

## The Future of the Church

- I. Christ's Kingdom will endure forever (Luke 1:32-33)
  - A. Isaiah prophesied to this effect (Isaiah 9:6-7)
  - B. Jesus said that the gates of Hades shall not overpower it (Matt 16:18)
  
- II. Following His death and resurrection 2000 years ago, Jesus ascended to the Father where He reigns over His Kingdom
  - A. Anticipating of His death, Jesus told His disciples that He would be leaving them going to a place where they could not come (although they were to follow later) – John 13:33, 36; John 8:21-22; Matt 12:38-40
  - B. Jesus comforted His Apostles by telling them that He was going to prepare a dwelling place for them in His Father's house (John 14:1-2)
  - C. Jesus told Mary Magdalene that He would be ascending to the Father in Heaven (John 20:17)
  - D. The Apostles witnessed Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:9)
  - E. Jesus is now in Heaven at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55; Heb 1:3; Eph 1:20)
  - F. Jesus has been reigning over His Kingdom for nearly 2000 years and He is reigning now; Kingdom is not of this realm (John 18:36)
    1. He is the head of the body, the Church (Col 1:18; Eph 1:22-23)
    2. He claimed to have all authority in Heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18)
    3. Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father and all things are in subjection under His feet (Eph 1:20-23)
  - G. Jesus will reign until He has conquered all enemies (I Cor 15:25)
    1. The last enemy that will be abolished is death itself (I Cor 15:26)
    2. Since death still exists (i.e., has not been abolished), Jesus must still be reigning now.
    3. Note this contradicts many who teach that Christ will return to earth, establish an earthly kingdom and reign over it for 1000 years.
  
- III. Jesus promised His Apostles that He would come again and receive them (John 14:3; I Thess 1:9-10)
  - A. When Jesus comes again, it will mark the end (I Cor 15:23-24)
    1. Jesus will reign over His Kingdom until the end of time at His coming again (I Cor 15:23-26)
    2. At this time after death is vanquished, Jesus will deliver the Kingdom to God the Father (I Cor 15:24) - ending His reign
    3. Then the Son will be subjected to the Father that God may be all in all (I Cor 15:28)
  - B. Jesus testified that God the Father alone knows the appointed hour of judgment whether that judgment be the destruction of Jerusalem or Christ's return (Matt 24:35-36; Mark 13:31-32; Acts 17:31)
    1. The Apostles compare Jesus' return to a thief in the night and to birth pangs – sudden and unexpected (I Thess 5:1-3; II Pet 3:10)

2. Jesus likened God's judgment to the days of Noah and the Flood (Matt 24:37-39)
  3. Jesus said that we should be on alert for we do not know when God shall act (Matt 24:42; Mark 13:32-37)
  4. How are we to react to those who claim to know when Christ shall return? (Deut 18:22)
- C. Why does God delay? Why hasn't He come yet?
1. Time has no significance to an eternal God (II Pet 3:8)
  2. God delays His coming in patience to all not wishing any to perish but for all to come to repentance (II Pet 3:9)
- IV. Many false teachings have been put forth describing what will happen when Jesus next appears
- A. Most false teachings arise from an improper interpretation of the apocalyptic language used in highly figurative texts of the Bible like those found in the book of Revelation.
- B. It is important to remember that since "all Scripture is inspired by God" (II Tim 3:16), all passages from the Bible must fit together in harmonious agreement.
1. There can be no contradictions in the teaching of the Bible.
  2. If passages conflict with one another, then one or the other or both interpretations must be wrong.
  3. Truth is only obtained by accepting the totality of what God has revealed.
  4. "No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (II Pet 1:20-21).
- C. Since the Bible contains clear, literal descriptions of what will take place during Christ's return, these verses should be studied first to provide definition and clarity.
1. The literal texts give important facts and details that can be easily understood.
  2. After that, any symbolic texts must be interpreted in a manner that does not contradict the literal, factual accounts.
  3. This provides a practical way to study the texts safely and accurately so as not to be led astray
- V. God gives a description of the events surrounding Christ's return (I Thess 4:16-17)
- A. Jesus will come in the same way that He ascended (Acts 1:9-11)
1. After speaking to His Apostles, Jesus was lifted up and a cloud received Him out of their sight
  2. Two men in white clothing then appeared telling them that Christ would return in the same way
  3. Hence, we know that Jesus will come from a cloud in the sky
- B. Jesus Himself will physically return (I Thess 4:16)

