

THE DOCTRINE OF THE LAST THINGS

(ESCHATOLOGY)

A Look At What The Bible Says By
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1. TEMPORAL DEATH

The words, **“Do not fear those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell,”** tell us that our existence does not end with physical death (Matthew 10:28). And, the words, **“It is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than to be cast into hell fire having two eyes: Where their worm does not die, and the fire is never put out,”** tell us that there will be no end to the suffering of those in hell (Mark 9:47-48).

Through the words, **“The hour is coming, in which all who are in the graves will hear His [Christ’s] voice, And will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation,”** Christ tells us that even though the bodies of the dead return to dust, they will rise to face God’s eternal judgment (John 5:28-29). The words of Daniel, **“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt,”** teach the same thing (Daniel 12:2).

The words, **“You fool, your soul will be required from you tonight: then who will own the things you have prepared?”** tell us that physical death takes place when the soul is separated from the body (Luke 12:20).

The same doctrine is also taught in the words, **“Jesus, having cried again with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit,”** (Matthew 27:50). And, in the words, **“When He had received the vinegar, Jesus said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost,”** (John 19:30).

The Death of a Believer

The words, **“Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died at a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to His people,”** portray the death of a believer as a reunion with those who have gone before (Genesis 25:8 see also verse 17). The words, **“Let your servant now depart in peace,”** tell us that there is no terror associated with the death of a believer (Luke 2:29). The words, **“The righteous dies, and no one cares: kind men are swept away, and no one realizes that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He will enter into peace,”** tell us that those who die in faith are delivered from the “the evil to come” (Isaiah 57:1-2). The words, **“The girl is not dead, but asleep,”** describe death as a sleep (Matthew 9:24). However, the words, **“To be absent from the body, and present with the Lord,”** tell us that it is the body not the soul that is being described as asleep (2Corinthians 5:8). [See also 1Thessolonians 4:13-14.] For a believer, death is the gateway into eternal life (John 11:26).

The Death of an Unbeliever

On the other hand, the words, **“Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it would have been better for that man if he had not been born,”** portray the death of the wicked and unbelieving in terms of horror and dread (Matthew 26:24). The same goes for the words, **“Where their worm does not die, and the fire is never put out”** (Mark 9:48). As it is written, **“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Hebrews 10:31).

The Reason Death is in the World

The words, **“In the day that you eat of it you will surely die,”** and the words, **“Just as sin entered the world by one man, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, because all have sinned,”** tell us that death is not in the world because God created it that way, but because of sin (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12). As it is written, **“The wages of sin is death,”** (Romans 6:23).

Because death came into the world as a result of sin, all instrumental causes of death such as murder, disease, storms, famines, floods and war are only in the world because of sin. And, the world rightly fears all of those

things, and should be calling on God for deliverance. However, the words, **“What shall separate us from the love of Christ? tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For your sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us,”** tell us that as believers we have nothing to fear (Romans 8:35-37). I am not saying that such things are not unpleasant, or that we should desire them. But, the words, **“All things work together for good for those who love God, for those who are called according to His purpose,”** assure us that all that happens works together for our good in Christ Jesus.

As Christians we must constantly remember that death is only in the world as **“the wages of sin”** (Romans 6:23). Those who deny that death is a punishment for sin cannot rightly understand or properly appreciate Christ’s atoning death on the cross. In fact, those who deny what the Bible says about sin being the sole cause of death quite consistently also deny Christ’s vicarious atonement.

The Sentence of Death

The words, **“Death passed upon all men, because all have sinned,”** tell us that all of the descendants of Adam are under the sentence of death (Romans 5:12). Those words as well as the words, **“The wages of sin is death,”** also tell us that if infants were not sinners they would never die of natural causes, and that every attempt by man to find a cure for death will end in failure. However, the words, **“Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,”** and the words, **“If a man keeps my word, he will never see death,”** tell us that there is one way in which sinful man can be freed from death, and that is through faith in Christ (2Timothy 1:10; John 8:51). And, Christ’s promise to all who believe is, **“I am the resurrection, and the life: he who believes in me will yet live, even though he is dead: And whoever lives and believes in me will never die”** (John 11:25-26).

The fact that we are freed from death through faith in Christ raises the question: Why then must believers also die? And, the Scriptural answer to that question is that we who believe are also sinners according to the flesh. So even for believers, **“The wages of sin is death,”** (Romans 6:23). However, the words, **“O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who has given us the victory through our Lord**

Jesus Christ,” tell us that for a believer death is not joined with a sense of divine wrath (1Corinthians 15:55-57). On the contrary, through faith we have assurance of God’s mercy and forgiveness. And, the words, **“I do not want you to be ignorant concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do those who have no hope. For as we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring those who have fallen asleep in Jesus with him,”** describe the death of the believer as a blessed sleep (1Thessalonians 4:13-14). However, the words of Stephen, **“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,”** remind us again that it is the body, not the soul, that is described as being asleep (Acts 7:59). For **“to be absent from the body”** is to be **“present with the Lord,”** (2Corinthians 5:8). And, to be with the Lord is to be **“in paradise”** (Luke 23:43; 2Corinthians 12:4; revelation 2:7).

