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PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESURRECTION THEOLOGY
AT ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL, ILLINOIS AND RISEN CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH,
DAVENPORT, IOWA

A Major Applied Project
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By
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February 2020

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To Nancy, who is a true Proverbs 31 woman, a wife of noble character. All my love to you.

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Soli Deo Gloria

ABBREVIATIONS

BDB	Brown, Francis, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs. <i>Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.
Ep	The Epitome of the Formula of Concord
FC	The Formula of Concord
LC	Martin Luther's Large Catechism
LCMS	The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
<i>LSB</i>	<i>Lutheran Service Book</i>
SC	Martin Luther's Small Catechism
SD	The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord
<i>TDNT</i>	Kittel, Gerhard and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . 10 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965.

ABSTRACT

Jacob, David K. “PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESURRECTION THEOLOGY AT ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL, ILLINOIS AND RISEN CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH, DAVENPORT, IOWA” Doctor of Ministry. Major Applied Project, Concordia Seminary, 2020. 145 pp.

In some Christian churches there exists a tension between the resurrection of the body and a cultural view of an immaterial heaven as the endpoint of eternal life. This MAP examines this tension and shows the biblical teaching of the resurrection from the dead in a bodily form on this present perfected earth as the endpoint of eternal life for the Christian. A multi-part Bible study was written to teach believers the understanding of resurrection as taught in the Bible. Eight volunteer participants from Rock Island Arsenal and Risen Christ Lutheran Church, Davenport, Iowa were asked five interview questions before and after the Bible study. The results of the data gathered and discussed and the conclusion from this study shows there is misunderstanding among believers on resurrection theology. There is also room for improved understanding of the biblical resurrection teaching.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

One of the most well-known Bible verses is “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16).¹ Eternal life through faith in Jesus has been the great Christian hope from the start of Jesus’ ministry. As the Bible teaches eternal life for the Christian, Jesus will return to this earth in the end times. The dead will be resurrected and judged. Those with faith in Jesus in their earthly life will live forever in the new heavens and earth. Those without faith will be thrown into the everlasting lake of fire.

In some Christian denominations, including The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), the hope of eternal life in Jesus as fully taught in the Bible has been subverted by another less important teaching. New Testament professor Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs states the problem as follows:

In its simplest terms, I would say it this way. The New Testament's authors thought and lived and wrote eschatologically, with their hope fully, firmly, and fervently directed toward the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our hearts and minds, however, are not so oriented, even though our tradition and the ancient creeds and the Bible itself should teach us otherwise. They lived eschatologically. We, in practical terms, do not. And we should.²

¹ All Scripture quotations from the New International Version (NIV), Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984, unless noted.

² Jeffrey Gibbs, “Regaining Biblical Hope: Restoring the Prominence of the Parousia,” *Concordia Journal* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 310.

Instead of living eschatologically, Gibbs says it is the interim state of the soul between the individual's earthly death and the second return of Jesus that most captures the imaginations of many Christians today. If Christians and Missouri Synod Lutherans are asked what the hope and goal of the Christian faith is, their answer is likely to be "Dying and going to heaven."³ This is a major problem. Gibbs writes, "Somehow we have allowed this minor Biblical emphasis to become our hope and our longing to the exclusion, for all practical terms, of the Parousia of Jesus Christ. God would like us to change that situation; as a student suggested to me in a conversation regarding our topic, it may be that we have lost our first hope."⁴ Since this article was published, numerous theologians in the LCMS have written articles on why it is important to restore the complete teaching of biblical resurrection theology concerning the proper understanding of eternal life. Other theologians in other denominations have also recently written books and articles about this same topic. This Major Applied Project seeks to examine resurrection theology in these writings and gather data about its understanding among groups attending Bible studies at Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois, and at Risen Christ Lutheran Church in Davenport, Iowa, to make conclusions from the data gathered.

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments present a continuous story of God and his creation from beginning to end. In the first book of the Bible, "God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Coming full circle at the end of the last book of the Bible, the author of Revelation writes, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1). Of these two bookend passages, Charles Arand says, "Everything in between moves from the first creation story to the

³ Gibbs, "Regaining Biblical Hope," 315.

⁴ Gibbs, "Regaining Biblical Hope," 311.

second creation story.”⁵ In the first creation, God made this earth from nothing in Genesis 1. Along with mankind, this perfect creation was broken by sin, starting in Genesis 3. Jesus redeemed all mankind and this creation through his life, death, and resurrection from the dead. On the last day, creation itself will be restored to its sinless state through the person and work of Jesus. The place of the believer in Jesus on that last day will be on this present restored creation with a resurrected body, healed and restored from its sin-filled state. The Bible moves in a narrative arc from perfect creation, to sin, to redemption in Jesus, and to the renewed creation on the last day.

In addition to John 3:16 mentioned above, Acts 4:11–12 records Peter’s sermon before the Jewish leaders. He identified Jesus as the son of God upon whom the promise of John 3 was based, also borrowing from Psalm 118: “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved.” Countless numbers of Christians through the ages have relied on the truth of these words for their future hope, in this life and the next. Not only is salvation in Jesus, but from the resurrection of Jesus we see a picture of what resurrection bodies must be like. “Christ’s resurrection body was suited for life on earth.”⁶

Although there were some differences between Jesus’ pre-resurrection and post-resurrection body,⁷ the Bible tells us after his resurrection Jesus walked around like a normal human being. He did not hover above the ground or fly from place to place like an airplane.

⁵ Charles Arand, “The Incarnation’s Embrace of Creation,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 50, no. 3 (December 2016): 179.

⁶ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, IL, 2004), 117. The following sentences of the nature of Jesus’ resurrected body are modeled after Alcorn’s comments in following pages.

⁷ After his resurrection, Jesus did pass through locked doors (John 20:26) and have the ability to appear or disappear at will (Luke 24:31). Scripture does not reveal whether or not these post-resurrection abilities will be common to all individuals resurrected to eternal life in him.

Scripture does not record anyone pointing out any notable differences in Jesus' resurrection body as they knew it before his resurrection, other than the nail marks in his hands and his side wounded by the Roman spear (John 20:27). Jesus walked like anyone else (Luke 24:15). He ate normal food as anyone would eat in his day (Luke 24:42). Jesus spoke normally in a voice the disciples recognized. The Gospel description of Jesus speaking was not like the descriptions of when angels spoke or when the Father spoke from heaven (Matt. 17:6). Jesus spoke normally. About Jesus' resurrected body, a good point is made by Pastor Randy Alcorn, "Shouldn't we interpret passages alluding to resurrected people living on the New Earth as literally as those concerning Christ's resurrected life during the forty days he walked on the Old Earth?"⁸ Jesus' resurrected body gives us the preview for the resurrected bodies to which believers will be restored on the last day. Eternal life with the believer's resurrected bodies is completed through the resurrection of the dead on the day of judgement, living forever with physical, resurrected bodies like Jesus on this renewed earth. Says Paul in Rom. 8:22–23: "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

The teaching of resurrection and life on earth is not only a New Testament teaching and hope. The resurrection of the dead and their resurrected life on earth with physical bodies is a theme that runs from the Old Testament to the New. Isaiah 25:6–7 says, "And he [God] 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

⁸ Alcorn, *Heaven*, 119.

spoken.” In addition, Daniel 12:2 states, “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.” The Old Testament clearly teaches not only that the dead will rise again—both believers and unbelievers—but also that those who are resurrected with faith in Jesus will live upon this earth in physical, resurrected bodies. Job 19:25–27 says, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And 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.”

In addition to the Scriptural texts which describe eternal life for the believer in Jesus, the ancient confessions of the Christian Church in the Apostle’s, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds all mention the resurrection of the body. The third article of the Apostle’s Creed, confesses “the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.”⁹ About this, Martin Luther writes in the Small Catechism, “on the last day he will raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.”¹⁰ The Nicene Creed says much the same as the Apostle’s Creed, “I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.”¹¹ The Christian teaching about resurrection and eternal life cannot be more clearly and seamlessly stated in the Bible and in the ancient Creeds of the Christian Church.

Incomplete Understanding of Biblical Resurrection

However, not all of the Christian Church so seamlessly reflects the proper understanding of these biblical truths in a holistic way. A resurrected life for the believer in Jesus on this renewed

⁹ Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006). 159.

¹⁰ SC II, 6 in Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press, 1959), 345.

¹¹ Commission on Worship, *LSB*, 158.

earth on the Last Day is not how eternal life in Christ is sometimes understood among some Protestant Christians. “This holistic vision of God’s intent to renew or redeem creation is perhaps the Bible’s best-kept secret, typically unknown to most church members and even to many clergy, no matter what their theological stripe.”¹² A recent poll of those who believe in the resurrection of the dead said that “two-thirds believe they will not have bodies after the resurrection.”¹³ Having graduated from the LCMS’ Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri with a Master of Divinity degree in 1994, I admit this complete biblical teaching of the bodily resurrection to eternal life on this renewed earth was also beyond my grasp for many years. I believed in Jesus’ words to the thief on the cross, “today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). I also believed in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead on the first Easter Sunday. How or if the two fit together was less clear in my mind, even as a seminary-trained pastor. This project will show some Christians share this lack of understanding.

Not only was my own understanding of eternal life incomplete, but a recent sermon in an LCMS church I attended reflected the same sort of misunderstanding of eternal life coming from the preacher. He said at the trumpet blast upon Jesus’ return to this earth, “he will come down and gather his believers to take them to heaven.”¹⁴ The preacher perhaps was referring to 1 Thess. 4:16, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (see also 1 Cor. 15:52 and Rev. 10:7). As we will see below, this preacher was working with a wrong understanding of the biblical word heaven. Heaven is not used in the Bible as a synonym

¹² Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 24.

¹³ Alcorn, *Heaven*, 112.

¹⁴ Dana Wilhelmsen, Title unknown, (sermon peached at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Temple, TX, December 22, 2019).

for eternal life. One can see how people in the pews may be confused about resurrection and eternal life in Christ when even their pastors need education.

The topic of the holistic biblical teaching of eternal life for the believer in Jesus is also not well-understood for many of the attenders at the Army Sustainment Command Wednesday Bible study at Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois. My assumption going into this project was those who participated in this Bible Study and the individuals from within this Bible study who participated in the project would not have a clear understanding of the whole of the biblical teaching on the subject. The data from this ministry project will clearly show misunderstandings and false beliefs about what the Bible teaches in this regard. The data will also show a number of sources outside of the Bible (and even outside of Christian teachings) have an influence on their understanding of eternal life.

One such influence is popular American culture of television and movies. Biblical resurrection theology does not mirror the view that “heaven is our eternal home,” as the popular culture commonly understands heaven to mean the spiritual dwelling place in the sky.¹⁵ Popular culture often shows heaven as a spiritual location far from the earth, where angels with wings fly to and fro. Those who are lucky enough to have passed through St. Peter’s questioning and heaven’s pearly gates sit around on clouds playing harps forever. In other portrayals of heaven, such as “Heaven Can Wait” or “It’s a Wonderful Life,” heaven is again a place far away from the earth. Inhabitants of heaven are sent back to earth to accomplish some task for the living. Those sent back to the earth from heaven are then given physical bodies for the completion of their task.

Contributing to the problem of the misunderstanding of eternal life among Christians is the

¹⁵ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 17.

use of the word heaven itself by many believers, their pastors, and their devotional materials. The word heaven is often used in churches as a synonym for eternal life. An example of such thought is the sentence, “I am going to heaven when I die.” The *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB) hymnal contributes to the misunderstanding. Hymn 748 is titled “I’m But a Stranger Here.” The first verse reads, “I’m but a stranger here, Heav’n is my home: Earth is a desert drear, Heav’n is my home; Danger and sorrow stand Round me on ev’ry hand; Heav’n is my fatherland, Heav’n is my home.”¹⁶ Herein lies a problem. When pastors and parishioners don’t properly understand the biblical meanings behind the word heaven or the nature of the great hope of eternal life through faith in Jesus, and when denominational materials can cloud their understanding, the brains of the people in the pews default to what they think heaven means. As we will see in this project, the understanding of the people in the pews, perhaps also their pastors, and maybe even their denominational leaders, can be off the mark of the complete biblical teaching.

The understanding of such individuals in the pews, as the data of this project will show, is often driven by the cultural understanding of heaven and its portrayals in the media. Most often, the cultural understanding is not the same as the biblical uses of the word. The word heaven in the Bible has two major meanings, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two of this MAP. One biblical meaning for heaven is the location of the Father “in heaven,” such as depicted in Isaiah 6 or Revelation 5. The other major meaning of heaven in the Bible is the sky where we see the clouds and the stars at night. As this MAP will show, those who have an incomplete understanding of the holistic, biblical teaching in the Bible do not understand heaven in the Bible to be a place or physical location, but as a mystical, ethereal other-worldly spiritual location inhabited by souls of believers which remain there forever, as often portrayed in TV and

¹⁶ Commission on Worship, *LSB* 748.

movies.

It is also an assumption of this project that it is the rare person who connects this spiritual understanding of heaven with the holistic, biblical understanding of eternal life as life forever inhabiting perfected, resurrected bodies on this present, renewed earth as the Bible clearly teaches. “Today there is much confusion concerning the gift of eternal life in Christ as to how it is to be believed and understood in the present mortal life here on earth and in relationship to the so-called afterlife.”¹⁷ My experience is that only rarely is the nature of heaven discussed in a sermon or Bible study. Speaking of the LCMS, Gibbs discusses “what one colleague has called “the scandal of Lutheran eschatology”—there isn’t any. Our dogmatic tradition has not allowed true biblical hope to occupy a prominent place, nor perhaps even to retain its true biblical content.”¹⁸ In my experience, the subject of heaven is discussed more by American culture and more often portrayed in television and movies, than it is ever dealt with in our churches. If this is true in a larger experience than mine, one can easily see how understandings of heaven can be skewed in the minds of people in the pews.

Not only do some Christians and Christian pastors not grasp the whole biblical teaching of resurrection and eternal life on this present renewed earth, but many other hymns and prayers reflect an incomplete view of eternal life than the one noted above. Even such a beloved Christian hymn as “The Old Rugged Cross” reflects the incomplete understanding of the whole biblical teaching on resurrection. Many Christians for many years have sung these words: “then He’ll call me some day to my home far away/Where his glory forever I’ll share.”¹⁹ The Bible clearly teaches the home for the Christian after death is not a mystical heavenly home far away,

¹⁷ Louis Brighton, “Three Modes of Eternal Life,” *Concordia Journal* 27, no. 4 (October 2001): 299.

¹⁸ Gibbs, “Regaining Biblical Hope,” 316.

¹⁹ Middleton, *New Heaven*, 28.

where we will share God’s glory forever. The forever home of the Christian is on this present, renewed earth. Not only does this hymn reflect an incomplete understanding of the Bible, but it also teaches the incomplete view of resurrection. The clear biblical teaching in the Old and New Testaments is that the home for the Christian after death is with a resurrected body on this present, renewed earth. Not only does this biblical truth put a different understanding on “the Bible’s best-kept secret,” but also places a renewed importance to the Christian emphasis on and care of this present earth (more on this in Chapters Two and Three). The full biblical understanding is the home for the resurrected believer in Jesus is on this present earth, not in a far-away heaven inhabited by only spirits.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Is Not Immune

Unfortunately, even the LCMS is not immune from falling into an incomplete understanding of the complete biblical teaching of resurrection at various times and places, as mentioned above. Some other good examples of less than a total understanding of biblical resurrection theology can be found in the *LSB* hymnal. In the Martin Luther hymn “O Lord We Praise Thee” (617), the first line of the second stanza of the *LSB* says, “Thy holy body into death was given/life to win for us in heaven.”²⁰ The words in the *LSB* are not the words Luther wrote for this hymn. Instead, Luther wrote these words: “Your holy body was given in deathly strife to win for us resurrection life.”²¹ From this modern “update” to Luther’s original words in this hymn, it is easy to see the difference in meaning which is presented by this change of wording in the *LSB*. Luther knew quite well the whole biblical teaching of resurrection. The holistic

²⁰ Commission on Worship, *LSB* 617.

²¹ James Ware, “Paul’s Hope and Ours: Recovering Paul’s Hope of the Renewed Creation,” *Concordia Journal* 35, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 134.

understanding of resurrection is all over his writings. A spiritual heaven far from this earth is not the biblical understanding of eternal life. The Christian is raised to eternal life on the Last Day with a resurrected physical body on this present earth. However the change was made to Luther's wording in the *LSB*, it only serves to add to the confusion in understanding the whole biblical teaching of resurrection.

Misunderstandings of the meaning of the biblical word *heaven* contribute to the lack of understanding of the complete biblical teaching on this subject. Hymns and prayers such as the ones noted above contribute to an incomplete understanding on the part of many believers. Cultural portrayals of heaven in television and movies that are biblically incomplete contribute to the problem of a proper understanding of heaven on the part of Christians. The lack of understanding of how the Bible defines heaven on the part of many Christians also contributes to the problem. This multi-faceted lack of understanding of the word *heaven*, coupled with the Church's very common use of the word *heaven* in hymns, prayers, and sermons creates significant problems when it comes to properly understanding the total biblical teaching of resurrection to eternal life, our great Christian hope in Jesus. This project will address the problem of the common misunderstanding of heaven by a number of Christians, including some in the LCMS.

The Ramifications of Incomplete Understanding of Resurrection

There are ramifications to a skewed or incomplete understanding of the holistic teaching of the Bible on resurrection to eternal life. Biblical resurrection theology reflects life after death on the renewed creation of the planet Earth at the fulfillment of all things in Jesus on the biblical

“last day.”²² Incomplete or unclear beliefs regarding life after death for some Christians can lead to the problematic attitude that through faith in Jesus, their sins are forgiven and their ticket to the afterlife has already been punched. I have experienced this view in my own faith life. Eternal life is won for mankind through Jesus’ death and resurrection. My God-given faith with Jesus as its object made eternal life my own. Then, all I needed to do was to wait for eternal life to begin, by passing through this earth as best I could before I died. Everything else was covered by Jesus. The lack of a clear understanding of heaven, coupled with an incomplete understanding of the biblical teaching of resurrection theology can lead believers to a distorted belief about their life after death; create problematic views of living the Christian life here and now on earth; may disfigure a proper and biblical view of creation; and can interfere with their understanding of the true meaning of the biblical story and their place within it.

Considering all these outcomes of an incomplete understanding of the holistic, biblical teaching on resurrection, none of them stated above necessarily involves the shipwreck of a believer’s faith. One might ask, what real difference does it make if a person has an incomplete understanding of biblical resurrection theology? Does it really make a difference if Lutherans have a limited or non-existent eschatology? After all, if that person still has faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sin and the hope to everlasting life, even if their understanding of eternal life looks more like an episode of “The Simpson’s,” if their picture of heaven is totally distorted and their understanding of eternal life is incorrect, what real difference does it make? As this project will show, the proper understanding of the word *heaven* and the proper understanding of eternal life as holistically taught in the Bible makes a significant difference in the life of the Christian.

²² Jeffrey Gibbs, “Christ is Risen, Indeed Good News for Him, and for Us,” *Concordia Journal* 40, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 126.

Errors in thinking about what it is left for them to do in this world are corrected. Those who believe this present earth is basically meaningless will find the care of this earth suddenly becomes quite meaningful and becomes an expression of their faith. Correcting the lack of a clear understanding of *heaven* and an incomplete understanding of the biblical teaching of resurrection theology leads believers to a far more meaningful and powerful understanding of their life after death. The problematic views of living the Christian life here and now on earth change to give the believer a more fulfilling reason for life on earth *before* they die. With a correct understanding of the holistic, biblical view of resurrection, the Christian gains a good, right, and proper understanding of the entirety of the biblical story and their place within it.

However, is having a correct understanding of biblical resurrection theology really critical to the faith of the Christian? After all, biblical resurrection theology is not the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ upon which the church stands or falls. But at the same time, during the execution of this ministry project, one individual made the comment, saying in effect, that “we are not going to know or be able to understand eternal life until we get there, so it [the biblical teaching of resurrection] doesn’t really matter.” Is this true? Francis Pieper, in *Christian Dogmatics*, says,

But Holy Scripture declares that those who, like Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus, denied the future bodily resurrection of the dead and sought to “spiritualize” the resurrection, “saying that the resurrection is past already,” have made a shipwreck concerning their faith and erred concerning the truth (1 Tim. 1:19–20; 2 Tim. 2:17–18). Such men do not belong in the Christian Church, but must be excommunicated.²³

Yes, it matters what one believes regarding resurrection. As Pieper says, the resurrection of the dead is a “fundamental doctrine” of the Christian faith.²⁴ It matters a great deal what one believes

²³ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. Theodore Engelder, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 1:85.

²⁴ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:85.

about the holistic biblical teaching about resurrection to eternal life. However, it goes too far to say those who do not have a complete understanding of the biblical teaching of resurrection should be excommunicated. As we will see with those who participated in this ministry project, those with an incomplete understanding of resurrection do not deny the resurrection. They believe in life after death through faith in Jesus. They believe in eternal life in Jesus. As we will see in this project, the problem is they cannot correctly connect Jesus' words "today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43) to the resurrection of the dead in 1 Cor. 15 and the new heaven and earth of Rev. 21. The problem is their understanding of eternal life is such that they believe the immediate resurrection upon their death on this present world and being brought into the presence of Jesus through faith in him, like the thief on the cross in Luke 23, is eternal life in its completeness. The holistic teaching of the Bible on the true nature of eternal life is much fuller and carries so much more meaning than this incomplete view. What this project seeks to accomplish is to consider the holistic teaching of resurrection to eternal life in the Bible and to discuss the thoughts of the participants in the MAP before and after a Bible study taught on the subject.

The Purpose of this MAP

The purpose of this project is to develop practical implications of a more complete understanding of the Biblical teaching of resurrection theology among Christian believers at the Rock Island Arsenal in Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois and Risen Christ Lutheran Church, Davenport, Iowa. Development of practical implications of a complete understanding of the biblical teaching of resurrection theology will grant the proper balance to the beliefs of the above-mentioned Christians. They will know there is more to being a Christian than faith in Jesus, forgiveness of sins in his name, and going to a mystical heaven in the clouds when they

die. They will know more about the bodily resurrection of believers in Jesus and life on the renewed earth with their resurrected body. Throughout the Bible, we read how God has united with his creatures in this present earth and works in and through them in creation. Those with a more complete understanding of biblical resurrection theology will also understand eternal life for them means a physical, resurrected bodily life on this present earth. The dying can be better comforted with a right understanding of this biblical teaching. Works of love done as a response to the Gospel of Jesus will have an effect in our world at the present time and will also have an effect for eternity. Our stewardship of the earth today has an effect that will last into eternity. As Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 15:58, “your labor is not in vain.” Somehow, the things we do on this earth will last into eternity.

The purpose of the research in this MAP is to measure the change in understanding of the end-product of their faith in Jesus—from a disembodied life in a spiritualized heaven more reflecting a cultural view of heaven, to a physical life on a renewed earth after death—after a five-part Bible study on resurrection theology and its practical implications. A group of no less than five volunteers will be identified prior to the presentation of the initial Bible study. These individuals will consent to participate in the study and be willing to participate in the Bible study and complete two interviews. Prior to the initial Bible study, the participants will be interviewed to measure their knowledge and attitudes about Biblical resurrection theology. At the end of the final Bible study, the participants will be given a second interview with identical questions to measure any changes in their knowledge and attitudes. Through a combination of pre-Bible study and post-Bible study questionnaires, along with interviews done after the Bible study, the research will measure changes in knowledge and attitudes of the participants regarding their understanding of the biblical resurrection theology and its practical implications.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

As mentioned in Chapter One, some in the Christian church might say resurrection theology is not that important. They might say faith in Jesus is all that matters. After all, isn't justification by faith in Jesus the article by which the Church stands or falls? Why should we concern ourselves with the resurrection? Accordingly, the data from this project will show that for the believers who were interviewed, faith in Jesus is far more important than what one believes about resurrection. As noted in the previous chapter, during the Bible study portion of this MAP, comments were made that what one believes about resurrection to eternal life is not that important to our Christian lives today. In this chapter, we will discuss the theological perspective of the biblical teaching about resurrection. The theological perspective will be shaped by the Bible, by the writings of Martin Luther and the Lutheran Confessions, and by theological perspectives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. What stands out throughout all the theological perspectives is the *great* importance of what the Christian believes about resurrection. The importance of what one believes about resurrection cannot be understated. Without the *bodily* resurrection of Jesus. St. Paul says, “your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). Gregory Lockwood, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians says, “this group in Corinth [who denied the physical resurrection] had struck at the heart of the Christian message.”¹ Lockwood goes on to say:

But the great hope toward which the church and indeed all creation looks is the renewal of that creation and the resurrection of the body. On that day, God will receive the full harvest of which Christ's own bodily resurrection is the firstfruits (1 Cor 15:20). For Christ will on the last day “raise me and all the dead and will grant

¹ Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 563.

eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.”
Without this hope, the gospel proclaimed by Paul would collapse.²

The biblical teaching of resurrection is of *critical importance* to the Christian faith. Though the Church stands or falls on justification, the Church certainly cannot well stand with a less than full understanding of the complete biblical teaching of resurrection.

As the idea is stated by Paul, faith in Jesus for our justification before the Father in heaven requires faith in the bodily resurrection. These are two sides of the same coin. Faith in Jesus’ perfect life, substitutionary death on the cross, AND bodily resurrection from the dead on Easter morning all belong together. They must belong together. One cannot exist without the other two. However, as noted above, our preaching and teaching often focuses on Jesus’ life and death on the cross. Unfortunately, in my experience, only rarely do these two get linked to the bodily resurrection of Jesus. This happens most notably around the time of Easter, for obvious reasons.

Yet, the complete biblical teaching of resurrection is somewhat complicated. A common Lutheran question asks, “What does this mean?” The proper understanding of the meaning of biblical resurrection theology is critical to this MAP and critical to the Christian faith. The proper understanding of biblical resurrection theology contains a number of parts. We must look at what the Bible means by the word “resurrection.” When we use the word resurrection today, do we mean what the Bible means when it says resurrection? We must discover what the Bible means when we use the word *heaven*. Is this biblical meaning the same as it is understood by Christians today? How do extra-biblical teachings about life after death influence what we understand about heaven and resurrection? How do we discover what the Bible says about the new heavens and the new earth. How do the new heavens and the new earth relate to heaven as it is commonly

² Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 565.

understood? Jesus said, “This world will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Mark 13:30). What does he mean by this? We must address this and other Bible passages that seem to say this world will be destroyed on the last day. If we believe, teach and confess eternal life on the last day consists of resurrection with our perfected physical bodies on this present redeemed earth, it is important to look at this belief as it is shaped by the Scriptures and the Lutheran teachings. Determining what all these words mean is a busy, but very important task.

