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## DEATH, RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT





# FOUNDERS

MINISTRIES

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Founders Ministries is committed to encouraging the recovery of the gospel and the biblical reformation of local churches. We believe that the biblical faith is inherently doctrinal, and are therefore confessional in our approach. We recognize the time-tested Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) as a faithful summary of important biblical teachings.

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TOM NETTLES

# Introduction:

## The Issues of Death, Resurrection and Judgment

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In our undertaking to give an exposition of the Second London Confession, we have come to our final issue. The important and existentially absolute issues of death, resurrection, and judgment constitute the final issue on this subject. After I give a brief treatment of chapter 31, paragraph 1, Eric Smith deals with the next two paragraphs. In his unusual gripping and pleasing combination of biblical exegesis, doctrinal synthesis, charming illustrations, and flowing literary style Eric gives a clear and certain sound on the issue of the resurrection of the body to glory and in a glorious habitation. In a virtual magnum opus, Reagan Marsh gives an exposition of both chapters in light of how these biblical truths organized confessionally can be accessed fittingly for biblical counseling. What a clearly and absolutely relevant reality it is that counselors employ the issues death, resurrection, judgment, heaven, and hell as awaiting every person after the short term of this life. How should that reality enter the words, encouragements, and admonitions of the biblical counselor? Reagan gives closely reasoned biblical concepts arising from (the Bible!) the confessional arrangement of biblical truths. The footnotes contain a wealth of biblically sound, historically reformed guidance on how to work through these ideas as a pastoral curer-of-souls. Aaron Matherly takes on chapter 32 with a lively style that is filled with both the serious joy and the frightening horror of the person who will be consigned to one of two destinies on the day that “God hath appointed . . . wherein he will judge the world in righteousness.” Matherly invokes the literature and art of western culture to demonstrate how pervasively these ideas

have influenced the perceptions of the idea-crafters in those disciplines. His use, moreover, of Benjamin Keach's expositions as a guide to understanding the biblical ideas in the confession gives a fitting wrap-up to this expositional adventure. Keach signed the confession in 1689 along with 36 others representing 107 churches. The synthesis of biblical exposition and the harvesting of expositional wheat from Keach makes for a great lesson in the beauty of theology done in the context of close biblical interpretation, confessional assertion, and historical theology.

Founders Ministries jointly prays that the reader of the exposition of this confession will find food for the soul, encouragement for discipleship and ministry, and renewed conviction of the eternal relevance and truthfulness of the "faith once delivered to the saints."



TOM NETTLES

# The State of Humanity After Death and the Resurrection of the Dead

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*31:1. The bodies of those who have died return to dust and undergo destruction. But their souls neither die nor sleep, because they have an immortal character, and immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous are then made perfect in holiness and are received into paradise. There they are with Christ and behold the face of God in light and glory while they wait for the full redemption of their bodies. The souls of the wicked are thrown into hell, where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved for the judgment of the great day. The Scripture recognizes no place other than these two for souls separated from their bodies.*

(Genesis 3:19; Acts 13:36. Ecclesiastes 12:7. Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:1, 6,8; Philippians 1:23; Hebrews 12:23. Jude 6, 7; 1 Peter 3:19; Luke 16:23, 24)

*Second London Confession, 31:1*

## **A Common Experience of Disembodied and heightened Consciousness.**

“The bodies of men after death return to dust and see corruption.” What happens to the relationship between body and soul at death. This in its immediate effects is the same for

all persons. At death the bodies of all persons complete their state of corruption by a rapid deterioration to dust. “From dust thou art to dust thou shalt return” (Genesis 3:19). The curse that fell upon all person as a result of the sin of Adam was the certainty of physical death. The special provision made by God for the immediate reception of Enoch and Elijah do not render the general curse doubtful or erratic (Genesis 5:21-24; 2 Kings 2:10, 11). The preacher of Ecclesiastes pointed to this universal certainty in saying, “Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, . . . Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:6, 7).

Paul expected that death would mean that the consciousness of the spirit would be unclothed for the earthly house would be destroyed. He desired to move immediately from residence in this earthly, corruptible body to the “habitation which is from heaven.” Being unclothed, having a heightened consciousness outside the body, was not the ultimately desirable state. He knew, nevertheless, that to be in this corruptible body was to be absent from the Lord and to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord. Before we go into the presence of the Lord, these bodies will die and then will undergo corruption unless our mortality is immediately swallowed up by life (2 Corinthians 5:1-8). The vagueness of mind that finds death so impenetrable, the immediate presence of God so mysterious, or the deluded assumption of some that consciousness simply ceases immediately gives way to a presence of the bright personal holiness of the triune God. Both the believer and the unbeliever will be consciously present—conscience, affections, memory, thoughts, unfiltered by devices of self-protection—before the all-knowing, all-seeing Creator and Judge.

The soul neither dies nor sleeps. “But their souls (which neither die nor sleep) having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them.” The soul is a created thing and does not have self-existence and thus its immortal subsistence is due to something given by God when God breathed into Adam’s nostrils the “breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). “Let us make man in our image,” the triune God said (Genesis 1:26). Out of all the created beings, only man was given responsible moral character, the ability to discern right and wrong, to reflect the character of God in the choice of the good, right, and holy. Man’s moral nature made necessary his unceasing life in the light of the eternal relevance of his moral responsibility. Because eternal consequences are at stake in each moral choice, humans can never simply pass out of existence but will bear the consequences, in body and soul, in the way they have responded to God’s righteousness as revealed in his Law. Though man is finite, his interaction with an infinitely holy God gives each of his actions infinite and eternal relevance. Nothing arising from the moral nature of image-bearers will go unanswered and none can perish or sleep for there is never a moment when moral responsibility is absent or the moral judgment of God rests.

## Particular blessings of death for the Righteous

*The world recedes; it disappears!  
Heaven opens on my eyes! My ears  
With sounds seraphic ring:  
Lend, lend your wings! I mount! I fly!  
O Grave where is thy victory?  
O death, where is thy sting?*

Alexander Pope

The event for the righteous, that is, those accounted righteous for the sake of Christ, is an event of unparalleled joy, bliss, and glory. “The souls of the Righteous being then made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise where they are with Christ, and behold the face of God, in light and glory.” In his great sermon, “A Believer’s Last Day His Best Day,” Thomas Brooks (1608-1680) pointed to six changes on the day of death that constitute the reality of the believer’s hope. One, there is a “change of place. . . . He changes earth for heaven.” The confession says that the souls of the righteous are “received into paradise.” “Today,” Jesus told the repenting, believing, adoring thief, “you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:40-43). Presently we are not in our place, therefore, we groan. On the day of death, groaning ceases, for believers have departed that environment and “they are with Christ” who has loved us with an everlasting love.

Second, death brings for the righteous a “change of company.” No longer do the profane, the vile, the wicked, the scoffer poison the society, no longer is the soul vexed with the oppressive jocularities of the skeptic, but the reality of the living God, Jesus the Mediator, the presence of holy angels, the spirits of just men made perfect, the perfect harmony of a redeemed assembly immediately provide a company of true fellowship and undiluted joy.

A third change becomes obvious when the employment of our energies in a constant fight and warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil cease. What an unimaginable release from conflict and constant watchfulness is accomplished on the day of death. This fight is exchanged for praise and the consciousness of perfect triumph with no insurrection of enemies even contemplated.

Fourth, there is a change of “enjoyments.” These enjoyments move from being obscure to being sweet, from imperfect to perfect, and from transient to permanent—“the Souls of the Righteous being made perfect in holiness.” This perfect holiness gives an unchangeable and optimal quality to the enjoyments of the Christian. “Pure are the joys above the sky, and the region peace; No

wanton lip, nor envious eye, can see or taste the bliss” (Isaac Watts). They are not fleeting, partial, fluctuating, and quickly exchanged for distress but reach the goal Paul set before the Philippians, “Make my joy complete” (Philippians 2:2). Isaac Watts wrote

*This life's a dream, an empty show;  
But the bright world to which I go  
Hath joys substantial and sincere:  
When shall I wake and find me there?*

Fifth, death moves the believer to a “change of transience.” He is now free of external changes in location, health, wealth, strength, reputation. He is free of internal changes such as clarity of perception of the truth, strength in times of temptation, and the constant contest between the flesh and the Spirit.

Sixth, death brings the believer to a change of rest; now the saints “rest from their labors” (Revelation 14:13). He is taken away from the evil yet to come and enters into peace (Isaiah 57:1, 2).

They now await the resurrection and the redemption of their bodies. They see Christ in his glorious body and live with a sense of increased joy in the anticipation of joining him in the glorified state with a new union of body and soul as yet unexperienced. This will be a gift given in eternity by Christ himself “who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory, by the exertion of the power that he has even to subject all things to himself” (Philippians 3:31). We have borne the image of Adam in his corrupted state but then we will bear the image of Christ in his glorified heavenly state. That which is perishable does not intrude into the sphere of imperishability, but the corruptible will put on incorruptibility and the mortal will be exchanged for a state of immortality (1 Corinthians 15:48-54). God has designed us so that the life of the soul finds its most mature expression through the exertions of the body. Paul did not want to “unclothed but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.” The clothing of the spirit with an incorruptible body is the epitome of “life.” Then Paul makes the gripping statement of God’s ultimate purpose for his image bearers, “He who prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Corinthians 5:5). The eternal state of living body and soul before God confirmed in holiness and active righteousness was the end for which we were created. To worship and love God with heart, mind, soul, and strength in the condition of having bodies that also were bought with a price brings to maturity God’s original design. The condition of innocence and the possibility of confirmed righteousness and eternal life were forfeited in Adam’s disobedience but restored in a more glorious and God honoring manner by the obedience of Jesus, Son of God and Son of man.

## **“The souls of the wicked are cast into hell”**

The event for the wicked is one of infinite gloom, torment, and eternal fear. As the righteous find heaven and the eternal presence of a gracious God through no merit of their own, so the ungodly are consigned justly to a place of endless darkness and wrath—“the souls of the wicked are cast into hell; where they remain in torment and utter darkness reserved to the judgment of the great day.” About this day Scripture speaks with firmness. “According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies” (Isaiah 59: 18). Having been consigned in accord with God’s wisdom and justice to the place of torment, these souls will await that time of final judgment when all the works of all men will be set before every perceiving being. The absolute justice of God, both in punishment and in salvation, will be on display so that every mouth will be stopped and none will be able to give any challenge. “Fear God and keep his commandments,” says the preacher, “for this is man’s all.” This will be seen without uncertainty, “for God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14). The wicked while in the state of suffering of soul also await a resurrection. Then the body of each will join the soul in a unified sense of personal suffering exactly in accord with strict justice.

### **There are no other options.**

Though both heaven and hell have this two-fold experience for those who died before the coming of the Lord—out of the body and then with the body—no other destinations beyond death are given in Scripture. The confession says simply, “besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.” This amounts to a specific and unequivocal denial of purgatory and limbo in Roman Catholic theology.

In short, purgatory is the destination of virtually all those who have faithfully embraced the doctrines of the Catholic church, have received the sacraments regularly, and thus eventually will enter heaven. Though all their desert of eternal punishment was taken by Christ, the temporal dimension of chastening is proportioned to the degree of purity and perfection in their acts of penance while in this life. Hardly any, except those denominated “saints” have had such purity of penitential duties. All others, therefore, must go through degrees of temporal punishment and purification for the inadequacies that permeated their penance as regulated by the priest. The Council of Trent solidified the doctrinal position: “Therefore the priests of the Lord ought, as far as the Spirit and prudence shall suggest, to enjoin salutary and suitable satisfaction, according to the quality of the crimes and the ability of the penitent; lest, if haply they connive at sins, and deal too indulgently with penitents, by enjoining certain very light works for very grievous crimes, they be made partakers of other men’s sin. But let them have in view, that the satisfaction, which

they impose, be not only for the preservation of a new life and a medicine of infirmity, but also for the avenging and punishing of past sins.”