The words, **“He who believes on Him is not condemned,”** tell us that there is no condemnation for those who trust in Christ (John 3:18). Even though we were, **“dead in trespasses and sins”** and **“by nature the children of wrath,”** God has **“raised us up together with Him [Christ]”** (Ephesians 2:1,3; Colossians 2:12-13). And, having **“risen with Christ,”** // **“the second death has no power over”** us (Colossians 3:1; Revelation 20:6 and 14). Therefore, temporal death holds no terror for us. As it is written, **“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on: Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labor”** (Revelation 14:13)

2. THE SOUL BETWEEN DEATH AND THE RESURRECTION

Although the Bible focuses the attention of believers on Christ, while looking forward to the Day of Judgment and the promise of eternal life, it says comparatively little about the state of blessedness that believers enjoy immediately after death. The Bible speaks of believers waiting **“eagerly for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (1Corinthians 1:7). It also reminds us that Christ **“will transform our vile bodies, and make them like His glorified body”** (Philippians 3:21). And, for that reason, we should always look forward to Christ’s second coming. At the same time, the Bible warns the unbeliever of the coming judgment and the need to repent. [See 1Corinthians 1:7; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 3:4; 1Thessalonians 4:13; 2Timothy 4:7-8; Titus 2:13 // 2Thessalonians 1:9-10; Hebrews 10:27; 2Peter 2:3-6; Jude 6-7; Matthew 25:31-46.]

Nevertheless, the Bible does speak of the condition of soul after death. The words, **“He [Christ] also proclaimed His victory to the spirits in**

prison,” describe the souls of the wicked and unbelieving as being in “prison” (1Peter 3:19). The words, **“I am tormented in this flame,”** tell us that they suffer torment (Luke 16:24). And, the words, **“Into hell, into the fire that shall never be put out,”** tell us that there will be no end to their torment (Mark 9:43).

On the other hand, the Bible assures us that the souls of the godly are in God’s hand. At death, Stephen cried out, **“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,”** (Acts 7:59). At death Jesus cried out, **“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,”** (Luke 23:46). Paul said, **“I desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better”** (Philippians 1:23). And, Christ said to the thief on the cross, **“Today you will be with me in paradise”** (Luke 23:43). In the Book of Revelation we read, **“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord”** (Rev. 14:13). The psalmist writes, **“At your right hand there are pleasures for evermore”** (Psalm 16:11). Jesus prayed, **“Father, I also want those, whom you have given me, to be with me where I am; and to see my glory”** (John 17:24). And, Paul writes, **“I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us”** (Romans 8:18). Therefore, because the souls of those who have died in faith are with God, the words, **“The dead do not praise the LORD,”** are speaking of unbelievers, or bodies in the grave, not the souls of believers (Psalm 6:5 and 115:17). As it is written, **“I heard the voice of a great multitude in heaven, shouting, Hallelujah”** (Revelation 19:1).

The Bible tells us that **“The righteous”** are **“taken away from the evil to come”** (Isaiah 57:1). And, the words, **“You are our Father, even though Abraham does not know us,”** make it clear that those who have passed on are not even aware of us, or of all of the wickedness and misery going on in this world (Isaiah 63:16). Those who deny this truth in order to justify prayer to the saints are not only engaging in an idolatrous practice, but such behavior borders on an attempt to contact the dead which Scripture clearly forbids. As it is written, **“There shall not be found among you any one who... talks with those who are dead, for all that do such things are abomination unto the LORD”** (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

Some see the appearance of Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration of Christ, or the appearance of "Samuel" at Endor as an exception to this rule (Matthew 17:3; 1Samuel 28:11-16). However, that is not necessarily the case. There is much we do not understand, and it would be wrong to just let our imaginations run wild. There is nothing in the account of Christ’s transfiguration to indicate that Moses and Elijah were aware of the apostles, much less of anything else going on in the world at that time. And, what the

witch saw at Endor may have been a vision of Samuel, rather than Samuel himself. That is indicated by the fact that Saul could not see Samuel. Furthermore, the message Saul received was clearly one of condemnation. Therefore, because Scripture is the source and standard of our faith, we should never interpret unclear passages to contradict its clear condemnation of those who attempt to contact the dead (Isaiah 8:20); nor should we ever attempt to supplement what the Bible says with human speculation or other revelations (Proverbs 30:6; 2Peter 1:20).

Between death and resurrection, all souls exist in one of two states; the state of being forgiven, or the state of being unforgiven. The words, **“Today you will be with me in paradise,”** tell us that those who die forgiven experience the joy and light of God’s presence (Luke 23:43). While the words, **“Throw him into outer darkness; where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,”** tell us that those who die without forgiveness will experience the horror and torment of hell (Matthew 22:13). Since these souls are no longer in the physical realm, the idea of them residing in physical places is unrealistic. Christ said that He was going to “prepare a place for” us, and we will be with Him “in paradise,” but idle speculation about the nature of such a place will not give us any facts beyond what is plainly stated in Scripture. Furthermore, the words, **“Where their worm does not die, and the fire is never put out,”** make it clear that there is no forgiveness after death (Mark 9:48). Therefore, when Christ, “preached to the spirits in prison,” He was not offering them forgiveness, but proclaiming His victory as the Greek word *kerusso* indicates, and as the context shows (1Peter 3:19).

The claim that Old Testament saints could not get into heaven because Christ had not yet obtained forgiveness, flies in the face of all that the Old Testament says about forgiveness. As it is written, **“The Lord our God is merciful and forgives,”** (Daniel 9:9). **“The sin which he has done shall be forgiven him”** (Leviticus 19:22). **“You have forgiven the iniquity of your people,”** (Psalm 85:2). Just as God is not limited by time, the forgiveness that He has provided for us is not limited by time. In fact, because it is forgiveness and forgiveness alone that makes us righteous in the sight of God, without forgiveness Abraham’s faith could never have been counted to Him for righteousness (Galatians 3:6).