Resurrection

The biblical hope of eternal life is resurrection from the dead on the last day with a physical body. Nowhere in the Bible is the teaching about the Christian hope of the bodily resurrection proclaimed more specifically and clearly than in 1 Corinthians 15.³ After Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sin, says Paul, Jesus rose from the dead having a physical body. However, some in the Corinthian church denied the resurrection of the dead (15:12). Paul countered this denial of the resurrection, saying, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised” (15:13). Paul makes the logical argument that the Corinthians who deny the bodily resurrection cannot have it both ways. If they believed Jesus was raised from the dead (which they did), then they must also believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead on the last day. As Lockwood says, “To put it the other way around, if there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead, then no such thing happened to Christ: he could not have been raised either (15:13).”⁴ It is clear Jesus’ resurrection body was a physical body from the witness of the Gospels. The belief in the bodily resurrection of the dead is the foundation of the Christian faith.

³ Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *The End Times, A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism*, (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1989), 28.

⁴ Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 563.

Without it, Paul says, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men” (15:19).

The Greek word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15 for resurrection is *ἀνάστασις*. Albrecht Oepke’s article in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)* lists two ways *ἀνάστασις* was used in Classical Greek. One is that *other than* the “transmigration of souls [in the Greek religious system after death] . . . resurrection is impossible.”⁵ Oepke says the resurrection of the *body* is impossible, but the resurrection of the *soul* in the Greek religious system after death is possible. This understanding agrees with the Greek philosophical system discussed below. Oepke lists another use of *ἀνάστασις* to the Greeks, noting that “resurrection may take place as an isolated miracle,”⁶ but also “the idea of a general [bodily] resurrection at the end of the age is alien to the Greeks.”⁷ In New Testament usage of the word, Oepke says *ἀνάστασις* “is not strange to the thinking of the [New Testament?] world around.”⁸ Oepke lists another shade of meaning: “As one customarily calls someone who is asleep or sick, and takes him by the hand and raises him, so the miracle-worker [in the New Testament] does with the dead, and they arise.”⁹ The allusion to one awakening from sleep is generally the context of resurrection in the New Testament.¹⁰ In addition, physical death is likened to the body going to sleep for the night. Resurrection to eternal life is the awakening from that sleep. Though resurrection already belongs to believers, “the resurrection to life is still the goal of their hope

⁵ Albrecht Oepke, “ἀνάστημι,” *TDNT* 1:369.

⁶ Oepke, *TDNT* 1:369.

⁷ Oepke, *TDNT* 1:369.

⁸ Oepke, *TDNT* 1:370.

⁹ Oepke, *TDNT* 1:370.

¹⁰ Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 597.

and striving.”¹¹ In summary, in the Greek world, which certainly has an influence on the New Testament, a soul ἀνάστασις after death is a part of their religious culture, but a physical, bodily ἀνάστασις is alien to their understanding, apart from the activity of the God of the Bible.

This understanding agrees with the Corinthian discussion of resurrection by Paul. The deniers of the physical resurrection in the Corinthian congregation to whom Paul writes, as did many Greeks of that time, believed that life after death was only spiritual, not physical. A physical, bodily resurrection would have been disgusting to them. Lockwood says, “Some of the Corinthians are promoting an idea that runs directly counter to the apostle’s message. Their skepticism about the resurrection was typical of Greek culture.”¹² About the Greek beliefs of the afterlife, Lockwood says, “Commonly the Greeks believed that at death, only a person’s soul was taken by the ferryman across the River Styx to the gloomy world of the shades.”¹³ Some of these same Greek philosophical ideas Paul argued against still survive today and have a clear influence on what some people still believe about resurrection. These ideas will be discussed in greater detail in another part of this chapter.

Paul goes on from here in 1 Corinthians to talk about the kind of resurrection body the believer will possess. It will be “raised imperishable” (15:42), just the opposite of our current bodies affected by sin, weakness, death, and decay. Resurrected bodies will be “raised in glory” (15:43), not with the sinful dishonor of our current bodies. Resurrected bodies will be “raised in power” (15:43), not having the weakness of the sinful flesh Christians possess today. Paul ends this line of argument saying the resurrected body is “raised a spiritual body” (σῶμα πνευματικόν; 15:44), not like the “natural” one of today (σῶμα ψυχικόν). Lenski, in his commentary on 1

¹¹ Oepke, *TDNT* 1:371.

¹² Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 560.

¹³ Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 561.

Corinthians quotes Luther saying about this resurrection body, “As weak as it is now, without all power and ability when it lies in the grave, so strong will it eventually become when the time arrives, so that not a thing will be impossible for it if it has a mind for it, and it will be so light and agile that in an instant it can float both here below on earth and above in heaven.”¹⁴

Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians 15 to explain what he means when he writes of the natural body versus the spiritual body of resurrection. The natural body (σῶμα ψυχικόν) of Adam was created by God in the Garden of Eden from the “dust of the earth” (15:47). The second man, Jesus, was raised from the dead on Easter morning with a spiritual body (σῶμα πνευματικόν). Paul says, “And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven” (15:49). In this section Paul draws the comparison between Adam and Jesus. Adam (and his descendants), after the sin of Genesis 3 are of the earth and subject to earthly death. Jesus, the second Adam, was raised from the dead with a resurrection body; sinless, imperishable, glorified, with power, and most importantly for this MAP, with a physical body. Lenski helps explain Paul’s contrast between the ψυχή and the πνεῦμα:

The Christian hope [of resurrection] should foster fruitful service of Christ and the brother. . . . In imitation of the apostle’s own pattern, the Corinthians are not to spend their days being ‘atakos’ (1 Thess. 5:14), “disorderly” or “idle, lazy” as frequently happens when Christians *lose their eschatological vision* [emphasis mine] (cf. 1 Thess. 4:11–18; 2 Thess. 3:6–13), but to devote themselves wholeheartedly to loving service of the Lord and others (cf. 1 Cor. 16:10, 13–14; Col. 3:17). The hope of the Gospel should energize them to labor diligently in the respective vocations. Serving their families and neighbors wholeheartedly. The final phrase is significant: labor done “in the Lord” (1Cor. 15:58) is never in vain.¹⁵

What the Christian believes about the resurrection is very important. The distortion of the full and proper eschatological biblical vision is dangerous and can be ruinous to the Christian

¹⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 458.

¹⁵ Lenski, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 605–6.

faith.

Resurrection in Lutheran Theology

The proper biblical teaching of resurrection has been a part of the Lutheran church since Martin Luther. His writing and preaching echoes this Biblical truth. In the following quote from his sermon preached on the First Sunday in Advent, Luther discusses the resurrection on the last day. Luther implies our future resurrection influences our life and work today:

St. Paul writes in Romans 4, 25 as follows: “Christ was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification.” Paul is indeed the man who extols Christ in a masterly manner, telling us exactly why and for what purpose he suffered and how we should conform ourselves to his sufferings, namely, that he died for our sins. This is a correct interpretation of the sufferings of Christ, by which we may profit. And as it is not sufficient to know and believe that Christ has died, so it will not suffice to know and believe that he rose with a transfigured body and is now in a state of joy and blessedness, no longer subject to mortality, for all this would profit me nothing or very little. But when I come to understand the fact that all the works God does in Christ are done for me, nay, they are bestowed upon and given to me, the effect of his resurrection being that I also will arise and live with him; that will cause me to rejoice. This must be brought home to our hearts, and we must not merely hear it with the ears of our body nor merely confess it with our mouth.¹⁶

The last sentence indicates that the saints of God through faith in Jesus, as they look forward to their resurrection with glorified bodies on the renewed earth of Rev. 21, should not simply believe this fact alone. They should not only hear it, or simply confess it, but also *live this truth in the here and now* on this earth.

Resurrection is a commonly used word in the *Book of Concord*. It occurs twenty-three times in the Tappert edition. Four of these uses of the word resurrection are in the three Christian creeds; Apostle’s, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, referring to the resurrection of the dead in Jesus, as in the Apostle’s Creed Third Article, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian

¹⁶ Martin Luther, “A Sermon on Christ’s Resurrection,” Evangelical Trinity Lutheran Church, Clinton, MA, accessed November 10, 2019, http://trinitylutheranms.org/MartinLuther/MLSermons/Mark_16_1_8.html.

church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.” Referring to resurrection in the Apostle’s Creed, Luther writes, “on the last day he will raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.”¹⁷

Resurrection is also used six times in the *Book of Concord* in direct relation to the resurrection of Jesus. One example of such a use is in the discussion of the false doctrine concerning the person of Christ:

They misinterpret and blasphemously pervert the words of Christ, “All authority has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18), to mean that in the resurrection and his ascension all power in heaven and on earth was restored or again returned to Christ according to the divine nature, as though in the state of humiliation he had laid it aside and forsaken it even according to his deity.¹⁸

A third and most common use of the word resurrection in the *Book of Concord* is in reference to the resurrection of the flesh of human beings. This ten-time use of resurrection in the *Book of Concord* has special interest for the subject of this MAP. The Formula of Concord says, “Fourthly, concerning the doctrine of the resurrection Scripture testifies that precisely the substance of this our flesh, but without sin, shall arise, and that in eternal life we shall have and keep precisely this soul, although without sin.”¹⁹ This quote directly applies to the resurrection theology Bible study content used in the MAP. Similarly:

No one except God alone can separate the corruption of our nature from the nature itself. This will take place wholly by way of death in the resurrection. Then the nature which we now bear will arise and live forever, without original sin and completely separated and removed from it, as Job 19:26, 27 asserts, “I shall be covered by this my skin, and in my flesh I shall see God; him I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold him.”²⁰

¹⁷ SC II, 6 in Tappert, 345.

¹⁸ FC Ep VIII, 39 in Tappert, 491.

¹⁹ FC SD I, 46 in Tappert, 516.

²⁰ FC Ep, I, 10 in Tappert, 467.

Here, the Reformers clearly state that the body the believer will have at the resurrection will be the same body as the believer was given in his or her earthly life, glorified and without sin.

The new edition of Luther's Small Catechism (2017) has a helpful section on resurrection in the Third Article of the Creed, Part 3. It says, "As Christians, we yearn for the resurrection of the body and life eternal in the new heavens and new earth- the time when we will be "perfectly pure and holy people . . . free from sin, death, and all evil, in a new immortal, and glorified body" (LC II 58)."²¹ Question 225 asks, "What will happen to this world after we Christians are raised from the dead?" Answer: The present creation, like our own bodies, will be set free from its bondage to corruption, and God will create a new heaven and a new earth."²² Question 226 asks, "What will the new creation be like?" Answer: the new creation is described in ways that are both familiar and mysteriously unfamiliar. The Bible describes a "new heaven and a new earth" in terms much like creation was before the fall, but entirely new and also different in certain ways."²³ The Catechism then adds six different Bible passages, which are critical to this MAP (2 Pet. 3:5–13; Is. 65:17–18; Rev. 21:1–5; 22:3; Matt. 22:20; Is. 60:19–20). Question 228 asks, "What will happen on the Last Day?" Then follows a list of nine items:

- A. Jesus will visibly appear in glory with His angels.
- B. The kingdoms of this world will give way to the everlasting reign of Christ, and human history will come to an end.
- C. The dead will be raised, the bodies of all believers (those who were alive and those who were raised from the grave) will be glorified.
- D. Christ will judge all people.
- E. Satan will be vanquished and banished forever.

²¹ Martin Luther, "An Explanation of the Small Catechism," *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 222.

²² Luther, "Explanation of the Small Catechism," 226.

²³ Luther, "Explanation of the Small Catechism," 226.

F. The current creation will be cleansed by fire and the heavens and earth will be made new again.

G. We will be reunited with all those who have died in faith.

H. There will be a great feast and unending rejoicing.

I. We will see God, and God will dwell with us forever.²⁴

“F” in this list has the most interest for this MAP. Many of the people who participated in the Bible study and interview portion of this MAP had trouble identifying the location of eternal life. Teaching them the location of eternal life is on this present earth was a new teaching for most (other than eternal life was “in heaven”) and actually flew in face of what they had been taught or understood about eternal life in their previous church experience. Here in this Catechism, we are teaching the confirmands, their parents, and the pastors or teachers of the confirmation classes, that eternal life is not enjoyed in a mystical, spiritual heaven. Eternal life is spent here on this renewed earth. We will discuss this aspect of resurrection theology in another part of Chapter Two.

In the third volume of Francis Pieper’s three volume *Christian Dogmatics*, an entire section called “Eschatology, or Last Things” is helpful in developing resurrection theology and this MAP, since it contains much of the subject matter needed to write the Bible study for this MAP. Pieper discusses the “State of Souls Between Death and Resurrection.”²⁵ He mirrors the teaching of the New Testament regarding the individual’s soul coming immediately into the presence of our Lord upon earthly death, but the body remains in the ground until the general resurrection of all on the last day. Pieper also discusses the “Resurrection of the Dead” and “The End of the

²⁴ Luther, “Explanation of the Small Catechism,” 228–29.

²⁵ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:511.

World.” His writings echo the biblical positions outlined above regarding these subjects. There is enough detail in these sections to flesh out these topics in Bible study and to answer many of the questions arising from them.

The newer LCMS dogmatics text, *Confessing the Gospel*, contains a section called “Last Things.” This section is expanded somewhat from the section in Pieper, whose first paragraph states,

The study of the last things covers such topics as death, ‘the intermediate state,’ the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, the total destruction of the present world, eternal life, and eternal death. Because the study of last things deals with the goal of the Christian faith, it has aptly been referred to as “the Christian hope.”²⁶

The difference between Pieper and *Confessing the Gospel* is mainly that of formatting. Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics* reads more like a commentary. Pieper comments on the topic at hand, bringing in the Bible, Luther and the Confessions, and other sources as needed. He does this in a way that suits his topic of discussion. *Confessing the Gospel* follows a different format. The whole topic of last things is discussed systematically from Scripture, the Confessional witness and the Creeds, and then a “Systematic Formulation” adds comments of the different parts of this doctrine, pulling in a number of different sources. Then topics are completed by a section “Historical and Contemporary Developments,” which covers the time from the Bible to today, commenting on issues and developments concerning the last things.

Lutheran Confessional writings, while assuming the biblical teaching of the bodily resurrection to eternal life, do not have many articles specifically addressing the teaching. “Other than Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession (“Concerning the Return of Christ for Judgment”)

²⁶ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:84.

and Article XVII of the Apology (“Christ’s Return for Judgment”), the Lutheran Confessions do not contain a separate article on eschatological subjects such as death, the resurrection, the final judgment, heaven and hell.”²⁷ As a result, other articles of faith may be emphasized more today than resurrection theology in the LCMS, which as noted above, does not live eschatologically today as in days past. Perhaps this is the reason for the confusion or lack of understanding of the complete biblical teaching of resurrection among some Lutherans, as noted above and seen within the discussions and data of this MAP? A change to living eschatologically would be a blessing to the church. This change would result in the church focusing less on the present world and more on the world to come, with eternal life upon it in our resurrected bodies.

The complete biblical teaching of resurrection to eternal life is not often specifically discussed in the regular life of the churches I have led or attended. Perhaps this is a result of my own shortcomings in the area. But from the numerous other sources in this MAP, such shortcomings do not only belong to me. As noted before, many Christians believe in the resurrection, but do not understand how we get from earthly death to resurrection on the last day. Pastors do a disservice to their congregations by not ensuring that their people clearly understand the complete biblical teaching of resurrection. This is unfortunate, because Scripture and the Lutheran teachings from Luther to today have a clear and right understanding of the biblical truths.

Heaven in the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions

Paul’s words about resurrection in 1 Cor. 15 apply to those today with a less than complete

²⁷ Samuel H. Nafzger, John F. Johnson, David A. Lumpp and Howard W. Tepker, eds., *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 2:1135.

biblical understanding of resurrection theology. Paul’s words apply today to those who focus their Christian hope on a spiritual-only resurrection to eternal life in a “mystical” heaven, much like those Greeks in Paul’s day who denied the bodily resurrection.²⁸ What the data from this MAP will show is happening in our churches today is similar to what was happening in Paul’s day with the Corinthian church. The culture in Paul’s day believed a number of ideas about eternal life and resurrection. Such beliefs were not the total biblical teaching of resurrection and eternal life, or were just plain wrong from a biblical standpoint. But, many in the congregation shared those beliefs. The culture in our day today also believes a number of ideas about resurrection and eternal life. Some of these beliefs are also not the total biblical teaching of resurrection and eternal life, or are just plain wrong from a biblical standpoint. But, many in Christian churches today share these cultural beliefs.

An example from today’s world is the word *heaven*. Heaven is a biblical word. Among the different Old Testament Hebrew words for *heaven*, שָׁמַיִם is the word most commonly used.²⁹ There are two basic meanings of this word in the Old Testament. One meaning is ‘the place where God dwells,’ such as “Out of *heaven* he let you hear his voice” (Deut. 4:36). The second meaning for this word is ‘the sky or the area above the earth,’ such as: “David did not count those below twenty years of age, for the LORD had promised to make Israel as many as the stars of *heaven*” (1 Chron. 27:23). In short, the basic Old Testament meanings for the word *heaven* are “the place where God dwells,” or “the sky above the earth.”

²⁸ Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 547.

²⁹ BDB, s.v. “שָׁמַיִם”.

The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament in use in Jesus' day and since) used the Greek word οὐρανός to translate עֲלֵיָשׁ. This is important for the New Testament, because this use was reflected in the New Testament.³⁰ In the New Testament, the same two basic meanings for *heaven* from the Old Testament are retained in this word:

1. Heaven is the dwelling place of God. We see this meaning illustrated in Mark 1:9–11 “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from *heaven* (οὐρανός), “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” This meaning for the word *heaven* in the New Testament has an equivalent meaning in the Old Testament.

2. Heaven is the part of the earth that is above the land. This meaning of the word *heaven* is shown in Heb. 11:12 “Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of *heaven* (τὰ ἄστρα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.” The word sky is of a similar meaning to this use of the word *heaven* in the New Testament.

Another way οὐρανός is used in the New Testament is in connection with the earth (γῆ).³¹

Four shades of meaning accompany this type of use in the New Testament. The first is the heaven and earth are created together by God (Acts 4:24; 14:15; Rev. 17:24, among others). Heaven and earth are connected in reference to God's creation. With such a connection, the second shade of meaning is heaven and earth also pass away together (Matt. 13:31; Rev. 21:1; 2 Peter 3:10, among others). The third shade of meaning is the heaven and the earth are connected and “stands under the same lordship of God” (Matt. 5:34; 11:25; Acts 7:49; among others). Under the Lordship of God in Christ, the fourth shade of meaning is shown in Eph. 1:10 that everything of the heaven and earth is under the Lordship of Jesus: “to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς

³⁰ James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 53.

³¹ See the discussion of these shades of meaning by Helmut Traub, “οὐρανός,” *TDNT* 5:513–20.

οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν αὐτοῖς).

In the *Book of Concord*, the uses of the word *heaven* mirror the biblical uses of the word *heaven*. In the Large Catechism on the Creed, Luther writes, “[God] makes all creation help and provide the comforts and necessities of life- sun, moon, and stars in the heavens.”³² In this quote, it is clear Luther uses the word *heavens* to describe what is in the sky. The Formula of Concord employs a similar use of the word; “of themselves and altogether spontaneously, without any instruction, admonition, exhortation or driving by the law they would do what they are obligated to do according to the will of God, just as the sun, the moon, and all the stars of heaven regularly run their courses.”³³ In these types of uses, heaven means, “sky, the part of the earth above the land.”

In other places in the *Book of Concord*, the word *heaven*, like the biblical meaning, means “the location of God the Father.” Luther’s Small Catechism quotes Eph. 6:9, “Masters, do the same to them, and forbear threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with him.”³⁴ In the Large Catechism, Ten Commandments, paragraph 115, “See, this work is well pleasing to my God in heaven; this I know for certain.”³⁵ These instances reflect God’s location being in heaven.

As Lockwood stated this idea above, the restored creation and the bodily resurrection to eternal life is the “great hope” of the Christian. N. T. Wright explains the proper understanding of the word *heaven* in relation to the great hope of resurrection to eternal life:

³² LC I, 14 in Tappert, 412.

³³ FC SD VI, 6 in Tappert, 565.

³⁴ SC IX, 11 in Tappert, 356.

³⁵ LC I, 115 in Tappert, 381.

For Paul and the other early Christians, what mattered was not “saved souls” being rescued *from* the world and taken to a distant “heaven,” but the *coming together* of heaven and earth themselves in a great act of cosmic renewal in which human bodies were likewise being renewed to take their place within that new world. (When Paul says, “We are citizens of heaven,” he goes on to say that Jesus will come *from* heaven not to take us back there, but *to transform the present world* and us with it.)³⁶

From the above discussion of the use of the word *heaven* in the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions, nowhere does the Bible or the Confessions use the word *heaven* as the word for the great hope of eternal life given to the believer in Jesus. That being said, to eliminate confusion, we use the word *heaven* only as the Scripture uses the word heaven.

Cultural Beliefs about Heaven

Having described the biblical meaning of the word *heaven*, it seems abundantly clear that many people, both Christians and non-Christians, use the word *heaven* to refer to that place you “go when you die.” They may also use the word *heaven* to refer to “the fullness of eternal life,” however that may be understood. These beliefs about the meaning of the word *heaven* add to misunderstandings of this word when it is used in our churches. Heaven is portrayed in movies, on television shows, and written about in books, but usually are not an accurate representation of how resurrection to eternal life is described in the Bible. Heaven is often portrayed as an “other-worldly” place, far removed from the earth. It is often portrayed as a non-bodily experience. Heaven is commonly portrayed in the media as a place in the clouds somewhere, occupied by angels with wings interacting with the souls of the “dear departed.” The data in this MAP shows that the people who participated in the interview portion of the project do shape all or some of their beliefs of what heaven is like from extra-biblical and extra-religious sources.

³⁶ N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography*. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018), 8.

A typical example of the portrayal of heaven comes from the popular holiday movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*.³⁷ A man named George Bailey needed help with his earthly problem of wishing he had not been born. The movie shows a picture of the night sky. Certain stars twinkle as Joseph, a voice presumably belonging to Jesus (or the Father) and an angel named Clarence discuss what to do about the situation. Then Clarence shows up on earth with the task to save George, so that Clarence might earn his wings. Here heaven is shown as a spiritual location in the night sky **where you go when you die**. Clarence, the man who had passed away many years prior, suddenly appears back on earth to help George accomplish the successful end to the movie.

Another movie that is typical of a cultural view of heaven shared by some in our churches is the movie "Ghost."³⁸ Sam was married to Mollie. In the movie, Sam was murdered by his business partner Carl. Sam came back to earth as a powerless spirit to save Mollie from Carl. Sam was only visible to a psychic, but could travel on the earth and watch close-up what was going on, without anyone else seeing him. The final scene of the movie showed Sam as a spirit, whose presence Mollie could feel and whose voice she could hear. Finally, Mollie could see Sam, who then departed from earth, disappearing into a very bright light. In this movie as in "It's a Wonderful Life," the heavenly character existed away from earth in a spiritual form, taking on his former physical body to come back to earth, then achieving his purpose and returning back to his mystical heavenly home.

The same type of error can be seen even in Biblical-themed movies. In one of the greatest religious movies of all time on the life of Jesus, "The Greatest Story Ever Told," an interaction is

³⁷ *It's a Wonderful Life*, directed by Frank Capra, featuring Jimmy Stewart, Donna Reed (Liberty/RKO Pictures, 1946).

³⁸ *Ghost*, directed by Jerry Zucker, featuring Demi Moore, Patrick Swayze (Paramount Pictures, 1990).

shown between John the Baptist and King Herod. Herod is threatening John with a large dagger. John says, “Kill me. Kill me so I can live. . . . My body is worth nothing. You can do what you like with it. But my soul is eternal and you can’t touch it.”³⁹ The Hollywood dialogue repeats the common theme of cultural belief that eternal life consists of only the souls of people. The body “is worth nothing” as John states in the movie.

Television shows reflect much the same view of heaven. In one episode of “The Simpsons” TV show, Marge Simpson imagines heaven. Her imaginary heaven was a place in the clouds, where Protestants had their own heaven, which was rather quiet, with people playing badminton and croquet. The Catholic heaven Marge imagined was much livelier. There was a mariachi band for Hispanics, an Italian dinner for the Italians, and fistfights between the Irish. Bart and Homer were in the Catholic heaven swinging baseball bats at a piñata, which Homer remarked felt good when he was hit in the head by one. Both heavenly scenes were otherworldly, fitting with the view many people share about the nature of heaven. Pastor Randy Alcorn in his book *Heaven* comments about this belief of heaven many people share. “I have found in many conversations that Christians tend to spiritualize the resurrections of the dead, effectively denying it. They don’t reject it as a doctrine, but they deny its essential *meaning*: a permanent return to a physical existence in a physical universe.” He goes on to say, “Of Americans who believe in a resurrection of the dead, two-thirds believe they will not have bodies after the resurrection.”⁴⁰

American media also shows another variation to the nature of heaven revealed in Scripture. The only focus in this variation of heaven is that the only verifiable paradise can be on the earth. John F. McCarthy writes of the views of German theologian Rudolf Bultmann, which illustrate

³⁹ *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. Directed by George Stevens, featuring Max Von Sydow, Charlton Heston, and John Wayne (MGM Pictures, 1965), 1:16:42–1:16:52.

⁴⁰ Alcorn, *Heaven*, 112.

this variation of the nature of heaven. Describing Bultmann's views, McCarthy writes that Bultmann believed the mythology of the New Testament should be eliminated, including, "the three-storied world of heaven, earth, and hell," along with the belief of "the supernatural activity on earth of God, good angels, and demons, the working of nature miracles, diabolical temptations, heavenly visions, the power of the Spirit, the reign on earth of Satan, sin, the event of Redemption by a God-man, and the future coming of Christ on the clouds of heaven."⁴¹ According to Bultmann, heaven can only be on earth.

If there is no future hope other than what can be verified - no blessed rest with Jesus after death, no final resurrection from the dead, then the earth and the part of space we can now see and touch is all that exists according to this viewpoint. The grave is the end. If there is no blessed rest and no final resurrection of the dead through faith in Jesus, the focus then is only here on earth and the attainment of the ideal. The focus for life then becomes the ultimate fulfillment or attainment of perfection of the human being. Such attainment of the ideal might take different forms: pleasure received from sex or pleasure received by the altered consciousness brought about by drugs and alcohol. If there is no real future, then the highest ideals of truth and goodness are paramount. Paradise would be found on earth as a perfect society, in which logic, knowledge, technology, and reason reign supreme. Such themes are often woven into television shows and movies. One such example is the Star Trek TV series. The starship Enterprise is not going to the galaxies to find God or locate the paradise of the Bible. They are looking for new civilizations that will add to human knowledge and expand human horizons, looking for that which will make us all better people here on earth. For in their eyes, this world is the only

⁴¹ John F. McCarthy, "Modernism in the Demythologizing of Rudolf Bultmann," *Living Tradition*, (112), July 2004: no page given, <http://www.rtforum.org/lt/lt112.html> (accessed August 5, 2015).

heaven that exists.