This concept of satisfaction involving “avenging and punishing” as an element of the sacrament of penance arises from a doctrine of justification in which sanctification constitutes an integral part, in that the sinner is not declared just but made just—“seeing that in the new birth, there is bestowed upon them, through the merit of his passion, the grace whereby they are made just.” This “cannot be effected without the laver of regeneration, or the desire thereof [baptism].” In this way “justification . . . is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man . . . whereby man of unjust becomes just. . . we are not only reputed, but are truly called, and are just, receiving justice within us . . . according to each one’s proper disposition and cooperation. . . Having, therefore, been thus justified, . . . they through the observance of the commandments of God *and of the church* [italics mine] faith co-operating with good works, increase in that justice which they have received through the grace of Christ, and are still further justified.” This, however will not serve finally and absolutely to justify a person, for “If any one saith, that, after the grace of justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise that there remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world, or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened to him: let him be anathema” [Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, “On the necessity and on the Fruit of Satisfaction; “Decree On Justification,” chapters 3-10 and Canon XXX].

The doctrine of “limbo teaches that two spheres short of both heaven and hell and not identified with purgatory are *limbus infantum* and *limbus patrum*. Unbaptized infants and the mentally incompetent who have not been cleansed of original sin by baptism but have no guilt from personal knowledgeable transgression are kept in a state of general natural joy but never experience the “beatific vision” of the immediate presence of the glory of the triune God. The fathers prior to their liberation by the work of Christ were kept in a similar state until their ascension to heaven was made possible by Christ.

The framers of the *Second London Confession* found no scriptural propositions for either of these concepts of the post-mortem position of people. They were in fact, not of neutral quality but antagonistic to the perfection of the finished work of Christ—the consummated obedience of Christ to every demand of the Law (Romans 5:18, 19; Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 5:7-10) and the propitiatory death of Christ (Romans 3:25, 26; 1 John 1:7-10; 2:1, 2; 4:9, 10)—that brought forgiveness of sins and a reckoning of righteousness for those who manifest a trusting submission to acceptance before God only in that redemptive transaction. As the article on justification states [Chapter 11.3]: “Christ by his obedience, and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified; and did by the sacrifice of himself in the blood of his cross, undergoing in their

stead, the penalty due unto them: make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in their behalf: yet inasmuch as he was given by the father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of free grace, that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners."

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## NOTES:

[1] Thomas Brooks, *A Believer's Last Day His Best Day*. Chapel Library, Pensacola: 2019.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Tom has most recently served as the Professor of Historical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He previously taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where he was Professor of Church History and Chair of the Department of Church History. Prior to that, he taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. Along with numerous journal articles and scholarly papers, Dr. Nettles is the author and editor of fifteen books. Among his books are *By His Grace and For His Glory*, *Baptists and the Bible*, *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman*, and *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles H. Spurgeon*.



ERIC C. SMITH

# The Resurrection of the Body

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*31:2. At the last day, such of the saints as are found alive, shall not sleep, but be changed; and all the dead shall be raised up with the selfsame bodies, and none other; although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls forever.*

(1 Corinthians 15:51, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Job 19:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 15:42, 43)

*31:3. The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonour; the bodies of the just, by his Spirit, unto honour, and be made conformable to his own glorious body.*

(Acts 24:15; John 5:28, 29; Philippians 3:21)

*Second London Confession, 31:2–3*

It was a cold, gray February afternoon when we buried my grandfather. The ground was still muddy from the snow that had melted earlier in the week. Every tree was bare. The small crowd under the tent shivered against the cold as the national guard officers folded the American flag they would present to my grandmother. But into the sorrow, the gathering of family members and friends read the Apostle's Creed from the tiny bulletins issued to them by the Methodist minister: "...I believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting, Amen." I was struck by the power of that ancient Christian confession against that bleak backdrop. It was also struck by how few funerals I attend ever even mention the hope of bodily resurrection.

In most funerals I attend, and in most popular discussions about death I observe, the focus of the Christian hope falls almost exclusively on what theologians call “the intermediate state:” the promise that upon death, the believer’s spirit leaves the body behind to dwell in the presence of Jesus in heaven. On the one hand, this emphasis is perfectly reasonable, since it is the *immediate* hope of all the saints who die before the Lord’s return. We are right to celebrate Jesus’ assurance that, “*Today* you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43) We rejoice that “the spirits of the righteous” are now “made perfect” in the heavenly assembly (Heb 12:23) . We find unspeakable comfort in the truth that to be away from the body *is* to be at home with the Lord, that for the believers, to die is *gain*, and that it really is better by far to depart and to be with Christ (2 Cor 5:6; Phil 1:21, 23).

But while our immortal spirit’s reception into heaven is the believer’s immediate hope, the Bible teaches that it is not our ultimate hope. As wonderful as the intermediate state will be, it is, well, intermediate. An even great future awaits the people of Jesus! A hope even richer, more thrilling, more satisfying. It takes the whole story of the Bible to understand this audacious Christian confession: I believe in the resurrection of the body.

### **“To the dust you shall return”**

The Bible’s first two chapters map out God’s design for human life: embodied human beings made in his image, living forever in fellowship with him in a perfect, physical creation. This, God says, is “very good.” (Gen 1:31). But by Genesis 3, the rebellion of those image-bearers has destroyed God’s beautiful design. Sin’s consequences are not only spiritual and moral, but physical: the once-submissive creation now rebels against its former caretakers, and bodily life is now marked by pain, sickness, weariness, and, ultimately, death. The man formed from the dust, made to live forever in face-to-face fellowship with God, must now return to the dust (Gen 3:19). The relentless recitation of the deaths proceeding from Adam in Genesis 5 bears grim witness to the awful wages of sin, and to the unyielding truthfulness of God’s Word: “in the the day that you eat of it, you will surely die (Gen 2:17; Rom 6:23).”

These opening acts in the biblical drama remind us that there is nothing “natural” about death. Death instead is an “enemy” (1 Cor 15:26), a sinister intruder on God’s good design for human life. The Genesis patriarchs wept over the bodies of their dead loved ones for good reason (Gen 23:2), and so do we. All human beings—whether they affirm the Bible’s account of reality or not—instinctively know that death is not the way it was meant to be. I can see it in the “gone but not forgotten” memorial decals on the pickup trucks in my hometown. You can sense it in the feverish attempts to stave off the aging process in fitness centers and cosmetic products. I can hear it in the quavering voice of the old bluegrass singer Ralph Stanley, pleading: “O death, won’t you spare me over til another year, won’t you spare me over til another year...”

The apostle Paul tells us that these are all so many manifestations of creation's "groaning" under the unnatural curse of death; we long to be "set free from [our] bondage to corruption (Rom 8:21)." But will anyone hear these groans? Can anyone deliver us from death?

**"...those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake"**

Yes! Standing in the ruins of Eden, God not only pronounces judgment, but promises salvation: "I will put enmity between you and the woman," God tells the Serpent, "and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Gen 3:15). God did not disclose the details of his plan, but he made it clear that he would one day restore the beautiful kingdom our sin had destroyed, and deal with the awful curse of death itself.

For the rest of the Old Testament, God's people cling to the persistent, if shadowy, hope that Yahweh would overcome death for them. One catches the patriarchs' hope beyond the grave in their insistence on securing burial plots in the land of promise (Heb 11:22). We hear it also in Job's confession that, "after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another..." (Job 19:26–27)

The prophet Isaiah foresaw a day when the Lord would spread a feast for his people on Mount Zion, and "will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken (Isa 25:6–8)." Near the end of the Old Testament, Daniel articulates God's coming victory over death explicitly in terms of a bodily resurrection: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever (Dan 12:2–3)." By the time Jesus comforts Martha at the grave of Lazarus, it seems Daniel's expectation has taken hold among God's people: when Jesus tells Mary that "your brother will rise again," Martha immediately responds "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." (John 11:23–24)

One thing this brief survey indicates is that, the saints of old longed for more than a strictly spiritual "life after death." Rather, they looked forward to the complete *undoing* of death, in a glorious, bodily resurrection at the end of history. They did not know that before that could happen, Someone would first blaze a trail through death, right smack in the middle of history.

## “In him was life”

From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus seems intent on nothing short of *abolishing* death (2 Tim 1:10). Beyond his seemingly endless reversals of leprosy and other terminal illnesses, Jesus repeatedly disrupts the funeral services of unsuspecting mourners. From the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7:11–17), to Jairus’s daughter (Mark 5:35–43), to his friend Lazarus (John 11:38–44)—Jesus with only a mere word reaches into the realm of death to retrieving its prey. There was precedent for miraculous healings, and even resurrections, in the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, but Jesus’ sheer audacity in the face of death is entirely new. He *bullies* death. He takes for himself the brazen title, “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25–26). He makes the staggering claim that one day “all who are in the tombs” will hear the sound of his voice and come out to give an account to him (John 5:28–29). Never had anyone spoken like this man! (John 7:46)

But all of this is made to seem like just a sad delusion when Jesus succumbs to the curse of death himself. After an agonizing and humiliating crucifixion on Good Friday, the one who called himself “the Life” (John 14:6) is rendered a “corpse (Mark 15:45).” The dead body of Jesus is wrapped in burial clothes, anointed with spices, bathed in tears, and sealed in a tomb—presumably to return to the dust like every son of Adam before him. Yet there were also hints that, even in his violent death, “the Life” was still lurking—from his strangely victorious cry before his final breath (John 19:30), to the rending of the Temple curtain, to—least explicable of all!—the opening of the tombs of the Jerusalem saints (Matt 27:52–53)! Improbable as it seems, could it be that Jesus’s own death was in fact his own master strategy to empty the graves of God’s people once and for all?

Of course, this is precisely what his followers discovered to be true on Sunday morning. The tomb of Jesus had been vacated, his discarded grave clothes neatly folded and left behind (John 20:6–7). “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” the angels asked, “He is not here, he is risen, just as he said.” (Luke 24:5–6) Over the next forty days, the risen Jesus would himself appear to more than five hundred of his followers (1 Cor 15:6). As they heard his voice and touched his flesh, it was clear that this was the same Jesus they had known and loved before. “*It is I myself,*” Jesus assured them. (Luke 24:39) Yet Jesus was also unmistakably *different*. His resurrection wasn’t like that of Lazarus, or Jairus’s daughter, who returned from death *the same*, only to die again later. Jesus had passed *into an entirely new state*. His body, subject to ordinary limitations during his earthly ministry, now had amazing, supernatural properties: he appeared and vanished at will; he could pass through grave clothes, a sealed tomb, and locked doors. As Jesus would explain, he had not simply “survived” death; he had *broken* death (Rev 1:18).

And he had done it for them.

## “Swallowed up by Life”

The apostle Paul helps us connect Jesus’s resurrection to our own future hope. Now ascended to God’s right hand, the risen King Jesus will one day return to us; when he does, he will transform our bodies to be just like his on that first Easter morning. “But our citizenship is in heaven,” he reminds the Philippians, “and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject all things to himself.” (Phil 3:20–21)

This transformation our bodies will undergo will be like that of a seed that has been buried in the ground. A seed goes into the soil as a bare kernel, but it bursts forth at harvest as a beautiful, golden shaft of wheat! It is the same seed you left covered in dirt, but its transformation leaves it almost unrecognizable! In the same way, these mortal bodies of ours will one day go into the ground, completely used up and expired. But on resurrection morning, Jesus will raise that same body in an entirely new condition: “What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. What is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” (1 Cor 15:42–44)

What assurance this gives us as our fallen physical bodies ache and age, get sick and grow weak. Paul compared life in these bodies to living in a “tent”—fragile, uncomfortable, temporary living quarters. In these tents, we often “groan,” longing for better, stronger, more permanent bodies. But instead of giving our hearts to bitterness, self-pity, or despair, Christians look with confidence to the resurrection bodies Jesus has promised us:

*For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. (2 Cor 5:1–5)*

This new body is the destiny of every believer, even if we are still living at the Lord’s return. “We shall not all sleep,” Paul tells the Corinthians, “but we shall all be changed.” Jesus will outfit all of his people with a body like his, that can sustain the glory and joy of eternal life in a world made new. When the last trumpet sounds and the dead in Christ rise, those still alive will experience “the perishable putting on the imperishable,” and “the mortal putting on immortality.” It will be the work of a moment when Jesus appears—“in the twinkling of an eye”—but at the arrival of King Jesus, death will forever be swallowed up by life (1 Cor 15:50–55).

