

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing our examination of eschatology, the doctrine of last things. Three weeks ago we quoted Louis Berkhof, who wrote that eschatology, “is the one locus of theology, in which all the other loci must come to a head, to a final conclusion. Dr. Kuyper correctly points out that every other locus left some question unanswered, to which eschatology should supply the answer.”¹ Well, we have now examined how eschatology answers the questions left open by our studies of theology proper, anthropology, Christology and soteriology. Dr. Spencer, how would you like to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: By moving on to the last locus with an unanswered question; namely, ecclesiology, the study of the church. According to Berkhof, the question left unanswered in that locus is “the final apotheosis of the Church”², or we could say the question is, “what is the final glorified state of the church in heaven?”

Marc Roby: That question certainly was not discussed when we covered ecclesiology. We were focused on the church here and now in this world.

Dr. Spencer: And that was our focus for good reason. But now that we are considering the doctrine of last things, it is reasonable to ask what form the church will take in the end. Back in Session 228 we gave a definition for the church, which was taken from Robert Reymond. He wrote that “the church in Scripture is composed of all the redeemed in every age who are saved by grace through personal faith in the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ, ‘the seed of the woman’ (Gen. 3:15) and suffering Messiah (Isa. 53:5-10).”³

And so, given that definition, the real question becomes, what is the final glorified state of all the redeemed people of God in heaven?

Marc Roby: And how would you answer that question?

Dr. Spencer: Well, I think the most wondrous answer is given in the book of Revelation, but before we give that answer, I need to remind our listeners that the Bible uses many metaphors to refer to the church. For example, in 2 Timothy 2:10 Paul said, “I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.”⁴ In that verse the church is called the elect. The church is also called God’s children. For example, in Romans 8:16 Paul wrote to Christians, saying, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” Also, in 2 Corinthians 6:16 Paul wrote to believers, saying, “For we are the

¹ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1938, pg. 665

² Ibid

³ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd Ed., Zondervan Academic, 1998, pg. 805

⁴ All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® (1984 version). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™.

temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’”

Marc Roby: Those are all amazing ways of describing the church; God’s elect, God’s children, and his living temple.

Dr. Spencer: And there are others as well, but the one I want to focus on now is that the church is called the Bride of Christ. In Ephesians 5:23-28 Paul wrote, “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” And Paul goes on talking about husbands and wives and concludes in Verse 32 by saying, “This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”

Marc Roby: That passage never explicitly says that the church is the bride of Christ, but it certainly makes a clear analogy by comparing the relationship between Christ and the church to the relationship between a husband and wife.

Dr. Spencer: And in addition to that passage, we also read in Revelation about the wedding feast of the Lamb, which is referring to Jesus Christ, who is called the Lamb of God. In Revelation 19:7-9 we read, “‘Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.’ (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!”’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’”

This explicitly speaks of the wedding of the Lamb, who is Jesus Christ, and his bride, who is wearing fine linen, which was given to her but which also represents the righteous acts of the saints. Therefore, the saints, who are the church, the redeemed people of God, are the bride of Christ.

Marc Roby: And those verses also agree with what we have said about the good works of believers. Salvation is a free gift of God, which fits with the fine linen being given to the bride, but if anyone is truly saved, he will have good works to demonstrate that his salvation is real, which goes along with saying the fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does all fit together. And now, knowing that the church collectively is called the bride of Christ, let me read Revelation 21:9-10, John wrote that “One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”

Marc Roby: And so now the wife of the Lamb, which is the church, is called the Holy City, Jerusalem.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, there is a great deal of imagery here, but that much is clear. And prior to those verses, in Revelation 21:2-3 we read, “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’”

Remember that we read earlier that the church is also called the temple of the living God? Well, here we see God coming to dwell in the heavenly Jerusalem, which represents the church and is again compared to a bride.

Marc Roby: And this heavenly Jerusalem will be a wonderful place. In the very next verse, Verse 4, we read that God, “will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Dr. Spencer: That is a wonderful picture of the glorified church as a whole. And we are also told a great deal about the final glorified state of the individual believers who together comprise the church. In Hebrews 12:23 we are told that those believers who have already died and are at this time awaiting the second coming of Christ exist as souls that have been made perfect as we noted in Session 228. In other words, glorified believers will be completely without sin.

Marc Roby: But we will not remain disembodied spirits. As we noted in that previous session, we will all receive a resurrection body when Christ comes again.

Dr. Spencer: And Paul tells us in Philippians 3:20-21 that “our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

Marc Roby: Hallelujah! I don’t know exactly what that means, but I know it will be a lot better than the body I have now.