One such episode of *Star Trek* that shows the paradise espoused by such ideas (known as Modernism) was called “Who Mourns for Adonis.” The *Enterprise* accidentally comes across a planet upon which the personified god “Apollo” lives. Apollo is “loving one second and vengeful the next.”⁴² He gives the crew of the *Enterprise* everything they could want. All they have to do is live on the planet and worship him. Female Lieutenant Palamas falls for this god Apollo. She talks to Captain Kirk, saying, “[Apollo] wants us to live in peace. He wants to provide for us. He’ll give us everything we ever wanted.” The words here sound similar to the God of the Bible, who loves his own and has given provision for his people through Jesus. He said in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” Captain Kirk’s attitude here is typical of modern attitudes that reject religion. Kirk will have nothing of this god Apollo. He sarcastically says, “Perhaps the thought of spending an eternity bending the knee and attending sheep appeals to you?” Kirk says more to Palamas:

Give me your hand. . . we’re the same. We share the same history, the same heritage, the same lives. We’re tied together beyond any untying. Man or woman, it makes no difference, we’re human. We couldn’t escape from each other even if we wanted to. That’s how you do it, lieutenant, by remembering who and what you are: a bit of flesh and blood afloat in the universe without end. And the only thing that’s truly yours is the rest of humanity. That’s where our duty lies.⁴³

Kirk says we, as humans, are all in this thing together. There is nothing beyond what we have right here and right now. We are all just “bits of flesh and blood floating around this universe”

⁴² Nick Farantello, “Star Trek Made Me an Atheist,” *The Humanist*, July-August 2009.

⁴³ *Star Trek*, season 2, episode 2, “Who Mourns for Adonis,” directed by Marc Daniels, featuring William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, and DeForest Kelley, aired September 22, 1967, on National Broadcasting Company, quoted by Farantello, “Star Trek Made Me an Atheist.”

hoping to bump into something that is going to make us better people. That is all. We are all just working to get closer to the perfect ideal, which has nothing to do with the living God.

In fact, there is great appeal to the atheist in Star Trek and Captain Kirk's speech here. Author Nick Farantello makes the bold claim that "Star Trek made me an atheist." Many times in Star Trek, an all-powerful being pretends to be a god. However, the all-powerful being is often up to no good and loses out in the end of the show. In many instances, the "god" is easily defeated by the technology or ingenuity of the Star Trek crew. In the episode "The Squire of Gothos," the main character plays such a being and causes much trouble for the crew of the Enterprise. In the end of the show, this being turns out only to be a child, whose parents show up and put an end to the shenanigans their son is creating. Star Trek often gave the viewpoint that if "god" was causing trouble on earth (earthquakes, wars, poverty, etc.) "why shouldn't Christians (or Jews or Muslims, for that matter) fight against such a being?"⁴⁴ Star Trek was showing God as bad- a troublemaker needing to be stopped. In Star Trek: The New Generation, Captain Jean-Luc Picard had an "absolutely clear moral compass despite the absence of any religious beliefs whatsoever."⁴⁵ God was not required for a person to be entirely moral. Humans could attain that state all by themselves. We can thank Modernism for ushering in the elevation of humankind and the rejection of anything we cannot verify by scientific means, including God and heaven.

The biblical word *heaven* has great meaning for the believer in Jesus. As this MAP has noted, it describes the sky above the earth and also the location of God. In my experience, the word *heaven* is used often in our LCMS churches. However, rarely is the word *heaven* used as the Bible uses it. Rarely do our people use the word *heaven* to describe the sky. Rarely do our

⁴⁴ Farantello, "Star Trek Made Me an Atheist," no page given.

⁴⁵ Farantello, "Star Trek Made Me an Atheist," no page given.

people use the word *heaven* to describe the location of the throne room of God. The MAP data shows that many believers wrongly use the word *heaven* to describe the endpoint of the Christian faith, as in the sentence, “I am going to FOREVER enjoy the blessings of heaven when I die.” I believe the data of this MAP shows that when most people say they are going to enjoy the blessings of heaven, what they really mean is they are going to enjoy the blessings of an eternal life through faith in Jesus in a spiritualized ethereal heaven as shown in TV and movies, which is an incorrect use of the word *heaven*. What the data shows in this MAP is some of our people and pastors need training on the complete biblical teaching of resurrection and the right understanding of the nature of eternal life. Due to the above noted misunderstandings and cultural inaccuracies regarding the term *heaven* when referring to the great hope of our faith in Jesus, the term “resurrection to eternal life” is much clearer and more biblical.

Greek Philosophy

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul contended with some in the Corinthian church who did not believe in a bodily resurrection. Greek philosophical concepts certainly contributed to this error on the part of those in the Corinthian church who believed in a non-bodily “spiritual” resurrection.⁴⁶ This non-bodily spiritual resurrection is consistent with some in the Church today who also believe in a “spiritualized heaven” as the location of eternal life. From ancient days to today, the teachings of Greek philosophers have had an influence on what some people believed in those churches regarding resurrection. “Remember that it was precisely the question of the resurrection of the body that brought to a premature close St. Paul’s sermon on the Areopagus [Acts 17:32–34]. The almost universal Hellenistic [Greek] rejection of the body and the

⁴⁶ Scholars are uncertain as to the actual problem Paul addresses in 1 Cor. 15.

identification of mind and man served to render the idea of the resurrection of the body thoroughly objectionable to the average Hellenistic mind.”⁴⁷

The ideas of Greek philosopher Plato have had a negative influence on the teachings of the Christian church, specifically in the area of the nature of eternal life. “Christian tradition continued to assume this union [of spirit and body in resurrection] until, the third century C.E., Platonic ideas of the soul’s great superiority to the body promoted the idea of the survival of souls apart from bodies.”⁴⁸ The incomplete beliefs regarding resurrection held by some in the Church today of eternal life in Christ being a “spiritual” existence without a body fits very well into this line with this philosophical understanding. N.T. Wright says the “vision of a nonbodily ultimate ‘heaven’ is a direct legacy of Plato and of those like the philosopher and biographer Plutarch. . . . It is Plutarch, not the New Testament (despite what one sometimes hears!) who suggested that humans in the present life are ‘exiled’ from their true ‘home’ in ‘heaven.’”⁴⁹

Pastor Randy Alcorn agrees with this assessment. In his book *Heaven*, he says,

Plato, the Greek philosopher, believed that material things, including the human body and the earth, are evil, while immaterial things such as the soul and Heaven are good. This view is called Platonism. The Christian church, highly influenced by Platonism . . . came to embrace the “spiritual” view that human spirits are better off without bodies and that Heaven is a disembodied state. They rejected the notion of heaven as a physical realm and spiritualized or entirely neglected the biblical teaching of resurrected people inhabiting a resurrected earth.⁵⁰

It was no less than church father Augustine who came to embrace this Greek philosophical thought as a church teaching of eternal life. “Thus Augustine [early church father AD 354–430]

⁴⁷ H.J. Blumenthal and R.A. Markus, eds., *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in Honour of A.H. Armstrong* (London: Variorum Publications, 1981), 56.

⁴⁸ Jeffery Russell, *A History of Heaven* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1997), 15.

⁴⁹ N.T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2016), 33.

⁵⁰ Alcorn, *Heaven*, 52.

was attracted to the spiritual interpretation of the kingdom we have already seen in Origen [early church father AD 185–254]. Indeed, ultimately for Augustine, the kingdom of God consists in eternal life with God in heaven.”⁵¹

Additionally, some New Testament Scriptures seem to advocate this idea of the true eternal home of the Christian is in a spiritualized heaven. For example, in one of the Bible studies for this MAP, when the quote was used from J. Richard Middleton that “There is not one single reference in the entire biblical canon (Old and New Testaments) to heaven as the eternal destiny of the believer,”⁵² someone asked about Phil. 3:20 “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.” About this verse and the “citizenship of heaven,” the author of the commentary *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* Gordon Fee writes,

The point of the imagery comes very close to that [a heavenly commonwealth in Philippi]. Just as Philippi was a colony of Rome, whose citizens thereby exemplified the life of Rome in the province of Macedonia, so the citizens of the “heavenly commonwealth” were to function as a colony of heaven in that outpost of Rome. That this is Paul’s concern lies in the context. They are to imitate Paul in their “walk,” because (“for”) their true “commonwealth” is in heaven; as such they live God’s righteousness as an outpost of heaven in Philippi.”⁵³

In other words, Paul is describing the group of believers in Philippi as a settlement on earth connected to God’s kingdom and living as such through faith in Jesus. Fee also speaks to how this passage then connects to eternal life in Christ:

(1) Our present citizenship is already “in heaven” from whence we “eagerly await [the coming of] our Savior,” who is none other than “the Lord, Jesus Christ,” the one who had the name “Lord” bestowed on him at his exaltation (2:9); thus Paul focuses first of all on the coming of Christ as the eschatological Lord and Savior. (2) At his coming Christ will “transform” the bodies of our present “humiliation,” by

⁵¹ Vlach, Michael J. *Platonism’s Influence On Christian Eschatology*. n.d. [http://theologicalstudies.org/files/resources/Platonism_and_Eschatology_article_\(PDF\).pdf](http://theologicalstudies.org/files/resources/Platonism_and_Eschatology_article_(PDF).pdf) (accessed September 2, 2017), 4.

⁵² Middleton, *New Heaven and a New Earth*, 72.

⁵³ Gordon Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 379.

“conforming” them into the likeness of his present “body of glory”; thus Paul also emphasizes the great “eschatological reversal” that they (and we) shall experience at his coming, that Christ himself experienced at his resurrection and exaltation. (3) He will do this “in keeping with the power” by which he is able to (and will) also subject all things to himself, thus emphasizing his absolute sovereignty over all things, including those in Philippi—and their “lord and savior,” the emperor.⁵⁴

Fee clearly shows how the heavenly citizenship Paul states in Phil. 3:20 is not saying eternal life for the believer is in heaven.

Continuing the idea from Plato and other Greek philosophers is that we must leave the sinfulness of our bodies and the broken creation in order to be saved and enjoy eternal life. The error present in this Platonic idea is readily apparent:

The first thing we might say about God’s human creatures is that God made us from the earth for life on the earth. We belong here. In this regard we are not unique, for we share this characteristic with every other creature on earth. That is to say, we are embodied and embedded creatures on earth. God did not create us as disembodied spirits like the angels. God made Adam from the adamah. To borrow from St. Augustine, “our bodies are the earth we carry.” We are embodied creatures and our bodies bind us to the earth. Air flows through us as we inhale and exhale. We drink and perspire water. We ingest the earth with the food we eat. We are so bound to the earth that when we travel into outer space, what must we bring with us? Portions of the earth: air, water, and food. Without them we die. God made us living creatures . . . God embedded us on the earth among other creatures in particular places at particular times. Consider how important places are in the Bible. The garden of Eden was home for Adam and Eve. And then they lost their home. The people of Israel spent years wandering in the wilderness longing for a new home . . . the promised land. And ultimately, the Old Testament speaks of a future home, a new Jerusalem. And so we move from the garden of Genesis 2 to the garden city of Rev. 21–22.⁵⁵

Human beings are created to be creatures on the earth. Adam and Eve lived in the perfect garden of Eden as perfect human beings prior to eating the forbidden fruit. The material of the human body and the creation at the start was not bad or inherently sinful. In fact, God called the creation

⁵⁴ Fee, *Philippians*, 380.

⁵⁵ Charles P. Arand, “Back to the Beginning: Creation Shapes the Entire Story,” *Concordia Journal* 40, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 138–39.

“good.” “In the beginning God created and it was good, very good. Yes, death and all that is opposed to God has wreaked havoc in God’s good creation. However, it is still God’s creation. And He will redeem it on the last day.”⁵⁶ Jesus is also a perfect man in a flesh and blood body such as ours. “Salvation is not about God delivering us from our creatureliness. To the contrary, Christ restores us to our creatureliness. . . . In the case of Jesus, the Creator became a male human creature to restore our creatureliness. And he rose and ascended and sits at the right hand of God both as God and as a human creature.”⁵⁷ To end this line of thought, Wright says “What creation needs is neither abandonment nor evolution but rather redemption and renewal: and this is both promised and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead”⁵⁸

The New Heavens and the New Earth

The Biblical teachings regarding the new heavens and new earth are an important part of resurrection theology and also an important part of this MAP. After all, the resurrected bodies of the believers in Jesus on the Last Day have to live somewhere into eternity. The Scriptures refer to this place as “the new heavens and the new earth.” There are a number of texts in the Bible where the new heaven and new earth are mentioned, in both the Old and New Testaments. However, a tension exists in the Scriptures as to the composition of the “new” earth. Is it “new” as in ‘never before existing,’ or is it new as in ‘the same earth, but renewed?’ Jesus comments on heaven and earth passing away in different places in the Gospels. His words must be taken into account in the consideration of this question. Other New Testament passages seem to support the idea that this present earth will be destroyed completely and re-made on the Last Day. However,

⁵⁶ Glenn Nielsen “Things We Do Not Fully Preach About: Preparing to Die,” *Concordia Journal* 40, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 28.

⁵⁷ Arand, “Back to the Beginning,” 135.

⁵⁸ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 107.

yet other texts seem to contradict the annihilation of this present earth. These passages support the idea of a new earth in the sense of a ‘cleansed and perfected earth’ that is not a complete replacement of what is here now. The proper understanding of these passages is important to the proper understanding of resurrection theology and foundational to this project, particularly to how we view our earth today.

The Bible contains four passages that directly speak of a new heavens and a new earth. Two of these are in the Old Testament book of Isaiah. In Is. 65:17 we read, “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.” Isaiah also writes in 66:22 “As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the LORD, “so will your name and descendants endure.” The other two passages are in the New Testament. Second Peter 3:10–13 “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” The last is in Rev. 21:1–2 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” The following section looks at each of these passages more closely.

The main words of interest in Is. 65:17 are “I will create new heavens and a new earth.”

The Hebrew for this part of the verse is: **וְאָרֶץ חֲדָשָׁה וְשָׁמַיִם חֲדָשִׁים בּוֹרֵא פִי־הַנְּגִי**

Notable in the Hebrew in this text is the word בִּרְאָה. The same root word בָּרָא is also used in Genesis 1:1, where God created בָּרָא the heavens and the earth from nothing. According to Brown, Driver, Briggs (BDB) *Hebrew-English Lexicon*, the chief meaning of this word is to “shape, create.”⁵⁹ The Hebrew word used for *heaven* שָׁמַיִם is the same Hebrew word as we would expect from the above discussion about the meaning of the word *heaven*. Also worth noting in the Hebrew is the word translated into English as “new.” The root for this word is הִדְשָׁה. What is interesting about this word is the verb can mean “renew,” as in the renewal of something that previously exists. BDB also notes an entry for this word as “הִדְשָׁה; new heaven and earth Is 65:17 (*in place of old*) [emphasis mine].”⁶⁰ This entry from BDB reinforces the discussion below of the meaning of new heaven and new earth from the New Testament.

Isaiah 66:22 has nearly the same Hebrew words as 65:17:

עֲשֶׂה אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר הִדְשָׁה וְהָאֶרֶץ הַחֲדָשִׁים הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּאֲשֶׁר בָּרָא The main difference in these two verses is the verb used in this passage from Is. 66. Instead of using the Hebrew word for “create,” here in Is. 66 the verb used is the usual Hebrew word for “make” עֲשֶׂה. In 66:22, the phrase is translated “the new heavens and the new earth I make” rather than “the new heavens and the new earth I [will] create” of 65:17. Significant here in 66:22 is the nuance of the verb “create.” In English this normally means to create something new that did not previously exist. The verb ‘make’ can take this meaning or take the meaning of making a duplicate of something that is in existence. The Hebrew of Isaiah does not contradict with the idea of Romans 8 that creation will be renewed, but not destroyed.

⁵⁹ BDB, s.v. “בָּרָא.”

⁶⁰ BDB, s.v. “הִדְשָׁה.”

Turning to the Greek of LXX, the text for Is. 65:17 regarding the new heavens and new earth reads, ἔσται γὰρ ὁ οὐρανὸς καινὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ καινή. This is translated “For there will be the new heaven and the new earth.” Of particular interest here is the Greek word καινὸς, translated into English as “new.” Of this Greek word, Johannes Behm in *TDNT*, says, “kainos is what is new in nature, different from the usual, impressive, better than the old, superior in value or attraction.”⁶¹ This meaning of καινὸς is different than the unused Greek word νέος also meaning ‘new’ in English. Behm points out the shade of meaning difference in these two words;

kainós denotes the new and miraculous thing that the age of salvation brings. It is thus a key teleological term in eschatological promise: the new heaven and earth in Rev. 21:1; 2 Pet. 3:13, the new Jerusalem in Rev. 3:12; 21:2, the new wine in Mk. 14:25, the new name in Rev. 2:17; 3:12, the new song in Rev. 5:9, the new creation in Rev. 21:5.⁶²

In contrast, Behm notes, “Unlike kainós, néos does not have an eschatological content in the NT. It refers to the new reality of present salvation.”⁶³ As such, we have a key Greek word for the understanding of this entire section of the meaning of the new heavens and the new earth. To end this section, there is nothing in the Hebrew or the Greek of the Old Testament that contradicts Paul’s argument in Romans 8 that the new earth of the Last Day is a renewed and perfected earth. The use of the word καινὸς in the LXX in these two verses supports Paul’s view.

In the New Testament, 2 Peter 3:10–13 is a problematic passage for a number of reasons. Not only does it contain the words “new heavens and a new earth,” but it also says, “the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved.” This text appears to state this world and the universe will be destroyed on the Last Day. It appears to stand in opposition to the renewal of the present creation of Rom. 8. At the same time, there are also

⁶¹ Johannes Behm, καινὸς, *TDNT* 3:447.

⁶² Behm, *TDNT* 3:447.

⁶³ Behm, *TDNT* 3:447.

major text critical problems with this text. These textual problems are reflected in the major English translations of 3:10. The NIV says, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it *will be laid bare* [emphasis mine].” The ESV translates this verse, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it *will be exposed* [emphasis mine].” The ESV and NIV translations have similar meanings. However, the NASB translated this same verse, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works *will be burned up* [emphasis mine].”

The editors of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament have the same problems trying to decide which reading is correct. Edition 27 contains the Greek καὶ γῆ καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ ἔργα εὐρεθήσεται. This is translated “the earth and the works in it will be discovered” (‘found,’ ‘exposed,’ and ‘laid bare’ all share similar meanings in English). Edition 28 of the Nestle-Aland GNT has καὶ γῆ καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ ἔργα οὐχ εὐρεθήσεται. This edition adds the word ‘not’ to the above, being translated “the earth and the works in it will *not* be discovered.” There are other textual concerns with the passage in total. Greek variants include ευρεθησεται λυομενα from a very important ancient Greek manuscript P⁷² (“will be found while being destroyed;” hence the NASB translation) Suffice it to say that any biblical text with these types of problems is not one from which to draw distinct conclusions.

Using Scripture to interpret Scripture in reference to 2 Peter 3, other texts in the New Testament with fewer textual problems convey a similar meaning as 2 Peter 3. As mentioned above are the words of Jesus, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass

away” (Matt. 24:35). Other Bible passages seem to conflict with the idea of the resurrection of the dead on the Last Day and life in eternity on this present earth, such as Rev. 6, in which we read in the end times “every mountain and island was removed from its place.” J. Richard Middleton discusses the entire class of New Testament texts which appear to point to the destruction of this present earth in the end times in his book *A New Heaven and the New Earth*. He writes, “The question here is whether this is obliteration followed by replacement or a reference to some form of (admittedly radical) transformation.”⁶⁴ He points to the verbs used for “passed away” in both 2 Peter 3, Jesus’ words in Matt.24 noted above, and Rev. 21:1, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” The Greek verbs used are *παρέρχομαι* in Matthew and 2 Peter and *ἀπέρχομαι* in Rev. 21. Middleton says the prefixes *παρ* and *ἀπ* “do not indicate any discernable difference in meaning.”

He also discusses the question of whether *παρέρχομαι* or *ἀπέρχομαι* means destruction or transformation from other places in the New Testament. He turns to Paul in 2 Cor. 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” Middleton writes:

Here Paul uses the verb *parerchomai* for the ending of the old life, which is then replaced by a new life in Christ. Are we to believe that Paul thinks that the passing away of the old life is equivalent to the obliteration of the person, who is then replaced by a doppelgänger? All the Pauline writings, not to mention common sense, suggest that no matter how radical the shift required for conversion to Christ, this describes the transformation rather than the obliteration of the person.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Middleton, *New Heaven and New Earth*, 205.

⁶⁵ Middleton, *New Heaven and New Earth*, 206.

Middleton's conclusion, then, is "the passing away of the present heaven and earth to make way for the new creation is also transformative and not a matter of destruction followed by replacement."⁶⁶ His conclusion of this section is also helpful:

The analogy between personal and cosmic renovation certainly suggests that radical purging is necessary. But in neither case is the picture one of replacement after annihilation. Whether the "new creation" of persons who are in Christ or "a new heaven and a new earth" at the end of Revelation (21:2), the point is that salvation consists in the rescue and transformation of the world that God so loves (John 3:16)⁶⁷

Another contribution to this discussion comes from Jesus' words in Matt. 19:28. It says, "Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The phrase translated "in the new world" in the ESV is translated "in the regeneration" in the NASB. The Greek word for "regeneration" in the NASB is *παλιγγενεσία*. Kittel says "This word derives from *πάλιν* and *γένεσις* and thus means "new genesis" either in the sense of a. "return to existence," "coming back from death to life," or of b. "renewal to a higher existence," "regeneration" in the usual sense."⁶⁸ In none of these offerings does *παλιγγενεσία* mean total destruction and beginning over from nothing. This agrees with Middleton's view that Jesus does not refer to the complete destruction and re-creation of the world in Matthew 24, but like here in Matthew, the Greek can suggest a regeneration and renewal.

Commenting on Matt. 24, Gibbs adds, "One day the Son of Man himself will sit on a glorious throne; this session will take place at the time of the "regeneration of all things." He goes on to say:

⁶⁶ Middleton, *New Heaven and New Earth*, 206.

⁶⁷ Middleton, *New Heaven and New Earth*, 206.

⁶⁸ Friedrich Büchsel, *TDNT* 1:686.

At least three questions emerge from Jesus' words to Peter and the other apostles. The first question has to do with the phrase "in the regeneration," since the Greek term *παλιγγενεσία* occurs only here and in the reference to baptismal regeneration in Titus 3:5. In the wider historical and cultural context of Jesus' ministry, the Greek term occurs in Stoic philosophy, in Philo, and even in Josephus. In these extrabiblical texts, the term has a variety of *referents*, depending on the worldview of the writer and the context in which it occurs. In all its uses, however, it retains its *meaning* of "rebirth" or "regeneration. . . . We should not think the "the regeneration" entails the total destruction of all aspects of the present created order. A radical purging and renewing of this old aching creation is a more appropriate way to speak of the overall picture of biblical hope (cf. 1 Cor 3:10–15; 15:1; 15:1–58).⁶⁹

It seems clear in this verse from Matthew, as in the above noted passage from Jesus in Matthew 24, that this present world will not be completely destroyed in the end times. It will be purified and renewed, restored back to its original Genesis 1 state.

However, not all scholars, nor even all Lutheran scholars agree with this assessment. In the Concordia Commentary series, *2 Peter and Jude*, Concordia University- Austin professor Curtis Giese considers whether or not this present earth will be destroyed completely in the end times. He does say, "Creation awaits the shedding of the old and the granting of the new."⁷⁰ He reminds the reader that Jesus' body did not experience decay: "His body was not annihilated, but transformed and glorified."⁷¹ Will the same be true for this present earth? Giese takes the approach that 2 Peter 2:10–13 teaches this present earth will be completely destroyed when Jesus returns. Giese says, "Peter does not speak of a renewal of the inanimate creation, the earth and its elements, animals and plants, or the heavenly bodies. The verbs employed by the apostle signify destruction."⁷² He goes on to say, "These verbs express discontinuity between the present creation and the substance of the eternal state, and they suggest the abolition of the non-human

⁶⁹ Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 11:22 –20:34*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2010), 985.

⁷⁰ Curtis P. Giese, *2 Peter and Jude*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2012), 191.

⁷¹ Giese, *2 Peter and Jude*, 192.

⁷² Giese, *2 Peter and Jude*, 192.

physical creation.” He adds a footnote at this point. It says, “All Lutheran dogmaticians affirm the resurrection of the body, of course. Regarding the rest of the universe, Lutherans have varied in their precise description of the relationship between the present physical creation and the new heavens and the new earth. For a brief survey and a balanced conclusion, see Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3:542–43.”⁷³ Lutherans are not in agreement at this point on whether 2 Peter 3:10 speaks of annihilation or renewal of the earth. As scholars disagree and Lutheran scholars disagree if the new heavens and the new earth are completely destroyed, or are renewed and restored, it is beyond the scope of this MAP to categorically state the answer to this question.

⁷³ Giese, *2 Peter and Jude*, 192.

CHAPTER THREE

RECENT RESEARCH

In the previous chapter, the biblical and theological considerations of resurrection theology were considered. In this chapter, the recent research on the topic of resurrection theology will be discussed. This literature review will highlight the topics covered in the first two chapters and will identify the most important recent resources that contribute to the discussion of resurrection theology. In addition, we will consider the recent research that shines the light of increased understanding to some long-held beliefs about the nature of eternal life for the Christian.

The 2001 Concordia Journal article, “Regaining Biblical Hope: Restoring the Prominence of the Parousia” by Jeffery Gibbs is one of the seminal resources for the topic of resurrection theology as researched for this MAP. The article comes from an earlier 1999 address to Concordia Seminary’s Theological Symposium held that year. Though the article simply restates clear Biblical truths, it seems to have re-kindled theological thinking about resurrection theology among some in the LCMS. The influential nature of this article is shown by its earlier date, in comparison to many of the other journal articles used in this MAP. The article frames the discussion for this whole ministry project, that some in the Christian Church are not focused on the hope of Jesus’ return and the bodily resurrection to eternal life. The first three footnotes in Chapter One above come from this article. Taking this thought a step further from the data of this MAP, some Christians are not focused on such a hope of the resurrection. Also some do not understand the biblical teaching about resurrection. Gibbs’ article is influential because it appears to be one of the earlier sources on this topic within the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in the last twenty years.

What Gibbs does in this article is to lay out the problem of the lack of focus on the hope of

biblical resurrection theology that occurs in our churches. He writes,

We look for it [the biblical hope of the Parousia] with endurance. Or do we? I don't think we do. I don't think our members do. I don't think our church does. The hope is in our doctrine. It's in the Bible. It's in the creeds. But the hope which genuinely, actually looks eagerly for the second coming of Christ has been obscured, partially and even sometimes completely obscured by something else. The sun has been eclipsed by the moon. When you ask Christians, Missouri Synod Lutherans, what their hope is and what their goal is, their answer will probably be, "Dying and going to heaven." By that phrase, they mean, "Entering the interim state, the condition of the soul's presence with Christ once the body dies." A minor Biblical emphasis about which we know very little and to which the Bible gives hardly any attention has supplanted the return of Christ as the content of Christian hope. We've given the second coming over to the "calculators," to the dispensationalists. And I say that we need to get it back. It is not enough to deny false teaching and harmful speculation about the last day and the return of Christ-although we surely must continue to do that. We must recover for ourselves the power and the joy that flow out of the true and Biblical understanding of the consummation of the age.¹

The article goes on from here to point out how this hope has gotten obscured. A number of factors contribute to the obscurity. Many of the factors have been addressed above. Greek philosophical concepts still alive and well today, the self-centeredness of Americans, the scarcity of Lutheran eschatological writings, and the misunderstandings of Bible verses, such as John 14, the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, Phil. 3:14, and hymns with poor theology, among other factors.

