

Lesson 13

Eschatological Things



Eschatology is the study of Last (or *End-Time*) Things which includes the following topics: death, judgment, Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell. The end of human life is the beginning of eternal life. Immediately upon death, we are rewarded according to our deeds and faith. At death, Christ gives a judgment and destination for each soul.

Every person must experience death in order to enter eternal life. **Death** is the last moment of our earthly life when the soul is separated from the body. After death, we enter into **Particular Judgment**. This is when we are judged individually by God. Remember, God grades on the Cross, not on the curve. **Heaven** is the Eternal Kingdom of God. To enter into Heaven is our ultimate goal in life. Heaven is perfect union with God in life and love that never ends. In Heaven, we become saints and enjoy the glory of the vision of God (*called the **Beatific Vision***) for all eternity.

Heaven is the state of everlasting life in which we see God and enjoy eternal happiness. All souls in Heaven are in the light of glory and have an immediate vision of God. They have made up for their sins either on earth or in Purgatory. Jesus speaks of various degrees (or "*mansions*") of happiness in his Father's house according to the various degrees of love and friendship with God through cooperation with His grace. While these are different, each person receives the full measure of happiness he or she can desire, like jars of different sizes each filled to the brim.

This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity (*this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels, and all the blessed*) is called "Heaven." Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness. This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father's house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise: "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Hell is a life of total separation from God forever. In His infinite love for us, God can only desire our Salvation. Hell is the result of the free choice of a person to reject God's love and forgiveness once and for all.

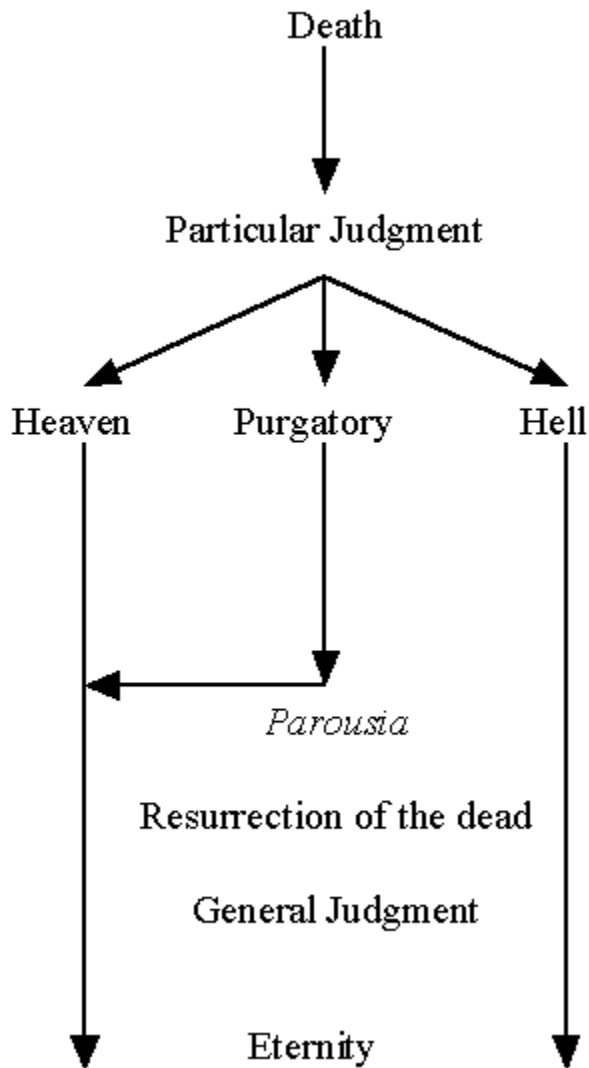
Purgatory is a possible outcome of particular judgment following death. Purgatory is a state of final cleansing after death of all our human imperfections to prepare us to enter into the joy of God's presence in Heaven. Purgatory is a time of purification from venial sins so that souls achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of Heaven. These souls must suffer the inability to see God completely and be freed from attachment to creatures. These souls are in a state of grace, a part of the Communion of Saints, but have unrepented venial sins. Purgatory is not an eternal state, but will only last until the general judgment at the end of the world.

In short, Purgatory is for those who are saved but in need of purification after death on their way to Heaven. The Catholic Church understands Purgatory as an indefinite state of purification in preparation for the fullness of the Beatific Vision. Purgatory is a state, not a place, since only the soul goes through purgatory and not the body.

Jesus promised his disciples that he will return again in glory to earth at the end of time. This is known as the **Second Coming of Christ** or the **Parousia**.



The following diagram illustrates the process of our passing from this life to the next:



Catholic Christians believe that all men and women will experience the end of this human life. The Word of God teaches us that each person will be judged immediately after death (*Particular Judgment*).

Catholics believe that the souls of the saved who are in need of further purification before facing God will be purged in Purgatory.

Heaven awaits those souls found to be in the state of grace or perfection.

Hell or eternal damnation awaits those souls who die without repentance for their sins.

At the end of the world, Jesus will come again in power and glory--the *Parousia*.

At this time the bodies of all the dead will be resurrected.

After the General Judgment, the blessed will possess Heaven for all eternity; the damned will suffer Hell for all eternity.

In his encyclical "The Hope of Salvation," Pope Benedict XVI wrote: "The Last Judgment is not primarily an image of terror, but an image of hope." Catholics believe that immediately after death, each person comes before God for an individual (*particular*) judgment and enters Heaven, Purgatory, or Hell. The **Last Judgment**, also known as the **General Judgment**, refers to the end of time when Christ will return in glory and all will be raised from the dead to stand before God, at which time our relationship with Him will be revealed to all. Jesus describes this last (*general*) judgment in Matthew 25:31-32, using the illustration of a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats. The message of the Last Judgment calls people to conversion so they are not separated from God forever.



Eschatological (*End-Time*) Things help us to keep our eyes fixated on our ultimate goal: the Kingdom of Heaven. Our faith, the sacraments, and discipleship are ways for us to preserve through the hardships of this life and remain on the road to sainthood. These Last Things (*Death, Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, and Judgment*) allow us to place our hope in Jesus Christ, who is the just and merciful judge.

With these Last Things in mind, we should be able to see the importance of keeping our souls in a state of grace. To do this, we must strive to eradicate sin in our life and utilize the Sacrament of Reconciliation often.

Indulgences

We continue to suffer the effects of our sins, even after we receive forgiveness; this is called **Temporal Punishment**. An **Indulgence** is a lessening of temporal punishment gained through participation in prayer and works of charity. An indulgence is usually attached to various devout practices, like a pilgrimage or novenas. Indulgences move us toward our final purification, after which we will live with God forever. In addition to obtaining indulgences for ourselves, we can gain them for those in Purgatory, who benefit from the lessening of temporal punishment as they prepare to see the face of God.

There are two types of indulgences. A **Plenary Indulgence** is one that remits all of the existing temporal punishment due for the individual's sins. A **Partial Indulgence** is one that will remit only a part of the existing punishment.

The principle behind indulgences is that all sin requires two forms of repayment. The first form of repayment is contrition, which is an appeal for forgiveness and mercy. The second form of repayment is an act of justice. Let's look at an oversimplified example of breaking a window. If you break a person's window, the proper thing to do is make an apology and pay to have the window replaced. Your apology shows that you are contrite (*sorrowful*) and the window replacement fulfills justice because the neighbor is now made whole again. Therefore, all sin is an offense against God requiring two responses: contrition and purification of the damage caused to one's soul which consists of an act of justice since we belong to God.

