**Who Needs Theology?**

**Last Things**

**Class #15**

*Life after death*

-Two popular books that came out in recent years are *90 Minutes in Heaven* and *23 Minutes in Hell.*

-Both supposedly testimonies of a person who died and then came back to life to tell us about it.

-People have always been fascinated as well as feared the afterlife for centuries.

-In fact, many of our popular (and religious ideas) find their roots in Greek mythology – regarding *Hades, souls, spirits, demons, ghosts, heaven, hell, the river Styx* (the river which formed the boundary between life and death – it is interesting that in *Pilgrim’s Progress* at the end of Christian’s life he leaves this world and goes down into a river and comes up on the other side in the afterlife).

-Many of the pictures that we form in our mind about the afterlife come a lot more from these traditions and popular culture than from what we read in the Bible.

-We get vague glimpses in the Bible and then often fill in the gaps with the pictures that have been simply handed down to us – assuming that is what the Bible is saying.

-It is interesting that many in folk Christianity make much over all the details (the furniture in heaven and the temperature of hell – and often have to go to accounts of near death experiences to get their data).

-Where many professional theologians and scholars say very little about the details.

(i.e. “What will our new body be like?” – 1 Cor. 15).

-There are certain things, however, that Christians have agreed upon throughout the ages.

1. Resurrection
2. Judgment
3. Heaven
4. Hell

1. Resurrection

-Life in heaven will be populated by persons with bodies not by disembodied spirits.

-The blessed hope for the Christian has always been the bodily resurrection.

-“I believe in the resurrection of the dead.”

\*Dan. 4, John 11:24, 1 Thess. 4, 1 Cor. 15.

-The intermediate state (between death and resurrection) receives little attention in the scripture, although most throughout church history have believed that some kind of conscious intermediate state exists, but that this is not our hope (2 Cor. 5:1-4)

-Other Christians deny any conscious existence of human beings between death and resurrection.

2. Judgement

-Every person will stand before God and face judgement.

-Every knee will bow before him, some in submission and some in defeat.

\*Heb. 9:27, Rev. 20:11-15

3. Heaven

-Pictures of heaven in the Bible: A perfect cube (perfect), streets paved with gold (priceless), fortified with strong walls (secure). How literal are we to take these pictures?

-Most Christians have believed that heaven will be a renewed earth and continuous with the original creation – the earth’s/cosmos redemption through renovation.

-Others believe that heaven will be a different world/place altogether.

4. Hell

-Pictures:

 Lake of fire – Rev. 20:14, Mark 9:43 (Jesus)

Outer darkness – Matt. 8:12 (Jesus)

How literal are we to take the pictures of hell?

-Everlastingly conscious. (Literal or Metaphorical)

\*Matt. 25:46, Matt. 8:12, Mark 9:48

-Annihilationism or conditional immortality (everlasting punishment)

\*John 3:16, Rom. 6:23, Rev. 20:14-15, Isaiah 26:14 & 19

 -Clark Pinnock, John Stott, John Stackhouse

*Heresies*

1. Immortality of the soul to the neglect or exclusion of bodily resurrection.

-“I’ll Fly Away” – compares the soul at bodily death with a bird flying away from a prison.

*When the shadows of this life have gone,*

*I’ll fly away.*

*Like a bird from the prison bars has flown,*

*I’ll fly away*

-Funerals where ministers talk about the person having “left this mortal body” to be home with the Lord forever to the neglect of any mention of the resurrection.

-See the body as a prison of the immortal soul.

-This is a popular belief among folk Christians, but almost non-existent among Christian theologians.

-Plus, only God is immortal. (1 Tim. 6:16).

1. Reincarnation or transmigration of souls or spirits.

-Your spirit/soul lives on and inhabits another person/animal/thing.

1. Objective immortality.

-A person’s immortality is simply their enduring influence on the world once they are gone.

*\*Go* over chart.

***The Kingdom of God***

-When Christ returns he will establish or completely manifest the rule and reign of God – “the kingdom of God/heaven” – that is already at work within history.

-“The kingdom of God” / “The kingdom of heaven” (Matthew).

-Are the kingdom of God and the new heaven and earth the same thing? (yes and no).

-The kingdom of God is the reign of God which is going on now and forever which will go on forever.

-Starts like a mustard seed and grows.

-The already/not yet.

