

Foundations

Eternity

3.10.24

Hebrews 6:1–3 (CSB)

6 Therefore, let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, faith in God, ²teaching about ritual washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³And we will do this if God permits.

1. The resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment are foundational doctrines of Christianity.

A. Without a resurrection, there is no Christianity.

1. With resurrection comes judgment.
2. God's goodness requires judgment of sin.
3. It is not good to overlook sin, just like a good judge cannot permit crimes to go unpunished.
4. Thankfully God, in His goodness, is willing to judge sin through and by Jesus.

B. This morning, I hope to answer or at least gives some direction to a few of the more common questions about eternity.

1. Some are theological, and others are practical.
2. The Good News is that believers do not have to fear death, for perfect love casts out all fear including the fear of death.

2. What happens after we die?

A. Do we go to heaven, or do we have to wait?

1. The Apostle Paul answers this in 2 Cor.

2 Corinthians 5:1–10 (CSB)

For we know that if our earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal dwelling in the heavens, not made with hands. ²Indeed, we groan in this tent, desiring to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³since, when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴Indeed, we groan while we are in this tent, burdened as we are, because we do not want to be unclothed but clothed, so that mortality may be swallowed up by life. ⁵Now the one who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as a down payment.

⁶So we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷For we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸In fact, we are confident, and we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to him. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

B. The Apostle Paul says that on Earth, we all have an earthly tent or body that will not live forever.

1. This body, while good, is mortal, and Paul even calls it a burden.

2. But for Paul, and for us, **the pains and groanings of this body are reminders that there is coming a day when this mortal body will be swallowed up by life (vs 4c).**

3. To be in this body is to be away from the Lord.

C. And to be out of this body is to be at home with the Lord (Vs.8).

1. I think it is safe to say that when we die, we go to our eternal destination.
2. For the believer, we go to be with the Lord.
3. For the unbeliever, we go to hell and eternal death.

3. Does hell last forever?

A. Yes, but not how we typically think of it.

1. Eternal life and eternal death last forever.
2. Some teach what is called annihilationism, which teaches that when unbelievers die, they simply cease to exist.
3. But the Scripture teaches something very different:

Revelation 20:11–15 (CSB)

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and one seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. ¹²I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books. ¹³Then the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them; each one was judged according to their works. ¹⁴Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

B. Eternal death lasts forever, but hell is thrown into the lake of fire.

1. From this Scripture and others, we can believe that when unbelievers die, they go to hell.
2. Hell is a place of punishment that lasts until the end of the age.
3. When all are judged, hell is cast into the lake of fire, of which there is no end or escape.

C. **When this life on Earth ends, the book is closed.**

1. The verdict is inevitable and cannot be changed.
2. Guilt or forgiveness has been established and is merely awaiting the final judgment.

4. **Is there a purgatory?**¹

A. The Catholic doctrine is based upon Rev 21:27, "nothing unclean shall enter heaven."

1. The last act of sanctification, the Catholics say, is purgatory.
2. It ensures that nothing unclean enters heaven.
3. According to the Catholic Church, Purgatory is only for Christians (the elect) and is entirely different from the punishment of the damned."²

B. There is no purgatory.

1. Once we die, eternity is set.
2. The doctrine of purgatory means "to cleanse," and it's where souls atone for past sins before entering heaven."
3. This is a Catholic doctrine but not a Christian doctrine.
 - a. It is based heavily upon the book of Maccabees and other works that are not Scripture.
 - b. No Protestant group that I'm aware of believes in purgatory.

C. Why?

1. Jesus is all we need.
 - a. He perfects His righteousness in us.

¹ For a Catholic defense, check out: <https://www.catholic.com/tract/purgatory>

² Ibid.

b. Though we are far from perfect, in Christ, we are made clean.

2. Purgatory isn't necessary.

a. According to Catholic doctrine, only martyrs and a few special people, go straight to heaven.

b. Most need more purging and that is done in purgatory.

c. Again, this is for the "elect" not for unbelievers.

d. The unbaptized and those who committed mortal sins after baptism go immediately to hell.³

e. But none of this makes sense of the Scriptures before us.

