

I. HEAVEN (Eschatology: The Intermediate State, the Precursory Signs, the Millennium, the Second Coming of Christ, the Final Resurrection, the Last Judgment and the Eternal State).

A. We end Essentials of Reformed Doctrine with the biblical teaching on heaven.

1. There are many misconceptions about heaven and we know precious little about it.

- a. Some think we will be forever in a disembodied existence in an immaterial realm, a place of pure light where we will sing forever in a choir or strum on harps while sitting on clouds.
- b. Others object to heaven as an intolerably boring place: nothing to do, endless church service.
- c. But heaven will be beyond any blessedness we can imagine; God tells us enough to make us long for heaven but not enough to satisfy our curiosity (I Cor. 2:9, but v. 10, “God hath revealed”).

2. We must also understand that there is more than one heaven.

- a. II Cor. 12:2 speaks about “the third heaven”: the atmosphere, outer space & heaven itself.
- b. The heaven where the saints are now (the intermediate state) is *not the same heaven* where the entire glorified church will be after the Judgment (the eternal state).
- c. Heaven is a place where the *souls* of the saints dwell, but the final state will be the new heavens and the new earth for the saints *soul and body*. We will only be temporarily disembodied.

B. The eternal state (the eternal home of God, Christ, the elect angels and the elect church) will be the new heavens and the new earth.

1. These new heavens and new earth are promised in Isaiah 65:17ff; II Peter 3:10ff; Rev. 21:1ff.

- a. The present world will pass away: it will not be annihilated as if God has to start all over again.
- b. God will cleanse or purge this present world with fire and bring forth a “new” (fresh) universe.
- c. This new universe will be a real, physical, tangible place fit for human beings to dwell with resurrected bodies, and it shall bring heaven and earth together. Never again will heaven and earth be separated by an unbridgeable gulf. Heaven shall descend upon the earth.
- d. This is the opposite of the JW’s conception. They teach two realms: a heavenly kingdom for 144,000; and an earthly kingdom for the rest of the faithful.

2. The new heavens and new earth are God’s eternal purpose: a renewed and perfected universe in which God’s glory in Jesus Christ is eternally displayed.

- a. The first Eden was never God’s eternal purpose: Adam’s sin did not spoil “Plan A” and force God to make a “Plan B.” Christ was always “Plan A,” the only plan. It pleased God to make Adam and Eve, to have them fall, and then for Christ to redeem them so that God was glorified.
- b. It was never God’s purpose to permit the devil to steal creation from Him: God will not “give up” on His creation, but the entire creation will be redeemed (with elect humanity [not every single human being] at its centre: Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20).
- c. Therefore Christ died, not only for some human beings but to overturn the curse which lay on the entire creation because of our sin (Rom. 8:21). When we imagine the eternal state we must think of a world like this one but infinitely more beautiful in which God’s glory shines from every blade of grass; a world of redeemed men, angels and animals; of forests, mountains and rivers.

II. THE GLORIFIED CHURCH: THE NEW JERUSALEM

A. In a vision the blessedness of the church is set forth in terms of a glorious city (Rev. 21-22).

1. The fact that this is a vision should make us sober in our interpretation of such passages.

- a. The “holy city, the new Jerusalem” (21:2) is not the literal city of Jerusalem. First, she comes down from heaven (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:2); second she is the Lamb’s wife, the church (v. 9-10).
- b. New Jerusalem is a symbol of the glorified church, the church as she is ideally in God’s counsel, the church as she shall be when she is perfectly sanctified (Rev. 21:2; Eph. 1:4, 5:27; Jude 24).
- c. The new Jerusalem is the church of all ages, consisting of Jews and Gentiles from the OT and NT, the patriarchs and prophets and the apostles (Rev. 21:12-14).

2. The primary idea of the vision is of beauty or glory. Everything which is precious, valuable and beautiful is found in this great city.