With this “great change” accomplished, we will at last know that unbroken reunion between Christ and his people that our hearts ache for in this life. As we together rise to meet the Lord, we know that all the “former things” that parted us before have now “passed away.” All things have now been made new, and “we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thes 4:14–17; Rev 21:1–4)

The hope of bodily resurrection makes the “committal,” or graveside service of a believer into a sacred moment of worship and gospel proclamation. Here, we remind each other that Christians are right to grieve for their loved ones who have died in the Lord, as Tabitha’s friends did for her (Acts 9:39). But we do not grieve without hope, as the world does (1 Thes 4:13). Instead, our hearts brim with confident expectation at the graves of our brothers and sisters. We have not abandoned them to the ground; we have planted a seed that Jesus is coming to raise up new, beautiful, and permanent. Our relationships have not been permanently severed; their bodies have “fallen asleep in the Lord,” and on resurrection morning, Jesus is coming to wake them up. Through a Savior whose love is stronger than death (SOS 8:6), they will rise again, and so will we. *And so we will always be with the Lord.*

### **“Then comes the end”**

The Bible’s grand story is not complete without the bodily resurrection of God’s people. It is blessedly true that the spirits of our loved believers who die before the return of Jesus will immediately be welcomed into his blessed presence upon death. But Jesus did not come merely to provide a detour around death for his people. He came to destroy death. To do this, Jesus invaded the tragic story of the first Adam as a “Second Adam,” a hero come to reclaim all that the first Adam lost of his Father’s “very good” world in the beginning. That mission remains unfinished so long as that sneering enemy, Death, claims the body of even one of his people. That is why the grand finale of Jesus’ victory will be the destruction of Death in the glorious, bodily resurrection of all who belong to him:

*But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:20–28)*

The scene Paul describes is breathtaking. Before the world began, God's Son had accepted a dangerous and costly assignment from his Father: to rescue sinners and reclaim his Father's world, no matter the cost (John 17:1–5). On other side of that completed mission, the Lord Jesus now stands before his Father in the company of all his redeemed, resurrected people. Every promise has been kept. Every enemy has been vanquished. Not one sheep is missing. All things are now in subjection to him, the world's rightful ruler. Then, shining like the sun, we will watch in awe as that faithful, noble Son presents it all as a gift of love to his Father. I don't know exactly what it will feel like in that moment when "God is all in all." But I think it may be something like what C. S. Lewis tried to capture at the conclusion of his Narnia stories:

*And as He spoke . . . the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.*

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REAGAN MARSH

# Counsel from the Confession? 1689 Eschatology and Pastoral Biblical Counseling

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“Why do you wear a beard? Our last pastor said godly men are clean-shaven.” “Do your wife and kids ever get tired of you reading the Bible and preaching to them all day long?” “You don’t mind baptizing my dog if I bring her by this week, do you?” I have heard enough oddball queries that, stepping into my 24th year in ministry, I am never quite sure what may come after “Pastor, I have a question...” One consistent inquiry, however, is this: “When will you preach Revelation?”

Eschatology presents as one of the most complex, controversial, fascinating aspects of theology imaginable. One of our elders jokes that the millennium is 1000 years of peace that Christians enjoy fighting about. While I have worked out my views as best I can, I increasingly sympathize with Calvin’s apocryphal conclusion in confessing he really was not certain what to make of it all.<sup>1</sup> Sensationalizing, self-proclaimed prophecy experts with big charts and best-sellers don’t help matters. Normal pastors look at the excess, mutter a sarcastic “Helicopters, antichrists<sup>2</sup>, and blood moons, oh my!” – and we preach on *anything* else.

But “my brethren, these things ought not to be so” (Jas 3:10<sup>3</sup>); such doctrines are in Scripture

to encourage and bless God's people (1 Ths 4:17b-18; Rev 1:3). Engaging last things has a wonderfully clarifying effect: they grab the attention, focus the mind, and sober the imagination. Respecting that effect, this essay will survey the Confession, outline a basic approach, provide an example, and offer suggested applications in light of last things. Promises God makes in prophetic or predictive contexts comprise roughly one-third of Scripture, thus positioning eschatology as a central aspect of Christian teaching. The Creed – such a beautiful summary of the gospel, is it not? – presents a massive chunk of the Christian hope as Jesus “sit[ting] on the right hand of God Almighty; from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead,” while bringing about “the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.”<sup>4</sup> It is no stretch to conclude that if our gospel has no place for Christ's return unto final judgment and redemption, we have no true gospel.

Errors compete for ascendancy in our day, as in every age. Social justice warriors demand an immediate, realized eschatology<sup>5</sup>; liberal teaching decries or denies biblical eschatological supernaturalism; and many traditionalists overemphasize it. The NT draws our hearts to Christ as “God over all, blessed forever” (Rom 9:5), the Lord who is “Immanuel, God with us” (Matt 1:23) – him whom our hearts love, though we have not seen him (1 Pet 1:8). We long for and “love his appearing” (2 Tim 4:8); it brings “joy inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Pet 1:8). Indeed, faithful eschatology lifts the saint to the exalted Christ (Rev 19:10). Jesus is our eternal God (Rev 1:4f), our everlasting Saviour (vv 5b-6), the one on whose promises we may expectantly rely (v 7) because of his essential character (v 8). His return to judge his enemies and redeem his people is our blessed “living hope” (1 Pet 1:3).<sup>6</sup>

Too often, however, these precious truths become mere cannon fodder in theological debate. Following Puritan wisdom, the 1689 Baptist Confession<sup>7</sup> maintains a beautiful focus on the main things of the last things.<sup>8</sup> Christians should order their lives in light of God's word and Christ's return (2 Pet 3:11f), and elders charged with caring for their souls must be diligent in helping them through regular pastoral biblical counseling. I have written elsewhere<sup>9</sup> presenting the Bible's process for this duty; this essay focuses on the practical application of eschatology as recapped in LCF 31-32's framework.

### **Confessional Counseling is Biblical Counseling**

For our purposes, then, confessional counseling<sup>10</sup> *is* biblical counseling (hereafter BC) – not somehow editing the symbol into Scripture, wedging the Confession into the canon's proper place, or substituting God's words for man's – but rather summarizing the Bible concisely, while presenting it accessibly and usefully with doctrinally-robust faithfulness. The Confession is a framework, not the foundation; a guide, not the ground of faith. Just as faithful expositors may

preach a sermon unpacking anything in Scripture from a single word to an entire book, we may counsel God's word by employing faithful scaffolding and vantage points where God's providence gives them. In the heat of the moment, counselees sometimes struggle to recall specific biblical applications, or to reproduce the structure of the Scriptural thought process they are still learning to redirect their struggles through. Thus, a confessional approach can provide a helpful reference point to which they may easily return, a path into the mind-renewing wisdom offered by its specific Scriptural citations.

I suggest this method as one tool among many possibilities<sup>11</sup> in a robust, faithful BC context – merely an accessible way to meet and engage people where they are, “a means of edification in righteousness,”<sup>12</sup> as Spurgeon termed it. It offers doctrinal instruction (BC is applied theology!) while guiding practical implementation, because unapplied counsel is incomplete (Jas 1:22). We need all of God's word for all of life, and the biblical counselor's task is to grasp the word, give it well, and guide souls by it to wholeness in Christ. As the Puritans often remarked, we are to teach “doctrine for life”<sup>13</sup> (1 Tim 1:5). Quite so here.

### **Approaching the Confession**

The Confession and Catechism help inform BC as differentiated practical applications of Scripture's counsels and exhortations flow from their layout.<sup>14</sup> Examine the respective tables of contents: they move from Scripture to God, from providence to man, then to covenant, Christ, effectual calling, the work and nature of salvation, life in Christ (living within “the true bounds of Christian freedom”<sup>15</sup> via the moral law), applications of the Second Table, life together in the church, and living in hope in view of last things. The Catechism branches out in treating the moral law and the Lord's Prayer – sections especially fruitful for pastors and counselors.

Consider the Catechism's treatment of the 7th commandment (Q's 75-77) – an extremely common point of sin for many Christians. After reciting the commandment (Q 75), it asks what the commandment requires and forbids (Q's 76-77). Note how the positive statement of the doctrine is followed by its practical application in terms of what God desires from and denies to his people:

“The seventh commandment requireth the preservation of our own and our neighbor's chastity, in heart, speech, and behaviour ... [it] forbiddeth all unchaste thoughts, words, and actions.”

Therefore, in counseling a man indulging pornography, we have one actively failing to preserve his own and his neighbor's chastity in godly expression of faithful marital love (1 Ths 4:4; Heb 13:4). Instead, he has engaged in idolatrous (Rom 1:25; Eph 5:5) self-love: polluting his heart

in lustful thoughts (Prov 23:7), speech (Matt 12:34b; Matt 15:18), and actions (1 Ths 4:3; 1 Pet 1:16). He unchastely violates God's holiness (Heb 12:14) by hidden (Prov 28:13) and open sin, loving the world and its perversions of God's good design (1 Jn 2:15). He breaks faith with the wife of his youth (Mal 2:15; Prov 5:18; cf. Prov 2:17) and invites God's vengeance (1 Ths 4:3-6) in coveting another woman (Ex 20:17; Matt 5:27f). The Confession speaks of those who continue practicing any sin or cherishing any sinful lust as "perverting the main design of the grace of the gospel to their own destruction" (LCF 21.3; cf. 1 Jn 3:6), for "the moral law doth forever bind all" (LCF 19.5); while "not as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned, yet it is of great use to them as well as to others, in that as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly..." (LCF 19.6; this paragraph is worth careful reflection for our purposes). He must learn to feel his sin's weight<sup>16</sup> and to "hate it and forsake it because it is displeasing to God."<sup>17</sup>

The biblical counselor finds here in brief compass Scripture's core teaching on the subject, so he may readily give "training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16f) and begin helping his counselee in the biblical and catechetical process of putting off sin, renewing his mind by God's word, and putting on righteousness (Eph 4:22-24) in the power of the Spirit (Rom 8:5-14).<sup>18</sup> The counselee could look up and write out the cited verses, noting and meditating on particular ways they confront, explain, and rebuke his sin, along with the counsel they give in very specific steps, application, thoughts, etc. From there he may search out further understanding via cross-references or related passages, pondering how "the way of the treacherous is their ruin" (Prov 13:15) and specific ways his pattern of sin has strengthened<sup>19</sup> other sins such as lying (9th commandment), worry and anxiety (1st commandment), discontented anger toward his family (6th commandment), objectifying women (Gen 1:27), sharing in the sins of others (1 Tim 5:22b; Mk 12:31; Rom 13:10) – not only the actors and producers, but think here of how every click contributes to human trafficking, abortion, other broken homes, cultural decay, and so forth. "Unchastity" is thus seen not simply to be sexual immorality (Grk. *porneia*<sup>20</sup>) expressed in illicit viewing and self-gratification, but comprehensively giving way to sinful passions (1 Pet 2:11) – quite possibly revealing a heart which does not know Christ and thus invites the eternal wrath of God (Eph 5:5f; Rev 22:15; Matt 5:27-30). All of this is fodder for cultivating repentance (1 Tim 1:8-10; Rom 2:4), encouraging and evaluating growth and change toward godliness by the word of God, aimed at restoring heart and home – structured around biblical exposition via the Catechism and Confession.

### **Guidance for Confessional Biblical Counseling**

1. *Subordination: Ensure the symbol is subordinate to Scripture in practice.* Your counsel must originate in and depend on God's word, not man's wisdom. This must be carefully

communicated in both your words – *how* you affirm and emphasize the 1689 or Catechism as beneficial; and in the work itself – how you actually counsel and apply *the Bible*, while demonstrating the symbol as a useful reference. The symbol functions to provide structure, not to override the substance of Scripture; it is a robust roadmap and reference point, but not divine revelation itself.