Dr. Spencer: It will definitely be a lot better than the best body that has ever existed in this world. For one thing, it will no longer be subject to sickness, pain, aging or death. We aren’t given any other explicit information about this body and I don’t want to go into all the speculation that has abounded in this area. But suffice it to say that we will all be pleasantly surprised and happy with our new bodies.

We are also told in several places that we will receive a crown. It is called a crown of righteousness in 2 Timothy 4:8, a crown of life in James 1:12, and a crown of glory in 1 Peter 5:4.

Marc Roby: And this is obviously not a real physical crown.

Dr. Spencer: No, but it clearly represents the reality that we will be righteous, we will possess eternal life and we will be glorious.

Marc Roby: And in 1 John 3:2 we read this amazing statement: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he

appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” That statement always blows my mind. We will see him, most likely meaning God the Father⁵, as he is.

Dr. Spencer: That is impossible to grasp fully. And it doesn’t imply that we will completely comprehend God in any way, only that our perception of him, in whatever form that takes, will be entirely accurate. But the verse also said explicitly that what we will be has not yet been made known. There is mystery that remains with regard to our final glorified state.

And yet, we are told more. For example, we are told about the saints in heaven in Revelation 7:15-17, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Marc Roby: There’s a lot of information in those verses, even though they aren’t as detailed or as specific as we might like. We will be before the throne of God! What an incredible thought that is. And he will spread his tent over us, which clearly refers to his protection.

Dr. Spencer: And we will never hunger or thirst. In other words, our every need will be taken care of. And we will not experience scorching heat or any other harm. And, even though it sounds paradoxical, the Lamb, Jesus Christ, will be our shepherd.

Marc Roby: And he will wipe every tear from our eyes, which repeats what I read earlier from Revelation 21:4.

Dr. Spencer: And in Revelation 5:9-10 we read about the four living creatures and the elders around the throne in heaven singing a new song to the Lamb in the center of the throne, who is Christ. They sing, “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

Marc Roby: Now that’s incredible to imagine. We will reign with Christ. And Paul told us about that. In 2 Timothy 2:12 he wrote that “if we endure, we will also reign with him”, referring to Jesus Christ.

Dr. Spencer: And Paul also wrote, in 1 Corinthians 6:3, “that we will judge angels”.

Heaven is going to be an amazing place and even though we are not given a great deal of detailed information about it or about what we will do there, we can be certain that it will be better than our wildest imagination. And in John 14:1-3 Jesus gave us a wonderful promise. He said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

⁵ See Session 64, pages 3-4 for an explanation. Many assume this is speaking of Christ.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

Marc Roby: That is an amazing promise. We will be with God.

Dr. Spencer: At the end of the day, I think the two facts about heaven that are the most glorious and incomprehensible are, first, that we will see God face to face in some way and, secondly, that we will be without sin. Both of those things are completely foreign to our experience in this world, so it is impossible for us to imagine what they will be like.

Marc Roby: But we are to live all of life in joyful expectation of that glorious day.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we are. In 2 Peter 3:10-13 we are told that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”

We need to be very careful to notice that this passage provides great encouragement to live holy lives. First, we are promised a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

Marc Roby: And as you said earlier, it is impossible to imagine what it will be like to be completely without sin. But if heaven is the home of righteousness, that will be the case.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it will. And this passage also encourages us to live holy lives by telling us that we can speed the coming of that day, which is a wonderful thing to consider as we do the work God has given us to do.

But there is also a terrible warning in that verse, which also serves to encourage us to live holy lives. We are told, “That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat”, which is a terrifying thought.

Marc Roby: And Jesus himself warned us that this could happen at any time. In Matthew 24:36-39 he said, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”

Dr. Spencer: That is a sobering warning. When Jesus said that they knew nothing about what would happen, it wasn't because they hadn't been warned, it was because they wouldn't believe. We are told in 2 Peter 2:5 that Noah was a preacher of righteousness, which surely means that he was warning the people while he was building the ark that God's judgment was coming. But his neighbors laughed at him. They must have thought he was completely insane, building this huge ship on dry land.

Marc Roby: And most people today think Christians are insane for believing that there is a heaven and a hell.

Dr. Spencer: Or at least that is what they usually say. But when people die and you attend their memorial services, it is strange how people speak about the person looking down on them, or that the dead person will be proud of someone or some other similar comment. Most people will acknowledge, if they are being completely honest, that they don't think physical death is the end of existence.

God made us for eternity and the truth is that there are only two possible destinies for every single human being. Either we will spend eternity in hell, being justly punished for our sins, hating God and in complete misery. Or we will spend eternity in heaven, with God and all the other perfected saints, enjoying glorious fellowship forever.

Marc Roby: And that is the final glorified state of all the redeemed people of God in heaven, which answers the question left open by our study of ecclesiology. And that also finishes our available time for today, so let me remind our listeners that they can send questions or comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We will do our best to answer you.