Likewise, the claim that infants that die without baptism are kept in “limbo” unable to enter either heaven or hell is not taught anywhere in Scripture, but is just a figment of someone’s imagination. The words, **“The wicked are estranged from the womb,”** apply to all who die without

forgiveness. While the words, **“As the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the babe leapt in my womb for joy,”** tell us that God is able to impart faith [and thus joy in the presence of the Lord] to the smallest of infants (Luke 1:42-44). **“The LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save;”** (Isaiah 59:1). Therefore, instead of professing ourselves to be wise, we need to admit our ignorance while trusting infants to God and His justice.

The words, **“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes,”** tell us that it is the forgiveness that is ours in Christ, not the law, that makes us righteous in the sight of God (Romans 10:4). And, the words, **“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us of all sin,”** tell us that all of our sin is completely removed by Christ’s sacrifice and atoning death on our behalf (1John 1:7). For that reason the claim that Christ’s death is not sufficient to pay for some sins, or that those who are guilty must atone for those sins by suffering in purgatory is not only unscriptural, it is anti-Christian. Worse yet, because it offers the guilty a false hope it is a false gospel. And, the words, **“If anyone preaches any gospel to you other than the one you received, let him be accursed,”** tell us that all who teach it are under God’s curse.

3. THE SECOND ADVENT OF CHRIST

The Bible clearly tells us that Christ will return. As it is written, **“This same Jesus that has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way that you saw him go into heaven”** (Acts 1:11). We are also told to, **“be ready”** for He will return **“at a time when you do not expect him,”** (Matthew 24:44). And, we need to be watchful, for we **“do not know either the day or the hour when”** He will return (Matthew 25:13). However, when He does return, **“every eye will see him”** including **“those who pierced him”** (Revelations 1:7). For He will, **“come in His glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory, and all nations will be gathered before Him”** (Matthew 25:31), and He, **“will judge the living and the dead [after their resurrection] at His appearing”** (2Timothy 4:1). [See Matt. 24:27-30; 1Thess. 5:2; Matt. 25:31; 1Thess. 4:16; Matt. 13:41-42; 1Cor. 15:51; Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29.]

The words, **“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection [singular] on the last day,”** tell us that there will be one general resurrection **“on the last day”** (John 11:24). The words, **“He who rejects me, and does not receive my words, has one who judges him: the word that I have spoken, will judge him on the last day,”** tell us that judgment

will take place on that same day [**“the last day”**] (John 12:48). And, the words, **“These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal,”** tell us that on the Day of Judgment the wicked will **“go away into everlasting punishment,”** while the righteous enter **“into life eternal”** (Matthew 25:46). [See Hebrews 9:28.] Let me also add that, when we are judged those who trust in Christ will not be condemned, not because they do not deserve condemnation, but because, **“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us of all sin”** (1John 1:7). As it is written, **“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,”** and **“Whoever believes in him will not be ashamed”** (Romans 8:1 and 10:11).

We must emphasize the truth of Christ’s return in opposition to all who scoff, **“Saying, Where is the promise of His coming?”** (2Peter 3:4). And also as a reminder to Christians, lest they say in their heart, **“My lord delays His coming,”** and begin to behave as if they will never have to answer to God (Luke 12:45). For, none of us know when Christ will return, as it is written, **“Of that day and hour no one knows, no, not the angels in heaven”** (Mark 13:32). **“Therefore you should be ready also: for the Son of man will come at a time when you do not expect him”** (Matthew 24:44). **“For you know perfectly well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. For when they are saying, Peace and safety; destruction will come upon them suddenly, as travail comes upon a woman with child; and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brethren, that that day should catch you unprepared as a thief”** (1Thessalonians 5:2-4). And, even if Christ does not come in our lifetime, at any time He could say to us **“Your soul will be required from you tonight,”** (Luke 12:20). So be ready! [See Matt. 24:36; Matt. 24:44; Mark 13:33-36; Acts 1:6-7.]

At the same time, even though we should be ready we should never try to compute the time of Christ’s return. As it is written, **“Do not add to His words, lest He reprove you, and you are found to be a liar”** (Proverbs 30:6). Because Christ said, **“Of that day and hour no one knows, no, not the angels in heaven,”** we know that God has not revealed the date (Mark 13:32). Therefore, every attempt to find it in Scripture, or anywhere else, is doomed to failure. And, the words, **“No truth of scripture comes from any private explanation,”** apply to every attempt (2Peter 1:20).

However, the Bible has listed certain “signs of the times” that we should be aware of (Matthew 16:3). And, they should arouse in us greater

watchfulness and preparedness. The Bible tells us that, **“There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken”** (Luke 21:25-27). We are also told that, **“They will hand you over to persecution, and kill you: and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will turn away from the faith, and will betray each other, and will hate each other. And many false prophets will rise up, and deceive many. And because iniquity will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end, will be saved. And the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come”** (Matthew 24:9-14). But, **“Let no one deceive you by any means: for that day will not come unless it is preceded by a great apostasy, and that man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God, or is worshipped; so that he sits as God in the temple of God, and says that he is God”** (2Thessalonians 2:3-4).

As a sign of the time, persecution of Christ and His Gospel is most telling. For even though Christians have been persecuted through the centuries, and persecution is going on today, it suggests a time when men turn away in ingratitude, harden their hearts, and show only contempt for the love Christ has shown them. Of this time the Bible says, **“Because iniquity will abound, the love of many will grow cold”** (Matthew 24:12). We are also told, **“That day will not come unless it is preceded by a great falling away,”** (2Thessalonians 2:3). Despite this opposition, **“The gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a testimony to all nations”** before the end comes (Matthew 24:14). [See Matt. 24:9; John 16:2; Matt. 10:17; Rom. 8:36; Acts 14:5-6, 19:16-22.]