- a. What could be more beautiful than a city which has foundations garnished with no fewer than twelve different kinds of jewels (jasper to amethyst) with the names of the twelve apostles in the twelve foundations (Rev. 21:19-20; see also Eph. 2:20)?
 - b. What could be more awesome than a city with twelve gates each carved in massive pearls, with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on them, and guarded by twelve angels (vv. 12, 21)?
 - c. What could be more breathtakingly magnificent than a city whose streets are made of pure gold, so bright that it looks like transparent glass (v. 21)?
- 3. The size and dimensions of the city are symbolic of perfection.**
- a. The city is a perfect cube and its measurements are 12,000 furlongs (1,500 miles or 2,200 km).
 - b. The idea is not that we will live in a city with such dimensions but that the city is perfect. The number 12,000 is highly significant (3x4x10x10) and indicates perfect fellowship with God.
 - c. The Holy of Holies in the tabernacle/temple was also a perfect cube (I Kings 6:20; II Chron. 3:8)
- 4. That the glorified church is described in terms of a perfect city is significant.**
- a. A city is an ordered society, a permanent dwelling place, a community. It is a city for which the Old Testament patriarchs longed to exchange their tents (Heb. 11:10, 16).
 - b. The New Jerusalem is a city with walls and gates but these are never shut because there is neither night nor danger there: perfect security, peace, safety and permanency (Rev. 21:25).
- B. The glory and blessedness of the new heavens and the new earth will be fellowship with God.**
- 1. That is the goal of everything that God has been doing for His people from the very beginning.**
- a. God created Adam and Eve and gave them “seed” so that He could share the blessed life of the covenant which He lives within Himself with rational moral creatures in His image.
 - b. There are various manifestations of this fellowship: walking with God; the tabernacle; the land of Canaan; the temple; the incarnation; the indwelling of the Spirit; but in heaven God’s tabernacle shall be permanently, everlastingly and perfectly with men (Rev. 21:3).
- 2. Because fellowship with God is the goal, the centre of heaven will be Jesus Christ.**
- a. There are many carnal conceptions of heaven. If Jesus Christ is not in heaven and if He is not the centre of heaven’s blessedness then heaven is not heaven and we do not want to be there.
 - b. Jesus is the centerpiece of heaven because Jesus is the way to heaven; it is by His blood that we will be in heaven. Without the sacrifice of Christ there is no heaven for any sinner.
 - c. Therefore we should not be surprised to find that Revelation 21-22 is filled with references to Jesus Christ. He is the “husband” (21:2), the one enthroned (21:5, 22:3); He is the temple of the new Jerusalem (21:22); He is the light (brighter than the sun, 21:23); from Him proceeds the river of life (22:1); His name shall be on our foreheads and we shall see His face (22:4) and His Coming fulfills the promise of heaven (22:12-13, 16, 20-21).
- 3. The activity of the saints, therefore, shall be blessed rest, blessed service and blessed fellowship without sin in glorified bodies and souls in the presence of God forever.**
- a. There will be no sin in the new heavens and the new earth: gone forever will be even the possibility of sin. Our sinful souls and bodies will be entirely sanctified with the holiness of Christ and we will no longer be hindered (as we are now) in our service, worship or fellowship.
 - b. That aspect of heaven is inconceivable to us now: we cannot imagine how we could exist in a realm where our thoughts, words and deeds will be perfectly holy, no longer tainted with pride, selfishness, envy or lust, where everything we do is done perfectly to the glory of God.
 - c. Life in heaven will be praise and worship (thankful worship without boredom); service (without drudgery, frustration or toil [Matt. 25:23; II Tim. 2:12; Rev. 22:5: something like what Adam and Eve did before the fall, tending, exploring, developing the new heavens and earth to God’s glory]); and rest (resting in God, refreshment in the waters of life, tears wiped away by God).
 - d. When we open our eyes there we will see the glory of God and we shall be satisfied with His likeness (Ps. 17:15) and we shall say, as the Queen of Sheba exclaimed when she saw Solomon’s kingdom, “Behold the half was not told me” (I Kings 10:7). *And this is all ours by grace, flowing to us from the fountain of God’s election and purchased for us on the cross of Christ!*