3. Jesus is the ONLY sacrifice for our sins.

Hebrews 10:19–23 (CSB)

¹⁹Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus—²⁰he has inaugurated for us a new and living way through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)—²¹and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. ²³Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful.

4. No, there is no purgatory because Jesus is the only sacrifice for our sins and we are only cleansed through His blood.

5. Can I know that I'm saved and going to heaven?

A. Let's think of it like this?

1. Do you think the Apostle Paul worried if he was saved?

³ https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_122.cfm

2. While Peter was being martyred, do you think he was afraid of missing heaven?

3. Where does this fear come from?

B. Many who worry and fret are godly people who have either embraced bad theology or are too hard on themselves.

1. My early understanding of God's love for me was very shallow and temperamental.

2. Especially as a kid, I was constantly worried that my next sin or mistake would be my last and that was when the Rapture would come and leave me behind.

3. This view of God's love does not reflect the biblical example.

C. However, not all who claim to be followers of Jesus are saved.

1. Matthew 7 gives several of Jesus' teachings that emphasize this point.

Matthew 7:21–23 (CSB)

²¹“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²²On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’ ²³Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you. **Depart from me, you lawbreakers!**’”

2. Sadly, many people who believe themselves to be absolutely certain they are going heaven but do not demonstrate a relationship or allegiance to Jesus and are in mortal danger.

3. For the people in this room, you know if you are doing the will of the Father.

a. You know if you are producing good fruit or bad.

b. You know if you are living according to the flesh or the Spirit.

Romans 8:13–17 (CSB)

¹³because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!" ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, ¹⁷and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

6. Do we become angels after we die?

A. I'm not exactly sure where this idea came from.

1. But the paintings of the Renaissance depict the dead as angels.
2. But this is ABSOLUTELY not true.
3. Here's why.

B. Angels are created beings who were created to be angels.

1. The creation of angels isn't mentioned in the Creation story of Genesis 1 or 2.
2. It took place more than likely before Earth was created, which would explain the existence of Satan in the Garden and the war in heaven mentioned in Isaiah 14.
3. But the angels are created beings, not disembodied souls.

C. This is good news for us because We were created as something far better.

1. God created us in His image, something not said about angels.
2. Angels were not given the chance for repentance, we are.
3. Angels are never called co-heirs with Christ Jesus but are only "ministering spirits."

4. So no, we do not become angels and that is Great news.

7. Is it ok to be cremated?

A. This one comes up more often than you would think, especially among the older generation.

1. Many people were taught that if a loved one is cremated, then there isn't a body for Jesus to resurrect, and therefore, they can't go to heaven.

2. This doesn't make sense.

B. First of all, our physical bodies do decay.

1. Second, and most importantly, is God so weak that He can't resurrect you to new life with a new, resurrected body?

2. I'll admit, the mechanics of this are complicated:

a. But it doesn't matter if you were buried in a box, a concrete tomb, buried at sea, or cremated;

b. NOTHING will prevent the resurrection of the dead when that day comes.

c. John in Revelation 20 saw the Earth and the Sea giving up their dead.

3. The resurrection of the body is a Grand Statement of God's power.

C. Burial is a matter of personal choice.

1. Every culture has had a different approach to burial.

a. Some believed it was honorable to burn the bodies, like the Vikings.

b. Others believed that by burning the bodies of their enemies, the enemies would be kept from going to paradise.

c. Islam does not permit cremation or coffins.

d. Modern Jewish burial does not permit coffins or embalming so that all of the body may return to the Earth.

e. The ancient Jews often used Ossuaries where a body was buried, and much later, the skeletal remains were placed in a chest or box often placed in a tomb.

2. My advice is to respect the requests of the loved one.

1. Funerals in America are expensive, which is why some choose cremation.

2. Some people choose to be organ donors, while others don't want to be embalmed.

3. Biblically speaking, none of this will prevent our resurrection!

8. Will my dog be in heaven?

A. I don't have Scripture and verse for this one, so I will quote a long-time pastor and leader within the Assemblies of God, Dr. George Wood.