After Jesus told His disciples that the Temple was going to be destroyed, they asked Him, **“When will these things take place? and what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the world?”** (Matthew 24:2-3). That question asked two things, **1-** when the Temple would be destroyed, and **2-** what would be the sign of Christ’s coming and the end. His answer to those two questions indicates that many of the signs foreshadowing the destruction of Jerusalem are the same as those foreshadowing His return and the end (Matthew 24:2-51). It also indicates that the Lord was viewing both events, one near in time the other further away in a way that revealed their similarities. And, in the words, **“They**

went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them,” the reference to “the beloved city” gives us another parallel between the destruction of Jerusalem and the end. Therefore, because many of the signs were fulfilled when the Temple was destroyed, Christ could come at any time, and we should be ready.

The Thousand Years

The claim that Christ will reign on this world for one thousand years, comes from the words, **“I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony of Jesus,... and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years”** (Revelation 20:4). In response to that claim it needs to be pointed out that 1- **those words say nothing about Christ reigning on this world**, 2- **the context, which speaks of souls reigning with Christ suggests that this reign is taking place in heaven**, and 3- **these words are describing something John saw in a dream or vision, not earthly events**. Furthermore, because this passage says nothing about Christ reigning on this world, those who claim that He will reign on this world are adding their own opinions to what the Bible says. And, because the claim that He will reign on this world contradicts Christ’s own words, **“My kingdom is not of this world,”** those who teach it are rejecting what Christ said (John 18:36). And, by rejecting what He said, they are taking away from what the Bible says. Therefore, that doctrine only exists in disobedience to God’s Word, which says, **“You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor shall you take anything from it”** (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18-19).

Because the claim that Christ will reign on this world does not come from Scripture, every passage that Millennialists interpret to support that claim is being interpreted to teach an unscriptural doctrine, and that is “private interpretation” at its worst (2Peter 1:20). Furthermore, those who teach that doctrine often teach a number of other unscriptural doctrines. One of those is the claim that Christ will raise up believers before the last day. That claim contradicts Christ’s own words, **“This is the will of the Father who sent me, that I should not lose any of those He has given me, but should raise them up again on the last day”** (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54). Moreover, when they interpret the words, **“Then we which are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air,”** to contradict Christ’s words, **“raise them up again on the last day,”** they are teaching contrary to God’s Word (1Thessalonians 4:17). It should be obvious that if Christ will raise up believers on the last day,

then the rapture will take place **on the last day**. [Compare John 6:39-40 with 1Thessalonians 4:17 and Job 14:12.]

Worse yet, the claim by some that God's offer of grace will be withdrawn in the future and people will go back to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament is satanic, and is condemned by the words, **"If anyone preaches any gospel to you other than the one you received, let him be accursed"** (Galatians 1:9). Those who hold that doctrine need to read the third chapter of Galatians, for that chapter plainly tells us that salvation has always been through faith in Christ. As it is written, **"The covenant concerning faith in Christ that was confirmed by God at the time of Abraham cannot be nullified by the law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, so as to make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it is not given by promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise."** (Galatians 3:17-18).

Another mistake that they make is to assume that Christianity is not the religion of Ancient Israel. What they fail to see is that because God gave the inheritance to Abraham through faith in God's promise, **"Those who trust in Christ are the children of Abraham"** (Galatians 3:7). **"For he is not a Jew, who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God"** (Romans 2:28-29). **"For not all who are descended from Israel belong to the spiritual Israel: And they are not all Abraham's children, just because they are descended from him: on the contrary, Through Isaac shall your descendants come. That is, It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted as the descendants"** (Romans 9:6-8). As it is written, **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"** (Galatians 3:28-29). Thus, **"All Israel will be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, He will turn ungodliness away from Jacob"** (Romans 11:26).

4. THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

The words, **"Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and He was buried, and He rose again the third day according to the scriptures"** (1Corinthians 15:3-4), tell us that our hope not only rests on the fact that Christ **"died for our sins,"** but also on the fact that He, **"Was**

raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25). He is, “The resurrection, and the life” (John 11:25), “As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1Corinthians 15:20), and, “Whoever lives and believes in” Him “will never die” (John 11:26).

This glorious hope is not only taught in the New Testament, but also in the Old, where we read, **“Your dead will live, together with my dead body they will arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust: for your dew is like the dew of the fields, and the earth will deliver up the dead” (Isaiah 26:19), and, “Those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). Having that hope we can say with Job, “I know that my redeemer lives, and that He will stand at a future time upon the earth: And after the skin worms have destroyed this body, yet in my flesh I will see God” (Job 19:25-27). Or with the Psalmist, “I will behold your face in righteousness: I will be satisfied, when I awake, with your likeness” (Psalm 17:15). As it is written, “You will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, O my people, and bring you up out of your graves” (Ezekiel 37:13). “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, where are your plagues; O grave, where is your destruction” (Hosea 13:14).**

In dealing with skeptics who denied the resurrection, Jesus said, **“Have you not read what God said to you, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:31-32). The same holds true for all of God’s people, for Christ said, “If a man keeps my word, he will never see death” (John 8:51). In fact, resurrection is even implied by God’s words to the serpent, “I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He will bruise your head, and you will bruise His heel,” for destruction of the serpent implies a reversal of what the serpent caused (Genesis 3:15).**

While the words, **“Your soul will be required from you tonight,”** tell us that the soul departs from the body at death (Luke 12:20). The fact that Christ will **“raise” bodies “up again on the last day,”** tells us that the soul will be reunited with the body at the resurrection (John 6:39). And, the fact that, **“Those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake,”** tells us that even if the molecules of which we consist are scattered among the dust of the earth, they will reassemble at the resurrection (Daniel 12:2).