In the final two pages of the article, Gibbs sets the hope back aright. He says the hope is restored "gently, pastorally, and patiently. Correcting such as massive misreading of the Scriptures will be like turning an ocean liner; it takes a long time once you've started, and you have to be patient and you can't turn too quickly."² Though the ship turns slowly, the payoff for such patience is very great:

One of the most exciting things about recovering a truly Biblical eschatological framework is the way that every major Christian teaching is sharpened, highlighted,

¹ Gibbs, "Regaining Biblical Hope," 315.

² Gibbs, "Regaining Biblical Hope," 321.

accented, and made even more important by the addition of “end-time” color to the portrait. Let me just suggest that our identity and faith as *Lutherans* should predispose us, among all the children of God, to appreciate and appropriate this eschatological point of view. For Lutherans delight in paradox, in tension, in saying “yes” to two antinomous truths at the same time. Law and Gospel. Old man, new man. Saint and sinner. Divine initiative and human responsibility. May I suggest to you that there is only one reason why such paradoxes exist at all? It is because we live in the tension between the inauguration and beginning of the last days in Christ, and the final consummation of the age in Christ. When Jesus comes again, we won't need to properly distinguish between Law and Gospel, because all will be received purely as God's gift. There will be no more tension, no more struggle between the old man and the new, for all will be made completely new. There will be no *peccator* any more. Only *iustus*. But until that time, we live in paradox, we expect paradox-because we were saved...in hope.³

The hope of a truly biblical eschatological framework is worth the effort, no matter how slowly the ship turns. The article by Gibbs is a tugboat aiding the turning of the ocean liner of the LCMS toward the hope of the bodily resurrection.

Another source document in the research for this MAP that is key to the hope of biblical resurrection comes from *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn. No less than seven footnotes from his book has been used up to this point in this MAP. It must be said Alcorn does not have an earned doctorate. He has authored over sixty books and may be thought of as a popular Christian author more than a scholarly one. However, within the context of this MAP, his book *Heaven* is the only bibliographical source book devoted solely to the biblical teaching of *heaven* and *resurrection*. As this book contains over 500 pages on these subjects, it is a great resource. Further, the quotes included in this MAP from *Heaven* are Alcorn's logical observations taken from New Testament passages. There are no “ground-breaking” conclusions Alcorn makes in his book. Much the same as Gibbs, Alcorn simply gathers Biblical data and writes about what the passage means to us. The next book this MAP will discuss is much different. The book *A New*

³ Gibbs, “Regaining Biblical Hope,” 322.

Heaven and a New Earth by J. Richard Middleton *does* take strong positions based on Greek exegetical data from the pertinent texts regarding resurrection. Middleton challenges status quo thinking. That book will be discussed below. But, Alcorn does not operate in this way. He takes simply understood Bible passages, points us to the truth in what they say, and makes logical statements based on them.

One such example is Chapter 11 of *Heaven*. It is titled, “Why Is Resurrection So Important?” This title has a strong allusion to 1 Cor. 15, where Paul makes the important argument about the importance of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. In the chapter of his book, Alcorn points out similar truths. In this chapter, he begins with a quote from Marcus Borg, who said as an adult what mattered to him was that Jesus’ tomb was empty. To Borg, whether or not something “remarkable happened to the physical body of Jesus was irrelevant.”⁴ Alcorn then walks through the Old Testament and the New Testament to show the biblical witness against the beliefs of Mr. Borg. Alcorn proceeds to use Jesus’ own words and actions after his resurrection to show the kind of resurrected body he had and to comment on how Jesus’ resurrected body is a model for our own resurrected body. It matters very much that something remarkable happened to Jesus’ body in resurrection. Alcorn also uses the contrast in this chapter of how many today believe resurrection is in spirit only. He contrasts this view using Jesus’ words and actions to show why this view is also wrong, such as in Luke 24:39, in which Jesus appeared to the Disciples after his resurrection. They were frightened of him and thought he was a ghost. Jesus said, “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” The book *Heaven* walks through the complete biblical teaching on the subject of heaven, resurrection, and the new heaven and earth in a simple way

⁴ Alcorn, *Heaven*, 111.

none of the other resources for this MAP accomplish.

Contrast the book *Heaven with A New Heaven and a New Earth* by J. Richard Middleton. Middleton is not a popular author in the same way as Randy Alcorn. Middleton has an earned doctorate, a PhD. from the Free University of Amsterdam. He is a professor of the Bible and Exegesis at Northeastern Seminary. Middleton's work is a very important resource for the topic of this MAP. It makes a strong case for eternal life on this present perfected earth on the Last Day. It does so with detailed exegesis of pertinent passages in the Bible. This book has been one of the primary resources for this MAP and the Bible study presented in the data-gathering part of this MAP.

In the preface, Middleton tells the story of climbing a mountain with a friend. His friend said it was a shame that the beautiful view from the mountaintop would one day be destroyed (implying at the end of the world). Middleton thought to himself that it would not be destroyed in the end. He wrote, "It did not make sense to me that the beauty and wonder of earthly life, which I was coming to embrace joyfully as part of my growing Christian faith, could be disconnected from God's ultimate purposes of salvation."⁵ He went on further to say, "Most contemporary Christians tend to live with an *unresolved tension* [emphasis mine] between a belief in the resurrection of the body and an immaterial heaven as a final destiny. Many also have in the back of their minds the idea of a new heaven and a new earth (from the book of Revelation) though they are not quite sure what to do with it."⁶ Here he perfectly states the problem behind this MAP. The problem concerning resurrection theology in our churches is an "unresolved tension" between the "resurrection of the body" of Scripture and the Creeds, with a much different

⁵ Middleton, *New Heaven and New Earth*, 12.

⁶ Middleton, *New Heaven and New Earth*, 12.

understanding of resurrection based on the cultural and philosophical view of a spiritual or immaterial heaven. Middleton does not set forth in his book to reconcile these two views. Instead, he shows from the Bible how “God is committed to reclaiming creation in order to bring it to its authentic and glorious destiny, a destiny that human sin had blocked.”⁷

Throughout the twelve chapters of this book, Middleton traces the problem of heaven as the point of the hope of eternal life. *A New Heaven and a New Earth* moves through the pertinent Scripture passages that show the vocation given to humans in Genesis as the tenders of God’s earth. He then goes through salvation history in the Old Testament to the resurrection and redemption of the New Testament that restore that vocation. Middleton looks in detail at the problem texts from the redemption of this present creation, of which they are a good number, as discussed in detail above. Middleton then ends his book by examining some ethical considerations raised by the previous chapters.

For the purpose of this MAP, the chapters of *A New Heaven and a New Earth* that deal with the New Testament passages are the most important chapters of this book. Numerous footnotes above point to the importance of Middleton’s research. He says in the preface “it turns out that careful examination of these “problem” texts actually provides further support for the redemption of creation.”⁸ Taking a closer look at passages which seem to support the complete destruction of the earth in the end times, such as Jesus’ words in Matt. 24:35 “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away,” Middleton shows how the proper understanding of the Greek words Jesus used support the redemption and renewal of creation, not its complete destruction, as noted above. In the writing of the Bible studies for this MAP, the

⁷ Middleton, *New Heaven and New Earth*, 13.

⁸ Middleton, *New Heaven and New Earth*, 19.

research from Middleton in regards to these texts was crucial to my own proper understanding. It was also critical to explain the proper understanding to the people in the Bible study sessions.

Resurrection, Creation, and the Environment

Added into the subjects in this chapter only touched on until now in the MAP are the environmental considerations brought about by a renewed focus on creation and what this means for the believer in Jesus today and what it means for the world in which we now live. To help us begin this task, Christian sceptic Christopher Morse in his book *Not Every Spirit* frames the discussion. As a sceptic, he points out his understanding of the errors of Christian doctrine, which helps to frame what follows in this chapter:

Christian doctrine would seem at this point to be confounded by the alternative of either having to admit that the eschatological character of the gospel message is simply dispensable for faith today, or that it calls those who seek to be faithful to it to a withholding of judgment in the here and now, a withholding of interest in what is going on in the immediate environment, a withholding of commitment for any really sustained involvement, and finally a withholding of all pleasure and delight in the good gifts of creation.⁹

His argument as a sceptic is that in the confusion of Christian theology, the Christian lives in the present and is not to be engaged with the world. Morse also says the end times can be tossed aside, because they have no meaning for people who are called to live for today. The consideration of God's good creation can also be tossed aside. Because, says Morse, pointing to 1 Cor. 7, the Christian should not focus on the world. As Paul writes, "From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For

⁹ Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit*, 2d ed. (New York: Continuum, 2009), 321.

the present form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor. 7:29–31). Morse cannot be further away from understanding the importance of both the consideration of the end times and the importance of the earth on which we live. St. Paul makes it clear, as we have already seen, that a proper understanding of the biblical teaching of resurrection, which includes our own resurrection as believers in Jesus, is of critical importance for the Christian church. In addition, the proper biblical focus on the understanding of resurrection does not withhold our involvement in the world by any means. In fact, it increases our involvement in this world. As Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection restores the creation broken by sin, the involvement of the Christian in the care of this world is also restored to its biblical prominence as in Genesis chapter 2. These are the two areas of focus in this chapter.

The Importance of the Resurrection

We begin with the critical importance of the resurrection to the Christian church. As discussed above, theologian N.T. Wright has much to say on this subject in a number of writings. He asks a good question in his book *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’s Crucifixion*, “Where does all this take us?” He says the destination where this takes us is a “fresh understanding” of the forgiveness of sins, which is not so that people can go to heaven when they die.” Wright says such a phrase (going to heaven when you die) and such a meaning was never spoken of in the account of the earliest Christian church in the book of Acts. Because of Jesus and his resurrection, “God’s kingdom [on earth] has already been well and truly launched through the death and resurrection of Jesus.”¹⁰

Wright goes on to discuss three points from the book of Acts that illustrate his point. One

¹⁰ Wright, *Day the Revolution Began*, 154–55.

example is Acts 28:23, which records Paul in Rome under house arrest “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.” Wright says heaven and earth meet in Jesus and it is in this meeting of heaven and earth where God’s kingdom begins in all its fullness.¹¹ From our Lutheran theology, the Lord’s Supper embodies this truth and continues its work. For us today in visible and physical form, Jesus’ body and blood as God in the flesh, are present in, with and under the bread and wine of the Supper. Heaven and earth meet there in Jesus. In the Lord’s Supper, his body and blood are present here on earth in the elements of bread and wine. *Confessing the Gospel* calls it an “Earthly Sign of Heavenly Reality.”¹² Jesus has brought the kingdom of God to earth in its final form.

The second point from Acts is the importance of the resurrection of Jesus. We have discussed this point in great detail in the previous chapters. There is no need to re-hash those chapters here. On the Last Day when Jesus returns, that fullness of the kingdom on earth he introduced in his incarnation will be perfected in this world. Wright adds his third point from Acts, that in this final new world, “all God’s people will be raised to new bodily life.”¹³ The earliest Church believed resurrection is the end point for the believer, not going to heaven when they die. This is the reason this project is written.

The Renewed Focus on Creation

Moving on to the importance of this present world, the resurrection on this present earth on the Last Day brings creation into a renewed focus. God first promised the land to Abram in Gen. 12:7, “To your offspring I will give this land.” God also says to Abram in Gen. 15:18, “To your

¹¹ Wright, *Day the Revolution Began*, 155.

¹² Nafzger, *Confessing the Gospel*, 882.

¹³ Wright, *Day the Revolution Began*, 155.

offspring I give this land.” and also in 17:8, “And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an *everlasting possession* [emphasis mine], and I will be their God.” This promise of the land is repeated in a number of places in the Old Testament, Gen, 24:7; Exod. 6:8; Ps. 105:11, among others. The promise of the land in Genesis has never been repealed or removed by God. What does this mean for us today? The promise of the land in the Old Testament is a type of the resurrection to come, fulfilled in the New Testament with the promise of eternal life through the resurrection of believers in Jesus to live on this present earth. In the Old Testament, God promised the land to the people of his covenant. Through Jesus in the New Testament, the promise is fulfilled. It is fulfilled not just with a small, arid piece of land in the Ancient Near East. God’s New Testament promise is fulfilled with the whole world! His promise is not to take us away from this earth, but to restore us to a restored creation. Again, from N.T. Wright:

The hope of Israel, expressed variously in the Torah, Prophets, and Psalms, was not for a rescue operation that would snatch Israel (or humans or the faithful) from the world, but for a rescue operation that would be for the world, an operation through which redeemed humans would play once more the role for which they were designed. It was the hope for a renewed world in which justice and mercy would reign forever. Jesus was explaining not that this hope had been abandoned in favor of “saved souls going to heaven,” but that this hope for new creation had been fulfilled in a shockingly unexpected way.¹⁴

Extending Wright’s thought to its conclusion for our purposes, is the importance of this world and the place of God’s people in this present world, regardless of whether or not their presence here in this world is before or after the bodily resurrection to eternal life:

The Messiah as “servant” remains the clue. He has brought to its appointed goal the destiny of Abraham’s people not so that they could escape the world and go to heaven, but so that they could be part of a worldwide people of praise. United worship here and now, rather than disunited church life in the present and a distant

¹⁴ Wright, *Day the Revolution Began*, 146.

“heaven” after death, was always, as far as Paul was concerned, the divinely intended goal of the Messiah’s death.¹⁵

Rather than, as Christopher Morse suggested above, that the Christian should withhold interest in the “good gifts of creation,” just the opposite is true. Biblical resurrection theology increases interest in the good gifts of creation. Biblical resurrection theology increases interest in the good gifts of creation because this creation is our home, both now and forever, as promised by God in Genesis and restored through Jesus. This creation is God’s creation. Adam and Eve were given the job of tending this creation. This task has never been removed. This creation is also our home in the age to come. There is a practical and spiritual element to our care for this creation.

The Care and Concern for Creation

In my experience, the care of this present earth has rarely been a concern of the Lutheran Church. Though we confess in the Small Catechism, “I believe that God has made me and all creatures,”¹⁶ there has not been a focus in the Lutheran Church on taking care of the earth in which we live today. Martin Luther often wrote of the importance of the world and our connection to the world. In a sermon of 1537, he encourages his hearers to “rejoice in their creatureliness by reminding them, that while “the world seeks great honor with money, power, and other such things,” it is a far greater honor to be able to say “I am a creature and work of the most high God.” For “he has given me my body and soul and daily preserves them.”¹⁷

Charles Arand of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, has written extensively on the subject of Christian care and concern for creation. He discusses why we have not always focused on the

¹⁵ Wright, *Day the Revolution Began*, 233–34.

¹⁶ “Explanation of the Small Catechism,” 133.

¹⁷ Charles P. Arand, “The Unbounded Creator and the Bounded Creatures,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (Autumn 2017): 275.

care of our world and why it is important for us to re-consider our attitude toward creation:

We also have to acknowledge an ambiguity in our own activities toward creation. We are creatures (even redeemed creatures) yet still corrupted by sin. On the one hand, we have been set free from trying to transcend our creatureliness and from trying to become more than human—from trying to become like God. We can begin to rediscover our creatureliness and learn to live as human creatures. God has given us a body and five senses in order to discover and delight in all that he has made. We can strive to work in harmony with his created design. On the other hand, our vision remains cloudy so that we cannot always see the long term consequences of our actions. The impediment of sin suggests that we proceed with something less than absolute self-assurance that we know what we are doing and that we can manage creation. As sinners, we cannot act without causing some harm. But we can seek to limit that damage and tend the wounds that we cause. As Wendell Berry eloquently put it, “we tend a geography of scars.”¹⁸

There are also other reasons why creation and the care of the environment have not been a focus of the Church. Numerous are the calls in Scripture that our place is to be in the world, but not of the world. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 2:12 “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God” He also wrote in 1 Cor. 7:31 “This world in its present form is passing away.” We read in 1 Peter 2:11 “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world.” We read in 1 John 2:15 “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” There are numerous other Bible passages in this same vein. They may lead the Christian to not place much value in this world. In the book *Heaven is not my Home*, author Paul Marshall contributes:

There are doubtless many reasons for our passivity, but one crucial one is that we don't take God's world seriously. We have accepted the heretical idea that the body will permanently pass away after death, and that we will only reappear as some type of disembodied wraith. But the Bible will have none of this. When Jesus arose from the dead, he had fish for lunch and overcame the despair of doubting Thomas by telling him to put his finger in his all-too-fleshy wounds. The creeds of the Christian church universally affirm, “I believe in the resurrection of the body. . . . It is also an unbiblical idea that the earth doesn't matter because we are going to heaven when we die. The Bible teaches that there will be “a new heaven and a new earth.” Our destiny

¹⁸ Charles P. Arand, “Caring for God's Groaning Earth,” *Concordia Journal* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 227.

is an earthly one: a new earth, an earth redeemed and transfigured. An earth reunited with heaven, but an earth, nevertheless.¹⁹

As such, he argues that we must take care of this planet. After all, the task God gave Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden has not been revoked, that “we have been called to be stewards of creation.”²⁰ As God continues to take care of and “keeps faith with all of the creation,”²¹ the task of the Christian is to do likewise. Marshall goes on to say,

The steward was to stand in the master’s stead, to look after affairs in the way the master wanted, and to give account to the master of what he had done. This is why stewardship is one way of describing the task of humankind on the earth. Humans are God’s stewards, standing in God’s stead. We look after his property.²²

Even after Gen. 3 and the introduction of sin into the world, this task went on to take care of the earth God created. Marshall says, “Noah gathered two of every kind of animal that made its home on the land or in the air and made sure that he had the right types of food for them. (Gen. 6:20–21). This rescue wasn’t just for farm animals, to provide Noah with food; it included the wild animals as well. Noah might be considered the patron saint of environmentalists.”²³ There will be more on Christian environmental concerns below.

There are theological implications for the care of this world. Arand argues that redemption and creation are bound together. Redemption is tied to God’s creation and vice versa. He writes:

The connection between the two great works of God means that Christians cannot be concerned about the redemption without being concerned about creation and vice versa. Christians are not only concerned about redemption, but are concerned about God’s creation. For they come from the same God. And when it comes to creation

¹⁹ Paul Marshall, *Heaven is Not My Home: Learning to Live in God’s Creation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 11.

²⁰ Marshall, *Heaven is Not My Home*, 23.

²¹ Marshall, *Heaven is Not My Home*, 31.

²² Marshall, *Heaven is Not My Home*, 131.

²³ Marshall, *Heaven is Not My Home*, 125.

care, the Christian account of redemption offers an approach, motivation, and critique that can make a fruitful contribution for addressing our issues.²⁴

Jesus addresses our issues through his life, death, and resurrection. In his life, death, and resurrection he wins for us life, forgiveness and salvation. The Father also affirms his creation through the resurrection of Jesus. “We see this in the life and miracles of Jesus, but above all, in his resurrection. What greater affirmation of creation and the goodness of creation could we have? Salvation is thus not only an issue that involves God and us, or me and neighbor. It includes the entire creation.”²⁵ As we read the Gospel witness to Jesus’ work on this world, he heals, he casts out demons, he feeds the multitudes from a few fish and some bread, in addition to many other miracles. These miracles exist not only unto themselves. N.T. Wright spoke above about heaven and earth meeting in Jesus. He ushered in the kingdom of God in its final form and shows himself as God through his power over everything in this created world. These events did not just happen for and unto themselves. From Arand:

The incarnation holds some rich possibilities for thinking about what it means to be a human creature. The Son of God became a creature and was embedded within creation and interdependent with all creation. Jesus came to do something. He did not perform miracles simply to demonstrate that he was divine or that he was the Son of God. To the contrary, his work, his miracles, are all aimed at reclaiming every piece of creation.²⁶

God said his creation was good. He made no mistakes in making this world. This world plays a part in our lives of faith, as noted above. Therefore, creation plays an important part in the Christian life. It has an important place within in our theology. In addition, we consider:

Jesus came to reclaim and restore his entire creation as the Lord of creation. He does so by beginning with where the problem of creation’s ruin began, namely, with us.

²⁴ Charles P. Arand, “Tending Our Common Home: Reflections on Laudato Si’,” *Concordia Journal* 41, no. 4 (2015): 314.

²⁵ Arand, “Caring for God’s Groaning Earth,” 225.

²⁶ Arand, “Caring for God’s Groaning Earth,” 229.

By uniting us with Christ's death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit makes us new creatures. He renews us in at least two ways. First with regard to our perceptions and senses. Second with regard to our actions. When we let go of our idolatry, we can begin to perceive properly. Not to claim that we have this of ourselves, but to receive it for what it is, a gift from God.²⁷

The importance of God's creation is obvious. We live in it. God gives us life through it. This earth will be our forever home.

As such, it will be helpful for us to develop a theology of creation that builds upon and develops Gen. 1:31 "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day." In other words, it will be helpful for us to develop a theology of creation that builds upon 'God created the world and it was good.' God created this world in the beginning. This world suffered from the effects of the sin of Gen. 3. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, mankind and creation are redeemed. Creation comes full circle on the Last Day, when it is perfected and restored to its original pristine and sinless condition. As mentioned above, creation and redemption are linked together:

The promise of the gospel occurs within a story that stretches from the beginning of creation to the end of creation. In some ways, it is fortuitous that Earth Day usually occurs within the season of Easter. On Easter, we Christians celebrate the bursting forth of the new creation in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The restoration of creation has begun with him and continues with us. Consider the story line. God first created the earth and its creatures. Then he created us, but we ruined his creation. So God begins the restoration of creation at the point where it all came unraveled. He first restores us in Christ. Then he restores his creation. Both the first creation and the new creation encompass the entire creation.²⁸

Then comes the question, "what does this mean?" What does a creation theology mean to the Lutheran Church? What is the place of the Christian within creation theology? These questions lead us to the next section of this chapter.

²⁷ Arand, "Attending to the Beauty," 323.

²⁸ Arand, "Attending to the Beauty," 226.

The Place of the Christian within Creation

Part of the meaning of “in this world but not of the world” (John 17:15) means we have a place in this world and a responsibility to carry out within it. This job of the care of God’s earth has nothing to do with earning his favor towards ourselves, nor are we to grab as much as we can hold onto for ourselves in this world. The job of the Christian is to act as a servant within this world and to fulfill God’s calling to us as his stewards of this world. Arand moves us in the direction of identifying just what this task is for to accomplish:

The longing of creation for its renewal calls us not only to embrace the goodness of creation but to embrace our place within it and thus calling to care for it. It calls us to see that we ourselves are a part of this creation, inextricably bound to and interconnected with everything on earth. The renewal of creation began with Christ, continues with us, and finds completion when the entire creation is renewed. As new creatures raised with Christ, we have been set free from the need to possess the earth for our self-aggrandizement, and free to recover our place within creation as those whom God created to live in a unique relationship with him and with our fellow creatures.²⁹

Christians across denominations have not always thought of taking care of the earth as a part of their faith, as noted above. Rev. Mitch Hescox is an Evangelical Christian “with a message that is at the heart of a growing eco-friendly Christian movement: Scripture says to honor God's creation by caring for the earth.”³⁰ He said, “One of the things that I have found out, in the nine years I've been doing this and probably a 1,000 sermons and presentations, if not more, is that a lot of Evangelicals have not been taught what the Bible says about caring for the earth. . . . We don't own this earth. God does. We are merely supposed to be stewards, caretakers.”³¹

Looking at what it means to be God’s stewards on this earth, there are some things to

²⁹ Arand, “Caring for God’s Groaning Earth,” 226.

³⁰ Emily Hopkins, “‘We Don’t Own This Earth’: The Biblical Case for Protecting the Environment,” *Indianapolis Star*, December 3, 2017, <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2017/12/03/biblical-case-protecting-environment/904987001/>.

³¹ Hopkins, “We Don’t Own This Earth.”

consider as we begin to define our place within God’s creation. We need not fear making a positive contribution to the environment or involving ourselves in environmental concerns. The worry enters in when the environment becomes a religion unto itself. Some environmentalists have been accused of making the earth their God. “For some individuals and societies, the role of religion seems increasingly to be filled by environmentalism. It has become “the religion of choice for urban atheists,” according to Michael Crichton, the late science fiction writer (and climate change skeptic).”³² Rev. Hescox mentioned above, is mainly concerned about the environment because of climate change, which has political overtones and may or may not be linked to stewardship of the environment. Against making the environment our God or worshipping at the throne of creation, Arand says, “The answer is not to ignore or reject environmental concerns because they can lead to pantheism, but to locate them within the Christian story and the Christian vision of life as God created it.”³³ When we have the biblical attitude of being a steward or caretaker, rather than ‘master of the earth to do with it what I want’ or one who keeps as much of the world for himself or herself as possible, or putting environmental concerns over and above God and his desires for us as expressed in his word, then we begin to get the proper focus of the proper care and concern for God’s creation. From Arand:

We are in a sense the household managers, or perhaps better yet, as human creatures—men and women together—we are the heads of creation’s household. We are responsible to look out for the flourishing of everyone in the household. To that end, God made us in his image that we might reflect his care for the world and he gave us the capacity to understand the functioning of the household so that we might cultivate it and develop human culture within it.³⁴

³² Joel Garreau, “Environmentalism as Religion,” *The New Atlantis*, no. 28, (Summer 2010): 61, <https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/environmentalism-as-religion>.

³³ Arand, “Caring for God’s Groaning Earth,” 222.

³⁴ Arand, “Unbounded Creator,” 281.

As we bring the care of creation more sharply into focus, what might this mean to the Christian today? The Christian can have the attitude that “working for clean water, the restoration of habitats and ecosystems, the protection of endangered species, can all serve to heighten our anticipation of that restored harmony when viewed through the eyes of faith. All this is to suggest, as Joel Kurz noted “Our faith should be at home with this earth, which after all is the realm of the new creation through Christ's work of redemption.”³⁵ Again, Arand helps us understand our place within this creation:

For what purpose did God create us as full-bodied creatures? What might be the implications of our creatureliness for our life within creation that we know as earth? As embodied creatures (unlike angels) we are embedded into the web of creation in such a way that we are interdependent with all of creation as we know it on earth. Our lives and well-being are enmeshed with the entire creation. What does it mean for who we are as creatures that God has placed us into the midst of a creation that is filled with countless numbers of different creatures? As Psalm 104:24 expresses it, “the earth is full of your creatures!” God has placed his earth and all fellow creatures of the earth into our care. We can best care for it by exercising self-restraint and living generously.³⁶

From here we can move forward to the eschatological focus of the care of God’s earth. The care and concern for creation also has an End Times component. The renewal of today’s earth and the work to improve the environment can be seen as a preview to the perfected world to come upon which the resurrected ones of Jesus will live eternally. We can “consider the importance of finding (or restoring) beauty in the midst of creation’s bondage to corruption as a confession of our eschatological hope of the new creation. In doing so we may persevere in work that endures into the age to come.”³⁷ As resurrection theology of the Bible points us to the resurrection of the believer in Jesus, a cleaner environment and our stewardship thereof points us

³⁵ Arand, “Caring for God’s Groaning Earth,” 226.