-Luke 17:20-21 / 1 Cor. 15:25-28

*Some Ways Revelation has been interpreted*

1. Futurism – All the signs and symbols (which tend to be read literally) refer to realities in the future.
2. Preterism – Most of the signs and symbols (which tend to be read symbolically) were fulfilled in the early days of the church.
3. Historicism – The signs and seals (which tend to be read symbolically) are codes for history.
4. Premillennialism

-Christ will return to earth at the end of this present age and establish his kingdom on this world.

-The millennial happens *after* Christ’s second coming and *before* the new heaven and earth.

-Many of the earliest church fathers took this view.

-The belief in the imminent, visible, and catastrophic nature of the Second Coming followed by an earthly, historical utopia ruled by Christ after it (for either 1000 literal years or for a certain period of time).

1. Dispensational Premillennialism

-Started in the 1800s with John Nelson Darby and the *Plymouth Brethren.*

-Saw a sharp distinction between Israel and the church.

-Added to Premillennialism things like the “Rapture of the Church” (to end the church age and begin a new age for Israel). 7 year tribulation, one world government anri-Christ.

-The millennium then became a time for God to literally fulfill all his OT promises to Israel and for Israel to rebuild the Temple and reinstitute sacrifice, etc..

-This view was popularized through the Schofield reference Bible and through the preaching and endorsement of D. L. Moody became quite popular in evangelical circles through books like *The Late Great Planet Earth, Left Behind, Dallas Theological Seminary* and American TV preachers.

1. Postmillennialism

-The kingdom of God will appear on earth *before* Christ’s second coming.

-Popular during the age of reason/science.

-Most common position of evangelicals from the 18th & 19th centuries.

-Position held by America's greatest theologian/philosopher Jonathan Edwards..

1. Amillennialism

-A denial of any socio-political, historical kingdom of God before or after Christ’s return.

-What follows Christ’s second coming is the judgement and his establishing the new heaven and the new earth.

-The millennium is a symbolic time between Christ’s incarnation and his second coming. (The age of the church).

-Most common position in church history and the position of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglican, Protestants and Puritans.

-The kingdom of God within history is not a utopian social order but God’s spiritual presence through Christ and the Holy Spirit in the church and in heaven.

-Satan is bound, the antichrist appears, and Satan is loosed for a season to tempt the

nations, Christ comes again, judgement, heaven or hell.

-The millennium is to be read allegorically or spiritually.

-Since Augustine (5th century) the church has predominantly been amillennial (practically all the reformers and Puritans were Amillennialists).

*Heresies*

1. Radically realized eschatology.

-The new heaven and earth have already been realized.

-Overemphasis on the *already*

1. Extreme Adventism and millennialism.

-Attempting to predict names and dates and times.

-Seeing everything as horrible now.

-This denies the reality of God’s kingdom now.

-Devalues what Christ has done and is doing now (often through his church).

-Overemphasis on the *not yet.*

*\*Go* over chart.

-There is a danger in both minimizing the doctrines of the end or of maximizing them.

**NAB Statement of Faith**

We believe God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring all things to their appropriate end and establish the new heaven and the new earth. The certain hope of the Christian is that Jesus Christ will return to earth suddenly, personally and visibly in glory according to His promise. The dead will be raised, and Christ will judge humanity in righteousness. The unrighteousness will be consigned to the everlasting punishment prepared for the devil and his angels. The righteous, in their resurrected and glorified bodies, will receive their reward and dwell forever with the Lord.

Roger Olson (p. 356-357).

“Christians need to learn how to revel in Christian hope for the future without wallowing in sensationalism and fear-mongering.”

“God will renovate this creation and unite it with heaven so that his people will deal with him in a new heaven and new earth for eternity.”

“The Christian does not live in despair over ‘what the world is coming to’ but in hope because of “who is coming to this world.”

\*1 Thess. 5:1-11

1. How literally do you think we should take the descriptions of heaven and hell in the Bible?

2. Do you agree with pastor Stef’s assessment about Christian funerals? When you go to a Christian funeral do you hear more about the immortality of the soul than about the resurrection of the body? If so, do you see any danger in this?

3. What do you think about the recent trend in Christian circles regarding the testimonies of near-death experiences?

4. Do you hold to (or lean towards) a particular millennial position? If so, which one and why?

5. Does a person’s views on the end times have any implication on the way they live in the here and now? If so, how?