“When the dead rise, the body that is sown in corruption; is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. As there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man, Adam, was made a living soul; the last Adam a life giving spirit. However the spiritual did not come first, but the natural; and after that the spiritual. The first man *is* of the earth, earthy: the second man *is* the Lord from heaven. As *was* the earthy *man*, so also *are* those who are of the earthy: and as *is* the heavenly *man*, so also *are* those who are of the heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy one, we will also bear the image of the heavenly one” (1Corinthians 15:42-49). **“Christ... will transform our vile bodies, and make them like His glorified body”** (Philippians 3:20-21). And, we will be **“as the angels of God in heaven”** (Matthew 22:30).

Now not all of us will die, **“But all of us will be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed, for our corruptible *nature* must be made incorruptible, and our mortal *nature must* become immortal. So when the corruptible has put on incorruption, and the mortal has put on immortality, then the Scripture that says, Death is swallowed up in victory, will be fulfilled. O death, where *is* your sting? O grave, where *is* your victory?”** (1Corinthians 15:51-55). **“For as we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring those who have fallen asleep in Jesus [i.e. the souls of those who have died in Christ, see 2Cor. 5:8] with him. For we are telling you only what the Lord has told us, that we who are alive and remain at the coming of the Lord will not precede those who are asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ will rise first [i.e. the souls that Christ brings with Him will be reunited with their resurrected bodies]: Then we which are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”** (1Thessalonians 4:14-17).

The passages just quoted make it clear that all of the effects of sin will be removed from those who trust in Christ. **Our incorruptible resurrection bodies will have no physical defects or any traces of age or suffering for all of those things are the consequences of sin.** God will give us **“beauty**

for ashes” (Isaiah 61:3). Our bodies will no longer be subject to earthly infirmities. They will no longer be disfigured, corrupt, imperfect, maimed, and unsightly, but will be perfect in every way. In contrast, because the ungodly remain in their sin, and are under a divine curse, their bodies will come forth from the grave **“Unto shame and everlasting contempt”** (Daniel 12:2). **“Where their worm does not die, and the fire is never put out”** (Mark 9:44). Having been raised from the dead they will be immortal, but will be subject to all of the pains of life, and destined for eternal disgrace and darkness as vessels unto dishonor (Romans 9:21, 2Timothy 2:20).

Because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One God, what one does they all do. We see that in connection with Creation, where the words, **“Don’t we all have one father? Hasn’t one God created us?”** tell us that the Father is our Creator: while the words, **“Who created all things by Jesus Christ,”** tell us that Christ is our Creator (Ephesians 3:9). We see that again in what the Bible says about the resurrection, for it is written, **“Just as the Father raises the dead, and gives them life; even so the Son gives life to whomever He will... The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God: and those who hear will live”** (John 5:21, 25).

5. THE FINAL JUDGMENT

The lord Jesus Christ has told us that He will raise up believers, **“On the last day”** (John 6:40). And, that He **“Will judge the living and the dead at his appearing”** (2Timothy 4:1). For Christ **“is the one whom God has appointed to be the Judge of the living and dead”** (Acts 10:42). We are told that, **“When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory, and all nations will be gathered before Him”** (Matthew 25:31-32). **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad”** (2Corinthians 2:10).

However, even though **“everyone” will “be judged according to their works,” // “judged according to what they have done”** (Revelation 20:12-13) there will be **“no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 8:1). On the contrary, no sin will be imputed to those who trust in Christ. As it is written, **“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven” // “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin”** (Psalm 32:1; Romans 4:8). For God has, **“cast all our iniquities into the**

depths of the sea,” (Micah 7:19) and only takes into account the good we have done (Matthew 25:34-40). As it is written, **“He who hears my word, and believes on Him who sent me, has everlasting life, and will not come into condemnation; but has passed from death to life”** (John 5:24). [See John 12:48; Revelation 12:11; Romans 2:16.]

Furthermore, the words, **“God did not spare the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them to be kept in chains of darkness, until judgment,”** and the words, **“The angels who did not keep their first estate, but went outside their bounds, have been kept by Him in darkness bound with everlasting chains until the judgment of the great day,”** tell us that on the Day of Judgment, God will not only judge men, but also all of the angels that sinned (2Peter 2:4; Jude 6).

When the Bible warns us that the day is coming when, **“All who are in the graves will hear His voice, and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation,”** those words are Law, not Gospel (John 5:28-29). Because they are Law, their purpose is not to terrify believers, but to warn unbelievers of the coming judgment and call them to repentance. As it is written, **“The law is not meant for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious”** (1Timothy 1:9). In contrast, the same section of Scripture comforts those who trust in Christ with the words, **“He who hears My word, and believes on Him who sent me, has everlasting life, and will not come into condemnation; but has passed from death to life”** (John 5:24). The first statement is Law, the second is Gospel. Furthermore, because believers have already **“passed from death to life,”** their future is already determined. At death, they will be with Christ in paradise, and that can never change (Luke 23:43). In contrast, those who die without faith in Christ will be in hell, and that can never change (Matthew 9:46).

The words, **“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump... the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed,”** tell us that our judgment will not be a long drawn out process (1Corinthians 15:52). On the contrary, the fact that believers are changed, **“in the twinkling of an eye”** tells us that our judgment is already determined. Furthermore, the words, **“Don’t you know that the saints will judge the world?... Don’t you know that we will judge angels?”** tell us that once Christ has raised us up, and separated the saved for the lost, we

will join Him in judging not only the lost, but also the angels (1Corinthians 6:2-3).