³⁶ Arand, “Caring for God’s Groaning Earth,” 228.

³⁷ Arand, “Attending to the Beauty,” 314.

to that time when God will make all things new.

From the Lutheran perspective, we can consider certain Bible passages with this view in mind:

Consider the story of Jesus and the woman who poured the nard. When viewed exclusively through the ethics shaped by the first article, one can sympathize with the disciples' objections. What a waste of resources! What could have been used to serve the hungry and relieve the poor was lost on this impractical, lavish, opulent act! It is an argument that we often hear today when it comes to art in church or the beauty invested in the church buildings themselves. But Jesus moves them beyond simply the first article preservation of this present world ("you will always have the poor with you") to beauty and a hope beyond this present existence: "She has done a beautiful thing to me...she has prepared my body for my burial." Jesus invites the disciples to consider this act from an entirely new perspective. Though it was incomprehensible to the disciples and even the woman, this reverent act for burial would give way to the beauty of the resurrection and the new creation. Her act would not be wasted or in vain, it would not die with the old world as so many of our efforts will (Ecclesiastes!). No, this would be made known wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world. So beauty here also carries an ethical act, but one that can only be valued as such in light of the resurrection and the hope of the new creation.³⁸

In Mark 14, Jesus places a perspective on this event that what the woman did would be known "wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world." This act of love on the part of the woman would have a lasting influence that supersedes time and distance from Bethany in Israel some 2,000 years ago. Certain events in our world today, such as the work to improve our planet also supersede time and distance, pointing to the End Times and this earth made new.

Arand points in the direction to go:

More work needs to be carried out in the area of eschatology and the Christian hope. In recent years, increasing numbers of biblical scholars have lifted up the need for Christians to recover and embrace what Christians have always confessed, namely, the resurrection of the body. In the process, they have drawn renewed attention to the emphasis in the New Testament on the new creation and the way it has been overshadowed at times by a near exclusive emphasis on going to heaven. More work needs to be carried out in terms of the continuity and discontinuity of the present age and the age to come. How do we bring all the various passages together? What are

³⁸ Arand, "Attending to the Beauty," 325.

the minor themes and the major themes? What are the clear passages and the unclear passages? The Scriptures speak about both being with Jesus when we die and of Jesus bringing the new Jerusalem down to the earth in the new creation.³⁹

With this in mind, the church moves forward seeking to proclaim the fullness of the eschatological promises of the Scriptures.

³⁹ Arand, "Caring for God's Groaning Earth," 229.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

The subject of this Ministry Applied Project “Practical Implications of Resurrection Theology” began by accident. I attended a Continuing Education seminar closest to my duty station at Picatinny Arsenal, New Jersey in the summer of 2014. Dr. Naomichi Masaki from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana taught a class on “Luther’s Lectures from Genesis.” Being at an assignment that was not very busy, I began a Doctor of Ministry program that fall, with the writing of an independent study class for Dr. Glenn Nielsen at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, based on the continuing education class I took earlier that year. It was in the writing of the independent study paper that I was introduced to the subject of resurrection theology. I was one of many Lutherans who appear to have an incomplete understanding of how one’s faith fits within the whole of the biblical story of resurrection. I was one of many who believed in resurrection, but had not connected the resurrection as portrayed in 1 Cor. 15 to the Creed’s “I believe in the resurrection of the body.” My belief in the resurrection to eternal life was similar to how the American culture portrayed heaven. This portrayal is as noted above, more of a spiritual heaven that the believer would enjoy in a spiritual body, not a physical one.

The Christians who believe in this way know quite a few biblical facts about Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection. In my experience, these Christians generally believe Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins. They generally believe Jesus’ resurrection assures them eternal life through faith in him. However, their understanding of what eternal life consists and what it means for their lives is uncertain, at best. The data in this MAP will demonstrate my opinion. They have been taught faith in Jesus grants them eternal life through the forgiveness of

their sins. They have been taught heaven is their home. These Christians believe these things because this is what their pastors and their denominations have taught them. Contributing to this problem is some churches and denominations in the United States teach an incomplete understanding of the biblical story. These Christians and their denominations do not understand a biblical resurrection theology that includes a bodily resurrection and life on this redeemed earth. Popular Christian teachings, along with hymns and praise songs suggest *heaven* as the endpoint of the person who dies with faith in Jesus. Certain Bible verses taken outside the whole teaching of the Bible contribute to this view, as discussed above in detail.

Working with the homiletics professor Dr. Nielsen, my initial idea for the applied project was to write and preach a sermon series on resurrection theology. My thought was to write and deliver four sermons on the subject. I would pre-test volunteers before the sermons and after the sermons to see how or if their knowledge and attitude on resurrection theology had changed from hearing the sermons. As I started to think about the sermon content, it became clear that writing and delivering a sermon series on resurrection theology in such a way that did not devolve into a theological lecture from the pulpit would be a difficult task. I discussed the sermon series idea with Dr. Nielsen in early 2015. He said maybe I could do a sermon series, but it would not be the best vehicle for a project. He was not enthusiastic about a sermon series on resurrection theology.

As my location changed in the summer 2015 to West Point, New York, my idea also changed about how to do a Ministry Applied Project on this topic. My concern that the sermons would turn into a Bible study from the pulpit, changed into writing and teaching Bible studies covering this topic and pre-test and post-test the group of volunteers to study a potential change of knowledge and attitude of this group after attending such a Bible study. The assignment at the

United States Military at West Point was a very busy and demanding assignment, which slowed my progress. It was not until I moved again, to Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois, that my Ministry Applied Project proposal was approved by the Concordia Seminary Doctor of Ministry Committee in August 2017. Changing assignments is a recurring theme in my Doctor of Ministry program and this MAP.

The Construction of the Project

My new assignment at Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois included a Wednesday Bible study class. Attendees at this class were soldiers and civilians from my unit, the Army Sustainment Command, and other commands at the Arsenal. These individuals who attended the Bible study were from different Christian denominations and different religious backgrounds. It was not a requirement to be Lutheran to attend this study. I did not know what denominations were represented in those who attended the class. Some individuals attended every week. Others attended when they were able to attend. It was the attenders of this class that were the pool of potential volunteer participants in this project.

The initial design of the project was four Bible studies on resurrection theology in four weeks to be presented to the entire Bible study class. A pre-test and post-test was written with the hypothesis of the MAP in mind, to test whether or not the hypothesis was proven or not. The hypothesis is that for those who participate in the Bible study, there will be a change in understanding of the end-product of their faith in Jesus from a disembodied life in heaven to a physical life on a renewed earth after death. Initially, my thoughts were to create a survey to test the understanding of the volunteers who participated in this project. Dr. Mark Rockenbach of Concordia Seminary St. Louis, recommended using interviews of the participants. He recommended a simple interview list of questions. Considering the hypothesis and the main

points of resurrection theology, these are the five interview questions I used:

1. What is your understanding of heaven? What shaped your beliefs?
2. What do you think happens to the believer in Jesus after they die? What shaped your beliefs?
3. What do you think is going to happen to this present earth in the End Times? What shaped your beliefs?
4. How does resurrection play a part in our life of faith on earth today? What shaped your beliefs?
5. Evaluate this statement: The physical world is evil, but the spiritual world is good. What shaped your beliefs?

These questions were formulated based on the most important parts of the MAP, directly linking to the main considerations of this topic as discussed above. These same five questions were used during the interviews before the Bible study began and after the Bible study concluded.

Upon the approval of the interview questions by my faculty advisor, the next step in the process was to present to the Bible study that I was enrolled in this Doctor of Ministry class. I explained to them the nature of what I was studying to raise their interest in the topic. Saying to the class that “heaven is not our eternal home” and a number of the Christian churches beloved hymns, such as “The Old Rugged Cross” did not align fully with the bible’s teachings on resurrection, created a high level of interest in the coming Bible study.¹

I then explained to the class members I needed a minimum of five volunteers from the class to participate in the data-gathering portion of the MAP. Their participation was strictly

¹ Tom Fettke, ed. *The Celebration Hymnal* (Nashville: Word/Integrity Music, 1997), 327. The last part of the fourth verse is, “Then He’ll call me some day to my home far away, where his glory forever I’ll share.”

voluntary. There would be no monetary reward from participation in the study. The volunteers could opt out at any time they wished. Those who volunteered to participate would have to commit to attending all the Bible studies, or be willing to make up any study they missed. They would also have to agree to be interviewed before the study began and then again after the study was concluded. The same five questions would be used in both interviews. The responses from the volunteer participants would be held strictly anonymously. Their names would never be included in the MAP documents. I explained to the volunteers that I might use a quote from one of their responses within the text of the MAP. Again, their names would never be used, nor would any quotes from their responses be attributed to them. The volunteer participants also had to agree to be audio-recorded during the interviews. The recording of their interviews was for my own ease of handling their interview responses. All of those who volunteered agreed to all of the stipulations required to participate in this project and signed a release explaining to them all their rights and requirements as they participated in MAP. All the volunteer participants signed these statements before the initial interviews took place. Before execution of the project, approval to conduct research at the Bible study was required from an approval authority at Rock Island Arsenal. This approval was granted, clearing the way for the project to begin.

Near the end of the Wednesday Bible study class on August 30, 2017, I introduced to those in attendance that the next Bible study on September 6, 2017, would begin my Doctor of Ministry project resurrection theology Bible study. I explained the topic to them and also the process to them. I explained that I needed a minimum of five volunteers to participate in the study. I explained to all the class what participating in the project meant. No one was required to participate. If anyone chose to attend the Bible study and not participate in the data-gathering, this was completely acceptable. I took the names of those interested in participating and made

appointments with each of them. It was during these appointments with the volunteer participants that I again explained to them what was required of them to participate. I explained to them again their rights in participating in this study. I gave them a form to sign that spelled out everything I told them. Each of the participants signed these forms agreeing to participate. Then I interviewed each of them, asking the five questions mentioned above. I will discuss their answer in more detail in the next chapter.

September 6, 2017 was the date of the first resurrection theology Bible study. The study continued over the next and over the next five weeks. Originally the plan was to have four Bible studies. The subject matter did not allow for a four-week study. The reason for the extra week was the unexpected difficulty of the 2 Peter 3 passage noted above in Chapter 2. Explaining textual criticism to a layperson audience is difficult in and of itself. Explaining a passage like 2 Peter 3, with multiple textual problems and differing translations with English Bibles like the New International Version (NIV) and the English Standard Version (ESV) is hard and takes time. In addition to the textual problems and the translation difficulties, also the discussion of the Greek words used in the texts also is time-consuming. However, this discussion is critical to the proper understanding of the subject matter. At the close of the Bible study, I made appointments with all the volunteer participants to do the second interview. These all were done with no problems. I completed the study with five volunteer participants in the data-gathering portion of the study.

The interviews were recorded on my personal cell phone, which was password protected. I used a dictation app for iPhone called “Dictate” in the manipulation of the volunteer’s responses. The app takes the sound file from the interview and turns it into text. I then took this text and compared it to the sound file of the interview to ensure accurate transcription. This process was

followed for all the interviews. This concluded the Rock Island Arsenal part of the MAP.

Once the interviews and transcription process were completed, it was early winter 2018. As I began to work with the data gathered from the interviews, two issues arose. The first issue was that some of the interview data was corrupted and unusable. All of the initial interviews were good. The second interviews from two of the participants were very incomplete or unusable. This left me with three good participants out of five from the Rock Island Arsenal data gathering process. Needless to say, this was a problem for the successful data gathering portion of this MAP. The second issue arose in May 2018. I was asked to take a vacancy at Risen Christ Lutheran Church in Davenport, Iowa. This vacancy made progress in the writing of the MAP very difficult, as I was in effect working a full-time job at Rock Island Arsenal and also covering a busy vacancy. This vacancy lasted for eleven months. Though the vacancy slowed my MAP progress, it did present an opportunity to offer a second iteration of the resurrection theology Bible study at Risen Christ during their Sunday morning Bible study hour, with the opportunity to get more participants in the study.

Before I could carry out this plan, Concordia Seminary required some additional items, in order to approve this plan. The basic MAP proposal was the same. However, new documents were required by the seminary to gather data at the new location. A new approval was also required from Risen Christ Lutheran Church before I could move forward with this plan. Once the new paperwork requirements were completed, I was set to begin the same process noted above in gathering the volunteer participants in the MAP. On September 2, 2018, I introduced the subject to the Risen Christ Sunday Bible class. I explained the topic was resurrection theology and gave a brief synopsis of the information being covered. I also explained to the class my need for volunteer participants in the data-gathering part of the project. As before, I

explained participation was strictly voluntary, would be completely anonymous, and the volunteers were free to end their participation at any time. At Risen Christ Lutheran Church and at Rock Island Arsenal, all parts of the data gathering process were identical. Five more individuals volunteered to participate in the study. After all the participants in the study signed the release forms, I began their initial interviews, completing them all prior to the first Bible study class. I recorded all the interviews on my personal cell phone as before. At the end of the Bible study, only four volunteers remained to participate in this MAP. Along with the three participants from Rock Island Arsenal, I ended the data gathering portion with a total of seven participants in the interview portion of the MAP.

The first Bible study on resurrection theology began September 9, 2018. As at Rock Island Arsenal, the resurrection Bible study at Risen Christ was well-attended, with approximately 50 people in attendance. It seems there is a wealth of interest from Christians on the subject of eschatology. I have heard numerous comments over the years about the popularity of Bible studies on the book of Revelation and the subjects of eternal life, Jesus' Second Coming, and the like. The execution of the Bible Study at Risen Christ Lutheran went much the same as at the Bible study at Rock Island Arsenal. There were also some differences. The chief difference was that at the church there was a retired pastor who attended the study. He asked some very pointed questions from the Bible during the course of the five weeks of the study at the church. The people who attended the Bible study at the Arsenal did not ask as many specific questions. The main difference in the two groups is that those who attended the Bible study at the Arsenal were a heterogenous mix of people from different backgrounds and different denominations. They were used to Bible studies offered from Army Chaplains who were not of their denomination. Many of these folks who attended at the Arsenal did not appear to have a deep knowledge of

Scripture. A few did, but it seemed apparent many others did not. The Bible study group at Risen Christ Lutheran Church clearly had a better grasp of Scripture. They were also a homogenous group of people, as we might expect at a church setting. They were a group of the same denomination, had listened to sermons and attended Bible study from the same individuals with similar theological training for a number of years. As the next chapter will show, a greater percentage of those who volunteered to participate in the data-gathering portion at Risen Christ answered the initial interview questions correctly than did those who participated at the Arsenal Bible study. It would appear those who attended the Bible study at Risen Christ were more familiar with the biblical teachings and had a more precise understanding of what the Bible teaches with regard to resurrection theology.

As I mentioned above, a retired LCMS pastor attended the Risen Christ Bible study on resurrection theology. One of his questions was about the Final Judgment. This question caught me off-guard. He wanted to know how “If we are saved by grace through faith, how can we be judged based on our works?” This question was based on Rev. 20:12, “The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.” His question pitted faith against works by which we are judged in the final judgment. This question caught me off-guard mainly because this topic of resurrection theology is not a complete end-all collection of eschatological doctrines of the Bible. Nor does this Bible study answer all the questions posed in eschatology, much less address all the specific questions about all manner of the end times and the Day of Judgment. The answer to this question from the retired pastor is that the Christian has nothing to fear in the final judgment for the sake of Christ and faith in him. The retired pastor did not seem to accept this answer. I told him we would address the question again the next week. The next week I brought along to class the third volume of *Christian Dogmatics* by Dr. Francis Pieper and

read to the class from Pieper regarding this question. This satisfied the pastor and I brought Pieper along to the Bible study each day as reference if needed.

The resurrection theology Bible study went along for the next weeks without incident. I completed the post-study interviews with my five participants after the class was over. The conclusions drawn from the responses of the participants in this MAP are shown in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

EVALUATION

As noted above, the research for this MAP was conducted at two locations; Rock Island Arsenal, Rock Island, Illinois and Risen Christ Lutheran Church, Davenport, Iowa. The data gathering at both locations was done one year apart from the other, with Rock Island Arsenal data gathering in September and October 2017 and at Risen Christ in September and October 2018. I will make some general observations on the two groups and their responses to the interview questions. Then we will look at each interview question individually and consider the participants' responses to the questions.

Comparing the Two Groups

The make-up of the group of volunteer participants from Rock Island Arsenal Bible study was a mixture of Protestant denominations. This is often the case in a ministry to the military context. The denominations of the participants included Baptists, Wesleyan Church, Protestant non-denominational, and Evangelical. One might expect differing responses from this group compared to the participants from the Lutheran church. In my data gathering, this turned out to be true. The main area where the data showed a difference between the groups was in the second part to each question, "What source or sources shaped your belief?" Every single participant in the Rock Island Bible study had sources other than the Bible which shaped what they believed about heaven or resurrection. In addition to the Bible, one respondent said, "Just being able to read the Bible and experience with other believers." This respondent also added that Christian books were important to what they believed. The comment was "You may have different writers come up with different books." This person also commented, "It's all Christian books." Christian books separate from the Bible formed the beliefs of every single respondent at this Bible study.

Another participant said, “I’ve read books where people said they died and were declared dead, and went to heaven, and they describe it as very physical, very beautiful.” Another participant said much the same, “I read some stuff about it so beyond just the Bible, what the Bible says about it” (referring to heaven). Another participant from the Rock Island Bible study added, “I just believe I have made a connection with Christ in the supernatural spiritual world wherein I believe that he lives in my heart.” This same person said, “I’m reading a lot of the Christian books that support there’s an afterlife.”

The participants in the data gathering from Risen Christ Lutheran Church had much different answers to the question about what shaped their beliefs on the subject. They did not include any sources to their beliefs in their answers to the interview questions other than God’s Word. Each participant said the sources to their beliefs were “the Bible,” or “Bible studies,” or “sermons.” One participant at Risen Christ added “Lutheran Church Missouri Synod” helped shape what they believed. No other books or alternative sources were identified by any of the four participants at Risen Christ that shaped their beliefs about resurrection theology.

Some conclusions one might make from this very stark difference between the two groups is a different focus of the foundation of our theology in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, as compared to other denominations. Holy Scripture is the “presupposition for Lutheran theological reflection as that theology is rooted in Holy Scripture.”¹ Other Christian Protestant denominations may not have this type of theological focus. Another conclusion one might make from the answers given by the volunteer participant group from Risen Christ is that they have had faithful pastors over the years that have not strayed from the doctrines of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Having personal knowledge of the pastors Risen Christ has had in the

¹ Nafzger, *Confessing the Gospel*, 1:26.

last few years contributes to the idea that having faithful pastors well-grounded in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions generally produce by the grace of God, well-instructed parishioners who generally have a good understand the teachings of the faith. This fact is shown by their members who exhibit good theological knowledge in their answers to the interview questions included in this MAP.

The Interview Questions

What is Your Understanding of Heaven

The first interview question is “What is your understanding of heaven?” This question sought to discover what the MAP participants understood heaven to be prior to the Bible study and also how their knowledge or belief changed after the study. In the initial interview, 100% of the respondents from both groups said in similar ways that heaven is a place we go when we die as Christians. However, specific responses in the initial interviews varied greatly. One respondent said heaven is “the kingdom of God.” Another said “paradise after we die.” Another mentioned “the pearly gates and that there are things that are supposed to be.” Another said, “a place of true peace and true love, our final place.” One participant from the Risen Christ group gave good responses to this question by saying heaven was “what God intended us to be—perfect with bodies and worshipping him and praising him; it’s going to be what God intended for us before the fall.” This response was the only one among the seven individuals interviewed who approached a more complete response about the nature of heaven in regards to eternal life in Christ.

Perhaps it was the wording of this question itself that led to these responses. I asked their beliefs about heaven and not their beliefs about eternal life. The question could have been worded differently: “What do you believe about the nature of eternal life?” I could have also

asked both questions. My feeling is that there would have been confusion in the initial interview if I asked “What do you believe about the nature of eternal life?” and another question “What is your understanding of heaven?” The Bible study addressed the difference in the two questions. But it was the beliefs of the participants about their understanding of heaven, especially the cultural influence of their beliefs about heaven that I wanted to discover in the initial interview. It was the feeling of the MAP advisor that the cultural influence on Christian beliefs about heaven and the afterlife was very important to this topic.

As I mentioned above, the second part to this question, “What source or sources shape your belief about heaven?” showed ways in which the culture influenced what some of the respondents believed about heaven. Christian books, other Christians, and near-death experience stories from other individuals all had an influence on what participants believed about heaven, particularly from the Rock Island Arsenal group who took part in the interviews. Interestingly, no one said television or movies had an influence on their beliefs. Perhaps a good interview question would have been to ask how modern cultural sources influenced their beliefs about eternal life.

With the second interview and the same question, the responses changed. Only one respondent from the Risen Christ group answered correctly, saying “After your study I understand heaven to be either that space above the earth or that place where God dwells.” This is the correct answer based on the actual biblical use of the word heaven, as noted above. Only one of Rock Island Arsenal group’s answers changed from their initial answer, adding the phrase, “when Jesus comes again there’ll be a new heaven and a new earth.” The additional phrase is from the Bible study. The other two from the Rock Island Arsenal group did not change from the first interview to the second. Answers to this question from the remaining members of

the Risen Christ group also changed. From this group, two of the answers on the second interview reflected the teaching of the Bible study. One said “heaven will be still on earth.” Another said, “After the resurrection of the dead, heaven will be on earth.” One person’s response from the Risen Christ group did not change.

The responses from the Risen Christ group “heaven will be still on earth” and “after the resurrection of the dead, heaven will be on earth” expose a defect in the third Bible study. The title “Why We Have an Incomplete Understanding of Heaven” is incorrect and misleading in regards to helping people understand the difference between heaven and eternal life. A clearer and more helpful title of the third study would be “Why We Have an Incomplete Understanding of Eternal Life.” For what follows in the third Bible study are examples from TV and movies that show an incorrect understanding of the meaning of *heaven* in the Bible. These examples were used in the Bible study to show those who attended the class that the culture has affected their understanding of heaven. Then the Bible study goes on to discuss Greek philosophy and Gnosticism to show how a spiritual understanding of heaven has entered the beliefs of some Christians. One of the discussion questions said, “Discuss how the Gnostic beliefs about *heaven* reflect Platonist views of *heaven* mentioned above [emphasis mine]. . . .” Here we clearly see the faulty and confusing teaching in this particular study, which reflected my own faulty and confused understanding of heaven and eternal life that sometimes entered into this study I taught to the two classes.

What the examples from TV and the movies in the Bible study illustrate are wrong understandings of eternal life. It only makes sense that the wrong understanding of *heaven* as the location of eternal life leads to a wrong understanding of the biblical proclamation of the great hope of the Christian, that of the bodily resurrection to eternal life. The Platonist teachings used

as examples in the study have nothing to do with heaven. The Platonist teachings have to do with their understanding of the nature of *eternal life*. In order to help people understand the difference between the meaning of *heaven* and the meaning of eternal life, the Bible study should have stated more clearly that these examples from TV and the movies, along with certain philosophical teachings, have caused some Christians to have an incorrect understanding of the nature of eternal life.

The lack of clarity in the third Bible study then was that at the resurrection, heaven will be on earth. The answers from some of the interview group show this faulty line of thought. Two responses on the second interview noted above said, “heaven will be still on earth” and “after the resurrection of the dead, heaven will be on earth.” The clear biblical teaching is that *eternal life* will be on earth. If this Bible study is used in the future, these corrections need to be made. If the corrections are made, it will lead to a much clearer understanding of eternal life on the part of the participants in the study.

What Happens to the Believer in Jesus When They Die

This interview question sought to discover what the interview participants believed about what happened to their soul and body immediately after they died. Responses for this question varied in the initial interview. From the Rock Island Arsenal group, one said, “What I do hope is that at some point in time I will go, my soul, to heaven and be in heaven- everlasting life.” This is the answer I expected to hear most at the initial interview. However, some answers were more unexpected. Another from the Rock Island Arsenal group said, “I think that they’re greeted by Jesus and I believe that they’re judged for what they’ve done on earth.” Another from this group answered this question by describing in detail what they think about the nature of *heaven* without talking about what happens after they die. From the Risen Christ group, someone said, “I think

maybe it's my own notion of or my understanding the time the time element okay and if there's something of somebody has that you're in the queue waiting for something that doesn't seem right it just seems like you're their number and I know that one.” Three of the respondents (43%) had similar answers like this one: “their bodies remain on earth and their souls leave their body and you are with the Lord.”

The same question in the second interview reflected improved answers on the part of three participants (43%), one from the Rock Island group and two from the Risen Christ group. One from the Rock Island Arsenal group said simply, “Their spirit’s immediately taken from their body and taken before Jesus.” From the Risen Christ group, the above-mentioned unclear response centering around time changed to “You are in the presence of God.” The third improved response is from the Risen Christ group. This person responded, “death is the separation of soul and body . . . the soul goes to temporarily reside with the Lord.” Four of the respondents’ answers did not change from the initial interview, two each from both groups. I believe the reason for the lower percentage of improved answers after the Bible study is the study did not focus on temporal death so much as the nature of resurrection to eternal life. While the Bible study did briefly discuss the sequence of the believer as to their death on earth, the temporary rest of the soul of the individual with God in heaven (as the location of God), and the unification of soul and body on the Last Day, the Bible study did not dwell on this sequence. My assumption going into this MAP was that the misunderstandings of eternal life did not center on what happens immediately after the death of the believer. It is the resurrection to eternal life where the misunderstandings by some believers are found. An addition to a future Bible study using these materials would be to spend more time with this subject to clarify understanding on the part of the attender of the class.

Tell Me What You Think Will Happen to the Earth at the End Times

In the initial interview, this question showed large variation of understandings. The most popular answer was a variation of “I don’t know.” Two of the three individuals from the Rock Island Arsenal group had this initial response to this question. Two of the four persons in the Risen Christ group also offered this answer. Four of seven individuals answered in this way (57%). Three other responses in the initial interview (43%) came close to being correct. One from the Risen Christ group said, “I believe that the Earth will be a place where we will dwell in [the] perfect Earth again as God intended us to have.” Another response from the Risen Christ group stated, “I believe Peter describes that it’s going to be burned and be purified and it’s going to be renewed- reborn to its original glory.” Yet another response from the Risen Christ group said, “would be repaired, would be made new again.” One final response from a participant worthy of comment said, “As long as I don’t die and wake up in hell, that is a good thing!” Indeed. This third question is a very technical question from the Bible that biblical scholars and even Lutheran scholars do not necessarily agree. While the Bible study spent about two sessions on this point, it is surprising that three out of seven participants in the interviews were close to the conclusion reached to this question by the MAP research in the initial interview.

