

## Lecture 7: The Afterlife

**True to his word**, the next time Professor Grimes' class met it did not meet outside. Instead of being battered by the elements, the intrepid students of Christianity 101 found themselves in the lowest sub-basement of Old Main. It was a dark and dreary place, and the room had a faint musty smell. The only light came from a few bare lightbulbs that dangled from wires from the ceiling. Dusty crates lined the walls, and there were cobwebs everywhere. Grimes would not have been surprised to find the skeleton of some poor lost student stashed away in a corner.

Still, it wasn't outdoors, so the professor was pleased. As an added bonus the room was both cool and dry. Grimes had cleared away some floor space in the basement's corner to hold his lectures. Since the basement lacked chairs, he rearranged some of the smaller crates into rows and threw a

sheet over them to act as a makeshift bench. It wasn't much, but it would do.

Grimes also had moved his industrial shredder to the basement and verified that it was still working. If a cell phone emergency arose he would be prepared.

"Good morning, class!" the professor announced. "Welcome to your new classroom."

"It's kind of dreary down here," Brad complained. "Are you sure there aren't skeletons lurking in the shadows?"

"Would you rather that we met outside in the rain? That can be arranged, you know."

"I guess not. But when are we going to get a proper class back?"

The professor smiled. "Probably the day money rains down from the sky and wishes come true. If you find a genie in a magic lamp then we might be able to acquire better accommodations. Until then we will continue to meet down here."

Wally spoke up. "But why bother meeting at all? Why not just call it a day and send us all home? I mean, after all, there isn't going to be another semester. Why are we

still having class?”

“Because you *desperately* need it,” the professor said firmly. “You are planning on spending the rest of your life as a professional in the field of theology, and yet your knowledge of theology is so poor that it defies comprehension. I know grade school children who could run rings around you. If you cannot find a way to pass this theology course then you need to find a new career path in life.”

Wally yawned. “I think you worry too much. You need to relax and chill out! When the time comes, God will tell me everything I need to know. Studying is, like, a total waste of time.”

Professor Grimes shook his head. “You are badly misinformed. God has *already* told you everything you need to know, and He put it in the Bible and commanded you to study it. God is *not* going to magically give you special knowledge whenever important situations come up in life. If you can’t be bothered to actually pay attention to the things God said in His Word, then you are going to go through life as an ignorant mess. In fact, God said that

if you can't be bothered to study His Word then you *will* be ashamed when you stand before Him and are judged for the way you wasted your life."

"That's harsh, man," Wally grumbled.

"We do not live in fairyland," the professor replied. "The world is not a place of gumdrops and candy and talking purple unicorns. This is reality, and the stakes are high – incredibly high, as a matter of fact. Which brings us to the topic of today's class. We are going to be discussing the afterlife."

"But how is that possible?" Iris asked. "The Bible says that 'eye has not seen, nor ear heard, what God has prepared for those who love him'."

Professor Grimes let out a long sigh. "Yes, 1 Corinthians 2:9 does say that. But tell me something, young lady. Did you ever look up that verse in the Bible and see what the very next verse said? Do you even know what that chapter is talking about?"

"Not really. Is it important?"

"It's *always* important! Context is everything. The *very next phrase* in the Bible is 'But God has revealed them to us by his

Spirit'. That verse is *not* saying that God has hidden something from us; it is saying precisely the opposite – that God has *revealed* something to us! On top of that, 1 Corinthians 2 is talking about *Christ*, not Heaven. That verse has *absolutely nothing* to do with the afterlife.

“The truth is that God has said a great deal about what happens after death. The Bible contains a tremendous amount of information about it – and sadly, its teachings have been pretty much ignored by the modern generation of Christians. Instead of believing what God has said, people have ignored God and believed whatever Hollywood told them. As a result, people believe all sorts of silly things that aren’t true.