6. THE END OF THE WORLD

In regard to the end of world, the doctrine that God has given us, the doctrine that He wants us to believe and teach, consists of what His Word explicitly says. And, it says, **“The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up”** (2Peter 3:10). That same doctrine is taught in a number of other passages. In Luke 21:33 we read, **“Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away”**. In Psalm 102:25-26 we read, **“Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will endure: yea, all of them will grow old like a garment; you will change them like clothes, and they will pass away”**. And, in Hebrews 1:10-12 we read, **“In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of your hands. They will perish; but you remain; they will all grow old like a garment, And you will fold them up like a robe, and they will be changed: but you remain the same, and your years will never end”**.

The passages just quoted do not describe a mere alteration or cleansing of this world, but a total destruction of both heaven and earth. Our Lord Jesus Christ has plainly said, **“The stars will fall from heaven”** (Matthew 24:29 see Mark 13:25). Job said, **“Man lies down, and does not arise: until the heavens are no more”** (Job 14:12). In the book of Isaiah we read, **“And all the heavenly bodies will vanish, and the heavens will be rolled together like a scroll: all its stars will fall, like leaves falling from a vine, or figs falling from a fig tree”** (Isaiah 34:4), and again, **“Behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth: and the former will not be remembered, or come into mind”** (Isaiah 65:17). In the book of Revelation we read, **“The sky departed like a scroll when it is rolled up”** (Revelation 6:14); and again, **“I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away”** (Revelation 21:1). That is what the Bible says, and that is what God wants us to teach (see Jeremiah 23:28).

When Peter said, **“In keeping with His promise, we look for a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells,”** he was not

speaking prophetically, but was stating what he believed, and what he expected others to believe (2Peter 3:13).

7. ETERNAL DAMNATION

The words, **“These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal,”** make it clear that at the last judgment there will be a complete and eternal separation of those who are saved from those who are lost (Matthew 25:46). And, the words, **“He who believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he who does not believe the Son will not see life; but God’s wrath remains on him,”** tell us that it is faith in Christ, not works, that determines where we will spend eternity (John 3:36).

As to the lost, the words, **“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men... Because that which may be known of God is known to them; for God has shown it to them,”** make it clear that the lost are without excuse, **“For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead”** (Romans 1:18-20). So, **“When the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, they... show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another”** (Romans 2:14-15). Yet, instead of being sorry for their sins, repenting of those sins and seeking God’s forgiveness, they **“suppress the truth in unrighteousness”** (Romans 1:18). And, **“knowing the judgment of God, that those who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in those who do them”** (Romans 1:32).

Now even though those words tell us that the lost know of the existence of God, and that their conscience warns them of God’s judgment, the natural knowledge of God alone is not enough to save, because it tells them nothing about Christ and the forgiveness available through His death and resurrection (1Corinthians 15:3-4). And, while God can reveal that to them, because **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,”** the natural knowledge of God is easily denied and perverted by man’s sinful imagination (Jeremiah 17:9).

A Place of Torment

The Bible makes it clear that those who have rejected the Gospel will, **“Be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power”** (2Thessalonians 1:9). That

punishment is elsewhere described as, “**everlasting fire**” (Matthew 18:8), a fire that will never be “**put out**” (Isaiah 66:24), where, “**they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever**” (Revelation 20:10).

While the terms “Sheol” (Hebrew) and “hades” (Greek) may denote the “grave,” the “hereafter” or “the place of the dead,” they are general terms, not the names of specific places. In contrast, our English word “hell” is the name we give to the place where the lost suffer eternal torment. And, that torment is very real. The words, “**Jesus, Son of God have you come here to torment us before the time?**” tell us that the demons who followed Satan will be tormented (Matthew 8:29). And, the words, “**I am tormented in this flame,**” and “**I have five brothers; [send Lazarus] that he may testify to them, lest they also come into this place of torment,**” tell us that the lost will also suffer torment (Luke 16:24 and 28).

At the time of Christ, the residents of Jerusalem dumped their refuse into the valley of Hinnom (Gehenna). The perpetually burning fires in that valley led some New Testament writers to use the name “Gehenna” as a synonym for hell. [See Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; and James 3:6.]

The words, “**Depart from me, you cursed,**” tell us that the damned are separated from God (Matthew 25:41). The words, “**Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord,**” tell us that separation from God will be eternal (2Thessalonians 1:9). The words, “**Cast out into outer darkness: where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,**” tell us that the lost will be totally cut off from the light of God’s presence – including all of the joy and beauty that is ours through faith in Christ (Matthew 8:12). And, the words, “**He also proclaimed His victory to the spirits in prison, who were disobedient, long ago,**” tell us that the lost are prisoners, and prisoners have no control over what they are allowed to do (1Peter 3:19-20).

In addition to this separation from God, the Bible also describes the suffering of the damned as, “**tribulation and anguish**” (Romans 2:9, “**being in torments**” (Luke 16:23), “**tormented in this flame**” (Luke 16:24), “**where their worm does not die, and the fire is never put out**” (Mark 9:43-46), “**weeping and gnashing of teeth**” (Matthew 8:12), “**wailing and grinding of teeth**” (Matthew 13:50), and so forth. Moreover, the words, “**the rich man also died, and was buried, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment,**” tell us that the lost begin to experience the torment of hell as soon as they die (Luke 16:22-23). In short, the Bible uses the strongest language to warn people of the horror of hell.

In addition, the words, **“I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house,”** tell us that those in hell will remember their former life, and that memory will carry with it all of condemnation and guilt that goes with knowing the reason they are cursed by God and in hell (Luke 16:27). [See Galatians 3:13.] Whether the fire of hell is physical or spiritual does not matter. If the Bible uses the word **“fire”** to describe the torment of hell, it does so because that is the most accurate way to describe it. Therefore, those who deny the reality of hell, or try to convince themselves that it is not as horrible as the Bible says, are deluding themselves. Instead of trying to downplay what the Bible says about hell, they ought to seek God’s mercy so that they do not wind up there.