Since I spent about two full sessions on the answer to this question, it is not surprising that all but one of the respondents in the second interview after the Bible study gave a response that the earth would be restored in some way. Eighty-six percent of the participants in both groups together gave improved responses. The answers to this question in the second interview were such that “the earth in the end times is going to be renewed,” as answered one person in the Rock Island Arsenal group. All three of the persons in this group had improved answers to this question in the second interview. Another from this group said, “I think the earth may become heaven, if that makes sense. I think it may become heaven.” Yet another response in the Rock

Island Arsenal group said, “I think what we mostly studied was that the Bible says the Earth will be a new Earth and it will be like heaven is described . . . it’s a re-restoration back to the original.” From the Risen Christ group, one respondent said, “Earth is changed but in order that we’re going to be restored.” This person did not know the answer to this question on the initial interview. Another person from Risen Christ said, “It’s not like going to get rid of everything and re-create it, is to restore everything to its previous proper glory.” The one person whose response did not improve in the second interview was from the Risen Christ group.

How Does Resurrection Play a Part in Our Life Today

The fourth interview question sought to test how the participant integrated resurrection theology into their life. It sought to answer the question of how eternal life affected their lives on this Earth today. This question required a more subjective answer from the interview participants. They answered what resurrection means to them personally. As the individuals gave a more subjective answer, one would expect a varied number of responses. One response from the Risen Christ group was, “Resurrection is the goal.” Another from this group said, “Christian life is based off of Jesus’ body raised after the third day. Because of that we know that our bodies will be raised as well.” Another Risen Christ person answered, “I think that that’s kind of the hope of hopes.” Still another from this group said, “It is a freedom. Jesus said he defeated death and we will, too. Knowing there is more than this earthly life is a very positive thing.” One person from the Rock Island Arsenal group said, “If the resurrection didn’t happen, Christianity totally falls apart. I think that is the most important part to truly prove to people that he was God as he said.” This person who participated in this MAP really understands the biblical teaching of resurrection. All these responses were given during the initial interview before the Bible study.

Resurrection is the “sine qua non” of the Christian faith. We cannot do without it.

Resurrection is central and key to our faith. Did the Bible study make this point clear to those who participated? The answer to this question is “not as well as it could.” Only three out of the seven respondents (43% total; 67% RIA, 25% RC) clearly made responses in the second interview that reflect they understood this point. One of these respondents from the Risen Christ group already understood this point before the Bible study began, as noted above. The other two of these three were in the Rock Island Arsenal group. The participants who understood made such statements as, “I think it’s central to our Christian faith today because if there was no resurrection there was no Jesus. Then I guess Paul said without that your faith is dead, so it’s key.” Another said, “To me it was the pivotal example of what those of us who believe in him and believe in his death and believe in his resurrection. That is what sustains me in life today.” Another positive response from a participant in the Rock Island Arsenal group said, “I think it plays a big part and I don’t think people really talk about it very much that, you know, Jesus was resurrected and we’re all going to be resurrected and I don’t think people really talk about that.” This answer to the question came from the same person who gave a good answer in the interview before the Bible study began.

Those who didn’t get this point (57% total; 33% RIA, 75% RC) clearly said things like, “Resurrection is something to look forward to.” Yes, that is true. One person from the Risen Christ group said, “This means I am not planted in the ground.” This is also true. Another from the Risen Christ group said, “We are here for his purpose. He’s not there for our purpose.” Another respondent from the Risen Christ group again was concerned about time in the answer to this question. The individual said, “It’s a little harder for me because I keep going back to this time thing that God’s time is infinite in our time.” The concept of time seems to be a stumbling block for this individual’s belief in some of these teachings. What the answers from the second

interview tell us here is that it is much harder to understand how Jesus' resurrection makes a difference in our lives today here on earth than it is to believe it is true. All the people who took part in the interviews seem to reflect belief in resurrection. Only three of the seven had an understanding of how that belief affects their lives today.

What Do You Think about the Statement That the World is Evil, but the Spirit is Good?"

The fifth and final interview question sought to find out from the participants in this MAP if they believed the philosophical idea that the world, the physical, and matter were evil, but the spirit or things of the spirit were good, pure, and holy. As noted above, these philosophical ideas contribute to the notion that resurrection can only be spiritual, or with a spiritual body. The physical body, with its lusts and sins, cannot attain to eternal life. Thus, the idea contributes to the wrongly held belief that resurrection is spiritual only and not for the physical body. Paul appears to write against this in 1 Cor. 15. I wanted to test whether or not these ideas were held by the participants in this study and if these ideas contributed to false beliefs regarding resurrection.

The participants in both groups of this MAP had more problems answering this question than any of the five interview questions. There was confusion between the spiritual and evil spirits. Someone from the Risen Christ group said, "Well, there's the Holy Spirit and there's also bad spirits." This person also said, "It's in our nature to be evil," but also said "I don't remember that as being something biblical," meaning the statement about the world being evil and the spirit being good. Another comment from the first interview by a member of the Risen Christ group was, "Those who have been called by the Holy Spirit and given the gift of faith want to do good, but because of their fallen human nature aren't really capable of pulling that off too often." Someone from the Rock Island Arsenal group said, "I just think that biblically it says, 'Separate yourselves from the world.'" Still another from the Rock Island Arsenal group said, "I believe

the physical world is run by demonic forces everywhere around us.” Clearly, there was confusion among all the respondents in this first interview regarding this question.

The Bible study did not clear up the confusion much, with only three of the seven (43% from both groups; 33% RIA, 50% RC) making comments in the second interview that were more along the lines of what they were taught in the Bible study. Only one person from the Rock Island Arsenal group and two from the Risen Christ group had better answers in the second interview. In reference to the question, one from the Risen Christ group responded, “That’s Gnosticism.” This is what they learned in the Bible study. Another from the Risen Christ group said of that question in the second interview, “That’s Plato.” The third respondent, this one from the Rock Island Arsenal group, said, “Not all of Earth is evil or the physical world is evil because it’s part of creation.” The other four participants gave other sorts of answers in the second interview. One from Risen Christ said, “No, we were evil through and through. I mean we sin, our souls in our bodies are imperfect.” Another from Risen Christ said, “The world is only as evil as we allow it to be. How we are making choices God allows [good choices]. The world is full of sin.” Someone from Rock Island Arsenal said, “You know what your flesh, your carnal mind is what relates to the physical world, so we have a choice. I believe my spirit. And my carnal are flesh and I am always at odds with one another because I want to react one way, but spiritually I know I can choose to respond a different way.” Another person from the Rock Island Arsenal group responded, “Not all of it is evil because there are believers, there are people that are always striving to do what’s right.”

Two comments from this last question stand out among the volunteer respondents to the interview questions. As I conducted the initial interviews, taught the Bible studies, and conducted the second interviews, two individuals’ answers to the five questions did not change at

all from the first interview to the second. This total lack of change on the part of these two individuals is somewhat unexpected. I would expect something to improve in their understanding or beliefs about this subject. That did not happen. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. Perhaps they did not understand the Bible studies or my presentation was unclear. Some individuals take new ideas and ruminate on them for a while as they process the information and make it their own. This process of change of understanding may take a long period of time.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This MAP has been a five-year long project to better understand the biblical teaching of resurrection theology. The relevant Bible passages themselves have been the main focus of this project. Numerous books and articles written about the relevant passages have helped in the understanding of these passages. Lutheran doctrinal writings from Luther to the present day have also contributed to a better understanding of resurrection theology. A number of books and articles on the topic of resurrection theology have aided this project to better understand the teaching, to include how a better understanding affects how we look at our faith and interact with our world today. Some of the sources in this effort have been more focused on the subject of the popular misunderstandings or misuse of “heaven.” Some of these sources include television and movies made with a depiction of eternal life that may or may not have any connection to what the Bible teaches on the subject. These were used to try to understand how such sources influence what Christians today believe on the subject. The MAP project sought to tie all these together in a multi-part Bible study. I measured volunteer participants’ understandings about the subject both before and after their attendance at the Bible study, then drawing conclusions from the data.

What the data showed was there is a clear misunderstanding about the nature of eternal life among those who participated the data-gathering portion of this MAP. Only one person of the seven was correct in their understanding of what the Bible teaches about eternal life in the pre-Bible study interview. From this data, we can assume that a similar percentage of the members of our congregations may have similar misunderstandings of this teaching. If true, this is a stunning statistic. Only fourteen percent of the congregation may have a good grasp of the proper

understanding of the great hope of the Christian faith! The great importance of resurrection theology and the resurrection to eternal life for the believer in Jesus has already been demonstrated in this MAP. It would do well for pastors to regularly re-visit this teaching to insure proper understanding on the part of their people. I say re-visit because the data from this MAP also shows that having gone through this Bible study, the post-study interviews showed less than a 50% improvement in the group's understanding. The members of the two groups in the data-gathering of this MAP also had trouble explaining what their belief in the bodily resurrection to eternal life means to them today. In their answers to the initial interview question on this topic, the group members did not specifically refer to a bodily resurrection. Having gone through the study, on the post-study interview question, only three of seven had an improved answer that included bodily resurrection. The biblical teaching of resurrection and what it means to us in our daily lives needs to be taught over and over again. We cannot assume our people have a good grasp on this subject.

An assumption at the beginning of this MAP was the beliefs of the volunteer groups were shaped by extra-biblical sources. The pre-study interviews showed this to be the case, with three of the seven individuals discussing how other books and sources outside the Bible influenced what they believed about eternal life. Interestingly, all three of these individuals were from the Rock Island Arsenal groups of mixed Christian denominations. None of the persons in the Risen Christ group identified any extra-biblical sources as influencing their beliefs about eternal life. Another take-away from this MAP is that some members of our congregations may have beliefs about resurrection that are not biblical. This points us again to regular teaching and preaching about resurrection to help increase understanding, through the power of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of our people.

The pre-study interviews also showed that those who participated in the data-gathering portion of this MAP had some trouble knowing the biblical teaching of the earth in the end times. Six out of seven did not know what would happen to the earth in the end times and could not even venture a guess before the study. As Lutheran scholars and other Bible scholars do not agree whether the earth will be completely destroyed and re-created or purified but not totally destroyed, it would be difficult to expect regular church members to have a good answer to this question. As a pastor, it is my hope that my people would at least have an idea on the subject. Once again, regular teaching and preaching can help in the effort to the understanding of the people in our pews.

What this MAP has shown is no clear understanding on resurrection theology on the part of all those who took part in the interview portion of this MAP. The data showed an improvement in understanding on the part of some who participated. The data also showed the improvement was not widespread as hoped among those who participated in the data-gathering. The typical improvement in understanding was a little less than half (43%) of the participants. While that number shows good improvement, most teachers would likely seek a higher percentage than 43% of their students to successfully learn the subject material being presented.

Some factors contributed to a lower percentage of understanding than was expected. The first factor is that this is not an easy subject. It is difficult for a short five-part Bible study to make a huge impact on the learner. Also in my experience, resurrection theology is not often taught in Bible class. It is not a common topic in Bible studies. As we have seen in this MAP, for some of the participants in the data-gathering portion, there is a large number of sources outside the Bible that affect their beliefs on this subject. Books, movies, television shows, accounts of near-death experiences, and other individuals' opinions all contribute to what the volunteer

participants believe about resurrection. The learning point from the MAP is a more lengthy Bible study on the topic of resurrection theology would be helpful. A longer study would give more time to spend on the topics being presented, allow for longer discussion, more Bible passages being used, and teaching on how the bodily resurrection or the end times teaching from the Bible has meaning for our lives today.

As for me personally, the MAP has greatly increased my knowledge of resurrection theology and the nature of eternal life. The meaning to my own spirituality as it applies to my everyday life has increased immensely. For me, the hope of eternal life in Christ with a physical body on this earth has given me more comfort and hope. My eternal life will not be in a mystical or spiritual body floating around on a cloud. Not only is this a wrong idea, but also such an idea is difficult for a physical being to grasp. After all, we live a physical life in a physical body on a physical earth now. Believing that the resurrection to eternal life in some ways will share the physicality we have now means much more than a spiritual existence somewhere forever.

In addition, this MAP has given me the opportunity to grow in my knowledge of the Scriptures and the teachings of the Lutheran church in general. As a Chaplain and soon to be a pastor again (Lord willing), the work throughout the whole of the Doctor of Ministry program has increased my knowledge and set me up for success in the future as a pastor. As for this topic and the teaching of this Bible study, I see its importance. What this MAP has also shown is the *great importance* of the subject of resurrection theology. It brings a great amount of comfort and hope to the believer. It is the central teaching of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the great hope of the believer in Jesus. I have learned through this process how to present this material in a way that will help the Holy Spirit move the person in the pew or the attender of the Bible study to a better understanding and a closer relationship with the Lord through it.

APPENDIX ONE

Resurrection Bible Study Part One

The Incomplete Understanding of Heaven (and its implications) in the Modern Christian Church

I. Introduction

A. Incomplete Understanding of the nature of eternal life

1. Introduction

- a. “A few years ago, Gabe Lyons published a study of millennials’ perceptions of their parents’ generation when it came to the Christian story. He noted that millennials felt that their parents had a view of Christianity that was primarily negative in tone and vision. It started on a negative note with the fall into sin and ended with Jesus’s death upon the cross. The Christian life thus focused primarily on the need to be saved from sin. But, they asked, **where was the positive vision that the Christian story provided of what God intended for his creation and for our life within it—both now and in the life to come?**” (Charles Arand, “The Incarnation’s Embrace of Creation” p.1)

What is the positive vision of what God intends for his creation now and in eternal life? What sources inform your beliefs? Discuss.

- b. Show video clip of heaven from “It’s a Wonderful Life;” (Joseph, etc. looking at the earth and George Bailey.)

What is this movie clip’s idea of the nature of heaven and those who have died?

- c. “In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain portrays a similar view of Heaven. The Christian spinster Miss Watson takes a dim view of Huck’s fun-loving spirit. According to Huck, “She went on and told all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn’t think much of it.” (Randy Alcorn, “Heaven” p.7)

Do you agree with Miss Watson in this quote that heaven consists of sitting on clouds and playing a harp forever? Why or why not?

- d. Does the following list reflect your beliefs of what eternal life is like? Why or why not?

- Focus on spiritual heaven as eternal life
- Belief that our eternal dwelling place is in a spiritual dimension and not on earth. [L] [SEP]
- Belief that planet earth is basically evil and is beyond restoration.
- Belief that heaven is entirely beyond human comprehension.
- Belief that our experience in eternity will be mostly that of spiritual contemplation and

inactivity.

- Belief that there is no time or linear progression of history.
- Belief that there will be no nations or governments. (Michael Vlach, “Platonism’s Influence On Christian Eschatology” p.8)

e. “Of Americans who believe in a resurrection from the dead, two-thirds believe they will not have bodies after the resurrection.” (Alcorn, “Heaven,” p.112)

Do you agree with the majority cited in this quote? What is the source of such beliefs?

2. Widely held beliefs of eternal life in Christ consisting of a forever life in a “spiritual body” in a heaven in the clouds are not biblical. These beliefs came into the early Church from Greek philosophy. Theologian N.T. Wright explains: “That vision of a nonbodily ultimate “heaven” is a direct legacy of Plato and of those like the philosopher and biographer Plutarch, a younger contemporary of St. Paul, who interpreted Plato for his own day. It is Plutarch, not the New Testament (despite what one sometimes hears!), who suggested that humans in the present life are “exiled” from their true “home” in “heaven.” That vision of the future—as ultimate glory that has left behind the present world of space, time, and matter—sets the context for what, as we shall see, is a basically paganized vision of how one might attain such a future.” (Alcorn, “Heaven” p.112)

Pastor Randy Alcorn agrees with this assessment. In his book “Heaven,” he says, “Plato, the Greek philosopher, believed that material things, including the human body and the earth, are evil, while immaterial things such as the soul and Heaven are good. This view is called Platonism. The Christian church, highly influenced by Platonism . . . came to embrace the “spiritual” view that human spirits are better off without bodies and that Heaven is a disembodied state. They rejected the notion of heaven as a physical realm and spiritualized or entirely neglected the biblical teaching of resurrected people inhabiting a resurrected earth.” (Alcorn, “Heaven” p.52)

In fact, Heaven is never mentioned in the Bible as the eternal dwelling place of the believer. “There is not one single reference in the entire biblical canon (Old and New Testaments) to heaven as the eternal destiny of the believer.” (J. Richard Middleton, “A New Heaven and a New Earth” p.72) Discuss.

3. The full biblical teaching of resurrection to eternal life tells a different story of resurrection to eternal life. The full biblical teaching from the Old Testament through the New Testament reflects eternal life for the believers in Jesus with a resurrected body on a renewed earth.

Job 19:24–26 “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And 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.” What does Job say about his flesh after his death (“skin has been thus destroyed”)?

Is 26:19 “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.” What does Isaiah say about our bodies after death?

Acts 4:1-2 And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon [the disciples], greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” What were Jesus’ disciples proclaiming about Jesus?

Rev. 5:9-10 “And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall **reign on the earth.**” Revelation speaks of the end times and the final victory of Jesus over sin, death, and the devil. What does Revelation 5:10 have to say about those for whom Jesus died?

Do these verses surprise you in relation to eternal life in a spiritual heaven? Why or why not?

Some commonly held beliefs in modern culture and even within Christianity are not thoroughly biblical. The Bible’s picture of life everlasting is with a physical body on the present renewed earth. As we move on in this study, we will look more in depth at the incomplete (and sometimes plain wrong) understanding of eternal life for the believer some Christians have. We will look more closely at the source of these teachings and how they got into the church. We will also look at the complete biblical teaching about the actual nature of heaven and what is the nature of eternal life with God. There are important implications of this teaching for our lives here on earth today.

APPENDIX TWO

Resurrection Bible Study Part Two

II. What the Bible Really says About Eternal Life

A. The word “heaven” is a Bible word

1. Old Testament. Among the different Old Testament Hebrew words for heaven, שָׁמַיִם is the word most commonly used.¹

a. There are two basic meanings of this word in the Old Testament. One meaning is ‘the place where God dwells,’ such as “Out of **heaven** he let you hear his voice” (Deuteronomy 4:36)

b. The second meaning for this word is ‘the sky or the area above the earth,’ such as: “David did not count those below twenty years of age, for the LORD had promised to make Israel as many as the stars of **heaven**” (1 Chronicles 27:23)

In short, the Old Testament meanings for the word heaven are “the place where God dwells,” or “the sky above the earth.”

2. The Septuagint. The Septuagint (translation of the Old Testament into Greek in use in Jesus day and since) used the Greek word οὐρανός to translate שָׁמַיִם into the Greek. This is important to mention because the Greek word of heaven for this Old Testament translation relates to the Greek word for heaven in the New Testament. Why is this an important connection from the Old Testament to the New Testament?

3. New Testament. The New Testament Greek also uses οὐρανός for heaven.² In the New Testament, the same two basic meanings for heaven from the Old Testament are retained in this word and are the majority of uses, as shown below:

a. **The dwelling place of God.** Mark 1:9–11 “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And **a voice came from heaven**, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

b. **The part of the earth that is above the land.** Hebrews 11:12 “Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the **stars of heaven** and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

¹ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1029.

² James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 53.

c. An additional, but rarely used meaning of οὐρανός in the New Testament is “an intermediate state, in which the faithful are away from the body but present with the Lord.”³ Pastor Randy Alcorn describes the state of believers immediately after death and this intermediate state as follows:

“The dust returns to the ground it come from, and the Spirit returns to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). At death, the human spirit goes either to Heaven or Hell. Christ depicted Lazarus and the rich man as conscious in Heaven and Hell immediately after they died (Luke 16:22–31; see Lutheran Study Bible). Jesus told the dying thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). The apostle Paul said that to die was to be with Christ (Philippians 1:23), and to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). After their deaths, martyrs are pictured in Heaven, crying out to God to bring justice on earth (Revelation 6:9–11).

These passages make it clear there is no such thing as “soul sleep,” or a long period of unconsciousness between life on earth and life in Heaven. The phrase “fallen asleep” (in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and similar passages) is a euphemism for death, describing the body’s outward experience. The spirit’s departure from the body ends our existence on Earth. The physical part of us “sleeps” until the resurrection, while the spiritual part of us relocates to a conscious existence in Heaven (Daniel 12:2–3; 2 Corinthians 5:8). Some Old Testament passages (e.g., Ecclesiastes 9:5) address outward appearances and do not reflect the fullness of New Testament revelation concerning immediate relocation and consciousness after death.” (Randy Alcorn “Heaven,” p.46–47)

d. See 2 Cor. 5:6–8 “So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

From this verse, scholars believe Paul speaks of an intermediate state between this present earth and the new earth to come on the last day. Here in the body we are not in the direct presence of God. Yet at the same time, Paul says we would rather be away from the body and with God. The only place we can be in the presence of God and not in the body is in the intermediate state between our present life on earth and the resurrected life on the renewed earth to come. Explain whether this verse from 2 Corinthians 5 refers to the final state of the resurrected Christian? Why or why not?

e. Phil. 1:21–23 “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Explain whether this verse from Philippians 1 refers to the final state of the resurrected Christian? Why or why not?

³ Ware, 131.

Paul here discussed the difference between staying here in the body doing “fruitful labor,” but desiring to depart and be with Jesus. He then says in verse 24 “to remain in the flesh is more necessary.” Thus biblical scholars infer Paul to mean departing this present earth will also mean leaving the body behind. Putting both these verses together, an intermediate state exists between the now time of this earth and the last day of this earth, upon which the dead will be raised and the final judgment will take place at the end time.

This rarely used meaning of heaven has wrongly become the major understanding of eternal life for some Christians. However, “heaven” and its proper meaning must be put into its rightful place within the biblical story and the Bible texts, without romanticization or incorrect usage.

f. Check on learning: Explain the biblical meaning of heaven from the above discussion.

B. Resurrection of the Dead on the Last Day

1. See Revelation 20:11–15 “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

The book of Revelation describes the end times of the earth. There is far too much material in Revelation regarding the whole of this period of time to discuss for the sake of this present study. However, for the aims of this study, it is worth discussing the specific point in time when the believer will be raised in body and soul. At the appointed time, says Revelation 20:13, the dead will be raised to face the Judgment at the end time. If we bring what has been said above to join with this verse, the body of the believer will be raised from its state of death and be united with the soul, which has been residing in the presence of God (from the above discussion we may rightly call this heaven) since the point of earthly death. Rev. 20:5 says those who do not believe do not experience the interim state the believer will enjoy before the final resurrection. The resurrected body and soul of all persons will stand for judgment. The good news for the believer in Christ is they need not fear this judgment (according to 20:6, “over such the second death has no power”).

Would it be right to say the soul of the believer enjoys the presence of God immediately after death until it unites with its resurrected body for the Judgment and eternal life after? Why or why not? Does the believer have anything to fear from this judgment? How does this understanding affect our lives today?

The Bible word heaven has great meaning for the believer in Jesus. As noted above, it describes the sky above the earth and the location of God. A little-used alternate meaning is the intermediate state of the believer between earthly death and his or her bodily resurrection on the

last day. However, throughout the Bible, the main focus of eternal life in Christ is the resurrection of the body and life on this renewed earth forever. The next part of this study will look more in-depth at how an incomplete understanding of eternal life came to be a commonly held belief today. Parts four and five of this study will discuss why the full biblical teaching of resurrection and eternal life is important and what it means to us for our lives today.

APPENDIX THREE

Resurrection Bible Study Part Three

III. Why We Have an Incomplete Understanding of Heaven

- A. Modern Culture. A number of sources from American culture reflect what some modern Christians believe about eternal life. Television and movies can have a significant impact on what people think about the teachings of the church. The following are some examples of heaven depicted in our culture that reflect what some believe about heaven.
1. TV
 - a. Highway to Heaven intro clouds, orchestra music, chimes. What does this opening give you mind to of what this show’s creator thinks is the nature of heaven? Is this a biblical view?
 - b. Play “Simpson’s” clip of heaven. What does this clip tell us about the Simpson’s idea of heaven? Does it reflect what you think when you think of heaven?
 2. Movies
 - a. “Ghost” Patrick Swayze’s character dies but spiritually comes back to interact with his wife. He is there but no one can see him, except for the already dead or certain others. Show final scene where he walks off into the light. How does this clip reinforce the cultural idea of eternal life?
 - b. “It’s a Wonderful Life.” Heaven is depicted as in the stars and inhabitants thereof are stars that blink when they talk.

Would you say these examples are an accurate depiction of how most television shows and movies show heaven? Discuss whether or not TV and movies have had an influence on what you believe about heaven.
- B. Greek Philosophy. Greek philosophical ideas have had a great influence on Western thought, including how some in the Christian church view heaven in 2017. The influence of Greek thought, especially that of Plato and his adherents, entered the early Christian church and continues to shape some believer’s beliefs about heaven to this day. Read these three quotations and answer the questions below.
1. Plato
 - a. “Christian tradition continued to assume this union [of spirit and body in resurrection], until the third century C.E., Platonic ideas of the soul’s great superiority to the body promoted the idea of the survival of souls apart from bodies.” (Jeffery Russell, “A History of Heaven” p.15)
 - b. “Remember that it was precisely the question of the resurrection of the body that brought

to a premature close St. Paul's sermon on the Areopagus [Acts 17:32–34]. The almost universal Hellenistic [Greek] rejection of the body and the identification of mind and man served to render the idea of the resurrection of the body thoroughly objectionable to the average Hellenistic mind." ("Neoplatonism and the Early Christian Church," p.56)

c. "Thus Augustine [early church father AD 354–430] was attracted to the spiritual interpretation of the kingdom we have already seen in Origen [early church father AD 185–254]. Indeed, ultimately for Augustine, the kingdom of God consists in eternal life with God in heaven." (Michael Vlach, "Platonism's Influence On Christian Eschatology," p.4")

How does the philosophy of Platonism describe the difference between body and soul? How did Platonism shape the beliefs of eternal life for some in the early church? How do these beliefs agree with modern cultural ideas that continue to shape the views of eternal life today (both in and out of the church)?

2. Gnosticism

a. The gnostics held the dualist belief that the material body is the evil prison of the soul, which must break free of matter in order to be saved." (Russell, "A History of Heaven," p.40)

b. "Irenaeus [early church father AD 200] wrote extensively against Gnostic Christians who felt that the present world was intrinsically bad and probably the work of an evil god." (Colleen Mc Dannel and Bernhard Lang, "Heaven: A History," p.50.)

If Gnostic Christians believed the world was bad, what is your thoughts about how they viewed the soul?

Discuss how the Gnostic beliefs about heaven reflect Platonist views of heaven mentioned above and how Gnosticism reinforces an incomplete view of eternal life for the believer in Jesus.

