

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: “What You’ll Do in Eternity” (Colossians 1:21-22)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 01/31/2010

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Introduction

Let me begin today by once again reading for you Colossians 1:21-22 –

“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.”

In our last two messages we’ve seen that Jesus Christ will bring our reconciliation to God to its culmination, when He presents believers holy, blameless, and above reproach in His sight before the throne of glory. And that will be your state for all eternity – free not only from the power of sin, and the guilt of sin, and the bondage of sin, but also from the very presence of sin, and from the very possibility of sin, and from all the effects of sin, forever and ever.

In previous messages we’ve talked about the past and present aspects of this truth, and today we’re going to look at the glorious future that lies ahead, for every blood-bought child of God.

Reconciliation Consummated

I want to begin today by reminding you of the word “reconciliation.” We considered that word in some detail in a previous message. In that message we looked at Colossians 1:20, where Paul declares that “it pleased the Father that in Him [Jesus] all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself,

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by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”

We saw that the word “reconcile” in that verse is very significant. In the original language it means “to change something backward and upward into its original condition.” Now this raises the question, just what is it that is being changed backward and upward into its original condition through the blood of the cross of Christ? Well, Paul gives us the answer. He says that “all things” are being reconciled. “All things” are being changed backward and upward into their original condition. And then he adds this for even greater emphasis: “all things” – “whether things on earth or things in heaven.” Nothing left out. All things and everything in the physical and material realm of the created universe. All things and everything in the spiritual realm of Heaven itself. In other words, the entire universe.

Why is this kind of reconciliation necessary? We find the answer in Genesis chapter one. God promised man the earth itself as his habitation, his inheritance. Genesis 1:28 – “And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’ ”

But then man fell into sin. But when man sinned, his dominion over the earth was not taken away. But the earth over which he rules is now under the curse, as we learn from Genesis 3:17 (“cursed is the ground because of you”). And because of the curse, man himself is now so corrupted by sin that he can no longer rule the earth properly.

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That’s why this world is in the condition it’s in. But immediately after the fall God gave the promise, in Genesis 3:15, that He would send a Redeemer. And in Colossians 1:14 we read that the Redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ himself: “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

The Whole Creation Eagerly Awaits It

Then from Genesis we come over to the New Testament, and Romans chapter eight tells us that the entire creation is waiting for the culmination of that redemption. Paul writes this:

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope...[and] we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

Notice the words Paul uses: “the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now” – “the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the

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revealing of the sons of God" – "the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." The universe was cursed on account of man's sin, and through the blood of Christ that curse and all the effects of that curse are going to be removed forever. This is the reconciliation of which Paul speaks in Colossians 1:20 – the reconciliation of "all things" – nothing left out. Everything being changed backward and upward into its original condition, when everything was perfect, and all things were under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And as we shall see, the restored creation is going to be far more glorious than the original.

God's Promise: New Heavens and New Earth

All of this will be God's fulfillment of His promise of new heavens and a new earth. We read of that promise in Isaiah chapters 65 and 66. Now those chapters are a combined prophecy of both aspects of the Second Coming of Christ. Now there are also passages that speak of the first and second coming of Christ as though the two were a single event, and the same kind of thing is true here. These chapters speak both of Christ's millennial kingdom on this present earth, and also of the new heavens and new earth. The distinctions in Old Testament prophecy about which parts apply to the first coming of Christ, and which parts apply to the Second Coming, are only clear in light of fulfilled prophecy. The same is going to be true about Isaiah chapters 65 and 66. Some parts of those chapters speak of the millennial kingdom on this earth, and some parts speak of the new heavens and new earth, and some parts perhaps speak of both. But in Isaiah 65:17, God gives us this great

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promise – “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.”

And then we come over to the New Testament, in Second Peter chapter three, and we find Peter speaking of that promise. He tells us that the present heavens and earth are going to be subjected to the fires of judgment and cleansing. In Second Peter three, beginning at verse ten, he writes:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up ...the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat...

But, he says, in the next verse, “We, according to [God’s] promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

And then in Revelation chapter 21, verse 1 and following, we see the promise fulfilled. John writes, “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”

New in Essence, or New in Quality?

As we read these passages, we need to address a critical question about the new heavens and the new earth: Are they going to be totally new, or are they going to be a renovation and restoration of the heavens and earth that now exist? The answer is

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that Scripture makes it clear that the present heavens and earth are going to be renovated, not annihilated. Let me give you three reasons why this is true.

The first reason is the original language of the New Testament. There are two words in the Greek language that can both be translated "new". One is *neos*, which means that something is completely new; it is new in time or origin; it is new in its essence. The other word for "new" in the Greek is *kainos* which means not new in origin, but new in nature or in quality. And it is this second word, the word *kainos*, that is used in the phrase "a new heaven and a new earth" in both Second Peter and in Revelation. It means, therefore, *not* the emergence of heavens and earth that are totally new, but the *renovation* of the universe which now exists. We have the prototype of this in the Genesis flood. God destroyed the earth by water, and he saved eight people along with every kind of animal, so that they could begin again on a renovated earth. And God promised never to destroy the world by a universal flood of water, ever again. But as Peter tells us, God will destroy the world as it now exists, by fire.