“We are going to start our discussion by talking about Hell. Jesus–”

“What a buzzkill, man,” Wally grumbled. “Why do you have to start on such a downer?”

“As I was saying before I was interrupted, Jesus talked far more about Hell than He did about Heaven. The truth is that we don’t talk about Hell nearly enough, and we don’t take it very seriously. People treat it as if it is some

sort of joke – but there is nothing funny about it. Hell is a very real place and a very serious danger. It is Hell, not Heaven, that is our default destination. You don't have to do anything to go to Hell because *you are already going there by default*. Since we have all sinned against God, all of us are guilty – and the punishment for our sins is an eternity of fiery torment. It doesn't matter if you consider yourself to be a 'good person' or to have lived a 'good life'. God is not the least bit interested in any of that. If you have not repented of your sins and believed in Christ then you are going to go to Hell. The only way to escape is through Jesus Christ. John 14:6 is very clear about this."

Brad spoke up. "But God is a God of love! He would never send a good person to Hell."

*"There are no good unsaved people,"* Professor Grimes said firmly. "In the eyes of God there are only two groups of people: those who *have* been redeemed by the blood of Christ, and those who *have not* been redeemed. God considers all those who have *not* been redeemed to be desperately wicked, and He will send them all to Hell if they do not

repent. It doesn't matter if *you* think they are sweet and kind; what matters is that God sees them as utterly depraved sinners. God takes their sins far more seriously than you do. The only reason God considers Christians to be holy is because God has credited to them the righteousness of Christ."

"What on earth does that mean?" Rob asked.

"It means that when God looks at a Christian He doesn't see all the sins they've committed. Instead He sees the perfect righteousness of Christ. The Bible says that Christians are dressed in Christ's righteousness. That is why they can enter Heaven – and, in fact, that is the only way anyone can enter Heaven. But back to the subject at hand. Hell is both very real and very terrible. Jesus said—"

Wally interrupted. "Hell is separation from God. It's where God puts people who don't want Him."

Professor Grimes sighed. "Hell is *not* separation from God. It's quite the opposite: it is a place where God eternally pours out His wrath upon the wicked. God is *very much*

present in Hell. People have this idea that demons run Hell and spend their time tormenting the souls that are trapped there, but nothing could be further from the truth. The reality is that according to Matthew 25:41, God actually created the 'everlasting fire' as a place to torment *demons*. Revelation 20:10-15 says that when the great Day of Judgment comes, God will take the devil himself and the wicked and will cast them into the Lake of Fire, where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. They will spend all of eternity experiencing the unending wrath of God."

Iris spoke up. "Wait a minute. Is that lake of fire the same thing as Hell?"

"No, it's not. When the wicked die they are sent to Hell, which Jesus said in Mark 9:47-48 is a terrible place of fire and pain. The wicked will remain in Hell until the Day of Judgment. Revelation 20:11-15 says that on that day all the wicked will be taken out of Hell and judged for their wickedness. They will then be cast into a separate place that the Bible calls the Lake of Fire. All those who did not repent and believe in Christ will be



tormented by fire for all of eternity, with no hope of escape or relief.”

Wally spoke up. “I don’t like the way you keep calling them *wicked*. There are lots of good people out there who don’t believe in God.”

“You are greatly mistaken, young man. When God uses the word ‘good’ He doesn’t mean the same thing that you do. To us a good person is someone who helps old ladies across the street, or who is kind to children, or who donates to worthy causes. To God a good person is someone who has no sins charged to their account. If a person has *any* sins that are not paid for then He considers that person to be wicked and He *will* cast him into Hell. That is why the gospel is so important – it is the only way to pay for our sins.”

“But I thought that everyone went to Heaven,” Brad replied.

Professor Grimes shook his head. “That’s not what Jesus said. In Matthew 7:13-14 He quite clearly stated that the road to Hell was wide and *many* people would go down that road to their everlasting destruction. He

furthermore said that the road to eternal life was narrow and few people would find it. Jesus did *not* agree that everyone goes to Heaven – and I have no doubt that He would know.”

