



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

## **A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)**

### **Lesson 15.9 – The Doctrine of the Last Things (Eschatology)**

#### **Eternal Life**

In our presentation of the doctrine of eschatology or the last things we have saved the best for the last. It is our privilege to present what the Bible teaches about eternal life. This is the great and final goal of every believer in Christ.

Eternal happiness in the presence of God in heaven is beyond our full comprehension. Jesus Himself used the simple word **“life”** when He spoke of it. He said: **“Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”** (Matthew 7:14). **“It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire”** (Matthew 18:8; also Matthew 18:9). At the close of His description of the final judgment Jesus said: **“These will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”** (Matthew 25:46).

Jesus’ apostle John recorded many of Jesus’ references to eternal life, as when He said to Nicodemus: **“God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16). Jesus said: **“He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment”** (John 5:24). On the Last Day these believers will **“come forth”** from their graves and participate in **“the resurrection of life”** (John 5:29). This is our goal, as Jesus said: **“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you”** (John 6:27). **“This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life”** (John 6:40). **“Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life”** (John 6:54). With these words Jesus meant that everyone who eats His flesh by trusting in His flesh and everyone who drinks His blood by trusting in His blood will enjoy eternal life. In its context this passage is not speaking about the Lord’s Supper, which Jesus instituted at a later time. Jesus Himself made that clear by saying on the same occasion: **“He who believes in Me has everlasting life”** (John 6:47). In His prayer on the night of His arrest Jesus said to His Father: **“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”** (John 17:3).

The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles also used the terms **“life”** and **“eternal life”** and **“everlasting life”** when they spoke about the future destiny of God’s family of believers. See Isaiah 26:19; Ezekiel 33:11; Daniel 12:1-3; Amos 5:4-6; Acts 13:48; Romans 1:17; Romans 6:8, 23; 1 Timothy 6:12; 1 John 4:9.

Jesus also pictured eternal life as a happy place and a truly happy home with truly happy experiences. Jesus said we have reason to be glad already now because we can look forward to a happy heaven: **“Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven”** (Matthew 5:12). Jesus promised that following Him would result in having **“treasure in heaven”** (Mark 10:21). Jesus called heaven **“an everlasting home”** (Luke 16:9) and **“Abraham’s bosom”** (Luke 16:22). Jesus told the repentant thief crucified next to Him: **“Today you will be with Me in Paradise”** (Luke 23:43). Jesus assured His apostles on the night of His arrest: **“In My Father’s house are many mansions”** (dwellings) (John 14:2).

Jesus often used the expression **“kingdom of heaven”** (Matthew 5:20; Matthew 7:21; Matthew 8:11) or **“kingdom of God”** (Matthew 21:31; Luke 13:29) or **“kingdom”** (Matthew 25:34; Luke 12:32) to picture the riches of our eternal home. This means eating and drinking at Jesus’ table (Luke 22:30) with

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Luke 13:29), as at a wedding banquet (Matthew 25:10). Jesus concluded His parable of the tares and the wheat with this amazing promise: **“Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”** (Matthew 13:43). The apostle John was told: **“Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb”** (Revelation 19:9).

Being in heaven means being **“glorified together”** with Jesus (Romans 8:17). **“The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”** (Romans 8:18). **“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”** (2 Corinthians 4:17). Heaven is our **“inheritance”** (Galatians 3:18) **“in the kingdom of Christ and of God”** (Ephesians 5:5). The apostle Peter described heaven as **“an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you”** (1 Peter 1:4).

Very often this final destiny for believers is called **“salvation”** (1 Thessalonians 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 1:14; Hebrews 9:28), **“the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”** (2 Timothy 2:10), **“the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”** (1 Peter 1:5), or **“the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls”** (1 Peter 1:9).

In the letter to the Hebrews we find expressions such as these: **“a better, that is, a heavenly country”** (Hebrews 11:16), **“My rest”** (Hebrews 3:11), **“His rest”** (Hebrews 4:1), and **“a rest for the people of God”** (Hebrews 4:9). The contrast between what we have now and what we will have then is expressed by these words: **“Here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come”** (Hebrews 13:14), which will indeed continue forever.

No doubt the greatest blessing of eternal life is that we shall be with God. The promise is recorded in various places in the Old and New Testaments that God will be our God, and we shall be His people. In the new heaven and the new earth this promise will be totally fulfilled in every way. **“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with them, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God”** (Revelation 21:3). This was Job’s faith: **“This I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”** (Job 19:26-27). This was also David’s faith: **“You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore”** (Psalm 16:11). This was true first of all of David’s Son, Jesus Christ, of whom David was prophesying. But it is true also for us because of Christ.