1. He said: The bible shows that there are horses in heaven.

2. And where there are horses, there are dogs.

3. Therefore, dogs go to heaven.

B. The salvation of house cats is very questionable.

C. And you can forget about seeing your pet snake.

Take a deep breath

9. I lost a baby; what happened to them?

A. This was the number 1 question people had on my Facebook post.

1. Will my unborn baby know me?

2. Will I watch them grow up, or will they be fully matured?

3. This question reminds us that life on this Earth is not as it should be and is marred by sin and death.

4. Because of what happened in Genesis 3, we have this question.

- a. The loss of a child is the hardest experience of humanity.
- b. In this room, many of you know the pain of this loss.
- c. This is a hard thing to talk about, but we need to.

B. Why does it hurt so much?

1. When an adult dies, especially one who has lived many years, we can grieve or celebrate what was and what has been.
2. A miscarriage, the loss of a baby, child, or kid, is the grieving of what never will be.
3. It's the loss of what should have been but isn't.
4. This morning, we invite Jesus into this pain and loss.

C. This question is so full of emotion that we often give bad advice to make others or ourselves feel better.⁴

1. For example, We may say the child is an angel, but that isn't what Scripture says.
2. Never tell someone that they are in a better or place.
3. Or, Jesus must have needed them.
4. None of this is helpful.
5. I've referenced a short blog in my notes that provides advice on what not to say and what to say.
 - a. My best pastoral advice is to pray with them, love them, and shed tears with them.
 - b. What does the Scripture say about this question?

⁴ <https://www.illumefertility.com/fertility-blog/pregnancy-and-infant-loss-awareness-month>

D. The passage that comes to mind and is on my heart for this year is 2 Samuel 12.

1. It's a heartbreaking story about King David, who got Bathsheba pregnant, and the prophet Nathan, who revealed David's sin.
2. Part of the word was that the baby would die.
 - a. Before I move on, I want you to know that that part of the story does not apply to you.
 - b. Heaven did not need your baby more than you, heaven wasn't short an angel, or not of that other junk.
 - c. And this part of the story DOES NOT apply to you.
3. King David fasts and prays, but the baby dies, and no one wants to tell the King cause kings can kill over bad news.
 - a. When he finds out, he breaks his fast and puts on fresh clothes.
 - b. And all of his staff are confused.

2 Samuel 12:22–23 (NLT)

²² David replied, "I fasted and wept while the child was alive, for I said, 'Perhaps the LORD will be gracious to me and let the child live.'²³ But why should I fast when he is dead? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him one day, but he cannot return to me."

E. we see in this verse the hope of a Christian parent.

1. David believed or sensed that his child was in the presence of God and that he would someday see his boy.
2. David may not fully grasp what he was saying but we can see the big picture:
 - a. that the child that you never knew will be known by you when you enter into eternity.

b. Scripture does not say if they will be full grown or what age they will be.

c. So I will be silent where Scripture is silent.

F. But through David's heartbreak, we see the good news that a reunion loomed for David and his son, and that applies to us, too.

1. He cannot return to me, so I will go to him.

2. The words of a grieving parent who trusted in God.

Apply: Communion and Prayer

A. In light of today's message, I draw our attention to the reality of Jesus.

1. Because Jesus rose from the grave, He has secured for us a resurrection into eternal life.

2. Yes, this world can be heavy and hard.

3. But Jesus has gone before us to prepare a place for us and He is coming for us again.

B. In the meantime, we remember His presence and His power in the elements of communion.

1. What we are going to do this morning is first, we will receive communion together.

2. Then we are going to worship together with one more song.

3. And if during that time you would like prayer, one of the prayer team or myself will meet with you here along the front.

4. After the service, if you would like prayer but more privately, hang around this side of the platform and someone will join you as well.

COMMUNION