“But that doesn’t make sense!” Brad complained. “A good God would never send anyone to Hell. That’s not loving at all.”

“God is not a one-dimensional stick figure,” the professor replied. “You act as if God’s only quality is love, and you define love to mean ‘doing whatever makes people happy’. But that is utter nonsense. God also happens to be *just*. Mankind has committed terrible sins against God, and those sins must be judged. Oh, sure, *we* don’t think they’re so terrible. We don’t really care that we’ve lied, cheated, murdered, committed adultery, stolen things, and have done all sorts of acts that are abominations in God’s sight. Since they’re not a big deal to us we can’t imagine that they’re a big deal to God.

“But our sins are a *huge* deal to God. We have wronged a God who is both infinite and holy, and that is an extremely serious matter. Think of it this way. If you deliberately burned

down the house of a mob boss, no one would be the least bit surprised if some henchmen showed up at your door and made your life *very* uncomfortable. After all, you committed a crime against a very powerful person, and he is not going to rest until you have suffered for it. Everyone would agree that what you did was incredibly stupid. You angered the wrong person.

“God is *vastly* more powerful than any person on Earth, and He is also vastly more holy. The most serious and terrible thing you could ever do is sin against God. It is a billion times more dangerous than sinning against the most notorious crime lord on Earth. God has infinite power, and He will not rest until justice is done. You cannot escape or hide from Him. Since you have sinned against Him – and *all* of you are guilty of this – then that sin must be paid for. If your sin is not paid for by the death of Christ then God will hold you personally responsible for it.”

Brad spoke up. “But couldn’t God just sweep those sins under the rug? Couldn’t He just say ‘Hey, no big deal’? Wouldn’t that be the loving thing to do?”

“That would be a deeply unjust thing to do,” Professor Grimes replied. “Justice demands that crimes be punished. Since a crime was committed, the criminal must suffer. If God just ignored sins then He would be unjust. Sin *must* be punished – and that is where the love of God comes in. Since sin must be punished, that means the only way we can be set free is if some innocent person suffers on our behalf. However, there aren’t any innocent people. Romans 5:12 says that *all* have sinned. Since all of us are guilty, God sent His sinless Son to suffer and die on our behalf. *That* is the love of God – that Jesus, who did no wrong, would suffer and die in our place. All who repent and believe will have their sins forgiven and will inherit eternal life.”

Iris spoke up. “But isn’t eternal life kind of boring? I mean, it sounds like it’s just one really long church service. I don’t know if I could stand that. It doesn’t sound like there will be very much to do.”

“That is exactly the perception I was talking about earlier,” Professor Grimes replied. “People have this idea that Heaven is an incredibly boring place – a vague, white

existence where people float around on harps, bored out of their minds, wishing they had brought a magazine or something to read. That picture of Heaven is utterly ridiculous.

“The first thing we need to realize is that it is *not* our destiny to float around as disembodied spirits on some sort of spiritual plane. Yes, it is true that when Christians die they leave their body behind and go to Heaven. However, beings in the afterlife have a body of some sort. We can see this from Luke 16:19-31, where Jesus tells the account of the rich man and Lazarus. Both of them died and went on to the afterlife. The rich man, who was being tormented by the fires of Hell, begged Lazarus (who was *not* in Hell) to dip his finger into water and comfort him. Since disembodied spirits don’t have fingers, that can only mean that Lazarus had a body of some kind.

“However, whatever body Lazarus had was just a temporary one. We know this because I Thessalonians 4:16-17 tells us that when the Lord Jesus Christ returns He will raise all Christians from the dead. That means that our original body, which had died and

returned to dust, will be brought back to life again. This time, however, it will be made incorruptible and perfect. 1 Corinthians 15 talks about this body at length and tells us that it will no longer be subject to aging, death, or disease. It will be full of life and full of glory.”