2. *Sufficiency: Ensure the Scripture is seen as sufficient, not the symbol.* Without any jabs intended toward friends of differing persuasion, this approach in no sense argues for an integrationist methodology or philosophy of the care of souls. God’s people were not unhelped before Wilhelm Wundt – or William Kiffin, Nehemiah Coxe, and Benjamin Keach.<sup>21</sup> The symbol’s doctrines present didactic and diagnostic grids, serving strictly to jar the memory and train the mind to turn to the Word for needful wisdom and help, *with understanding*.
3. *Structure: Ensure your counsel is structured according to Scripture’s weighting.* The Confession is wonderfully instructive in both its *specificity* – what it goes on record affirming – and its *silence* – what it simply omits. I do not posit any portion of Scripture as less inspired or useful than another (2 Tim 3:15f); but I do argue that since some parts of Scripture are “of first importance” (1 Cor 15:3f), there must necessarily be some matters of secondary weight (cf. 2LC, 1.4-5,7). Biblical counselors should also carefully consider and apply the concept of theological triage here.<sup>22</sup>
4. *Soundness: Ensure your counsel is scripturally sound.* “It is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Cor 4:2). Textual faithfulness is the ground upon which lives may be changed (Jn 17:17) – and doctrinal faithfulness flows only from its sure foundation. Symbols are incredibly helpful, but they are not inspired and can be wrong.<sup>23</sup> Privilege Scripture, reason from Scripture, systematize Scripture, teach Scripture, memorize Scripture together, counsel Scripture, apply Scripture, and you will be doing confessional counseling.

## **2LC Eschatology and the Care of Souls**

LCF 31-32 concisely summarizes last things and concludes with specific applications (32.3). After a brief walk through these chapters,<sup>24</sup> let us apply and develop their teaching for a man battling anxiety.

### **The Intermediate State (LCF 31.1)<sup>25</sup>**

Scripture teaches that while our bodies return to dust (Gen 3:19) and see corruption (Ac 13:36f)

at death, the soul returns to God (Eccl 12:7; 2 Cor 5:1,6,8; Heb 12:22-24a). Contrary to the JW and SDA “soul sleep” error, the JW’s further error arguing the soul’s re-creation upon awakening, and the RCC error of purgatory, the Bible presents an immediacy to entering this intermediate state (Lk 16:22ff) until the resurrection (Jude 6). Consider Christ’s assurance of grace to the penitent thief: “Today [*immediacy*] you will be with me [*in his presence*] in paradise [*his eternal home*]” (Lk 23:43). The Catechism summarizes our question by vivid contrast: “The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.” But lost men have only the fearful expectation of judgment (see Heb 10:26f): “The souls of the wicked shall at their death, be cast into the torments of hell, and their bodies lie in the grave till the resurrection and judgment of the great day.”<sup>26</sup>

### **The Last Day (LCF 31.2-3)**

Both Testaments speak of the coming “day of the Lord” (Isa 7:18-25; Joel 2:11), the “day” (Ezk 30:3; Heb 10:25), the “day of Christ” (Php 1:6), the “day of judgment” (Matt 12:36; Ac 17:31), the “day of vengeance of our God” (Isa 61:1f), the “day of wrath” (Rom. 2:5), the “day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2), “the great and glorious day of the Lord” (Ac 2:19f), “the consummation of the ages” (Heb 9:26), in light of “the last hour” (Jn 5:25,28). All these refer to what 2LC terms “the last day” (31.2), when living Christians will be changed (1 Cor 15:51-53) and all the dead will be raised (Ac 24:15): the lost to dishonor, and saints to honor – a resurrection of life or of judgment (Jn 5:29). Body will be reunited with soul (1 Cor 15:42f) as the whole man is readied for eternity (Job 19:26f). A pithy remark sometimes attributed to Luther reflects a practical, holy perspective: “I keep only two days on my calendar – this day and That Day.”<sup>27</sup>

### **The Last Judgment (LCF 32.1)**

Judgment is indeed the order of God’s appointed Great Day (Jn 5:25-29; Matt 24:36), and it will come in God’s appointed way – in righteousness, by Jesus, who is both Saviour and Judge (Ac 17:31; Jn 5:22,27). We aren’t told how long it will last, but neither man nor angel is exempted from “giving an account of himself to God” (Rom 14:10,12; 1 Cor 6:2f; 2 Cor 5:10; Eccl 12:14). Jesus paints a striking description in Matt 25:31-46 as sheep are separated from goats (vv 32f). Those righteous, demonstrating they have known and loved Christ by their dealings with men as unto him, receive God’s promised benediction and approbation (vv 34-40) in the joyful blessings of a kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (v 34; cf. Jn 14:2f).<sup>28</sup> The “cursed” (v 41) wicked ones, defined by sins against Jesus and their fellow men (vv 41-45), receive according to their deeds the “eternal punishment” (v 46) of “eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (v 41).<sup>29</sup> Their sin is finally seen like David’s – “against you, you only, have I sinned,

and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment” (Psa 51:4). Eternal conscious blessedness or torment (contra EO heresy denying heaven and hell’s physicality) awaits all men on that Day.

### **God’s Stated Reasons (LCF 32.2)**

God’s eschatological goal is his glory. He intends to display it in mercy to Christ’s blood-bought elect and in justice to willful reprobates. God will show himself the one who makes known his power and the riches of his glory unto vessels of mercy “prepared beforehand for glory” (Rom 9:22f). His aim is not fundamentally to prepare us for heaven, but for himself. He will show himself the promise-keeping God, receiving his servants into his joy (Matt 25:21; 2 Tim 4:8) while sending his enemies to their just reward (Matt 25:46b; Mk 9:47f; 2 Ths 1:7-10). His goal is exalting his name before heaven and earth: believers will have “the full enjoyment of God to all eternity.”<sup>30</sup>

### **How to Respond? (LCF 32.3)**

The 1689 concludes by calling men to faith in God’s word, particularly that Christ will return and the Day will come. Thus the twin graces of repentance and faith should issue in forsaking sin and fearing God (2 Cor 5:10f). Saints should frame their sorrows in this light (2 Ths 1:5-7; 2 Cor 4:16-18), fighting carnal security (Mk 13:33-37; Eph 5:15) all our days, fixing our hopes on Christ’s “glory to be revealed” (1 Pet 1:13; Rev 22:20).

So 2LC’s eschatology emphasizes the main things of the last things, highlighting promises concerning Jesus and the providences which will bring about the soul’s undying happiness in him. In particular, LCF 32.3 presents multiple specific applications which shepherds may employ in BC with troubled souls. Its practical divinity warns hardened sinners, lifts sorrowing heads, encourages struggling hearts, and strengthens battle-weary hands as Christians look unto him (Heb 12:2). Jesus is powerful enough to bring about all he has purposed, and he works amidst our bleakest moments of sin and sorrow, showing he can be trusted with every day and eternity.

### **Reasoning Forward: Counseling Confessionally**

Consider now your own care of souls in light of the age to come.<sup>31</sup> Reflect on these intersections with your counselee’s life as you ask, “In light of last things, how does the Bible weigh in practically on his anxiety?”<sup>32</sup> What kind of steps might he take generally and specifically? Here are 15 possible points of application addressing this question, though more could readily be included – practicing self-denial, cultivating heavenly-mindedness, engaging in self-examination, reflecting on eternity, meditation on Scripture, etc. Each could be developed for giving

instruction or implementing via homework. Note, however, that Scripture connects each of these applications to the last things in some way.

1. *Take steps to cultivate a life of careful obedience* (Eph 5:15f). Anxiety can tempt strugglers to throw up their hands, crying “What’s the use?” But Scripture teaches Christians will stand before God for an accounting of our lives, though not for judgment (Rom 14:12). Jesus has taken all punishment for our sins at the cross (Isa 53:4-6), such that our standing and acceptance is secure in him, our obedience made acceptable in his, and we are now able to live for his glory (1 Cor 10:31). Thus the Catechism instructs us to pursue obedience to God’s revealed will (Q 44), making it our aim to be pleasing to him (2 Cor 5:9). Our desire is to hear “well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:23) on that Day.
2. *Take steps to cultivate a life of reverent fear* (1 Pet 1:17). Anxiety exposes a wrong fear of God – fear he will not be faithful, his providences cannot be trusted, my sins are too great for his patience, or things will go so terribly wrong he cannot make them right. His perfect love casts out such fear (1 Jn 4:18). Scripture explains God forgives “that he may be feared” (Ps 130:4).<sup>33</sup> Holy fear of God should increasingly mark a Christian’s life. We no longer fear him as our Judge – but we are quick to recall that, had he not shown mercy, we still would. As William Secker wrote in 1660, “Divine patience is to be adored by all and abused by none.”<sup>34</sup> Reverent fear befits a people obtained by the blood of God (Ac 20:28).
3. *Take steps to cultivate a life of genuine contrition* (Mk 1:14f). Anxiety frequently circles around the presence, patterns, pain, and power of old, entrenched besetting sins. Watson noted “The first sermon Christ preached, indeed the first word of his sermon, was *Repent*,” and Luther wrote that Jesus here “willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”<sup>35</sup> Repentance – the first word of the gospel, so to speak – is not crying and worrying, but changing and walking in newness of life. Christians live in a fascinating, frustrating tension between having been forgiven our sins and “rescued from the wrath to come” (1 Ths 1:10) in Jesus, while yet mourning our sins (Matt 5:4) and moving forward in godly grief (2 Cor 7:1,8-13)<sup>36</sup> until the end of days.
4. *Take steps to cultivate a life of growing faith* (Mk 1:15). Anxious hearts often resist hard thinking on deep truth. Wisdom recognizes certain seasons where intense study may not be advisable, but Scripture’s command to grow in grace and knowledge of Christ abides (2 Pet 3:18). Confidence in Christ grows in direct proportion to our grasp of his character, which comes only by the Word. The Christian life is ultimately a process of growth in his Cross; we simply cannot understand the “four last things” apart from that main thing.

Two of the four (judgment and hell) are God's fixed exposition of the Cross for those who do not receive its grace. Death is God's explanation of its necessity, and heaven is his eternal joy in its purchase. Heaven is Christ<sup>37</sup> – Christ for us, Christ with us, Christ in us, forever (Jn 17:24). Anxious hearts need to see these verities and feel their weight as ballast in life's storms.

5. *Take steps to cultivate a life of persevering faith* (Eph 6:10-13): “having done all...stand firm.” Anxiety often presents with doubts which debilitate daily obedience. In 1646, John Gere described an English Puritan as a steadfast believer, whose “whole life he accounted a warfare.”<sup>38</sup> Christians would do well to kindle such fervor – not growing lax or listless in this day of battle, but engaging our adversary (1 Pet 5:8) every hour we remain on earth. Contrary to our modern comfort culture and entertainment mindset, Jesus lived a life of warfare. Paint your cruise ships a battleship gray, brothers; we servants are not above our Master (Matt 10:24), who returns wielding a sharp double-edged sword (Rev 2:12).
6. *Take steps to cultivate a life of increasing humility* (1 Cor 10:12). Anxiety is frequently rooted in pride. We should labor “not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought” (Rom 12:3): not growing “wise in our own eyes” (Prov 3:7; Isa 5:21), not “doing what is right in our own eyes” (Jdg 21:25), and “not leaning on our own understanding” (Prov 3:5). Last things concern the victory and vindication of the King of the ages. He “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6:16) and does not need my counsel or input (Rom 11:34). His “eyes are too pure to look upon evil” (Hbk 1:13), such that evildoers may not dwell with him (Rev 21:26f). Indeed, “nothing good dwells in me” (Rom 7:18 – no good thing issues from my life except what God has already appointed (Eph 2:10). Humility celebrates, champions, and clings to the surpassing worth of Jesus, counting all else relatively worthless in view of eternity.<sup>39</sup>
7. *Take steps to cultivate a life of quiet submission*<sup>40</sup> (Eph 1:11). Anxious hearts frequently fret because they seek to control matters beyond their control. In view of God's providences and plans (Isa 46:10), we come to realize King Jesus exercises far greater authority than we will ever grasp; it is ours to submit to his sweet sovereignty, resting in his all-wise disposal of our lives. The lyrics of Samuel Rodigast's (1649-1708) hymn, thematically based on Deut 32:4, are fuel for prayer and patience before the mystery of providence – an excellent place to meditate on *my* end of days, as well as *the* end of days.