1. This is not a vision but rather an actual physical event.
2. This is one and the same Jesus who lived on earth 2000 years ago.
- C. Jesus will not be alone; He will be accompanied by angels (Matt 25:31) in flaming fire (II Thess 1:7)
- D. There will be the sounds of: a shout, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God
  1. The shout is Christ's command to bring His faithful dead back to life (I Thess 4:16)
    - a. This is the voice of Jesus Himself (John 5:25-29; 6:40; Phil 3:20-21)
    - b. "Shout" is a translation of the Greek word, "keleuma", which is used of an officer to his troops or a sea captain to his crew.- it is not just an inarticulate sound (e.g., thunder)
    - c. This command first is directed to Christ's people since the faithful dead shall rise first
    - d. Recall Jesus once before called forth the dead (Lazarus) back to life (John 11:43)
  2. The archangel, chief of God's angels, will call forth the heavenly host
    - a. He will execute the Lord's commands
    - b. Christ will sit on His throne and all nations will be gathered before Him (Matt 25:31-32)
    - c. The angels will gather together His elect and remove the sons of the evil one for destruction (Matt 13:36-43)
    - d. Souls will be separated as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats (Matt 25:32)
  3. The trumpet of God like the voice of the archangel is one of the sounds marking the final glorious "end"
    - a. Paul calls this the "last trumpet" (I Cor 15:52)
    - b. Paul associates the timing of the sound of the last trumpet with the resurrection of the dead and the changing of bodies from perishable to imperishable (I Cor 15:52)
    - c. We shall all be given an immortal body
- E. The dead in Christ shall rise first (I Thess 4:16)
- F. Then those still alive will rise to meet Jesus and the risen saints in the clouds above the earth (I Thess 4:17)
  1. Note that this means there will be some still alive on the earth when Christ comes; humankind will not become extinct prior to Christ's coming again.
  2. The living shall be given new imperishable bodies in the twinkling of an eye (I Cor 15:51-52); those living will not experience physical death (though some may experience spiritual death)
- G. Jesus will call the Saints (saved) into His eternal home (Matt 25:34), and they shall remain with the Lord forever (I Thess 4:17) - eternal life (Matt 25:46)
- H. The lost will be sent away from God into eternal punishment (Matt 25:46)
  1. This will include those who do not know God and those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (II Thess 1:8)

2. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction - away from the presence of the Lord and from the Glory of His power (II Thess 1:9)

VI. What will our new immortal bodies be like?

- A. Paul compares this changing in the resurrection to the planting of a seed (I Cor 15:36-49)
  1. That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies - seeds come from dead plants
  2. The seed which is sown does not resemble the new plants - they have different bodies
  3. We must shed our flesh and blood to attain a new spiritual form for eternity
  4. God will give this body as He chooses; it is not for us to know now
- B. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (I Cor 15:50)
  1. The perishable cannot inherit that which is imperishable.
  2. We know that spiritual bodies will be different from our current physical ones for in eternity our physical forms are unsuitable.
- C. The change from perishable to imperishable bodies is the victory over physical death (I Cor 15:54) – Jesus' resurrection is the victory over spiritual death

VII. What will happen to God's physical creation?

- A. The present heavens and earth are being maintained by His word – reserved for fire - kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (II Pet 3:7)
- B. God never intended for the heavens and earth to last forever.
  1. The psalmist said they will perish (Ps 102:25-26)
  2. Jesus Himself confirmed this (Matt 24:35)
- C. The creation has been running down - wearing out - since God cursed the ground following man's sin in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:17; Rom 8:18-22; Ps 102:26)
- D. When Christ comes again, the universe will have served its purpose and be needed no longer
- E. The heavens will pass away with a roar (II Pet 3:10) and with burning (II Pet 3:12)
- F. The elements will be destroyed, melting with intense heat (II Pet 3:10, 13)
- G. The earth and all its works will be burned up (II Pet 3:10)
  1. This is the Greek word, "katakaio", meaning to burn down, consume wholly – burn up utterly
  2. Hence, the earth will be no more

VIII. What is God's promise for a new heavens and a new earth mentioned in II Pet 3:13?

- A. The promise of a new heaven and earth also is found in Isa 65:17 and Isa 66:22
- B. John described a vision of it in Rev 21:1
  1. Notice that in other Scriptures the physical realm created for humankind is referenced by the collective words: heaven, earth and sea (Ex 20:11;