A second reason for understanding that the Bible speaks of the renovation of the present heavens and earth is found in the passage in Romans eight that we read a few moments ago. Paul says that the existing creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God, so that it may be set free from its bondage to decay because of sin. He is saying that the present creation will be liberated from corruption in the Day of the Lord, not that it will be a totally different creation from the one that now exists.

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A third reason that we understand that the heavens and earth are going to be renovated, is that the Scripture tells us that the bodies of believers are going to be renovated. The differences between our present bodies and our resurrection bodies are glorious differences. But those differences do not take away the continuity. It is we ourselves who shall be raised, and it is we ourselves who shall always be with the Lord. Not people like us, but we ourselves. Those who are raised with Christ will not be a totally new set of human beings. They will be the people of God who have lived on this earth. Christ is going to present us to Himself – we ourselves, Colossians 1:22 – “holy, blameless, and above reproach in His sight.” In the same way, the new earth will not be totally different from the present earth. It will be the present earth gloriously renewed, made perfect, just as we are going to be gloriously renewed and made perfect.

John’s Vision of the Promise Fulfilled

We come now to the Bible’s description of the life to come. What is it going to be like when we are presented before Christ, “holy, blameless, and above reproach in His sight”? We find the answer in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. I’m going to read just a few verses, beginning at chapter 21, verse one:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from

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heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. 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."

Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." [And here again, we have the Greek word *kainos*, new in quality.] And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (21:1-8)

[And then at chapter 21, verse 22] But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.

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[And then in chapter 22, beginning at verse 3] And 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. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Then he said to me, 'These words are faithful and true.' And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.

What You'll Be Doing in the Life to Come

Now, you may wonder over whom the glorified saints are going to reign, especially since Revelation says that all human beings on the new earth are going to reign with Christ. The answer is that we are going to be reigning over the new creation. The mandate that God gave to man in Genesis to have dominion over the earth will still be in effect. But now, for the first time since the Fall of man, we shall be able to rule the earth perfectly and in righteousness.

And Revelation 21 tells us that "the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into [the holy city, and]...they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations." How, you might ask, is this going to be? The answer is that there is always order and authority in God's economies, whether on heaven or on earth. God has established some angels in heaven who occupy higher positions than others. And so we shouldn't wonder at the fact that God will establish authority structures in the new earth. The

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difference is that there will be authority, and submission to authority, without the influence of sin. There will be no envy, no strife, no rivalries, no resistance to God-established authority. All of those things are the effects of sin, and sin and all of its effects will be completely banished from the new heavens and the new earth. Satan and his hosts, and all who are unbelievers, will be in the Lake of Fire, unable to tempt man to sin ever again.

Revelation 22 tells us that the nations will live together in peace. The curse that has overshadowed the creation since the Fall of man will be removed. The servants of God shall worship and serve Christ. And there is every indication that the rest which awaits the people of God in the life to come, is not a rest of idleness. We aren't going to be sitting on clouds strumming harps. We're going to actively reign with Christ.

This is pictured for us in the experience of ancient Israel when God brought them out of bondage in Egypt. God brought them to the Promised Land, the land of Canaan, which is a picture of the new heavens and the new earth. Israel's rest in the land of Canaan was a rest from wilderness wandering. It was a rest from battles against enemies. But it was not to be a rest of idleness. God commanded them to take dominion over the land, and to be productive in it.

We find a description of the highest joy and the greatest privilege of life in the new heavens and new earth in Revelation 20:4 – "They shall see his [Christ's] face, and His name shall be on their foreheads." Life in the new heavens and the new earth will

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be marked by perfect *knowledge* of God, perfect *enjoyment* of God, and perfect *service* for God.

The Key Question: Will You Be There?

The key question, dear friend, is this: Are you going to be there? Or, are you going to be in the Lake of Fire, experiencing the wrath of God for your sins forever and ever? The only alternative to eternal life in the new heavens and new earth is eternal death in the Lake of Fire. And the different between heaven and hell is faith in Jesus Christ. Trusting in Him to be your Savior from sin and from eternal death.

Can you imagine what it will be like to be free from the power, the bondage, the effects, the presence of sin – no more possibility of sinning forever? A tongue that never lies or says hurtful things anymore. A heart that never says "No" to God, ever again. Creativity and productivity without envy. Dominion without destruction. Riches without greed. A mind that never forgets. A body that never gets sick or experiences pain. No more accidents and injuries. No more weapons or wars. No more hospitals. No more funerals. No more grief or sorrow.

At the beginning of the Bible we see God creating the heavens and the earth. At the end of the Bible we see the new heavens and the new earth. And the new heavens and new earth are going to be far more glorious than the original, because God is going to make His dwelling place among men on earth, forever and ever. And at the center of the picture, at the center of history, and in every page of God's Word, is the Lamb that was slain, the first-born from the dead, the Reconciler who is going to

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present us "holy, blameless, and above reproach in His sight." And on that great day, we shall all cast our crowns before him, as the hymn writer puts it, "lost in wonder, love, and praise."

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