Since much of the suffering that we endure in this world is caused by sin and the harm that men do to other men, some wonder if those in hell will continue to sin. That may be the case since they will not have the Holy Spirit. And, the fact that their punishment never ends tells us that they will not be improved by punishment. Therefore, if they do sin they will suffer torment because of it, and nothing they do will be acceptable to God (Isaiah 64:6). If they refrain from sin they will do so only under coercion in endless agony.

The words, **“That servant, who knew his lord’s will... and did not do what his master wanted, will be beaten with many lashes, but the one who does not know, and committed deeds worthy of flogging, will be beaten with few lashes,”** seem to indicate that there will be degrees of punishment in hell (Luke 12:47-48). Hell will still be horrible for everyone who is there, but certain passages make it clear that it will be far worse for those who knew God’s word and rejected the gospel. That is why we read, **“And you, Capernaum... it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the Day of Judgment than for you”** (Matthew 11:23-24), or **“Woe to you, Chorazin, woe to you, Bethsaida... I tell you, It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the Day of Judgment, than for you”** (Matthew 11:21-22).

The words, **“Warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment,”** tell us that hell is a place (Luke 16:28). Peter describes that place as a “prison” (1Peter 3:19). However, the fact that those passages are talking about disembodied spirits indicates that they are in a spiritual place, not a physical place. That place is just as real to them as our world is to us, and the torment is very real, but we should not expect to find it anywhere in the physical realm. In fact the words, **“We look for a new heavens and a new**

earth, in which righteousness dwells,” indicate that hell (which is full of unrighteousness) will not be a part of the new universe [i.e. the new heaven and new earth] (2Peter 3:13). The words, **“Outside of it are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whoever loves and makes a lie,”** tell us the same thing (Revelation 22:15). That being the case, hell may exist in a different plain of existence, a different dimension.

While the lost need to be warned of God’s coming judgment, and of hell, they also need to know that God offers them forgiveness in Christ. Without God’s promise of forgiveness, a terror of hell may only lead them to close their mind to God’s Word and try to shut it out of their thinking.

8. ETERNAL SALVATION

The words, **“These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal,”** tell us that after last judgment, the righteous – those whose sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ (compare Romans 10:4 with 1John 1:7) – will enter into eternal life. Now the words, **“Today you will be with me in paradise,”** tell us that those who trust in Christ begin that eternal life at death (Luke 23:43). However, after the resurrection and final judgment they begin eternal life with their resurrected and glorified bodies. Of that life we are told that there will be, **“A new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”** (2 Peter 3:13). And, of that existence we are told, **“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men, and He will live with them, and they will be His people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God, and God will wipe every tear from their eyes; and there will be no more death, or sorrow, or crying, neither will there be any more pain: for the former things have passed away”** (Revelation 21:3-4).

The words, **“We... rejoice in hope of the glory of God,”** and the words, **“God, who is rich in mercy... has raised us up together with Him, and made us sit with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,”** give us a glimpse of what God has in store for those who are saved. Paul says, **“I desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better”** (Philippians 1:23). John says of those who are with Christ, **“They will never again hunger, nor will they thirst; nor will the sun beat down on them”** (Revelation 7:16), for, **“God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away”** (Revelation 21:4). The Psalmist writes, **“In your presence is abundant joy;**

at your right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11). And, Jesus prayed, **“I also want those, whom you have given me, to be with me where I am; and to see my glory, the glory that you have given me: because you loved me before the creation of the world”** (John 7:24). In short, **“The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us”** (Romans 8:18). All of those statements tell us of the glory and blessedness that God has waiting for those who trust in Christ.

At the same time, the words, **“We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom that God ordained before the world to our glory,”** tell us that these truths cannot be known apart from Divine Revelation (1Corinthians 2:7). As it is written, **“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, the things that God has prepared for those who love him”** (1Corinthians 2:9). For that reason, the truth that God has revealed to us in Scripture should never be confounded with the twisted and distorted ideas about the soul and heaven held by pagan philosophers and unbelievers. On the contrary, the Bible warns us that, **“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked”** (Jeremiah 17:9), and that, **“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”** (Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25).

Although the heathen have always speculated about the immortality of the soul and life after death, all of their speculation is at best only a caricature of the truth. The sensual “heaven” of the Moslems and Mormons has more in common with sexual fantasy than the glory God has prepared for those who love Him. The Bible plainly says, **“In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are as the angels of God in heaven”** (Matthew 22:30). Furthermore, all who hope to gain eternal life apart from faith in Christ are deluding themselves. The words of the Apostle Paul, **“Strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world,”** tell us that there is no hope of Salvation among the heathen (Ephesians 2:12; see Acts 4:12). Also, the words, **“Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this world? Hasn’t God made the wisdom of this world foolish?”** tell us that there is more eternal wisdom in the heart of those who trust in Christ, than in all of the unbelieving philosophers (1Corinthians 1:20).