Whate'er my God ordains is right: his holy will abideth;  
I will be still, whate'er he doth, and follow where he guideth.  
He is my God; though dark my road, he holds me that I shall not fall: wherefore  
to him I leave it all.

Whate'er my God ordains is right: he never will deceive me;  
he leads me by the proper path; I know he will not leave me.  
I take, content, what he hath sent; his hand can turn my griefs away, and patiently  
I wait his day.

Whate'er my God ordains is right: though now this cup, in drinking,  
may bitter seem to my faint heart, I take it, all unshrinking.  
My God is true; each morn anew sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart, and pain  
and sorrow shall depart.

Whate'er my God ordains is right: here shall my stand be taken;  
though sorrow, need, or death be mine, yet am I not forsaken.  
My Father's care is round me there; he holds me that I shall not fall: and so to him  
I leave it all.

8. *Take steps to cultivate a life of deepening gratitude* (1 Ths 1:10). Anxiety weighs a man down (Prov 12:25), and a heavy heart is typically not a thankful heart. Innumerable mercies are ours through the Cross. How could we not be thankful to such a One as Christ? How could we forget or minimize our indebtedness to One who suffered and loved us so much? How could we take for granted his grace, his word, his people, his worship, his daily mercies, his sustaining care? How dare we presume so wickedly to be angry with such a King when his dealings in our lives displease us? Responding like that is rebellion, not reverence, and certainly not gratitude; it bespeaks an entitled mindset. Job learned that lesson when he was rebuked (Job 38-41) and repented (Job 42:1-6). Gratitude's holy spark kindles flames of acceptable worship. "In everything, give thanks," Paul wrote (1 Ths 5:18); "forget not all his benefits," David counseled (Ps 103:2). Nothing we could face in this life compares to what Jesus underwent for his people, and eternity will not exhaust the gratitude he is due.
9. *Take steps to cultivate a life of joyful confidence* (Isa 28:16). Anxious hearts ground their confidence on the wrong things. The ESV renders *chûsh* in Isa 28:16 as "in haste." Its sense is not being afraid or shaken<sup>41</sup> – for example, by painful or prolonged providences. Modern evangelicals freak out when life goes badly, turning to Facebook to rant or rally support, finding soundbite theology (usually heretical) to prop up their perspective, and then arguing when corrected. Why? Because there is no foundation built on the word of God; they are easily shaken, or "in haste." Scripture calls us to a right esteem of Christ's person and work, a confidence in God's character, a firm dependence on his promises and faithfulness. Thus Christians are to have no worldly confidence, foolishly rooted in self-

esteem (our age's darling idol) or shifting winds – but that anchored to the immutable, eternal Lord of all (1 Cor 15:58; Heb 6:10), who may be trusted far beyond what my eyes can see.

10. *Take steps to cultivate a life of mutual encouragement* (Heb 3:12-14; Heb 10:23-25). An anxious heart is a discouraged heart, which often discourages others. Aim, then, to encourage others toward holiness (Heb 3:12-14) – indulging sin endangers the soul, and can reveal a heart which has not yet closed with Christ. Aim also to encourage others to hold fast to Christ in sound doctrine (“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,” Heb 10:23 – contrary to modern therapeutic notions of deconstructing faith), in personal and public devotion to Christ (“let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together,” vv 24f), and in our daily walk (“but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near,” v 25).
11. *Take steps to cultivate a life of stewarding time* (Ps 90:12). Mismanaging time breeds much anxiety, prompting anxiety over how little time remains, feeding further anxiety over how incompletely tasks will be done...and the beat goes on. Scripture counsels redeeming the time “because the days are evil” (Eph 5:16-18), asking the Lord to give us a heart of wisdom by teaching us to “number” – read: manage, fill, steward, recognize the brevity of – “our days rightly” (Ps 90:12). Take practical steps to steward your days, in light of the end of days to come.<sup>42</sup>
12. *Take steps to cultivate a life of urgent witness* (2 Cor 5:11). Anxiety weighs down a man's heart and weakens a man's heralding. Considering Christ's return, we are to plead with and persuade others to be reconciled to God. Jesus anchors his Great Commission in promising he “will be with [us] always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). Little else can be more important than others hearing of Jesus. Much anxiety dissipates when our focus shifts to prayerful reasoning and convincing, announcing and answering – evangelism can have a wonderfully clarifying and calming effect for an anxious heart. A returning King should have a proclaiming people. Jesus is coming back. Go share the gospel with someone.
13. *Take steps to cultivate a life of intentional churchmanship* (2 Cor 6:11-18). Anxiety often manifests in social reluctance, aloofness, distancing from others, and slowness to engage closely with others. Scripture commends a churchmanship marked by love to one another (vv 11-13) and lawful fellowship with one another (vv 14-16a) that walks through life together as the family of God (vv 16b-18). Godly churchmanship requires

a local congregation which is deeply committed to Scripture, sound doctrine, and the communion of the saints. In these last days, our attention is to be corporate and climactic (v 16), because “we are members of one another” (Eph 4:25) and will be together forever with the Lord.

14. *Take steps to cultivate a life of willing suffering* (Php 1:29). Christians battling anxiety often fear the worst. Closely related to our view of providence, how we approach even the possibility of suffering is indicative of how we view God. Consider that Jesus promised his disciples that they would be despised and rejected like he was (Isa 53:3; Matt 10:22). They would be mistreated like he was (Matt 5:11f; cp. Ac 7:52). Indeed, our expectation should be “not if, but when.” Jesus expects his people to pray, fast, and give alms – three times in Matt 6:1-18 he tells them “*when* you do this, do it this way” – echoing Matt 5:11’s expectation of “*when* others revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely on my account.” The normal Christian life, until the King returns, holds the certainty of opposition from a world that hates him. It bears the possibility of loss, pain, or death for his sake. And Scripture promises that our God is worth it all (2 Cor 12:10). Christian: you have nothing to fear from your Father’s hand.

15. *Take steps to cultivate a life of expectant hope* (Jn 14:2f). Anxious hearts are often hopeless hearts, or hearts struggling to hold onto hope. Just as “there is much prayer that arises from real disbelief in the atonement,”<sup>43</sup> so too much anxiety and fear arises from a real disbelief in Christ’s promises. Ryle noted that “Christians often miss the comfort Jesus intends them to enjoy here.”<sup>44</sup> Thus Peter counsels us: “preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:13).

Those odd questions will keep coming. I did not shave, though I did abbreviate family worship slightly from 20 hours per day to about 20 minutes; and I politely declined baptizing the dog. But I have found new joy in what the NT calls “our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:13). So should you, pastor – and so may you point your people afresh to Christ. The struggler has every reason for hope that, because Jesus is who he says he is, he’s good for what he promised in his word, now and forever.

“Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.”<sup>45</sup>

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## NOTES:

1 T.H.L. Parker (1916-2016), *Calvin's NT Commentaries, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*, 117-19. Hence Robin Barnes' remark that "Calvin himself was perhaps less inclined to apocalyptic thought than any other early Protestant leader, and early Calvinist thinkers tended to avoid the explicit interpretations of current events in prophetic terms" ("Apocalypticism," in Hans Hillerbrand [1931-2020], *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, I.66).

2 Later in the same article, Barnes also notes that "Not surprisingly, Catholic propaganda sometimes identified Luther (among other Protestant leaders) as the Antichrist" ("Apocalypticism," in Hillerbrand, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, I.67; cp. *The 1689 Baptist Confession*, 26.4; 1 Jn 2:18; 2 Jn 1:7;). Note also Hillerbrand's own survey in "Antichrist," *ibid.*, I.45f.

3 All Scripture is quoted from the ESV.

4 Phillip Schaff (1819-1893), *The Creeds of Christendom*, II.45-55. Faithful treatments of the Apostles' Creed include William Perkins (1558-1602), *An Exposition of the Symbol, or Creed of the Apostles* in *Works*, V.3-416; Herman Witsius (1636-1708), *Sacred Dissertations upon the Apostles' Creed*, 2 vols; and R.C. Sproul (1939-2017), *What We Believe: Understanding and Confessing the Apostles' Creed*. John Calvin's (1509-1564) *Institutes of the Christian Religion* may also be recognized as an extended exposition of the Creed. On the validity of creeds for Baptists, Andrew Fuller's (1754-1815) brief but powerful argument in *On Creeds and Subscriptions* is not to be missed (in his *Works*, 830f) and should be read alongside Robert Martin's (1948-2016) "The Legitimacy and Use of Confessions" in Waldron, *Modern Exposition of the Baptist Confession of Faith, 5<sup>th</sup> revised edition*, 13-29; cp. the 1742 Philadelphia Baptist Association's conclusion that reprinting the 1689 Confession was "needful and likely to be very useful" in Samuel Jones, *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association 1707-1807*, 46. Further worth consulting are John Murray (1898-1975), *The Creedal Basis of Union in the Church*, in *Collected Writings*, I.280-87; Samuel Miller (1769-1850), *The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions*; John Skilton (1906-1998), *Scripture and Confession: A Book about Confessions Old and New*; Tom Nettles' defense of catechisms in *Teaching Truth, Training Hearts: The Study of Catechisms in Baptist Life*, 13-45; Carl Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative*; and David Hall's excellent *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*.

5 Cf. Voddie Baucham's poignant description of the woke movement in *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe*, 67: "This new cult has created a new lexicon that has served as scaffolding to support an entire body of divinity...complete with its own cosmology (CT/CRT/I); original sin (racism); law (antiracism); gospel (racial reconciliation); martyrs (Saints Trayvon, Mike, George, Breonna, etc.); priests (oppressed minorities); means of atonement (reparations); new birth (wokeness); liturgy (lament); canon (CSJ social science); theologians (DiAngelo, Kendi, Brown, Crenshaw, MacIntosh, etc.); and catechism ('say their names')." We witness its applied eschatology in the recent demonstrations and riots.

6 Helpful general treatments of eschatology are C.H. Spurgeon's (1834-1892) *Sermons on the Second Coming of Christ*; Anthony Heokema (1913-1988), *The Bible and the Future*; Joel Beeke, *The Beauty and Glory of Last Things*; Edward Donnelly, *Biblical Teaching on the Doctrines of Heaven and Hell*; and Sam Waldon, *The End Times Made Simple*.

7 Hereafter the Confession, the 1689, 2LC, or the LCF. All quotations of the 1689 are from Lumpkin (1916-1997), *Baptist Confessions of Faith 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*; all quotations of the 1693 Baptist Catechism are from Renihan, *True Confessions: Baptist Documents in the Reformed Family*. For helpful introduction to the Baptist confessional tradition, see Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 130-41, 216-22; Belcher and Mattia, *A Discussion of the Seventeenth Century Particular Baptist Confessions of Faith*; Renihan, *A Toolkit for Confessions: Helps for the Study of English Puritan Confessions of Faith*, 7-84, and the several introductions in his *True Confessions*. Waldron's "The Historical Origin of the Baptist Confession of 1689" in *Modern Exposition of the Baptist Confession of Faith, 5<sup>th</sup> edition*, 493-501, the prefatory material by Steve Weaver and Michael Haykin in their reprint of Hercules Collins' (1646/7-1702) *An Orthodox Catechism*, 7-39 and their introduction in *Devoted to the Service of the Temple: Piety, Persecution, and Ministry in the Writings of Hercules Collins*, 1-30, are also valuable. John Bower's introductory material in *The Larger Catechism: Critical Text and Introduction*, ix-63, provides helpful contextualization for the influential Westminster tradition.