- Acts 4:24, 14:15) - so this is description of where man dwells
2. Rev 21:1, specifically says the 1st heaven and earth have passed away and there is no more sea.
  3. These verses call the new "environment" where immortal man will live - the "new heaven and earth"
- C. Peter describes the new realm a place where righteousness dwells (II Pet 3:13) so it is an abode of the saved, i.e., the lost will have no part in it
- D. There are two New Testament Greek words that are translated "new"
1. One, "neos", refers to the time line of an object indicating something which is young as opposed to something old; this IS NOT the word used in this passage
  2. The second word, "kainos", is the one employed in II Pet 3:13; it refers to something fresh, different in contrast to an item that is worn out (not rejuvenation but different - replacement)
- E. Hence, the passage is talking about a totally different dwelling place for humankind, not a physical rejuvenation of the universe as it was "in the beginning" (Gen 1)
- F. In eternity, when Christ delivers the Kingdom to the Father both God and man (the saved) will dwell/live together
1. This is a new concept designed for our immortal, spiritual bodies, not an environment suitable for the mortal flesh and blood
  2. We are united with God in a new (different) "heaven and earth" model
- IX. What happens to us at death?
- A. Our physical body will die and decay
1. Man was said to be made from the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7)
  2. In death, our physical body returns to the dust of the earth - decays (Gen 3:19; Ecc 3:20, 12:7)
- B. Man is special; unlike the animals, we possess an eternal soul
1. Man was made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27); this is said of no other life form
  2. Man has a soul (Matt 10:28)
  3. Although we had a beginning, we will have no end; our spirit will live forever (Matt 25:46; Ecc 12:5)
- C. After death, comes judgment before God (Heb 9:27)
1. The words of Jesus will judge those who reject Jesus (John 12:48)
  2. In the final reckoning before God, each will receive according to his deeds measured against the Word (John 5:29; II Cor 5:10; Rev 20:11-15)
  3. God's ultimate, eternal sentence is rendered when He Comes again (Matt 25:31-46)
- D. Jesus described a death experience in His story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)
1. In death, the righteous, poor man was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom

- a. There he was comforted (Luke 16:22, 25)
  - b. This dwelling place for the righteous was called Paradise by Jesus (Luke 23:43)
  2. In death, the unrighteous, rich man went to a place of torment in Hades
    - a. He was in agony complaining of flame
    - b. He was conscious and aware of Paradise seeking assistance from Lazarus
  3. The two different areas were separated by a great, fixed chasm that cannot be passed
  4. There is no relief
  - E. At the Second Coming of Christ, following the resurrection all attain their final disposition, heaven or hell (see above section IV)
- X. After death, comes judgment before God (Heb 9:27) - Clarification
- A. In death, we will know our future - our destiny -
    1. If saved (sins forgiven), then we are comforted in Paradise awaiting Christ's return
    2. If we are lost (sins not forgiven), then we are tormented in Hades
  - B. There are two groups of passages dealing with the possession of eternal life
    1. John 3:16; John 5:24 and I John 5:13 assert that we have eternal life
    2. Rom 2:4-7; Titus 1:2; I John 2:25 assert that we are to "seek" it, "hope" for it and rejoice in the "promise" of it.
      - a. Logically, we do not: "seek" something we already possess; "hope" for something already received (Rom 8:24), or rejoice in expectation of a "promise" that has been realized.
      - b. If you require John 3:16; John 5:24 and I John 5:13 to mean that a child of God actually possesses eternal life here and now - you are in hopeless conflict with these latter Scriptures.
      - c. If you are presently in actual possession of eternal life, then you can never fall from grace for that is the meaning of eternal (i.e., lasting forever).
        - 1) We know this to be a false doctrine (see teachings in Heb 6:4-6; II Pet 2:20-21; I Cor 9:26-27 as well as examples in Acts 8:9-24 and Acts 5:1-11).
        - 2) This means the true understanding and meaning must lie elsewhere.
    3. Because all scripture is inspired (II Tim 3:16-17), we know that we must be able to harmonize these passages and that the correct meaning/interpretation will do so.
    4. If we have eternal life in prospect, then these passages fit together perfectly.
    5. Consider John 5:24, ". . . . has eternal life . . . . "
      - a. The Greek word "echei" which is translated "has" in English, really is the futuristic present tense (coming from the 3rd person singular of the present indicative of the Greek "echoo")
      - b. It denotes an event which has not yet occurred but which is regarded as

- so certain that it may be considered as already coming to pass.
- c. It is something which must ensue by some unalterable law - through the promise of God!
  - d. Eternal life is within our grasp.
    - 1) Our sins have been forgiven, hence, we have no barrier between us and God.
    - 2) We are guilty of nothing (having no unforgiven sins)
    - 3) Thus, John 5:24 says we escape God's judgment and pass from death into life
    - 4) One might say that Christians escape charges and have no reason to even appear in court before the judge
    - 5) Sinners, however, are charged and guilty so must be judged and sentenced
- C. The words of Jesus will judge those who reject Jesus in the last day (John 12:48) - The words of Jesus form the basis or metric by which they will be judged
- 1. In the final reckoning before God each will receive according to his deeds measured against the Word (Rev 20:11-15) - That is, all are accountable for their actions or inactions
  - 2. God's ultimate, eternal sentence is rendered at the Second Coming of Christ (Matt 25:31-46)