



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)
Lesson 15.1 – The Doctrine of the Last Things (Eschatology)

The Perfect Life to Come

As believers in Jesus Christ, we already enjoy amazing blessings now in this age. Jesus' apostle John writes: **"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God"** (1 John 3:1). But we can look forward to even greater blessings. For John continues: **"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is"** (1 John 3:2). Already now we have the perfect righteousness from God by faith in Jesus, just like the apostle Paul (Philippians 3:9), but there is still more to come, as Paul says: **"I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ... I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"** (Philippians 3:12, 14).

In this present world we Christians already have perfection through the righteousness of Christ that is counted as ours when we trust in Jesus. **"Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"** (Romans 5:1). To the believer in Christ **"his faith is accounted for righteousness"** (Romans 4:5).

Yet every Christian knows that he is far from perfect in his Christian living because of the sinful flesh that remains with him until his death. It is written: **"The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish"** (Galatians 5:17). That is why even the apostle Paul had to say about himself: **"I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find"** (Romans 7:18).

Besides the continued presence of our own sinful flesh, we also continue to live in a world that is marred by the sin of others and the judgment that God has placed on all of creation because of human sin. **"The whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now"** (Romans 8:22). For this reason, what the apostle Paul told his converts in Galatia is true also of Christians of every time and place: **"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God"** (Acts 14:22).

As believers in Christ, we are looking forward to something better than our lives in this world, just like the patriarchs of old: **"But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them"** (Hebrews 11:16). On the night before His death Jesus promised His disciples that He would send them the Holy Spirit. He said, **"He will tell you things to come"** (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit has told us things to come in the writings of Jesus' apostles. For us believers in Christ these things to come are amazing, glorious, beyond comprehension, perfect in every way.

Jesus' apostle John was given the privilege of seeing a vision of this perfect world to come, **"a new heaven and a new earth, ... the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ... He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain"** (Revelation 21:1-4). It will be indeed perfect, for **"there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie"** (Revelation 21:27).

When the Sadducees attempted to raise doubts about such a future life by telling Jesus the story of a woman who had seven husbands in this life and then slyly asked Him: **“In the resurrection, whose wife does she become?”**, how did Jesus respond? He said: **“The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection”** (Luke 20:33-36). The perfect life to come will be radically different from our present life on this earth. In the world to come nothing at all will mar our happiness.

Our present bodies are not even fit for living in that radically different and perfect life. God’s Word tells us what must happen to our bodies before we can live in that perfection. Paul informs us: **“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet”** (1 Corinthians 15:50-52). Our bodies will be changed. The dead will be raised with incorruptible bodies, and the living will have their bodies changed instantly to make them fit for that perfect life. **“The Lord Jesus Christ ... will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself”** (Philippians 3:20-21). Even our minds will be glorified, as Paul indicates: **“Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known”** (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Eschatology, the doctrine of the last things, has to do with this perfect life to come and everything connected with it: the return of Christ, the last judgment, the resurrection of the dead, death itself, the state of the soul after death, eternal life, eternal death, and the signs preceding the end such as the destruction of Jerusalem and the appearance of the Antichrist. As we study what God has told us about these things, there will still be questions without an answer. We should not try to answer questions that God has not answered. For example, we should not make the mistake of trying to figure out when Jesus will return as judge. Jesus Himself said: **“Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only”** (Matthew 24:36). We are limited in our explanation of the future to what God Himself has told us.

What God has told us is sufficient to fill our hearts with hope for the future. The hope for the future is a sure hope because it is based on the promises of God, who does not lie. It is true that we cannot see what is to come. **“For we walk by faith, not by sight”** (2 Corinthians 5:7). The apostle Paul told the congregation at Thessalonica: **“I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope”** (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Non-Christians have no sure hope for the future, but we Christians have a sure hope that is based on God’s sure Word. Paul declares with absolute certainty: **“The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words”** (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

The apostle Paul himself was comforted with this hope as he faced death. He wrote to Timothy: **“The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!”** (2 Timothy 4:18). Because we Christians have this hope for the future perfect life, we are strengthened to live the Christian life despite the difficulties and hardships in this world, we are fortified to persevere and endure to the end, and we are spurred on to bring the Gospel of Christ to others before it is too late. **“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal”** (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Questions

1. What blessings do we Christians enjoy already in this world?
2. What greater blessings are in store for us in the life to come?
3. What problems do we have in this life that we will not have in the life to come?
4. Who are the only ones who are promised these perfect blessings?
5. How are the new heavens and earth described in Revelation?
6. How did Jesus answer the question of the Sadducees?
7. Why do our bodies have to be changed to live in that perfect life?
8. Give an example of a question about the future that God does not answer.
9. What does it mean to walk by faith, and not by sight?
10. What is the difference between the outward man and the inward man?
11. What is meant by the term eschatology?