8 As there are things "of first importance" in Scripture (1 Cor 15:3f), so too in early modern Reformed confessional summaries of Scripture. For example, Benjamin Keach's (1640-1704) *Articles of Faith of the Church of Christ, or Congregation meeting at Horsely-down* (1697), chapters 34-35 address last things in familiar language:

*XXXIV. Of the Resurrection.* We believe that the Bodies of all men, both the Just and the Unjust, shall rise again at the last day, even the same numerical Bodies that die; tho the Bodies of the Saints shall be raised immortal and incorruptible, and be made like Christ's glorious Body: and that the dead in Christ shall rise first.

*IIIV. Of Eternal Judgment.* We believe that Christ hat appointed a Day in which he will judg the World in Righteousness by Jesus Christ, or that there shall be a general Day of Judgment, when all shall stand before the Judgment-seat of Christ, and give an account to him for all things done in this Body: and that he will pass an eternal Sentence upon all, according as their Works shall be.

Puritan expositions, following the pattern of their respective symbols, often focus less on eschatological *systems* and more on the *surety* and nature of the events themselves: the *quattor novissima*, the four last things. (This is not to say that they overlook particulars of eschatological dogmatics altogether, though as Muller notes, a significant spectrum marked their conclusions, and they held together by common confessional commitments [Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, IV.390f]; cf. Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope*; Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 771-840; Jeffrey Jue, "Puritan Millenarianism in Old and New England," in Coffey and Lim's *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, 259-76; for a broader picture, consult Riddlebarger's essay in Barrett's

*Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, 721-55). For a sampling of the Puritan emphases, read William Ames (1576-1633), *The Marrow of Theology*, 205-10, 214-16; Ezekiel Hopkins' (1633-1688) profound *Death Disarmed of Its Sting* in *Works*, III.168-340, or John Bunyan's (1628-1688) insightful poem *One Thing is Needful, or Serious Meditations upon the Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell* in *Works*, III.725-37. Robert Bolton (1572-1632) gives searching but balanced treatment in his classic *The Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Hell, and Heaven*, as does William Bates' (1625-1699) careful and thorough *The Four Last Things, viz. Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell, Practically Considered and Applied in Several Discourses* in his *Works*, III.231-507 (Beeke notes that it is "often considered [Bates'] greatest work" in *Meet the Puritans*, 59). Thomas Goodwin (1600-1689) blends instruction with imagination at points in his *Exposition of the Revelation* (*Works*, III.1-226); but "the testimonies of our redemption," as the 1560 *Geneva Bible's* prologue to Revelation terms it, often prompt both high thoughts of God and enthusiasm concerning them. *Christ's Sudden and Certain Appearance to Judgment and God's Terrible Voice in the City* by Thomas Vincent (1634-1678), alongside Thomas Brooks' (1608-1680) *London's Lamentations* and "The Glorious Day of the Saints' Appearance," (in *Works*, VI.3-312;313-34) and "The Dolefulness and Danger of Neglecting Christ, and the Opportunity of Grace" by Alexander Grosse (c.1596-1654) in his *Happiness of Enjoying and Making a True and Speedy Use of Christ* (pp. 131-62) complement the evangelistic focus of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) in "Wrath Upon the Wicked to the Uttermost," "Wicked Men Useful in Their Destruction Only" and "The Final Judgment" (*Works*, II.122-24, 125-29, and 190-200). Edwards' 1734 "The Day of a Godly Man's Death is Better than the Day of His Birth" (in McMullen's *The Blessing of God: Previously Unpublished Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*, 149-62) is also similar in scope to Brooks' 1651 "A Believer's Last Day His Best Day" (*Works*, VI.387-408). The richest of Dutch Puritanism is represented well in Godefridus Udemans (c. 1581-1649), *The Practice of Faith, Hope, and Love*, 81-84, 106-15, 161-66 and Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711), *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, IV.303-70.

9 My overview of the pastor's care of souls in the ministry of biblical counseling is *Authority and Application: An Introduction to Biblical Counseling* (in *Theolog Journal*, vol. 1, #1, 80-94), available at <https://logcollege.net/theolog>.

10 No Christian in his right mind would dream of replacing Scripture – God's inspired, all-sufficient, inerrant, authoritative, sacred word – with a mere document of human construction, however august and honored its position in church history. I use the concept of "confessional counseling" *strictly to emphasize the deeply theological nature of BC* – and to point out that, given the biblical counselor's proper dependence on systematic theology, the 1689 may be considered (at one level) as an abbreviated-format systematic theology. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) said that "There is no type of preaching that should be non-theological" (*Preaching and Preachers*, 65) – precisely my point regarding BC, too. "Confessional counseling" here includes biblically-faithful creeds, confessions, and catechisms in the sense discussed and is in no sense whatsoever intended to substitute the Bible as the ground of all godly counsel.

11 For example, many men who would never meet with me in my study almost immediately engage me and the Bible in great detail and attentiveness with a hammer in hand fixing something or a bow in hand shooting

something. Julie Lowe's *Building Bridges: Biblical Counseling Activities for Children and Teens* employs a similarly creative approach in to engaging young people with God's word.

12 C.H. Spurgeon, in his preface to the 1689, when he reprinted it for his congregation's use.

13 J.I. Packer (1926-2020) wrote "The Puritans made me aware that all theology is also spirituality [which he defines a few lines down as "teaching for Christian living"]...If our theology does not quicken the conscience and soften the heart, it actually hardens both" (*A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, 15). William Ames (1576-1633) taught "Theology is the doctrine or teaching [*doctrina*] of living to God" (*The Marrow of Theology*, 77), as did Perkins: "Theology is the science of living blessedly forever...The body of Scripture is a doctrine sufficient to live well" (*Works*, VI:11). Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706) later agreed that "Christian theology is best defined as the doctrine of living for God through Christ...[it] unites theory with practice, and is 'a knowledge of truth that is according to godliness,' Tit 1:1...Indeed, the study of theology, to the extent that it is true theology, is not sufficient, unless...it is earnestly devoted to practical theology and to practice" (*Theoretical-Practical Theology*, I:66,79,95). For what this looked like, see Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, 841-977, and Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 107-24, 191-218, 233-76.

14 Consult Renihan's introductory work in *A Toolkit for Confessions*, 63-92.

15 Cf. Samuel Bolton's (1606-1654) classic work, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, provides marvelous exposition of how the Christian lives in light of God's law. Thomas Boston (1676-1732) states matters concisely in his annotations on Edward Fisher's (fl. 1627-1655) *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 189-90: "Believers work from life, not for life." In the same stream, John Flavel (1627-91) wrote "They who are freed from [the Law's] penalties, are still under its precepts. Though believers are no more under its curse, yet they are still under its conduct. The Law sends us to Christ to be justified; and Christ sends us to the Law to be regulated" (*The Method of Grace*, in his *Works*, II.271; cp. his excellent *Exposition of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism*, in *Works*, VI.217-58). So too Benjamin Beddome (1717-1795), *A Scriptural Exposition of the Baptist Catechism*, 87-94; Matthew Henry (1662-1714), in the same unique catechetical-expositional method as Beddome, concurs (*Works*, II.215-18).

16 As Anselm (1033-1109) answered Boso, "You have not yet considered the greatness of the weight of sin" (*Cur Deus homo?*, ch. 21).

17 From *A Catechism for Boys and Girls*, Q 78, in Nettles, *Teaching Truth, Training Hearts*, 94; cp. Hercules Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism* (1680), Q 123-124, where similar instruction appears, useful in meditation, repentance, and learning holy obedience:

*Q 123. What is the meaning of the seventh commandment?*

*A. That God hates and abominates all sexual vileness and filthiness. Therefore, we must hate and detest*

the same. This also means that we must live temperately, modestly, and chastely, whether we are married or single.

*Q 124. Does God forbid nothing else in this commandment but actual adultery and external acts of sexual sin?*

*A.* No. Since our bodies and souls are the temples of the Holy Spirit, God will have us keep both in purity and holiness. Therefore, deeds, gestures, words, thoughts, filthy lusts, and whatever entices us to these, are all forbidden.

18 The *crème de la crème* represented in the Reformed and Puritan experiential tradition here are Thomas Chalmers' (1780-1847) *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*, Thomas Watson's (1620-1686) *The Doctrine of Repentance*, and John Owen's (1616-1683) trilogy comprised of *On the Mortification of Sin*, *On Temptation*, and *On Indwelling Sin in Believers* (*Works*, VI.1-86; 87-151; 153-322).

19 On this head, see my "[Of Marriage: The 1689 Baptist Confession, chapter 25](#)" in *The Founders Journal* (Winter 2020, #119), n. 28. The principle of overeating as a gateway sin to indulging further lusts presents frequently in pornography use. My point is not managing over-indulgence vs. an appropriate indulgence in sexual sin (no such thing), but that "giving opportunity to the devil" (Eph 4:27) in one area invariably also cedes ground in other areas. Sexual sin never stays in a box.

20 So BDAG, TDNT, NIDNTT all confirm this understanding.

21 Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) along with William James (1842-1910) are commonly considered the fathers or formalizers of modern psychology. William Kiffin (1616-1701) both drafted the First London Baptist Confession and lived to sign the 1689; Nehemiah Coxe (fl. 1675-d. 1689) co-pastored the famous Petty France Church and likely co-edited 2LC; along with pastor-theologian Benjamin Keach, they were some of the most influential Particular Baptist men of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

22 Albert Mohler's excellent booklet *The Pastor as Theologian* (accessed at <https://www.sbts.edu/press/the-pastor-as-theologian/>) presents the concept of theological triage helpfully. Gavin Ortlund develops the concept in *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage*.

23 We need look no further than Article 1 of the 1963 *Baptist Faith and Message's* statement on Scripture: "The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ."

24 For helpful treatment of the major themes in LCF 31-32, see Waldron's *Modern Exposition of the 1689*, 439-91; addressing the nearly-identical Westminster Confession, note A.A. Hodge's (1823-1886) concisely powerful work in *The Confession of Faith*, 380-96. For more extended engagement, Thomas Boston's *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* and his *Body of Divinity* (in his *Works*, vols I and II) are simply unsurpassed.

25 It is ecclesiastically significant that 2LC's treatment of last things appears where it does, following consideration of our life together in the church (chapters 26-27) and sacramentology (chapters 28-30). As believers come to the waters of baptism, we're baptized into Christ's death with his promise of resurrection (Rom 6:3-11). At the Lord's Table, we similarly "proclaim his death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). In other words, the Confession recognizes our ecclesial polity, practice, and life together are both framed and shaped by the death, resurrection, session, and return of Jesus.

26 William Collins (d. 1702), *The Baptist Catechism* (1693/95), Q 40,42.

27 This excellent statement is often attributed to Martin Luther (1483-1546), but there is little evidence he said it.

28 Cf. William Gurnall (1616-1679), "The Christian's Reward," in *The Christian's Labor and Reward*, 28-45; and Chapel Library's *The Free Grace Broadcaster: Heaven* (Issue 254, Winter 2020).

29 Two Edwards volumes edited by Don Kistler on this point are stirring: *Unless You Repent: Fifteen Previously Unpublished Sermons on the Fate Awaiting the Impenitent* and *The Wrath of Almighty God: God's Judgment Against Sinners*.

30 Collins, *Baptist Catechism*, Q 41; cf. *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (1647), Q 1. Richard Baxter's (1615-1691) *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (in his *Practical Works*, 1-120) is a classic work about how the saints enjoy God in heaven.

31 Thomas Doolittle's (1630-1707) sermon "[How Should We Eye Eternity?](#)" provides a fruitful starting point for further reflection.

