

In an effort to better understand this, let us answer this question: For what is man

made? Communion with God, to walk with Him.

What is the nature of this? This is supreme joy and delight for man, Mat 17:4

What does removal from the face of God mean? This means it is the most unbearable suffering of body and soul.

Romans 2:9 tribulation and anguish Luke 16:23 being in torment

Luke 16:24 tormented in this flame

Mark 9:43-44 fire not quenched. Matthew 8:12; 13:50; etc.

To illustrate the terrible agony setting in with this banishment from the sight of God, the dogmatists point to the agony of a fish removed from its element. But there is a difference: the fish which is removed from its element soon dies, whereas the man who is banished from communion with God must by God's judgment live on "guilty of the eternal judgment" Mark 3:29.

A number of questions still need to be discussed. One of them is:

"Is hell-fire physical or hyper physical?" Many recommend the deferment of judgment and they prefer the immaterial interpretation. Scripture usually speaks of things of the future world as belonging to this life (i.e. heaven as a banquet). Therefore Hell-fire is most likely figurative for extreme agony. Isaiah 66:24 says this fire is non-consuming.

As a rule our old theologians concluded their presentation with the remark: "Is it wiser to be concerned about escaping this eternal fire by true repentance than to engage in an unprofitable argument as to the nature of this fire."

One thing is certain, hell contains no atheists, because the damned actually experience God as the righteous Judge.

Another question is "To what degree is this torment?" Matt 11:16-24, The severest punishment follows on the rejection of the Gospel by those to whom it had been preached in full measure.

Finally, "Is there a specific location for hell?" There is no scriptural proof for any specific location. "We search not where it is, but rather how we may flee it."

## THE CAUSE OF ETERNAL DAMNATION

John 3:36; Mark 16:16: If only faith saves then unbelief or not trusting God's promise in Christ condemns the sinner. Since Christ took care of the payment for sin, we only are called to trust that and lack of faith or trust is the cause of eternal damnation.

Ephesians 5:6 sin is simply the consequence of unbelief.

What is the purpose of the doctrine of eternal damnation? To warn against unbelief.

Matt 3:12, 2; 8:11-12; Mark 9:43ff; Matt 26:24; matt 24:48-51; Rom 2:5

What weakens the purpose of this doctrine? When we debate the doctrine of God, of man, of Christ and justification or deny them outright or substitute doctrines according to man. Honest questions are no problem as long as the one asking is willing to hear an honest answer.

What part of God's nature is revealed in this doctrine? The ultimate justice of God. Such retribution only overwhelms those who decline to cling to God's original will and grace and mercy demonstrated in Christ toward all men.

## 8

## Eternal Life

### THE FACT OF ETERNAL LIFE

We know that there is eternal life and that believers will come to behold God as He is and to

enjoy unspeakable bliss in soul and body. What is the only source of this knowledge?

The revealed Word, Scripture. And the Word made flesh. Who was born, lived, died and was raised again.

How do you think Paul dealt with Plato's immortality of the soul? Eph 2:12. They have no hope, it must not be mistaken for Christian doctrine. There are many ideas that can appear to be Christian and still not be Christo-centric.

The hope of eternal life can spring only from faith in the Gospel of Christ as its only source.

Think of some Bible passages to support this statement: John 3:16; Titus 3:7; John 6:40

### THE NATURE OF ETERNAL LIFE

What is it that causes heavenly bliss? 1 John 3:2 Seeing Christ face to face. Also the Transfiguration. Matt 17:1-8 Peter looked up and saw Jesus alone, his fear was gone.

1 Corinthians 13:8-12: To what is the Christian's knowledge of God through God's

Word in this life compared? Future knowledge

What will that knowledge be? Perfect, v.12. This excludes every possibility of defection from God.

We will see God but will we see each other? Matthew 17:3-4 We will see and recognize all the company of believers.

Will the blessed see the damned? This must be left unanswered, but if so the bliss will not be diminished.

Some Particulars . . .

There are two sides to eternal life.

1) 2 Timothy 4:18; Revelation 7:16-17; 21:4 - freedom from every evil.

2) 1 Peter 1:8; Psalm 16:11; John 17:24 - Fulfilled with unutterable bliss

But trying to describe heavenly life is almost impossible. Look up Colossians 3:3. What conclusions can we draw from this passage? It is hid in Christ

The Bible does give some conceptions of the glory of our inheritance. What are they?

Matthew 25:10; Revelation 19:9 It's like a wedding feast.

Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:39 Relaxed dinner with the patriarchs

Luke 22:30 It's eating and drinking. Celebrating.

What of the bodies of believers? 1 Corinthians 15:44; Philippians 3:21; Matthew 13:43

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2 Corinthians 12:4

Are there degrees of bliss? No, all the blessed are perfectly happy, everyone of them will find full contentment for himself.

Luther writes:

*"It is true, there will be a difference in yonder life, according as they have labored and lived here. For example, St. Paul was an Apostle, Samuel or Isaiah a Prophet, etc. One will have greater brightness than the other because he worked or suffered more in his office.... Thus everyone will have his distinction and glory according to his office, and still one God and Lord will be in all, and one and the same joy and bliss. In his person none shall be more or have more than the other, St. Peter no more than you or I. None the less there must be a difference because of the works. For God did not do through Paul what He did through Isaiah, and vice versa. For that reason everyone will bring along his works, through which he will shine and praise God so that people will say: St. Peter has done more than I or another. This man or this woman has led such a fine life and done such great things. In short, all are to be alike before God in faith and grace and celestial bliss, but they are to differ in their works and their honor."*

Degrees of glory will not cause envy, but only praise of God, because sin has been completely eliminated.

What about the third heaven or seventh heaven? \_\_\_\_\_

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### THE LOCATION OF HEAVEN

Can a specific location be established now? No

Will there be a specific location? Probably How can this conclusion be made? Christ's human body is essential to have and so also the bodies of the saints, so as there is a local presence for these, it is not improbable that there is a specific location for heaven.

### THE SUBJECTS OF ETERNAL LIFE

Who will be the citizens of heaven? Those that believe in Christ atoning sacrifice.

John 3:16,18 makes clear that faith is the way to salvation. What else does verse 18 tell the

Christian not to do? We should not arouse hope of a possible conversion after this life.

What is he to do? Luke 24:47 \_\_\_\_\_

For what purpose? Acts 26:18 \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) They should stay alert lest by unfaithfulness and laziness they contribute to the cause of damnation.
- 2) to instruct and reprove an erring brother – Matt 18:5-17
- 3) to not cause offense to the world - Matthew 18:7 Christ is to be the stumbling block and the foolishness, not our own peculiarities.

### THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCTRINE

What is the purpose of this doctrine: Matthew 5:12 to keep up courage and Christian Morale, by following Christ's direction we Christians are despised on earth 1 Cor 1:23 and we rise above these things. Rom 8:37, by maintaining hope 2 Tim 1:12;

From this practical viewpoint the whole Christian faith should be taught and particularly eschatology.