Jesus said in His sixth beatitude: **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”** (Matthew 5:8). In this life we have our allotted share of pain and grief and misery, as well as ignorance and imperfections of all kinds. **“For 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). **“We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is”** (1 John 3:2). **“There shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads”** (Revelation 22:3-4).

Most of the descriptions we are given concerning eternal life do not tell us exactly what it will be like, but rather tell us the things that will be lacking in heaven, such things as evil, sin, temptation, and all the consequences of sin, such as pain and grief and sickness and death. The prophet Isaiah declared by the Spirit of the Lord: **“He will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken”** (Isaiah 25:7-8). **“They shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them; for He who has mercy on them will lead them; even by the springs of water He will guide them”** (Isaiah 49:10). **“The former troubles are forgotten. ... For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. ... I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying. ... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain”** (Isaiah 65:16-25).

Eternal life will be without the many troubles and distresses of the present time. Creation itself will be delivered from its present corruption. The apostle Paul has told us: **“The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ... The creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”** (Romans 8:18-21). **“Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”** (2 Corinthians 4:17).

At the present time we must still **“wrestle ... against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”** (Ephesians 6:12). But in our eternal future all the corrupt human authorities will have no power. The devil himself and all his hosts will have no power. Death itself will have no power. For it is written: **“Then comes the end, when He (Christ) delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death”** (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). **“Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory.’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

Jesus’ last revelation to John summarizes all the evil things that will be lacking in the glorious life to come. Suffering, imprisonment, tribulation will be no more, but rather **“the crown of life”** (Revelation 2:10). Those who have **“washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb ... shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”** (Revelation 7:14-17). **“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, for the former things have passed away”** (Revelation 21:3-4). **“There shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie”** (Revelation 21:27). **“There shall be no more curse”** (Revelation 22:3). **“There shall be no night there”** (Revelation 22:5). **“Outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie”** (Revelation 22:15).

Enjoying eternal life involves being able to see God. Job confidently affirmed: **“I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another”** (Job 19:26-27). The presence of God is what makes heaven heaven. Asaph cried out: **“Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You”** (Psalm 73:25). **“My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the LORD”** (Jeremiah 31:14).

Peter, James, and John saw the glory of Jesus, the Son of God, when He was transfigured before their eyes on the high mountain. **“His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light”** (Matthew 17:2). Jesus has promised this to of His believers, saying: **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”** (Matthew 5:8). Jesus said that the **“angels”** of the little ones **“always see the face of My Father who is in heaven”** (Matthew 18:10), and that is what is promised to us also. We shall **“enter into the joy”** of our Lord, as in Jesus’ parable of the talents (Matthew 25:21, 23).

The apostle Peter tells us that **“when His glory is revealed”**, we shall be **“glad with exceeding joy”** (1 Peter 4:13). We shall be presented **“faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy”** (Jude 24). In his vision of the life to come the apostle John saw **“a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb”** (Revelation 7:9), praising, thanking, honoring, and worshiping God. It is written: **“When He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is”** (1 John 3:2).

The question has often been raised whether the saints will know one another in heaven and whether we shall be able to converse with one another and with the angels and with God Himself, or any of the Persons of God. John says that the goal of his testimony about Jesus was so that we who believe in Him **“may have fellowship”** with the apostles, and **“with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ”** (1

John 1:3). This would seem to mean at least this much: that we would have the same kind of intimate fellowship that Jesus had with His apostles on earth, and no doubt much more.

Jesus said that **“many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”** (Matthew 8:11; also Luke 13:38-39). When we sit down with others at a banquet, we usually enjoy conversation with them. Peter, James, and John recognized that it was Moses and Elijah who were talking with Jesus on the high mountain, and those two prophets no doubt heard Peter’s desire to set up three tents so that this wonderful moment could be prolonged. Staying in the glorious presence of Jesus was not possible at that time, but will it not be possible in eternity? Believers in Jesus on the Last Day will **“meet the Lord in the air”** and from that moment on **“shall always be with the Lord”** (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

The joys of heaven will be perfect, sinless, uninterrupted, and endless. **“We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”** (2 Peter 3:13). We shall **“be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust”** (2 Peter 1:4). Our inheritance is **“incorruptible and undefiled and ... does not fade away”** (1 Peter 1:4). Our inheritance is **“eternal”** (Hebrews 9:15). Our salvation is **“eternal”** (Hebrews 5:9). **“We have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”** (2 Corinthians 5:1). Jesus promised His disciples: **“Your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you”** (John 16:22). Jesus called our future residence **“an everlasting home”** (Luke 16:9). **“For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the LORD, ‘so shall your descendants and your name remain”** (Isaiah 66:22).