C. Annihilationism. Another false belief makes the final step in the contemporary incomplete view of heaven with the teaching of annihilationism. This belief fits hand in glove with the teachings of Plato and the Gnostics. Annihilationism is the belief that our present world will be destroyed at the end times. When the Father in heaven purifies the creation damaged by sin, the present earth will be destroyed by fire. This belief reinforces the spiritual nature of eternal life, also reinforcing the belief that the physical is bad and sinful, while the spirit is good.

a. "We see this continuity of the old and new also with respect to the rest of creation. Scripture repeatedly talks about how heaven and earth will pass away and give way to a new heaven and a new earth. Notice that the earth is present in both cases, but it becomes a new earth. What passes away is the sin and corruption of this world. 2 Peter 3:10–13 is of special interest as it is often cited as supporting some sort of an annihilationist view of the end times. But even Peter here draws upon the time when the earth was destroyed by the flood. But it was the same earth (now purified) that emerged from the flood. So also here. This view would seem supported by Paul's contention that creation will be set free from its enslavement

to corruption (Rom 8: 19–21). Again, all of this does not mean that there aren't differences between the first creation and the new creation. But those differences are within boundaries of creation." (Charles Arand, "The Incarnation's Embrace of Creation" p.8)

b. See Rom 8:19–21.

"For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the **creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption** into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

How does this passage shed light on other Bible passages which appear to support annihilationism (destruction of the earth in the end times)?

c. "In striking contrast to Luther, much of our hymnody and thought encourages us to believe that the creator God abandons his creation, and that the Christian hope is to leave the creation for a non-earthly, heavenly existence. Thus a gnostic or dualistic goal of escape from the created order, which is antithetical to Pauline Christianity, is actually portrayed in many of our hymns and prayers as the center of the Christian hope. The result is the distortion, not merely of this or that element of the scriptural narrative, but of the biblical story as a whole. The grand narrative of the Bible moves from creation, to fall, to God's redemption of his creation through Christ. God is both creator and redeemer of his creation, and the biblical story, which begins with God's creation of heaven and earth (Gn 1–2), climaxes with the renewed heaven and earth (Rv 21–22). By replacing the Pauline hope of creation's renewal with the dualistic hope of escape from creation in heaven, we lose the coherence of this entire biblical narrative. (James Ware, "Paul's Hope and Ours: Recovering Paul's Hope of the Renewed Creation," p.135)

The Bible begins with the creation of this world in Genesis 1. The Bible ends with the depiction of the renewed creation upon which resurrected believers will live in Revelation 21–22. The ultimate for the Christian is not leaving this body and this earth to live forever in a spiritual heaven, while this sin-stained earth is destroyed. Through the work of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, he had redeemed us and this present earth. The endpoint for the believing Christian is eternal life in a physical body on the present earth! The fourth Bible study in this series will look more in-depth as to why the complete biblical teaching of heaven and resurrection is important for the believer.

APPENDIX FOUR

Resurrection Bible Study Part Four

Resurrection Bible Study Part III (Con't)

a. See Revelation 21:1–5. This passage is relevant to the present discussion. Yes, “the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” as the author states. However, as the passage continues, it is “the old order of things [that] has passed away.”

“Echoing our Lord’s statement John goes on to say, “the first things passed away” (aperchomai). Then the one sitting on the throne said: “Behold, I make all things new.” The two statements go together. The second statement does not say that God makes all new things, as if creating everything ex nihilo, [out of nothing] but that God makes all things (panta) that currently exist new (kaina). This second statement helps us understand^[17] the first statement. When old things are made new things, then the old things “passed away.” They no longer exist as the old things (cf. 2 Cor 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”). Brighton comments, “God will not annihilate the present creation, cast it out as some trash, but rather he will, by recreation, transform the old into the new.” John goes on to depict the future new Jerusalem and the future garden of Eden with the tree of life. It is all very physical and material, a future heaven on earth.” (“Daddy, Will Animals Be in Heaven?” The Future New Earth,” Concordia Journal Volume 40, p.153.) Comment?

The Bible begins with the creation of this world in Genesis 1. The Bible ends with the depiction of the renewed creation upon which resurrected believers will live in Revelation 21–22. The ultimate for the Christian is not leaving this body and this earth to live forever in a spiritual heaven, while this sin-stained earth is destroyed. Through the work of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, he had redeemed us and this present earth. The endpoint for the believing Christian is eternal life in a physical body on the present earth! The fourth Bible study in this series will look more in-depth as to why the complete biblical teaching of heaven and resurrection is important for the believer.

IV. Why the Full Biblical Teaching of Resurrection is Important

The full biblical teaching of resurrection brings with it a number of important facets that the incomplete teaching of a “spiritual heaven” does not include. When we embrace the full biblical teaching, there is much meaning for our lives today and in the future.

“I don’t know how our work for justice for the poor, for remission of global debts, will re-appear in that new world. But I know that God’s new world of justice and joy, of hope for the whole earth, was launched when Jesus come out of the tomb on Easter morning, and I know that he calls his followers to live in him and by the power of his Spirit and so to be new-creation people here and now, bringing signs and symbols of the kingdom to birth on earth as in heaven. The

resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit mean that we are called to bring real and effective signs of God's renewed creation to birth even in the midst of the present age." (N. T. Wright, "Surprised by Hope" p.209).

A. The Full Biblical Teaching Renews Focus on our Physical Bodies

With the philosophical idea that the physical is evil or bad and eternal life consists of only a spiritual resurrection, the human body becomes less important. The full teaching of a bodily resurrection, with eternal life on a renewed earth changes how we look at our present bodies. What this means for us is that how we treat our bodies and how we treat other people will last beyond today. It will last beyond our lives. The work we do for the Lord in the here and now, which is living the life of the believer in Jesus, has an effect for the future, to eternity in bodily form on a redeemed earth. How does a different focus on resurrection and eternal life change how we view "now?"

"Paul speaks of the future resurrections as a major motive for treating our bodies properly in the present time (1 Corinthians 6:14–15), and as the reason not for sitting back and waiting for it all to happen but for working hard in the present, knowing that nothing done in the Lord, in the power of the Spirit, in the present time will be wasted in God's future (1 Corinthians 15:58)." (N. T. Wright, "Surprised by Hope" p.26).

Read 1 Cor. 6:14–15 "By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?"

Read 1 Cor. 15:58 "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." What do these verses tell us about the importance of our bodies today?
What do these verses tell us about the lasting effects of what we do today?

The full biblical teaching of resurrection realigns our focus from a mystical, heavenly goal to a physical eternity. "Salvation is not about God delivering us from our creatureliness. To the contrary, Christ restores us to our creatureliness. . . . In the case of Jesus, the Creator became a male human creature to restore our creatureliness. And he rose and ascended and sits at the right hand of God both as God and as a human creature." (Charles Arand, Back to the Beginning: Creation Shapes the Entire Story," Concordia Journal Spring 2014 p.135). This quote seems to say Jesus makes us human like we were meant to be from the start. Comments?

Luther's Small Catechism (2017) p.225ff

224. What will happen to me when I am raised from the dead on the Last Day? I will enjoy being with Christ in His new creation, in body and soul, forever.

764 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

765 Matthew 25:34 Then the King will say to those on His right, "Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

766 Psalm 16:11 You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

225. What will happen to this world after we Christians are raised from the dead? The present creation, like our own bodies, will be set free from its bondage to corruption, and God will create a new heaven and a new earth.

767 Romans 8:19–23 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

768 James 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

769 Revelation 21:5 And He who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

226. What will the new creation be like? The new creation is described in ways that are both familiar and mysteriously unfamiliar. The Bible describes a “new heaven and a new earth” in terms much like creation was before the fall, but entirely new and also different in certain ways.

770 2 Peter 3:13 But according to His promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

771 Isaiah 65:17–18 For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.

772 Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

773 Revelation 22:3, 5 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His servants will worship Him. ... And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

774 Matthew 22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

775 Isaiah 60:19–20 The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.

Read 2 Peter 3:5–13, where Peter compares the end-time cleansing of the creation by fire with the cleansing of the earth by the flood in Noah’s day. In Revelation 21:1–5, John describes the new heaven and the new earth as the new Jerusalem.

APPENDIX FIVE

Resurrection Bible Study Part Five

Resurrection Bible Study Part IV (Con't)

Why the Full Biblical Teaching of Resurrection is Important

“Paul speaks of the future resurrections as a major motive for treating our bodies properly in the present time (1 Corinthians 6:14–15), and as the reason not for sitting back and waiting for it all to happen but for working hard in the present, knowing that nothing done in the Lord, in the power of the Spirit, in the present time will be wasted in God’s future (1 Corinthians 15:58).” (N. T. Wright, “Surprised by Hope” p.26).

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Read 1 Cor. 15:58 “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” What do these verses tell us about the importance of our bodies today?
What do these verses tell us about the lasting effects of what we do today?

The full biblical teaching of resurrection realigns our focus from a mystical, heavenly goal to a physical eternity. “Salvation is not about God delivering us from our creatureliness. To the contrary, Christ restores us to our creatureliness. . . . In the case of Jesus, the Creator became a male human creature to restore our creatureliness. And he rose and ascended and sits at the right hand of God both as God and as a human creature.” (Charles Arand, *Back to the Beginning: Creation Shapes the Entire Story*,” *Concordia Journal* Spring 2014 p.135). This quote seems to say Jesus makes us human like we were meant to be from the start. Comments?

B. Renews Focus on Importance of This Earth

“Everything that God does takes place within this creation for the sake of this creation. Everything begins here; everything ends here. The first thing that the Bible says about God is that God creates (“In the beginning, God created . . .” Gn 1:1). And the last thing the Bible says about God is that he creates (“Behold, I make all things new” Rv 21:5). Everything in between moves from the first creation story to the second creation story. In this way, creating encompasses the full scope of God’s activity. This means then that “A doctrine of redemption is meaningful only when it swings within the larger orbit of a doctrine of creation. . . . and so God addresses us and interacts with us only through his creation. We are part of his creation. And so we cannot extract ourselves from it or transcend it to deal with God apart from creation. It is here within creation and through creation that God deals with us. We deal with God only through creation (e.g., our bodies, ears, mouths, and brains).” (Charles Arand, “The Incarnation’s Embrace of Creation” p.3–4).

“The hope of Israel, expressed variously in the Torah, Prophets, and Psalms, was not for a rescue operation that would snatch Israel (or humans or the faithful) from the world, but for a rescue

operation that would be for the world, an operation through which redeemed humans would play once more the role for which they were designed. It was the hope for a renewed world in which justice and mercy would reign forever. Jesus was explaining not that this hope had been abandoned in favor of “saved souls going to heaven,” but that this hope for new creation had been fulfilled in a shockingly unexpected way.” (N. T. Wright, “Surprised by Hope” p.146).

To end this line of thought, Wright says “What creation needs is neither abandonment nor evolution but rather redemption and renewal: and this is both promised and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead” (N. T. Wright, “Surprised by Hope” p.107). How do these quotes change how we look at creation?

For this discussion we also look at the passages from Genesis that tell us the instructions God gave to Adam and Eve about taking care of the garden of Eden:

Gen 1:27–28 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule (person of influence) over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Gen 2:15 Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. What do these verses say about what God’s original purpose(s) for mankind?

Now that we have seen that this present world is not going to be annihilated, but renewed; and this creation of which we are a part is our “forever home,” creation becomes more important. Instead of thinking about Greenpeace or treehuggers as “a little off” or thinking of creation as ours to do with it as we please (in a destructive way), understanding the importance of creation as a practice of faith gives us a biblical perspective on taking care of creation. How might we be “people of influence” with creation, with a view to the practice of faith?

C. Brings Whole Bible Together as One Integrated Teaching

A line of thought running through this entire study is that through the renewed focus on the full biblical teaching of eternal life consisting of life in our perfected bodies on this perfected earth, the Bible becomes integrated from beginning to end. Instead of the false idea that the Old Testament contains some nice children’s stories about Noah’s Ark and Daniel in the lion’s den, which may or may not have a connection to the New Testament, or that we can ignore the Old Testament altogether, we now see how important the Old Testament is to the New. Everything from Genesis to Revelation, for the sake of Jesus, now becomes whole and connected together.

Ephesians 1:10 says it all: God’s plan was to unite all things in the Messiah, things in heaven and on earth. (N. T. Wright, “The Day the Revolution Began” p.157).

“With all wisdom and understanding, 9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.”

“Hope of the resurrection is thus able to inspire believers to expect that God’s original purposes for human life will ultimately come to fruition, despite what suffering we experience in the present . . . Resurrection is the ultimate completion of God’s purposes.” (J. Richard Middleton,

“A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology,” p.154)

Comment on how the full biblical teaching of resurrection changes your view of the unity of the two Testaments?

D. Changes Our Understanding of the Meaning of Salvation

“But what do we mean by “salvation?” Some clarity here will be important. For many contemporary Christians, “salvation” either refers to going to heaven when you die, which is simply not what the Bible means by this term, or is a synonym for what theological tradition has called “justification,” being made right with God through the forgiveness of sins. . . . This latter use of “salvation” is not wrong, but it leaves out a great deal. It focuses on the beginning of a right relationship with God through the deliverance from the penalty of sin . . . it is limited by its individual focus and its fixation on the notion of deliverance. . . In the Bible, salvation is a comprehensive reality, both future and present, and affects every aspect of existence.” (J. Richard Middleton, “A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology,” p.79)

“And with all this we lift up our eyes and realize that when the New Testament tells us the meaning of the cross, it gives us not a system, but a story; not a theory, but a meal and an act of humble service; not a celestial mechanism for punishing sin and taking people to heaven, but an earthly story of a human Messiah who embodies and incarnates Israel’s God and who unveils his glory in bringing his kingdom to earth as in heaven.” (N. T. Wright, “The Day the Revolution Began” p.415). Do these quotes change your understanding of “salvation? Why or why not?

Not only does full biblical understanding of resurrection adjust the typical understanding of salvation, but also we can see how this fuller understanding puts us within God’s story, not God into our story. Putting God into our story is person-focused, not God-focused.

Throughout these last few weeks, we have looked at the incomplete and the complete biblical teaching of eternal life. Hopefully you have learned from this study. We have just begun to scratch the surface in this study. Below are some resources you can look to for developing this topic as you see fit:

Alcorn, Randy. *Heaven*. Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004.

Middleton, J. Richard. *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology*. Baker Publishing House, 2014.

Wright, N.T. *The Day the Revolution Began*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2016.

Wright, N.T. *Surprised by Hope*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008.

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APPENDIX SIX

Participant Pre-Bible Study Interview Responses

1. What is your understanding of heaven?

Participant A: My understanding of heaven is, is where my mind is saying the pearly gates and that there are things supposed to be... a place of true peace and true love, our final place. There should be no more pain. There should be no more anything. Everything should be good. Everyone should be happy, singing praises, and just being glorified.

Participant B: My understanding of heaven is, of course, the after-life, life after this body that God has blessed me with. Once I depart this body and I die in the flesh, I will re-arrive in the spirit, which I believe is when I will be in heaven. My idea of heaven is a place where those of us who follow Jesus Christ and believe that he died on the cross for our sins over 2,000 years ago, and we believe that with all of our heart. And we know in our heart of hearts that he is the Son of God and he is the one who was sacrificed for our sins, I believe that he resides in heaven as well. He will accept me. He's the one who makes the determination before our Father God. He's the one who makes the determination as to whether we would enter heaven's doors or not.

Participant C: My understanding of heaven would be, that it's God's home and His home for all of the believers that He deems are worthy to be a part of His kingdom who can come, who have no evil in them. No one with evil in them can go there. He's building or has built a place for all of His children there, and in Revelation, I think, it describes the streets of gold, jewels and just absolute beauty. And then I've heard testimonies of people like near death experiences and stuff and other people who believe that they've been transported there and revealed heaven. I've read some stuff just about there being kind of a way for people who have died who are there can see earth going on. Just that it's a place that... What He creates for each person is kinda different and then when you go there, you have a job. I read some stuff about it so beyond just the Bible, what the Bible says about it.

Participant D: My understanding of heaven. The Lord is waiting for us when it's our time everybody's going to be dying but those that have believe will go to heaven that was bad don't have to leave him in God the Trinity will be judged and go to hell what is heaven consist of its are perfect What God intended us to. To be perfect. Bodies and worshipping him and praising him and, Yeah it's going to be what God intended us before the fall

Participant E: Well, I think I have an issue the absence of sin and so as we are in heaven we will not have worries will not dwell upon. Her relatives down below or whatever I guess it transcends all understanding. We really won't know until we get there all those things. I guess that would that in itself I guess what I would say is it there is there was also know that the notion that we have the things we like on the surface is what will get to do. I don't think there's such a thing of, I think it's our ability to do things as mortal are our brains how they process and over time how things have changed since the fall; our brains power is diminished so much that you know it's is just totally different will ever be different..

Participant F: Heaven is the kingdom of God and it is a place that I aspire to to live with him for return. And get to do so through the holy innocent and suffering and death in Blood of his son Jesus Christ my Lord.

Participant G: Paradise after we die. Eternal. No fear, no pain. Have to die to get there.

What shapes your beliefs about heaven?

A: Just being able to read the Bible and just experience with other believers and just having... Being able to share each other religion. Cause like I say is, there's no way I can say I ever read the Bible from front to end, but there is scripture I could quote, so I would say more the Bible is more of the source. And they also have other sources out there that you can actually go that you can use. You may have different writers come up with different books. You know what I'm saying? They try to tell a story what I call it is, that being saying is they trying to break it down. It's in the Bible, you can read the scripture, but then they try to break it down so you can have a better understanding of it. 'Cause I really don't have any title of the books. I just have different ones, different types.

B: Well, of course, the Bible is primarily my main source. And the scripture in John, "No one comes to the Father but by me." And John 3:16, it's what shaped my form of heaven. And then other than sources or other than actual physical sources, I just believe I have made a connection with Christ in the supernatural spiritual world wherein I believe that he lives in my heart.

C: Mainly the Bible, what's revealed in the Bible, but then also just supported from what other people, near death experiences and then like I said I read a book, I can't remember what it was called, but it was from someone who said that she was revealed some stuff about heaven.

D: The Lutheran Missouri Synod. I'm just through years of church and church and Bible study I have and believe you know that.

E: Well, I guess the source that I would say is maybe in a different statement. Let me back up. Well since God can't be in the presence of sin and that and that aspect. When Moses went up and he had to be put into the cleft of the of the cave or of the outcropping just so we could not see the glory of God.

F: The Bible. Well as all the rest of everything I know comes from the Bible in one way shape or form so I think yeah we didn't

G: My faith. My Christian upbringing. Participation in church and studies.

2. What happens to the believer in Jesus when they die?

A: What I think they do is, the believers right now and believers that as they die, like I said, it says, "If you repent your sins then you shall be saved." If you live that Christian life path, once you die it's pretty much is... My understanding is, my mind is yes, they say you're going home, but my understanding is you're just in a holding place. You're in a resting place, because now you're not resting, because you done passed or you've died, or terminology being used is. But at the same time is when he come back is when you'll go to that. We go back, we talk about heaven, that's when we all will go on Judgement Day. That's when, it'd be determined then. That's where my belief is at. What I do hope is that at some point in time I will go, my soul, to heaven and be in heaven- everlasting life.

B: Well, I believe... For some people, they believe heaven is on earth as well. You can live a hell and a heaven on earth. I don't believe that. I believe you can only live heaven away from this world, from this earth because of all the devastation that occurs. When you get to heaven, there's not gonna be any devastation, there's not gonna be any suffering, there's not gonna be pain, there's not gonna be any disgruntlement. I believe it's gonna be filled with heavenly angels and beautiful melodic music. And I believe that what Jesus says, "I go before you to prepare a house for you." I wanna believe that I have my own house in heaven, but as far as the intricate details of how I will live in heaven, I just believe it would be unspeakable joy.

C: I think that they're greeted by Jesus and I believe that they're judged for what they've done on earth and the Lord will show them if they've done... Just reveal everything that they've done and probably explain to them all their questions that they have from being on earth about why certain things happened and then accept them into His kingdom.

D: So their bodies remain on Earth and their souls leave their body and you are with the Lord. And whatever time frame eventually the last trumpet Jesus will come down and our bodies will be raised from the dead and those who are alive will come after and we'll join our spirits.

E: I know I'm going to be in heaven cuz I believe in Jesus and his resurrection saved he. He's justifies me and his sin atoned for my sins and that belief in and that is one save me on the baptism when I was a Youngster to carry it to say but I'm going to say the same thing is when when we when we are separated from our body. I know Jesus is supposed to be our intercessor and. I guess I'm a little foggy in how all that works in the end so was I in my same notion that it's going to be an instantaneous saying waiting in line but there's scriptures says that the book of life is going to be read to us and all of our sins will be known and Jesus will I think- But our sins are forgotten and I didn't reveal but the book of life has that I guess that's what you're going to help me with pastor. I don't know if I'm helping.

F: Death is the separation of body and soul so that the Earthly remains remain here in this all goes with Christ in heaven.

G: They are with Jesus in paradise. Romantic ideal that grandfather will meet me in heaven and say let me show you around.

What shapes your belief about this question?

A: Sources on that would go back to the Bible and just saying is it's just different things I, as a person is going into my faith in it and at the same time is having a better understanding is that my minister maybe give out a word and play that. The Bible studies. It could just be a man's group or we just... Any time we can have a little fellowship, talk about things. Everyone has their different opinions on it, but like you said, it's based off what my belief is, that one day, yes I will lay to rest but when he come back again, that's when we all go to heaven.

B: Sometimes I forget the actual scriptures, but it's all Biblical. I believe the Bible is truth from beginning to end. Even though, I have to admit, I haven't read the whole Bible. But I have read enough of the Bible and I continue to stay in the Bible. And what I read helps me through my daily walk on this earth. And when I use its methodology and its principles, and I apply it to my life, it works.

C: The Bible. I'm trying to think of a particular verse about just that God judges the living and the dead and hearing people's testimonies, too, about near death experiences about being met with a vision of their entire life. About what they've done and the decisions they've made and the things they've done and also my own personal relationship with the Lord. I think that it's really important to be obedient because we're basically vessels here for the Lord and that what we do and if we're obedient or not determines a lot whether the Lord's determination for... I think, I believe there's levels in heaven too. Some people can just have accepted Christ and they also make it to heaven, but then there's people who are obedient to the Lord and true followers of Jesus and spread the gospel and make that their life's purpose and really, really, really delve into that, I think they have a different place in heaven. And I just believe that just from my own walk with the Lord, just bring me deeper and deeper into the word and just impressing upon my heart the importance of being obedient to what He says just because I am His child. And just that that's important on the other side that you're obedient and listen to Him. And so that's why I think that that's really important.

D: The biblical, inspired word of God.

E: I think maybe it's my own notion of or my understanding the time the time element okay and if there's something of somebody has that you're in the queue waiting for something that doesn't seem right it just seems like you're their number and I know that one.

F: The Bible.

G: Bible study, sermons. Jesus' words in NT.

Question 3: Jesus talked about the new heaven and the new earth in the end times. Tell me what you think will happen to the present earth in the end times?

A: I really don't know. That's like a big, wild bang. I can only think that it would just be non-existent. I believe, because right now when he do come back he will actually pretty much... We'll

all be in heaven. You'll be in heaven or like the other place would be hell, but I think, what I'm saying is, all believers will be in heaven, all non-believers be in hell. But it's a fact of it is that too, but I think there would be... To me, my mind is saying that there would be no earth.

B: Well, yeah, I don't know, but I feel that I believe I know a portion of what will happen is those of us who are still... Because on earth, those, like my relatives who've already died and gone on to heaven, they're gonna join Jesus. The ones that believed are gonna join up with Jesus and we're all gonna meet him in the sky. I'm trying to understand... Basically, the new earth is what you're asking and the new heaven? This earth, okay. Yes. I don't know. I don't know.

C: I believe it says in the Bible that it will be restored to all its glory. I believe that's what it says. I honestly don't really concern myself that much about what's gonna happen, I know that He's gonna come back at some point whether I'm alive or not. So I just worry more about just spreading His love more than exactly what's gonna happen to the earth. I know that the Lord created it perfectly and it's fallen from grace and the prince of darkness is the prince of the earth and he's running things, that's why there's so much evil, destruction, earthquakes, storms. So he's destroying the earth from what it was originally created to be. And so yeah, I believe that the Bible says that He's gonna restore it into all its glory and perfection. But like I said, I don't really worry that much about that, I think more about what's happening right now.

D: I believe that the Earth will be a place where we will dwell in perfect bodies in perfect in the perfect Earth again as God intended us to have.

E: I don't have opinion. Well he said that would be repaired would be made new again. This is our bodies are made new again like a 30 year old person or 28 year old is in your prime. I guess if the garden represented what Earth was and he was in one with God than that could be a fun. I wish it was something different not necessarily a planet with ground and all that.

F: I believe Peter describes that it's going to be burned and be purified and it's going to be renewed/reborn to its original Glory.

G: I'm not sure. Based on study, I've heard the world will be inexistence, but I'd prefer to be in heaven. As long as I don't die and wake up in hell that is a good thing.

What shapes your beliefs about this question?

A: I really don't have a particular source. All I'll say it's just, based off is, what I'm sayin' is, go back to the Bible studies and the things that has been taught and just separate little religion and belief with the main groups and the fellowships and all that stuff. And other believers talking and it's opened my eye. That's what I believe and I believe that to me, in my mind, to simply be true.

B: No answer.

C: The Bible. I believe that... I can't remember exactly where I read that but I believe it's in Revelation where it says that He's gonna restore the new Jerusalem after, is it 1,000 years or something? I don't remember exactly how that whole... I know that He sees in some people, if

you wanna get in the chronological order of things that got. Everyone doesn't necessarily agree with what's gonna happen. The rapture, the no rapture, the tribulation, the Second Coming. When is the Second Coming really? You can read it in Revelation and that's why it's really confusing because it's not really clear in there. And I believe that's for a reason. It's so that, if it was clear, everyone would know and everyone would say, "Oh, Lord, Lord." But because of the way that it's written, it's supposed to be difficult to understand. And you can only really understand with the keys from the Lord. He will direct the knowledge to each of His believers individually. I believe that outside of it with your relationship with Him. I don't believe it's all revealed in the word directly, I think some of it's revealed in the personal relationship.

D: No Answer.

E: Maybe I'm relying too much on myself but this time aspect God says is time. Or it says that. God's time I didn't want to Bone up on anything because I want to come in or cold. His time and our time or two different things and what happens when hearing here. It doesn't matter to me there's things like in Revelation you know there's a lot of picture that goes on with that and back and forth and I know I'm more of a bullet point kind of guy and I just can't Revelation is probably a great but, Psalm is good for me. Maybe not as much but actually we did Psalm in life light that that opened up something for me but the time it was.

F: Holy Scriptures.

G: Bible study and sermons over the years.

Question 4: How do you think resurrection plays a part in our Christian life on earth today?