Historically, seeing God has been described as a **“beatific vision,”** that is, a seeing that is inseparable from supreme bliss. The words, **“You will show me the path of life: in your presence is abundant joy; at your right**

hand there are pleasures for evermore,” equate all the joy and pleasure of heaven with God’s presence (Psalm 16:11). The words of Job, **“After the skin worms have destroyed this body, yet in my flesh I will see God: Whom I will see for myself, my eyes will see him, not the eyes of someone else; though my reins are consumed within me,”** tell us that he believed in the resurrection and equated seeing God with salvation (Job 19:25-27). Christ said, **“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they will see God”** (Matthew 5:8). However, the words, **“Moses said, I beseech you, show me your glory... But He [God] said, You cannot see my face: for no man shall see me and live,”** make it clear that no sinner can ever see God and live (Exodus 33:18-20). And no sinner ever shall! The words of the Psalmist, **“I will behold your face in righteousness: I will be satisfied, when I awake, with your likeness,”** tell us that when the saved see God no sin will remain in them (Psalm 17:15). Furthermore, the words, **“What we are going to be like has not yet been revealed: however we know that, when He [Christ] appears, we will be like him; for we will see him as He is,”** tell us that we will be transformed by seeing Christ (1John 3:2). Therefore, seeing God involves far more than just seeing Him with our eyes.

In this life we only see God through His Word, a seeing that Scripture describes as, **“Like a dim reflection on a glass,”** but, as Paul puts it, **“Then we will see face to face: now I know in part; but then I will know even as I am known”** (1Corinthians 13:12). All who see God, having been cleansed of sin through **“the blood of the Lamb... will never again hunger, nor will they thirst; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat, because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will feed them, and will lead them to fountains of living water: and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”** (Revelation 7:14, 16, 17). And, because the **“devil who deceived them”** will be **“thrown into the lake of fire”** there will never again be any spiritual foe to interfere with their bliss (Revelation 20:10).

The heavenly blessing that all Christian believers will enjoy consists not only of the fact that we will never again have to experience the suffering brought on by sin, but also of great joy and **“pleasures for evermore”** in the presence of God Psalm 16:11.

Concerning the things that we will never again suffer, Isaiah says, **“The Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces; and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth”** (Isaiah 25:8). And, again, **“They will not hunger or thirst; nor will the heat or sun strike them: for He who has mercy on them will lead them, and guide them to**

the springs of water” (Isaiah 49:10). In the book of Hosea we read, **“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, where are your plagues; O grave, where is your destruction”** (Hosea 13:14). [See also Rev. 21:4; 1Cor. 15:26 and 55-57; Rev. 2:7, 11; Rev. 7:16-17; Matt. 22, 30.]

Concerning the positive blessings of heaven, the words, **“We know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away,”** tell us that our intellect will be enlightened (1Corinthians 13:9-10). The words, **“Who will transform our vile bodies, and make them like His glorified body,”** tell us that sin will be removed from our nature (Philippians 3:21). The words, **“When the dead rise. The body that is sown in corruption; is raised in incorruption, it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power, it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. As there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body,”** also speak of our resurrection body (1Corinthians 15:42-44). The words, **“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality,”** assure us that our spiritual bodies will be incorruptible and immortal (1Corinthians 15:52-53). And, the words, **“To give to them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for grief, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness,”** tell us of the beauty, joy and happiness that will belong to all who are saved through faith in Christ.

In addition to all of those blessings, we will dwell in the presence of God which is the greatest blessing of all. The words, **“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men, and He will live with them, and they will be His people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God,”** tell us that God will dwell among us (Revelation 21:3). Jesus said, **“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back, and take you with me; so that where I am, you may be also,”** and **“If anyone serves me, my Father will honor him”** (John 14:3, John 12:26). The Apostle Paul said, **“We have courage, and would prefer to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord”** (2Corinthians 5:8). In the book of Hebrews we read, **“You have come to mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels”** (Hebrews 12:22). And, the words, **“So shall we ever be with the Lord,”** tell us that we will never cease to be in God’s presence (1Thessalonians 4:17). [See Luke 23:43, John 17:24, Phil. 1:23, Matt.8:11, Luke 13:29.]

Because all who are saved through faith in Christ will dwell in God's presence, they will all be equally happy and blessed in every way. However, the words, **"Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens; and those who turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever,"** seem to indicate that there will be degrees of glory (Daniel 12:3). The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-23) may also indicate this, however, the words, **"Whoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life,"** (John 3:16) tell us that no one who trusts in Christ will ever be cast **"into outer darkness: where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"** (Matthew 25:30). Regarding this, there is much that we do not know, but we do know that there will be no envy among the saved for sin will no longer be part of our nature.

While the Bible portrays heaven as "a place," (John 14:2) we should not think of it as a physical place. Because God created the physical universe, He transcends the universe. At the same time, because He is present everywhere angels are in His presence even when they are doing His will on earth, and Christ was in heaven at the same time He was on earth. As it is written, **"No one has ascended up to heaven, but He who came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven"** (John 3:13). And, again, **"The angel said, I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God"** (Luke 1:19). [See Matt. 18:10.]

Because it is only those who are justified through faith in Jesus Christ who are saved, ministers need to be faithful to their calling lest any be lost through neglect. Moreover, Because Christians often endure hardship and persecution in this world, we all need to keep our eyes on Christ, and the promise of eternal life that is ours through His death burial and resurrection. Walking in that faith we have God's own assurance that He will keep us by His grace. As it is written, **"What shall separate us from the love of Christ? tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am convinced, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Romans 8:35-39) [See John 3:36, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:47, Acts 26:18, Ezek. 3:18-19, 2Tim. 2:23-26 and 4:1-2, 1Tim. 4:15-16, Matt. 18:15-17, 1Cor. 5.]

ALL GLORY TO GOD ALONE

If you have found understanding in the pages of this book, and been blessed by reading it, know that the wisdom it imparts was not revealed to me because I am especially wise, but to help you to grow in faith and understanding. I am just an ordinary believer that has spent many years in prayerful study of God's Word. [See Daniel 2:30.]

Gary Ray Branscome