We always need to remember that all of these heavenly blessings are gifts from our God, won for us by the obedience of our Savior Jesus Christ and His suffering and death in our stead and behalf. Eternal life is not given to us as a reward of merit. Even our faith in Christ is God’s gift to us, created by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. God’s law curses us all, for we have not kept it. **“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us”** (Galatians 3:13). **“By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Since **“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17), we who are still living in this world of sin have been given the privilege of being God’s instruments to bring others to faith in Jesus Christ through our use of the Word of God. The apostle Paul longed to bring the Gospel of Christ to as many as possible, so that he **“might have some fruit”** among them (Romans 1:13). What is more wonderful than to be a participant in Gospel work that results in the conversion of unbelievers to Christ and an increase in the population of the new heavens and the new earth! Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: **“I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ”** (Romans 15:29). We also can go to others with the blessing of the Gospel of Christ, preaching the Gospel to every creature as authorized by our Lord and Savior (Mark 16:15).

What God said to His prophet Ezekiel He says to us all: **“Receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. And go, ... speak to them and tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD”** (Ezekiel 3:10-11). When someone is in danger of losing his faith by continuing in some sin, we can bring the Word of God to that person. Jesus says: **“If he hears you, you have gained your brother”** (Matthew 18:15). We want to help our fellow-believers in Christ to continue as believers, and we want those who are on the outside to come in and enjoy the blessings of Christ and His Gospel with us.

What greater accomplishment can there be in life than to be a participant in the grand mission announced by Jesus after His resurrection from the dead: **“Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”** (Luke 24:47). There are many ways to participate: preaching, teaching, supporting the preaching by assistance, prayer, and financial support, talking to neighbors, giving the example of a Christian life, watching for opportunities to share the Gospel **“in season and out of season”** (2 Timothy 4:2).

Consider how people are given an inheritance in heaven. The apostle Paul was sent to the unbelieving Gentile world **“to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me”** (Acts 26:18). What tool was Paul given for this work? The means of grace, the Gospel of Christ in Word and Sacrament. Paul wrote to Timothy: **“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you”** (1 Timothy 4:16). There is an urgency in doing these things, for everyone’s time of grace comes to an end when he dies. **“It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment”** (Hebrews 9:27). Since faith in Christ must be acquired in this life, since there is no opportunity for conversion after death, we are all urged to participate in the grand project of preaching the Gospel of Christ to the world while we still have the opportunity to do so.

Our Lord has given us certain promises to encourage us to let the light of the Gospel shine wherever we are. The Lord said to His prophet Daniel: **“Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever”** (Daniel 12:3). In Jesus’ parable of the talents the man who gained five more talents was told: **“Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord”** (Matthew 25:21). The same thing was said to the man who gained ten talents with his ten talents; in addition, a talent was taken away from the man who wasted his one talent. The master said: **“Take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents”** (Matthew 25:28). Jesus said a similar thing in the parable of the ten minas (Luke 19:11-27). The one who gained ten minas with his mina was told: **“Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities”** (Luke 19:17). The one whose mina gained nothing was told: **“Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas”** (Luke 19:24). Jesus concluded: **“To every one who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him”** (Luke 19:26). We are to use what God has given us in the service of the Gospel.

The Christian worker needs to use good materials in his spiritual building. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire”** (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). The reward for good workmanship will be the presence of believers in heaven because of our working with good materials, such as the means of grace, which Jesus instructed us to use. The apostle Paul used the best materials possible. Therefore, he looked forward to seeing his converts on the last day. He wrote to the Thessalonians: **“What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy”** (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20).

Paul’s aim in being the Lord’s missionary to the Gentiles was very clear. He wrote to the Corinthians: **“Though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more. ... I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the Gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with you”** (1 Corinthians 9:19, 22-23). To Timothy he wrote: **“I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”** (2 Timothy 2:10).

Eternal life – that is our goal. Eternal life – that is the goal we desire for all others. Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to reach this goal. Participating in the Gospel ministry in the ways God has appointed for us is the only way we can help others attain this goal.

## Questions

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1. What do you understand by the term “eternal life”?
2. What are some of the other terms the Bible uses for eternal life?
3. Prove that the Bible teaches that believers in Christ will see God.
4. List some of the things that will not be found in heaven.
5. Why will Satan not be able to disturb us in heaven?
6. Why does it seem likely that we will know one another in heaven?
7. In what ways will the new heavens and new earth be different from the current ones?
8. What must we always remember about our eternal salvation?
9. How can we participate in bringing others to eternal life?
10. What makes the goal of eternal life a greater goal than all others?