Iris spoke up. “And then we’ll go to Heaven with that new body?”

“Yes we will – but that’s not the end of the story. We will remain in Heaven while God pours out His wrath upon the world during the time known as the Tribulation. When the Tribulation is over will come back to Earth with Christ to reign with Him, but that is something I will cover in greater detail in our last class. The point I want to make is that during the Day of Judgment, God will condemn the wicked for their sins and cast them into the Lake of Fire. At that time He will utterly put an end to all sin, death, suffering, and pain. All of the things that have made our lives so hard will be done away with forever.

“God will then destroy this universe and create a new one – a perfect place that will never know pain, or suffering, or death, and

that will never have any wicked people. God will create a new Earth and will place all of us there to live forever. In fact, God will actually leave Heaven and move in with us on Earth, where God and Man will live together. *That* is our future – not to live as disembodied spirits in Heaven but to live on a perfect Earth, with perfect immortal bodies, with God Himself.”

Iris spoke up. “So what you’re saying is that we’re *not* going to live in Heaven forever, but instead are going to spend eternity on the new Earth that God will make?”

“Exactly!” the professor exclaimed. “That puts things in a different light, doesn’t it? It’s certainly hard to imagine what it would be like to live as a spirit in a world made of clouds. However, it’s vastly easier to imagine living on a perfect world. But there’s more! The Bible says that God has prepared for us a *city*.”

“A city?” Iris asked.

“Yes – the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21 and 22 has a great deal to say about it. It’s a vast city that is 1,500 miles on each side and has streets of gold and rivers of living water. It is an astonishing place. The Bible refers to that city as our mother and our home. In

other words, we will spend eternity living in a *city* in a perfect world. We will *not* be spending eternity as a disembodied spirit floating on a cloud somewhere.”

Brad spoke up. “Oh, come on. You don’t really believe in that whole mansions thing, do you? Most Bibles these days translate it as ‘rooms’.”

Professor Grimes sighed. “There is a great deal I could say about ‘most translations of the Bible’, but since all that is way over your head I will refrain myself. The truth of the matter is that the translation ‘mansion’ in John 14:2 is not at all unfair, and I believe it makes a great deal of sense. Think about it, young man. Are you telling me that after a lifetime of suffering on behalf of Christ, when we finally get to that Heavenly city – the one that God has spent *two thousand years* preparing for us – God is going to shove us into a one-room closet for all of eternity and tell us to have fun? Is *that* really what you think of God?”

“Actually, I don’t think we’ll have homes at all,” Brad explained.

“I see – so you think God will condemn all



of His children to be *homeless* for eternity? We're going to live in a city so extravagant that its very *streets* are paved with gold, but we will be so desperately poor that we won't even have a chair to sit down on? God – who created an uncountable array of stars and galaxies *in order to serve as a night-light for the Earth* – couldn't be bothered to build a house for the Bride that He died to save? I think that's completely preposterous."

There was silence for a minute. The light bulb hanging over their head gently swung from side to side, casting shadows on the wall.

Iris finally spoke up. "But what are we going to be doing there? I mean, eternity is a long time, isn't it?"

"We're going to be doing *more*," Professor Grimes replied. "Throughout the Bible God said that if we are faithful in the things of this life, God will give us much greater responsibilities. He acted as if the things of this world were relatively small and minor compared to what He would give us to do in the future. In Luke 19 He spoke of a man who gave his servants a small sum of money to manage. When they did well, their master

rewarded them by giving them entire *cities* to manage. The idea was that the things of this life were *small* compared to the responsibilities that were to come. Whatever is going to be in our future, it will be much greater than what we've encountered so far – and that is something to think about.”

The professor glanced at his watch. “It looks like that’s all the time we have for today. Be sure to read the next chapter in your book. Next time we will talk about the church sacraments. You are dismissed!”