32 The Puritan divines address anxiety repeatedly and with deep insight, though their verbiage is typically "worry" or "carefulness." For example, see Henry Scudder (c. 1585-1652), *The Christian's Daily Walk*, especially chapters 12-15; James Durham (1622-1658), "God's Relation to His People, a Means to Prevent Anxiety" in *Collected Sermons of James Durham*, 877-87; Robert Bolton (1572-1631), *General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God*, 116-26; David Clarkson (1622-1686), *Against Anxious Carefulness* (*Works*, II.137-71); John Howe (1630-1705), *Of Thoughtfulness for the Morrow, with an Appendix Concerning the Immoderate Desire of Foreknowing Things to Come* (*Works*, II.390-450); and Flavel's incredible counsel in his *Practical Treatise on Fear* and godly help for unsettling times in *The Righteous Man's Refuge* (both in his *Works*, III.239-320 and III.321-413). Helpful modern treatments include Ed Welch, *A Small Book for the Anxious Heart*; John MacArthur, *Anxious for Nothing*; and *Tabletalk: Anxiety*, May 2021.

33 Valuable treatments of the Christian's right fear of God include Owen's *Exposition upon Psalm 130* (*Works*, VI.379-606); Jeremiah Burroughs' (1599-1646) *Gospel Fear*; and Bunyan's *Treatise of the Fear of God* (*Works*, III.437-91).

34 William Secker (d. 1681), *The Consistent Christian*, VI.15 ([Chapel Library](#) reprint, p. 145).

35 Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, 13; Luther, *The Ninety-Five Theses*, 1.

36 Some years back, I adapted an old article (now lost) by Jim Newheiser into this chart contrasting true and false dealing with God.

<b>Worldly Sorrow/False Repentance (2 Cor 7:10b)</b>	<b>Godly Sorrow/True Repentance (2 Cor 7:9-11)</b>
1. Self-focused, 1 Sam 15:30; Gen 4:13	1. God-focused, Ps 51:4; 2 Sam 12:13
2. Hates sin's consequences, Gen 4:14; Ac 8:24; Ex 10:16-18	2. Hates the sin, Ps 32:5; Ps 51:1-3
3. Self-protective/defensive, Gen 4:14; 1 Sam 15:30	3. Fully accepts responsibility, Ps 51:3; 2 Sam 24:10
4. Blames others, Gen 3:12; 1 Sam 15:19-21,24	4. Concerned for others, 2 Sam 24:17; Php 2:3f
5. Impatiently demands trust and restoration, 1 Sam 15:30	5. Patiently accepts consequences, Ps 51:4; 2 Sam 24:13f
6. Criticizes the disciplinary process, Gen 4:13	6. Submits to discipline/accountability, 1 Cor 10:12; 2 Cor 7:8
7. Unchanged heart that doesn't bear fruit, Lk 3:7-9	7. Changed heart that bears fruit, Ps 51:6-12; Lk 19:1-10

37 A perpetual temptation with anxiety is escapist fantasies about heaven. Puritan thought offers several correctives, giving strength to continue walking faithfully under providence. Robert Traill (1642-1716) in *The Lord's Prayer (Works, II.74f)* points to Christ as its substance: "According to the frame of men's spirits, they frame thoughts of heaven, and of the way to it. The Turks' paradise is brutish; the Popish paradise is little better. The natural philosopher's conceptions of heaven are more manly, though carnal. Only a true Christian can have a right thought of heaven; because he knows Jesus Christ, and communion with him. Christ himself is the way to heaven, as he is a slain Redeemer; and Christ himself is heaven itself, as he is a glorified, enjoyed Redeemer. All this is unintelligible and incredible to every natural man. Can ever that man count it blessedness to be with Christ above, who counts it a piece of misery to be in his company on earth?" Flavel, preaching on Jn 3:16, concurs in *The Fountain of Life Opened Up (Works, I.67f)*: "It is a special consideration to enhance the love of God in giving Christ, that in giving him he gave the richest jewel in his cabinet; a mercy of the greatest worth, and most inestimable value. Heaven itself is not so valuable and precious as Christ is! He is the better half of heaven; and so the saints account him, Psa 73:25, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" Ten thousand thousand worlds, saith one, as many worlds as angels can number, and then as a new world of angels can multiply, would not all be the bulk of a balance, to weigh Christ's excellency, love, and sweetness. O what a fair One! what an only One! what an excellent, lovely, ravishing One, is Christ! Put the beauty of ten thousand paradises, like the garden of Eden, into one; put all trees, all flowers, all smells, all colours, all tastes, all joys, all sweetness, all loveliness in one; O what a fair and excellent thing would that be? And yet it should be less to that fair and dearest well-beloved Christ, than one drop of rain to the whole seas, rivers, lakes, and fountains of ten thousand earths. Christ is heaven's wonder, and earth's wonder." See too Timothy Rogers' (1658-1728) moving description in *Trouble of Mind and the Disease of Melancholy*, 187-205.

38 John Gere (1600-1649), *The Character of an Old English Puritan, or Nonconformist* (1646). While certainly not sympathetic toward credobaptists – he wrote this tract against John Tombes (c.1603-1676) – the picture he paints is one of godly Christian character, really the normal Christian life.

39 Consult “God’s Thoughts and Ways are Above Ours in Other Respects,” in John Shower (1657-1715), *God’s Thoughts and Ways are Above Ours*, 102-27; and Baxter, *Christian Directory*, I.IV.V.192-214.

40 Baxter has wise counsel here in “Cases of Conscience,” in *Christian Directory*, I.III.V.74f.

41 So Jamieson-Faussett-Brown Commentary (1871). John Gill (1697-1771) and Keil and Delitzsch (1861) concur in their respective commentaries on Isa 28:16. Motyer renders it “will not panic” (*Isaiah by the Day*, 138), noting further “it means rushing hither and yon...all haste and flurry (even ‘being in a flap’; cf. 7:2) in contrast to the rest and repose” (*The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, 233f). Edward Young agrees: “the word serves best to show the hurriedness that stands in opposition to the quiet of the one who trusts” (*The Book of Isaiah*, II.288). Brown-Driver-Briggs renders it “will not flee or hasten about distractedly”; TWOT approves Driver’s journal article suggestion of “will not be agitated” (note John Watts’ conclusion in *Word Biblical Commentary*, 24.367f, n. 16h). Hence Watson’s wisdom: “Trust God when promises seem to run quite contrary to providences” (*Body of Divinity*, 123).

42 Refer to Edwards, “The Preciousness of Time” and “Procrastination” (*Works*, II.233-36 and 237-42); Baxter, *Dying Thoughts* (in his *Practical Works*, 867-956) and his directions for redeeming and improving time in “Cases of Conscience” (*Christian Directory*, I.V.230-46; John Fox (fl. 1624-c.1662), *Time and the End of Time*; Richard Steele (1629-1692), *A Discourse Concerning Old Age*).

43 Oswald Chambers (1874-1927), “Have You Come to ‘When’ Yet?” in *My Utmost for His Highest*. While I firmly disagree with Chambers’ views on sanctification as unbiblical, he’s got this point right.

44 J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John, part 3 (vol. 7)*, 36-41.

45 Hopkins, concluding *Death Disarmed of its Sting* (*Works*, III.340).

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AARON MATHERLY

# A Trumpet Blown in London: Benjamin Keach and the Doctrine of the Last Judgment

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*Day of judgment! Day of wonders!  
Hark! the trumpet's awful sound,  
louder than a thousand thunders,  
shakes the vast creation round.*

*How the summons will the sinner's heart confound!*

Although many modern Christians are likely unacquainted with Newton's classic hymn, it would be difficult to overlook the presence of its subject matter in Western culture. Even as the remaining vestiges of biblical Christianity grow dimmer in our increasingly secular age, the Bible's teaching on the last judgment nevertheless continues to engage the imagination of the West. History bears witness to this longstanding fascination with hell and judgment, and throughout the centuries attempts to portray these themes can be found on the page, canvas, staff, and more recently, the camera reel. One might think of Dante, whose epic journey to

*Paradiso* led him first led him through that suffering city, or perhaps recall the macabre works of the great medieval and Renaissance painters like Giotto di Bondone's *Last Judgment* (1306), and Hieronymus Bosch's surreal triptych, *Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1500). Composers like Giuseppe Verdi have also tried to represent the final judgment through the medium of music, and his requiem *Dies Irae* (1874), with its crescendo of frantic strings and pounding drums, provides one notable example. Similarly, the silver screen has presented moviegoers with depictions of hell from the earliest days of cinema with films like *L'Inferno* (1911), to the current plethora of over-the-top horror flicks.

Although trying to convey the terrors of that final day, many portrayals of hell and judgment rely more upon the fancies of their authors, artists and composers than the biblical testimony on the matter. These sources—Hollywood perhaps being the primary offender—often shape our understanding over and above Scripture, and this is a regrettable fact considering the gravity of the subject. Thankfully, the *Second London Confession's* thirty-second and final chapter on the last judgment brings clarity to this often-misunderstood topic. Just as the Poet had Virgil to guide him through the depths of the *Inferno*, it is fitting that we too have a guide to help us navigate this important doctrine, the illustrious seventeenth-century Particular Baptist, Benjamin Keach (1640–1704). As both a signatory of the *Confession* and a prolific writer, Keach offers valuable insight into the *Confession's* teaching on the subject. More importantly, however, Keach helps to illuminate the Bible's teaching on that great day of judgment and wonder.

### **The Coming Harvest**

The *Confession's* statement on the last judgment consists of three paragraphs which correspond broadly to three related aspects of the doctrine: the first paragraph speaks to the reality of the final judgment, the second paragraph highlights the nature of the final judgment, and the third paragraph provides several important applications derived from the doctrine. The first paragraph reads:

God hath appointed a Day wherein he will judge the world in Righteousness, by Jesus Christ; to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father; in which Day not only the Apostate Angels shall be judged; but likewise all persons that have lived upon Earth, shall appear before the Tribunal of Christ; to give an account of their thoughts, Words, and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.

The *Confession* first affirms the certainty of that fixed day on which God will judge the world. Likewise, the day of judgment featured prominently throughout Keach's writings. In his exposition of Luke 16:22, Keach guaranteed that one day, because of sin, "all men must die," and all must pay the debt of death. In his *Tropologia*, Keach drew from Matthew 13:39 to highlight

the inescapable day of judgment. Commenting on Jesus' parable of the weeds, Keach noted that both sinners and God's elect now share a common field: "In a field grows wheat and tares, good and evil seed; so in this world there are good and evil men, saints and sinners, which God would have grow together, like the wheat and tares, until the harvest." At present, the seeds sown continue to ripen, but one day the field will be ready for that great spiritual harvest that will separate the godly from the ungodly:

When the harvest is ripe, it is cut down; the husbandman sends reapers into the field: so when all the elect are ripe for heaven, and wickedness is grown to full maturity, so that ungodly ones are all ripe for hell, the end of the world will come, and then God will send reapers into the field, which are the holy angels; and they will put down, and gather out of the field, all things that offend, and them that do iniquity.

Although the husbandman waits patiently, the time fast approaches when his bearing with wicked men will come to an end, and at that time God "will not till, plow, or sow the field of the world any more; no more Gospel to be preached, nor graces or gifts to be distributed, when this harvest is ended." On that discriminating day of wonders, said Keach, all persons will appear before the Christ's dread tribunal and he "will judge the world . . . all men, according to their works."

### **Abandon All Hope. . .**

Whereas the first paragraph emphasizes the universal nature of the final judgment, the second paragraph delineates mankind into two groups: God's elect who will go into everlasting life in the presence of God, and the reprobate who will be cast into eternal torments and everlasting destruction. The second paragraph of the chapter states:

The end of God's appointing this Day, is for the manifestation of the glory of his Mercy, in the Eternal Salvation of the Elect; and of his Justice in the Eternal damnation of the Reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient; for then shall the Righteous go into Everlasting Life, and receive that fulness of Joy, and Glory, with everlasting reward, in the presence of the Lord: but the wicked who know not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into Eternal torments, and punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

Keach himself explicated upon these two groups in his sermon *A Trumpet Blown in Zion*. Delivered in 1693—nearly fifty years before Edwards famously stepped foot into the pulpit at Enfield—Keach's fiery exposition of Matthew 3:12 and Jesus' metaphor of the wheat and the chaff offered grave, forceful warnings of impending judgment for those outside of Christ. The

wheat, wrote Keach, represents the elect who, like the grains which must be procured through much pain and effort, have had their spiritual convictions plowed up and their hearts sown with the grace of God. Keach continued: "Believers may be compared to wheat upon this respect, Christ takes much pains (to speak after the manner of men) with his own elect, not only by plowing, manuring, but by sowing, watering, weeding, fanning and purging them like wheat." Just as wheat is able to endure cold and frost, and all manner of bitter weather, so too do God's elect withstand trials and persecutions by the grace of the Spirit. The elect are those who, like pure wheat, will be placed in Christ's garner, which, wrote Keach, "is meant heaven itself." There, said Keach, "shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or that make a lie, but they that are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." These will be invited to that great banquet and enter into heaven's eternal rest in the presence of God.