A: How that plays a part for me today is saying, it's like, it says, when you believe and have your faith in you... It says you will become a new creation. What that really mean, is saying is, as human body doesn't change but spiritually your body change. Meaning that now, you may now... Yesterday you was on the bad side but now you're on the good side, meaning now you done said, "I confess my sins, believe Jesus Christ has died, and now I shall be saved." Once you became saved is almost resurrection means is that your old ways then died. Now in the case of Jesus when he died, that mean he died for our sins, so when he came back in our world, the saying is, once you accept him as your savior, now you're a new creation, creature, now you can go do bigger and better things. I think you die and then you... You don't really die, but I'm saying is you really... You die in your sinful ways, but now you're more on the path.

B: Well, it gives me hope and I'm gleeful, and there's more than just hope. The way it plays a part of my life today is I know and I believe that regardless of how I pass away on this earth, that I'm going to join with Jesus. As a matter of fact, I've often told my husband and my boys, I will never deny the name of Jesus. If I'm killed because of that, rejoice. Rejoice in my death on this earth because I'm gonna be risen with Christ. To me, it gives me more confidence and it gives me more strength to deal with the horrific things that are happening. It gives me more of a... Regardless of all the terrible things that are happening today, I believe that it's prophesied that it has to happen and knowing that my time to resurrect with Jesus... 'Cause you're asking about me,

how does it affect me and my... How does knowing that I'm gonna resurrect. My resurrection is going to happen, how does it affect my viewpoints today as a Christian living on this earth? And all I can say is it just... I feel like I'm emotionally prepared to deal with the worst situation that's gonna come our way. I'm prepared to deal with that mentally, I believe I am. You never know until you get there. But I believe I am and I wanna be prepared. And just as I started off earlier, if I'd die because of my belief in Jesus, then that shapes my whole viewpoint on living and breathing on this earth today. I just think I have more of a composed mindset about the horrific things that are happening in this world today. And that could possibly happen to me.

C: And that's what it says that, if I died before his Second Coming, then when he comes again, my body would rise and then my physical body would go up to heaven. I believe that's what it says in the Bible. And if the resurrection didn't happen Christianity totally falls apart. There is just one little sentence and someone was saying "No one wants to talk about this." It's kind of a dirty thing in the church that all these people were resurrected from the dead and were appearing to people and you also... In the Bible it says that, in the Second Coming the dead will rise and then you'll receive your heavenly body. But like you said I really haven't thought much about that.

D: Christian Life based off of Jesus is Jesus's body raised after the third day. He was raised his body was raised he didn't die and because of that we know that our bodies will rise as well For today gives me the hope and the comfort of you know that this isn't it here on Earth. It gives me such comfort and such- and I'm not as fearful of the future.

E: Well there's been a lot of the same symbolism or actual symbolism on what. A resurrection is in time. . With the great flood yeah well that the flood was a baptism and in a way it was also it to cleanse Earth and then brought back life. So that was a resurrection of its own. If I die today: Praise the Lord! If [my wife] and I have talked about that and I go in between us I'll go first or you will go first now I'll go first and that understands you know she's taken care of or you go first so you don't have to be in this lousy Planet while we get old you know I'll be the one that's getting fed the gruel and you can you can be moved on. So resurrection is the goal.

F: I think that that's kind of the hope of hopes. There is life after death in that Life Will Go On For Eternity as a beloved child of God in his creation.

G: It is a freedom. Jesus said he defeated death and we will too. Knowing there is more than this earthly life. That is a very positive thing. I am not afraid of death.

Question 5: What do you think about the statement that "The physical world is evil but spiritual or spirit is good"

A: I think what that could be... In my mind it could be two different ways. You're saying it's almost like okay, when you say the physical body is evil, like we all sin. Whatever, they're all, in the glory.

B: I think I deal with that on a daily basis. I believe the physical world is run by demonic forces everywhere around us. I really do believe that. I see it in my job, I see it through my son's issues

that he's having with his team. For those who are put into leadership, the verse that comes to mind is "We wrestle not with flesh and blood but with principalities in higher places, rulers and principalities in the higher places." And I believe that this world is really being driven by an evil force. But the spiritual world is stronger when we activate it, when we call on the spiritual forces that support us during our time of dealing with evil issues and situations in this physical world. So the spiritual world to me is always stronger but is a battle, is a constant battle between the flesh and the physical world and the supernatural or the spiritual world. And it's always been a conflict even in the days of Jesus.

C: I think I like it just the way it is. 'Cause I don't know if it's really just... If you just say the physical, just... I don't know. From when I read it in the Bible it just says the world, it doesn't say the physical world, it says the world, "Move yourself from the world." I don't know, I guess it's more biblical if you just say the world, but that's just my opinion. 'Cause some people believe, and that... This is just a comment, that isn't connected to your answer or anything, but some people believe the world, everything including our bodies is bad but the spirit, our soul and if you wanna, the spiritual world that we can't see is good or we know not all of that is true but some people feel like, "If I could just leave this earth and leave my body then everything will be okay." I don't really think that the... I just feel like it's hard to be here but I feel that it's good because the Lord brought us here for an intentional purpose, predestined or the believers that are here were predestined and chosen before the beginning of time to be here. And so as hard as it is in suffering, and I have chronic illness, I had cancer and so believe me, I know what suffering is and as hard as it is, I believe it's for... I just have to believe it's for a good purpose. That's what I believe, that I don't believe my body is bad, I don't believe everything is inherently bad. I just think that biblically it just says, "Separate yourself from the world, come out from the world. Don't concern yourself with worldly things and don't worry about your clothes, don't worry about... " Whatever Jesus said about, "Don't worry about where your food's coming from, don't worry about your clothes." That stuff is just silly.

D: Okay. The physical world is evil but the spirit is good okay. Meaning their flesh meaning you are because we are imperfect and only imperfect comes from evil. God did not create an imperfection and it's because of the evil because of the devil. He tempted Adam and Eve and then our world became imperfect and decaying and sewn in are the spirit of God wrote in our hearts. I'm good and you know in the knowledge of Good and Evil and we know what is good. And I think it's a universal thing that people know. But they don't always. It don't always listen to God they don't always do it that's what I mean. I don't I think there's there's an understanding of what is good but because we are, not only our physical world. Became in perfect you know what we as humans became imperfect because of Adam and Eve's place. So. The holy spirit is good I mean that Holy Spirit is what guides us to do, to distinguish between right and wrong. I think our body Mind and Spirit is imperfect and it's only through the holy spirit that would end and it when we are going to go to heaven is when it becomes perfect again but since we. Personally I know but again the Lord is merciful and he. Through Word and Sacrament we then get renewed in the spirit can work in us the source of your belief question God's Living Word.

E: Life, I think the physical world is corrupt and their world. Well there's the Holy Spirit and there's also bad spirits which can drive you off the darkness so that's kind of. I don't know if that's really accurate in so you don't agree with that statement. Nothing in this world and itself

is., there's no inherent goodness with it. Now the, our sinful nature is what rules us upon birth and we're always fighting that so this the world and itself. I don't think is good so I guess it would be, I think the evils around us and it's in our nature to be evil. Because we're separated from God. The spirit is something that we're always fighting to shed the evil spirit and the Holy Spirit convicts us to keep on doing as Paul says I keep on doing what I don't want to do but I do it, but I know by Jesus died for my sins and so as I go through this life no matter how much I'm being bludgeoned by doing things I don't want to do, I need to, the Holy Spirit Will convict me and make me- should not do that so okay I guess I'm really not heard that. I've heard some people say maybe that in the past but it's not I don't remember that as being something as a Biblical. What's after that was okay well it's kind of confusing until we are resurrected we will not. We will be free of these bodies in this world and amongst where there is no evil allowed can't be in the presence.

F: Physical world is fallen from its original created Glory courtesy of man. Let me read your question. I think those that have been called by God to be. Rephrase that who have been called by the Holy Spirit and given the gift of faith want to do good but because of their fallen human nature aren't really capable of pulling that off too often. Certainly not consistently.

G: There are evil spirits as well. It is not evil. There is a lot of evil in the world, but the world is not evil.

APPENDIX SEVEN

Participant Post-Bible Study Interview Responses

1. What is your understanding of heaven?

A: My understanding of heaven is it's a place that once we die, it's a place that we gonna go after death. And once Jesus comes back again, He's gonna call us all up to come be in heaven.

B: My understanding of Heaven is that it's a place where those who believe in Christ Jesus, believed in their hearts that He died for our sins, and He saved our souls, He's gone to Heaven to make a place for us, and there's a place for me in Heaven. There's a place for those of us who believe in Christ Jesus and what He died for. And so my concept of Heaven is, it's just that, it's a place where we will live forever in eternity with Christ Jesus.

C: Heaven is a place where God dwells and his angels and believers dwell, and when Jesus comes again there'll be a new heaven and a new earth. Just that in Revelation it describes heaven as, you know, the dimensions of heaven and streets of gold and jewels and there's no death or crying or weeping and...we get a new body, a resurrected body when you go there.

D: Okay heaven. Will be a new, Heaven well after the resurrection after the resurrection of the Dead. Heaven will be here on Earth. Heaven it'll be a new Earth. Where the Lord has defeated and destroyed evil so it'll be a Transformed Earth. Where we will dwell. That's heaven; but spiritually when we die our spirit leaves our body our imperfect body here on Earth and our soul goes to be with the Lord.

E: That heaven will be still on Earth.

F: After your study I understand heaven to be either that space above the Earth or that place where God dwells that's clearly from the Bible just not from my own weak understanding your wish of things.

G: Heaven is paradise with God. No pain, no worries

What shapes your beliefs about this question?

A: My source is my belief and it's going out based off what it said it is, also too is and I know we just came out of the discussion of what heaven is, so a lot of open discussion with different peers that are talking about it. But it kinda gave me that picture... A different picture, way I saw it. Well, I see it one way and so I be like I said, my sources would be the Bible, you know what I'm saying? Different readings, and then just my belief.

B: The sources that shape my belief, first and foremost, is the Bible, and secondly, it's many of the testimonies that I've heard. I'm an avid supporter of Christian TV, and I've seen many testimonies. I'll be honest, some of them I may question, but there are many credible testimonies.

Who's to determine what's credible and who's not, I think that's the Spirit within me. And when I'm listening to a testimony I think I can discern when something is valid and when something is not. So, the sources come from reading a lot of the Christian books that support there's an afterlife, and that maybe they have experienced it in one form or another. Testimonies that I've seen on Christian TV programs where they've gone to Heaven and come back in some instances, or they almost got to Heaven and God told 'em it wasn't their time. So, I guess my sources may come from what I have read, first in the Bible, books that support people's versions of what they have seen and believe about Heaven, and then testimonies I've actually listened to and observed.

C: The Bible. I mean, I've read other...I've read personal, you know, near-death experience books and stuff too, but I mean what I just told you I would say that was Biblically based. I think there's other things that I've read that I might, you know, believe...I think that was more the experience of heaven, not necessarily the, you know, what heaven is. That was more those people's experiences of what happened when they got there for a temporary time period, so...

D: The Bible and. You know talking about. The Bible study that you brought out various versus that supported.

E: Because that's what we read during our last four weeks. I cannot quote. Because the Bible tells us that and sometimes the cultural hearsay shade you from the Generation prior.

F: Scripture

G: The source of this belief is upbringing, faith assurance, Bible study

2. What happens to the believer in Jesus when they die?

A: I believe that the believers is go to a... In my mind it's like a holding place until... My beliefs say until He come down on Earth, and then that's when He'll draw man unto Him. So when we say He come down again, second time is... That's when we're. My belief I say is like all my grandparents right now, they was buried, but their soul is still there because their soul won't go up to heaven until He actually come backs for all of us. I would say their soul is in my mind, where I would think their souls are... In my mind it's like a holding area. Like it's like a holding area because you really don't know until judgement day. Judgement day is really a critical whether you go to heaven or not. That's the way I look at it. So I believe this until that judgement day, everybody's like a... Like a airplane, is it's just in the holding pattern until...

B: Well, we talked a lot about what the Bible says about we will be raised up at the blink of an eye, and I believe that. For instance, I have a lot of loved ones who've gone on, who are deceased, but since the trumpet hasn't sounded yet, I believe they are asleep. And that's what it says in the Bible, I can't remember the exact scripture, but it says the sleeping will rise first. So, if I die before the trumpet sounds then I'm gonna become one of those sleeping spirits that will eventually, bodies I guess, that will rise eventually but my spirit, I believe my spirit is joined with Christ in some form or fashion. Their spirit's immediately taken from their body and taken before Jesus. That's what I believe as a believer in Christ.

C: It'll be like you think of what happens in a believer. Yeah, I mean, from what we studied in the Bible study was that after you die and you go to heaven if...once the new heaven and the new earth is created you come back to Earth in your perfect body.

D: Believer's soul immediately goes to be with the Lord. His body remains as it was on Earth and. So that's what happens.

E: Think you were in the presence of God. Where then you will be judged. As it is stated the separate the sheep from the goats. Actually. We're reading Dr. Walter in our devotional yesterday. And he stated that. It isn't a text he said that both Sinner and saved will go to heaven. And then alluded to that that's when the separation would. happen.

F: Okay the whole believer death is the separation of soul and body so at death the body's done. It's in Genesis from dust you are from dust you shall return. The human body is the soul temporarily goes to reside with the Lord.

G: Heaven is to be with Jesus in paradise as soon as I die.

What shapes your beliefs about this question?

A: The source of that belief is just Bible teachings and there's just, me just the vision on where... Where else would they go if heaven is not already established, so why would it say He would come back again and there's a judgement day, so sources say that's in the Bible. I would say my source is the Bible. Why would I say is that if it's not? That's just the way I believe.

B: No Answer.

C: The Bible

D: The Bible so well because. So the Lord Jesus was is our example of what happens you know his his Spirit went to be with the father in you know after he And then his body joined. Okay resurrected with his body okay.

E: Dr. Walther.

F: Again the Bible.

G: The source of that belief is the same answer as above.

Question 3: Jesus talked about the new heaven and the new earth in the end times. Tell me what you think will happen to the present earth in the end times?

A: I would think... I think at the earth's end time, this is me, my belief, and say that that's just where I believe that people belief is heaven is above the sky and the cloud. But I done flew several times and do I vision I'm in heaven then? Or is heaven another place? So in my theory, I

think earth may become heaven, if that makes sense. I think it may become heaven.

B: I think after much discussion and your Bible studies and reading a little bit more about it in the Bible that the earth in the end times is going to be renewed. Because before it gets renewed it is going to be demolished is the you know it's going to be but I don't know if the earth is going to be demolished but the people are right everybody. There's going to be death and destruction. So when I hear destruction that means the earth will be destroyed and there will be a renewed earth. But I don't know if it's going to start over with the Garden of Eden. But possibly when you say destroy. It puts me to the mind of like I guess when I think of the word destroyed I think like a pile of rubble which could actually be right and then renewed to me.

C: I think what we mostly studied was that the Bible says the Earth will be a new Earth and it will be like heaven is described or there's no pain, death, tears. Like a perfect Earth, kind of like the garden again. And you got to kind of wonder though, I mean, I was thinking about this today because I was watching something about someone questioning Christianity and you've got to think about okay, so God gives us our lives and then he, with that, he gives us the opportunity to choose him or to not choose him. And, you know, lovingly God is...he gives us freedom. And so if on the new heaven and the new Earth would we still have that choice? Do you know what I mean?

D: I believe that God's intention was for us to be here on Earth. As he created the heavens and the Earth and people on it Adam and Eve perfectness because of sin. Our Earth became corrupt and everything on it and so when our when last judgment our bodies were will rise with our souls in those that believing in the Lord. Will be dwelling on a transformed Earth. Where corruption and evil will be. Removed. Intended.

E: That's difficult for me. Because. Earth is changed but in order that we're going to be restored. The Earth is going to change and itself the crust is going to shrink and be back like it used to be with all the water and everything like it was. Under the crust I'm not sure. You could. I guess you could be this planet as it is with the. All the mountains in the beauty and with all that disruption is different than what it was when was first created so I don't know how to how to take that. But if we take that. The great flood. Where it said that it was. The water's coming up from the depths Deluge for the 40 days and 40 nights of rain and all the water covering up over the peaks in the. mountains. And then that now was Become seas and our atmosphere of moisture to. cause weather. I don't recall there being and that's where many my memory comes in I can't remember what the bullet point came out of that for me during our discussion. And again I'm only once I can't hear so well so depending on where I sit.

F: For all intents and purposes reborn or there was a place in revelation behold I make all things new it's not like going to make get rid of everything and recreate it is to restore everything to its previous proper Glory.

G: The new heaven and the new earth as long as I am somewhere with the Lord is better than here now. I am not as positive about what is going to happen to this present earth if destroyed.

What shapes your beliefs about this question?

A: The Bible, just reading the Bible and they're saying different studies that you do and then put that together.

B: No answer

C: The Bible

D: So. Because Christ. I'm pretty bad at this. I mean just have to sort he reassures us. That and gives us this whole that we. Will. Be with him with our bodies and perfect perfect bodies and Earth cuz Jesus. When he came. With his body back to Earth he was in and it was him but in a different- you recognized him but didn't recognize him he do is he still ate and and people could touch him. But he had he could go through locked doors and. Perfect okay.

E: No answer.

F: Again, the Bible.

G: Source of belief is the same as above.

Question 4: How do you think resurrection plays a part in our Christian life on earth today?

A: For the Christian believer I believe it plays that that's second part is like... Resurrection is like if you... Everyone say is you had the opportunity. Even sometime on your death bed you can have that one moment where you can profess Jesus Christ your lord and savior and you can go to heaven. I won't say you'll go to heaven because at the end of the day, the resurrection to me is the judgement day. That's when you have to answer before Jesus to determine what is your resurrection. Like I know that they talk about hell, but is hell really what's being spoken, or it just how do... And that's why I think resurrection will separates, I say good from bad. So that's what I'm saying and then I go back to other question the earth. If the earth divided in half, you got the bad side and the good side. That's what I don't know. But I'm just wondering if that's... Resurrection is more focused on looking on judgement day, that's when we'll be... 'Cause I think when you say as a person that you do believe in Jesus Christ and all that, I think you are right there, as a resurrection days of saying you accept him you your personal savior and you start living the life as a Christian. And then when you die, you die as a Christian and you die as a believer, you die as all that. So really, you just die to go back in that place I was telling you. Like we all, when you die is like you're in a waiting area, in this big waiting area waiting for that day of judgement day.

B: Well, resurrection plays an important part in my faith today because of the fact that Jesus was resurrected. To me that was the pivotal example of what those of us who believe in him and believe in his death and believe in his resurrection. That is what sustains me in life today to deal with all of the offense. That are happening because I know that one thing we talked about it

during I know I didn't talk about it at Bible study but in another Bible study where I said that if I have to make a decision if I'm told where I am going to die unless I reject Jesus. Then I'm going to be OK with agreeing to die because I know I'm going to be resurrected so if it to me that's the ultimate sacrifice that I can say that. I will write. Someone walked into a room and said are you a Christian and pointed a gun at me I'm going to say yes I'm a Christian so everything up until that point is what I live for. I live for the fact that I know that I will live with Jesus in heaven when it's all said and done. I will be resurrected so I believe in living with by the principles of the Bible and the word of Jesus.

C: I think it plays a big part and I don't think people really talk about it very much that, you know, Jesus was resurrected and we're all going to be resurrected and I don't think people really talk about that. I mean, what we talked about was taking care of your body because, you know, it's going to get resurrected. And taking care of the Earth and that type of thing. But I see that even bigger than the resurrection my...our body is a temple and you know, even just taking the resurrection out of it, we're supposed to be honoring our body because it's a temple of God. And when you look at it like that then yes, it's going to be...it's already a temple so yes it will be resurrected and the, you know, the whole reason your body was created was to house God in the first place and then it's going to come back again.

D: So here. As we live in this imperfect world. We are. We have to. We're a part of - God made us and. We are here for his purpose he's not there for our purpose. So. In our pain and sorrow and suffering in this imperfect world we. We are to serve him. Because he is our creator and we will eventually be faced in Judgment of what we have done here on Earth and how we were it's very important so it gives us a reason to. You know for our own salvation. To serve the Lord here on Earth for a eventual. Eternal life.

E: Well we I guess that it's a little harder for me because I keep on going back to this time thing that God's time is infinite in our time. Take so long and so I will talk with using it as my qualifier I think that those who have passed away when we say it we're all going it is just a second apart from each other and got this time and it's actually a process of those your. You been through. Say the test that was the case and those who are not going to be making it that that's already going to be done

F: Read that one more time. Resurrection plays a part in our Christian faith day today. I think it's Central to our Christian faith today because if there was no Resurrection there was no Jesus then I guess Paul said it in without that your faith is dead so it's key. You know if there wasn't a resurrected Christ our faith is futile. What are you actually believing in? But again, if you and I believe in the resurrection that all things will be made new then that also means my horrible Beat to Death spiritual.... Our physical body will be resurrected in its intended glory and reunited with my soul and I get to be with the Lord forever. Okay who would not want that in the first place. . .starts his own debate.

G: Jesus is resurrected and assures us we will be too. Resurrection is something to look forward to. We have his word we will be resurrected. This means I am not planted in the ground. Not staying behind. Since the Lord is resurrected bodily, I shall be, too.

Question 5: What do you think about the statement that “The physical world is evil but spiritual or spirit is good”

A: Okay, when you say the physical world is evil, it's because there are so many things out there. As you could be going down a straight line path, that you can deter and make you go left or it could make you go right and that's kind of where that spiritual, I mean that physical evil is because it's out there for every different reason you have. Alcohol, drugs, and all these different things there but I think in a spiritual... Spirit is good is it's like, once you do get to heaven with spirit, if you leading that straight line and once you go to judgement day, there's no reason Jesus just say, “Well, done my faithful servant.” So that right there, spiritual is more directing where there is no negativity. There is nothing but happiness and in my mind and vision, heaven is just... Who knows? There may be football teams but there are spiritual football teams. So much that hard as... Here on this earth today which I believe but like I say, if you go back to the world of evil, physical world of evil is driven by the world that's dead 'cause it have... We have so many different things that can turn you... Deter you away from being in the spirit because there's so many things but I don't really think once you get to that stage, there won't be no evil. I think all evil goes away. I define it as being as that... Not all of it is evil because there are believers, there are people that always striving to do what's right, but the issue that I have when I say that the world is not fully evil is because there are good people but at the same time there are bad people and if I was to choose a number, I would say 70 over 30 because there's... In my mind I would say, I would say 80 over 20 'cause I think 20% of the world is just, in my mind is evil. Like, there's a lot of things that they do is, that they do evil. There's no reason for it but I believe it's just a way of pattern that my belief say is that, “How do I test your faith if I don't put in any evil doers down there?” 'Cause everyone can have the opportunity to me, to be in my mind, on the left, living Christ like but there's that... People that venture away to the right that can choose to do the evil. And then my other thing would say is, why was there such thing as heaven and hell if everybody was gonna be good? 'Cause there would never anything would be spoken about hell if everybody was gonna be good so I think it's kinda like... Say I would say in my mind it's 80/20 'cause there's always that 20% out there that's always looking for evil. Evil things.

B: I believe that is talking about the physical. The flesh is what we feel and what we think logically versus what we think supernaturally. I believe the supernatural equals the spirit world and I believe that the flesh and your carnal mind is what relates to the physical world so we have a choice and I believe my spirit. And my carnal are flesh. I am always at odds with one another because I want to react one way but spiritually I know that I can choose to respond a different way and sometimes it takes an act of a supernatural force to help redirect my mindset and a supernatural force is Jesu and the Holy Spirit that lives in me.

C: Yeah, I mean, I think... I know what I said the first time we did this because I said the world is evil but the spirit is good and I said I agree with that. But after we talked about it more and, you know, talking about the resurrection, you know, the new Earth, that not all of Earth is evil or the physical world is evil because it's part of creation. So I agree but it's probably not true and... however, I do feel like in the Bible it doesn't make it pretty clear that you're supposed to remove yourself from the world. Now I say world as worldly things, worldly cares. Right. But I

think it gets dicey in there because when you...when it says in there, you know, remove, you know, don't concern yourself with things of the world then that makes it seem like the world is evil. But the physical world of creation no, I don't think that's evil.

D: No we were evil through and through I mean we sin, our souls in our bodies are. Imperfect. Eventually. The resurrection our bodies will be transformed and our souls and bodies will join in his perfect union and with God I know that people think that we are living in a corrupt shell and they think that are going to live in heaven And it's a spiritual realm but God's intention was to he created our bodies. And. Is not going to throw away our bodies there is an intent for us to. Be transformed in our own bodies with their souls.

E: And that's Plato. Actually got it we've got a Encyclopedia Britannica 1911 and it's got a large amount of Plato and stuff that that came in early on that belief in the separation of the two. And have you shouldn't one of the other maybe a little bit but I don't think that our bodies are in our. Can be separated like a vapor or an angel Angelic like a spirit the Holy Spirit can around here we're all. We're all the. same. Is spirit and body or soul body and out of upon Resurrection. Be able to taking us out of our Decay and we will be. Visibly. What can I say was restored body but I think I mentioned that somebody said it should be called. And it's not just for some reason I live and that's my historical thoughts that I'm it's easier to welded up my brain and something it's with him or newer on memory and so the know if Jesus is brought back just using Jesus as a model of a resurrection and a Time. No he came back and he did have nails that I did answer a little different when we were talking about it. He had scars to show. Peter. Yeah as that and before that I was thinking well we would be brought back. Without blemish at our ideal. Fighting weight whatever was your 28 years old or Jesus being at early 30s or 30 and that being that time. That we would come back. As him as as his as his age came back then. I can't I have not gone back to look through for that possibility but that's it. But I wouldn't want to I guess I don't care what it what I look like when I come back but I want then we go back will be without sin will be no judgment so what we look like it does matter yes but if you have scars that would show there were things that are going on and that would be a recollection of maybe sinful things, so how would that be allowed or a purpose in in heaven because the Sorrows are gone the complete disjoint from this this chaos we are in now so. As I'm thinking about Jesus will have a purpose for that his whole purpose was to show I'm the resurrection and what better means for that to be done is by having the physical sign that he was to show the disciples but once we're all said and done you don't want to be saying yeah I was in a car wreck and that's why I'm all distorted up in my face like that it doesn't match the sinful nature that we have or had.

F: From the study. That's Gnosticism. Folks not understanding that ok people in and of themselves people are sort of good and lightning strikes and strong winds and horrible rains and it's worst of two evils the world just mean and evil and it hurts us so when we get the physical remains gets to escape this evil. I'm just I'm just here and I get pushed around by the wind and the waves and so I don't have to be anymore but getting pushed around enough you get grumpy get grouchy and all the sudden now you're become the evil that you Proclaim you hate. Funny how that works. I guess what came out of the study I've never read anything from the gnostics but that is certainly not what the Bible teaches. Please create all the stuff in the end of every creation like God saw that it was good. Yeah and got to be that way courtesy of man okay that's that sort of Twisted that the world was good man was evil. He continues to this very day this

world. Man was created to maintain this world and we've done a right lousy job of it.

G: The world is only as evil as we allow it to be. How we are making choices God allows. The world is full of sin.

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