

What on EARTH is HEAVEN?

October 4, 2016

Class One: **INTRODUCTION** and

Question #1: *What is the Blessed Hope?*

REVIEW:

This six-week series is really Part 2, the flip side of last winter's five-week class: *What in HEAVEN'S Name is HELL?* The focus of the first class was the eternal destiny of the "**the lost**": those who by proud indifference or open hostility reject God's salvation in Christ. How we answer this question involves the character of God. Three of the four major views are considered acceptable/orthodox by Biblical Christians:

- **Eternal conscious torment** of the lost by God [historically most common, introduced by Augustine]. This view raises questions about God's justice.
- **Final total destruction** of the lost [embraced by increasing number of biblical scholars and Christian communions: see **Rethinking Hell** by Date, Stump and Anderson—I consider this view the most Biblically solid].
- '**Reverential agnosticism**' on the topic [held by many NT scholars]).

The fourth view (**Universalism** = God accepts all into eternity) is generally considered heresy because it denies Scripture and the necessity of the Gospel.

A corollary issue raised in the first class was the question of "*the immortal soul*," the core doctrine of the Greek philosopher Plato and embraced by many early Church Fathers such as Augustine—who were trained in Platonic Philosophy. The two actual words, *immortal* (rarely) and *soul* (often) do appear in the Bible, but **never once together**. Nor does a single Biblical passage, using other words, champion the natural possession of immortality by all human souls. Rather the Bible declares: "**God alone is immortal**" (1 Timothy 6:15-16), only those in Christ receive immortality as the gift of God in Christ by His Gospel (2 Timothy 1:10)—and we will only **put on immortality** at Jesus' return (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

INTRODUCTION:

Four Scriptural passages set the tone and spirit for this Class: Isaiah 1:18; 1 Peter 3:15, 2 Timothy 3:15-17; and 2 Peter 3:18. This class IS the place for questions and different understanding to be discussed with mutual respect. I am assuming

we share a huge and stable common center of Jesus Christ as LORD and Savior, revealed in the Bible as the inspired and authoritative Word of God.

KEY QUESTION: As Christians, what exactly is our “*blessed hope*” in Christ? **What** is eternal life with God? **Where, who** and **what** are we in Christ throughout eternity, and **how/when/why** does all this come about? **How** will we spend eternity—and **who** will we be? We can start to answer these questions by asking another question: Is the promise of eternal life in the Bible the hope that we will leave earth and go to “heaven” or that God will bring heaven back to us? This requires defining how the Bible uses the term HEAVEN?

1. In Scripture, the term “heaven” or most often “kingdom of heaven” denotes the realm or dimension of God’s visible presence and activity, and is often used (esp. in the 1st Gospel) as a synonym for God. Compare Matthew 4:17 with Mark 1:15 for example, or see Jesus’ parables in Matthew 13.
2. God’s original ideal was the full union of heaven (His realm and presence) and earth (our realm of existence), as described in Genesis 2:4, 22; 3:8.
 - a. From the entrance of sin, the goal of God’s work of reconciliation has been a *heaven to earth directional movement* to bring about the complete reunion of heaven and earth—the full restoration of His “good” creation [think of all the great OT/NT stories of God’s acts of salvation] (Matthew 19:28; Acts 3:19-21; and Revelation 21:1.)
 - b. Throughout the Bible, the *movement of God* for our redemption is not towards taking us “up”—rescuing us out and away from earth to heaven. Rather, *God acts to bring heaven back “down”—the coming back of God to earth (to us) for salvation.* God’s goal is the restoration of His original intent: to renew the unity of God and man (heaven and earth: Revelation 21:2-5; Romans 8:18-24; Philippians 3:20; 1 Corinthians 15:51-55; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18).
 - c. The birth, life, atoning death and resurrection of *Jesus Christ* was the *first-fruits demonstration of God’s restored Kingdom on earth.* Jesus visibly inaugurated the Kingdom of God (Luke 11:20) and created the Way, in Himself, by which the full restoration of God’s Kingdom (the reunion of heaven and earth) comes about (Luke 2:9-12; Matthew 3:16; Matthew 17:1-5; 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 1:12-20). **SO—our “blessed hope” is Titus 2:13.**