Conversely, explained Keach, the chaff in Christ's metaphor are the hypocrites and the ungodly, especially those who, like the worthless fodder that cleaves to the wheat, infiltrate the church but will inevitably be purged by Christ's winnowing fan. Although oftentimes giving off the appearance of being true saints, inwardly the chaff possess "no substance, having mere dry, barren and empty souls." The chaff, Keach further explained, are "full of vain words and foolish talk," and possess "vain, carnal, proud and empty heart[s]." Such persons, argued Keach, "are not like to ascend God's holy hill, nor abide in his tabernacle," and their ultimate end is in God's unquenchable fire.

Throughout his works, Keach wrote at length on the nature of the punishment of the wicked. In his *Tropologia*, Keach recognized the disagreement among exegetes concerning the literal nature of fire described in Scripture in passages like Matthew 3:12 and 13:42, and at least in this particular work he was reluctant to take a side on whether "it be real fire or not." Elsewhere, however, Keach allowed that the fire could be a literal, physical flame, albeit unlike anything known to man in this world: In a sermon on Luke 16:23 and the rich man in torment, Keach noted that hellfire prepared for the ungodly exceeds the severity of any earthly fire in that it torments both body and soul alike:

Both soul and body too shall be tormented for evermore, when the bodies of men have been tormented, their souls have been at ease, and sustained them under their outward sorrows, but in hell the soul will be tormented as well as their bodies; the soul will be tormented in one fire, while the body is tormented in another.

Moreover, unlike ordinary fire, hellfire does not radiate light: "If therefore the fire of hell be material fire, yet it will not be like our common fire, the property of which is to give light; but it will be dark fire: God can change that quality of fire, if be please, tho' it may have all other

properties.” For Keach, The darkness of hell points to one of the most harrowing aspects of the last judgment, namely, a spiritual darkness that entails a complete separation from God and his grace for all eternity.

Although Giotto’s *Last Judgment*, with its portrayal of lost souls being cast down into hell and suffering all manner of torments by Satan and his devils, attempted to touch upon the severity of the sinner’s fate—even Keach noted that one of the miseries of hell is that the condemned would spend eternity alongside the myriads of fallen angels—this and similar depictions obfuscate the most important aspect of God’s judgment: the outpouring of his wrath. It is not Satan and his angels nor Dante’s ironic punishments of the damned that should cause sinners to tremble at the thought of judgment, but, warned Keach, falling into the hands of the living God. While it may provide some reference point to the severity of God’s judgment, for Keach not even the pain inflicted by earthly fire can fully convey the nature of God’s wrath. Appealing to Psalm 90:11, Keach suggested that the torments of God’s wrath are “inconceivable, or beyond all understanding.” Although physical fire can inflict excruciating pain upon the body, God’s wrath “is far more intollerable than any fire into which any mortal was ever cast.” Similarly, wrote Keach, earthly fire “[is] nothing to the wrath of God, when God kindles it in the consciences of men, nor to hell fire.” Unlike physical fires that can be abated, Keach likened God’s wrath to a fire that is ceaseless and unextinguishable because, he further explained: “It is to satisfy divine justice . . . yet no satisfaction can [sinners] by suffering make, for the wrong done to the holiness and justice of God.” Consequently, as illustrated in Keach’s sobering analogy, God’s wrath will eternally feed upon the condemned “like as a hungry man eats that which satisfieth him not.” In that place, the condemned “will have a judgment without mercy, sorrow without joy, pain without cease, darkness without light,” and they will roar and howl—hating both themselves and their Creator—against God and his elect for all eternity. Thus, in that great judgment upon sinners, wrote Keach, “all hopes of being saved die when they die: their expectation perishes, and all means of grace cease: the door of mercy is shut for ever.”

### **Terror for the Wicked . . .**

Painters have frequently touched upon Scripture’s teaching about the inevitability of death and judgment, and Peter Bruegel’s macabre work *The Triumph of Death* (c. 1562) provides one such example. Death, represented by the artist as an innumerable army of skeletons searching out its victims, ultimately overcomes all persons regardless of their status. One scene depicts a skeleton taunting a king with an hourglass that has run out of time, while another section of the painting reveals knights hopelessly trying to fend off the endless waves of death’s mercenaries. Men, women and children, nobles and peasants, and monks and priests all succumb to death’s ruthless and inescapable grasp. Likewise recognizing that death fast approaches for all persons, the

*Confession's* final paragraph draws out several important applications from the doctrine of the last judgment:

As Christ would have us to be certainly perswaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly, in their adversity, so will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour, the Lord will come; and may ever be prepared to say, Come Lord Jesus, Come quickly, Amen.

Like Bruegel, Keach's exposition of Luke 16 also affirmed the inevitability of death and judgment. Because of sin, death comes to all, whether rich or poor: "Kings die as well as peasants; Caesar rides in triumph one day, and the next day stabbed to death. Alexander that conquered the world was conquered by death. Nay, grace itself exempts no man from death; the righteous die as well as the wicked."

Furthermore, Keach warned that death and judgment can come at any time, and thus sinners' time on earth is never guaranteed. Like Edwards' spider dangling precariously over the fiery pit by a slender strand, Keach too cautioned his readers against any false sense of security:

That many persons are very near being cast into hell, even every ungodly and unbelieving sinner. O, how soon may some of you, if in your sins, feel how intolerable the torments of hell are? It is not afar off, no, there is only a small thread of life between sinners and eternal torments.

The life of man is like the wind that speedily passes away, a cloud that vanishes, and a flower that quickly fades. Thus, Keach cautioned, one ought not presume upon certainty of tomorrow: repent now while there is still time.

For Keach, both the terrible nature and fast-approaching time of God's impending judgement ought to instill terror into the hearts of unbelievers, a sentiment he raised in a sermon on Matthew 13:47-50 and Jesus' parable of the net. Although many of God's elect have not yet been caught, the net, understood by Keach as the gospel, will one day be gathered back to the shore and "all means of making the good better, or the bad good, shall cease for ever." That is, the current season of repentance is soon coming to an end, and sinners will ultimately face the reality that "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." One day, those unrepentant will hear those dreaded words, "depart ye from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Thus, the preacher pleaded:

How might this awaken sinners, and be a means to turn them from spiritual darkness to light; and from Satan, the prince of darkness, to God: Oh! that these closing, direful, and

amazing lines, might turn many to righteousness, to believe, repent, and obey the Gospel, before the Lord Jesus come in flaming fire, rendering vengeance upon all that know not God nor obey the Gospel.

“Death may be nearer than you are aware of,” warned Keach, “and that is the evil day to all Christless sinners, then they go to hell; dare you defer seeking Jesus Christ, ‘boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what one day may bring forth.’”

### ... Consolation for the Godly

Keach, like the *Confession*, noted the “vast difference between the state of the godly and ungodly at death.” Although it does not provoke Christians to terror as it does for those outside of Christ, Keach argued that the impending judgment ought to prompt reflection upon one’s own estate:

Oh what a motive should this be to us all; God weighs our persons, our graces, our gifts, our duties, and all our services, in scales. Take heed you are not found too light, found wanting as be sure you will if you be found chaff, when put into the balance of the sanctuary.

Appealing to 1 Corinthians 11:32, Keach elsewhere urged Christians to “examine and try ourselves, judge ourselves, since the time will come which will try every person.” In his *Trumpet Blown in Zion*, Keach likewise suggested this same introspection so that those in the church “would not be found chaff at the great day.” All sin will eventually be laid bare, thus Keach implored his hearers to find refuge only in the mercies of Christ and his free grace: “Be sure build on Christ alone, and see that that faith thou hast in him, be the faith of God’s elect, which sanctifies both heart and life, and is attended with good fruits.”

Furthermore, whereas the last judgment provides a dire warning to the ungodly, Keach highlighted the comfort and consolation that doctrine provides for Christians. First, Keach reminded Christians that God’s wrath is appeased towards them, and that “Christ’s blood has quenched this dreadful fire.” Christ, he continued, “hath born it, and allay’d it, nay, quite put it out, so that you shall never feel the burning or tormenting nature thereof.” Christ will not lose one grain of his spiritual wheat, thus the saints can have full confidence that their reward on that last day will be heaven itself. Thus, expressed Keach:

Let [Christians] lift up their hearts with joy! What a blessed and happy condition are they in now! But what will their state be when this life is ended? Such need not to fear death; for, as their souls go then to Christ, so when Christ comes, he will bring them with him; “they shall appear with him in glory.” What a harvest of joy.

Keach elsewhere spoke of the “thrice happy” estate of the redeemed. First, for those trusting in Christ and his righteousness alone, the law will be silent against them on that great day, “being fully answered.” Moreover, the Judge will smile upon the elect “as the favourites of heaven,” and will say to them “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Third, noted Keach, the saints will be free from their earthly troubles. The doctrine of the last judgment reassures believers that present trials and suffering will one day cease, and “though you have sorrow here, sorrow now, yet you shall be comforted, being delivered from whatsoever is evil, and possess whatsoever is truly good, and when you die you shall partake thereof.” Keach himself was no stranger to persecution—he, along with many of his fellow dissenters, faced imprisonment during the reign of Charles II—thus the doctrine likewise provides comfort for those reviled and facing martyrdom for the faith, and encourages believers to stand firm in the gospel knowing that one day they will be vindicated.

Finally, reflecting upon the doctrine of the last judgment ought to provoke the redeemed to praise God:

Let the redeemed of the Lord rejoice and magnify the God of their salvation, who hath given them good hope through grace, that they are delivered from wrath to come, by being called out of spiritual darkness into Christ’s marvellous light, and by him have escaped that dreadful doom, of being cast into utter darkness.

To borrow from an Augustinian sentiment, all people are born into the same, sinful lump. Thus, wrote Keach, recognizing one’s own deliverance from the coming judgment brings the wonders of God’s glorious grace and work of salvation into greater view:

We refer the excellency of divine grace; all men, my brethren, naturally are alike vile, sinful, and odious by sin; there is no difference; it is only that mighty work of the Spirit of God upon the souls of his elect, that makes them so glorious, amicable, and precious.

Therefore, Keach implored, “sing praises to our God, sing praises to our King, sing praises to our Judge, sing praises.”

## **Conclusion**

Given the current confusion on the topic—and especially if recent surveys on the state of evangelicalism are accurate—readers today would be wise to consider the *Confession’s* and Keach’s teaching on the last judgment. As we have seen, the doctrine contains both hope for the godly and despair for the ungodly; it offers consolation to the redeemed and grave warnings for those outside of Christ. Although a difficult doctrine, it is an important one. Thankfully, both

the *Second London Confession* and the voluminous writings of Keach offer readers the precision needed to navigate this crucial topic. Like Newton, one of Keach's own hymns encapsulates this great scriptural teaching:

*What Man is He that Liveth here,  
and Death shall never see?  
Or, from the hand of the dark Grave,  
can, Lord, deliver'd be?  
But blest are they, who die in Christ,  
Their Death to them is Gain;  
Their Souls do go to Paradise;  
The Wicked go to Pain.*

*Praised be God for Jesus Christ,  
Who gives such Victory  
Unto thy Saints, o'er Sin and Death;  
Sing Praise continually.  
The Godly ly in a sweet Sleep,  
They sleep in Jesus do;  
And no more Pain, no Sorrow shall  
for ever undergo.*

