

“Who concerning the Truth Have Misaimed” — 2 Timothy 2:18

Misaiming concerning John 14

Misaiming: “14:2, 3 I go to prepare. His departure would be for their [the disciples’] advantage since He was going away to prepare a heavenly home for them and will return to take them so that they may be with Him. This is one of the passages that refers to the rapture of the saints at the end of the age when Christ returns. The features in this description...describe...taking believers from earth to live in heaven....After being raptured, the church will celebrate the marriage supper (Rev. 19:7-10), be rewarded (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:9, 10), and later return to earth with Christ when He comes again to set up His kingdom (Rev. 19:11—20:6)” (*MacArthur Study Bible*, Nashville: Word Bibles, 1997, p. 1613).

Truth: The biblical note cited above contains at least three errors plus a strong indication of eschatological incoherence. The first error is the claim that the Lord Jesus was about to go away “to prepare a heavenly home” for the believers. This error is compounded by the writer’s note on *mansions* in John 14:2: “Lit. dwelling places, rooms, or even apartments (in modern terms). All are in the large ‘Father’s house’” (1613). Contrary to the natural, religious concept, “My Father’s house” in John 14:2 is not heaven but God’s dwelling place on earth, as indicated by the Lord’s word in 2:16, where He uses the expression “My Father’s house” to refer to the temple. According to chapter two, the temple is a type, a figure, of the body of Jesus, which in resurrection has been enlarged into the Body of Christ, the church as the corporate Christ (1 Cor. 12:12). The temple in John 2:19 is the body of Jesus as His individual body, but through His death and resurrection this body has increased to become His corporate Body, the church, including all the believers. Now the church, the Body of Christ, is the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5), God’s dwelling place (Eph. 2:21-22), God’s temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Furthermore, the “many abodes” in John 14:2 are the many members of the Body of Christ. If we (as we must) understand “My Father’s house” in John 14:2 in light of the proper interpretation of the same words in John 2, we will realize that the Father’s house with its many abodes is not “a heavenly home” but the church as the Body of Christ and as the house, the dwelling place, of God.

Another error in this misaiming is that to be with Christ is to be with Him in the Father’s house in heaven. John 14:10-11 reveals clearly where Christ is—He is in the Father—and His desire was that the disciples would also be in the Father, as revealed in 17:21. Through His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus, the unique way to God and into God, brought His disciples into Himself. Since He, the Son, is in the Father, those who believe in Christ are in the Father by being in Him. As a result, we are with Him where He is—in the Father.

The third error in the note cited is the claim that “I will come again and receive you to Myself” points to “the rapture of the saints at the end of the age when Christ returns.” The Lord’s word about His coming in John 14:3 has nothing to do with the rapture of the saints to be with the Lord in heaven. The simple truth is that the Lord, who was going by dying on the cross for our redemption, was coming again in His resurrection to be with the disciples forever. Thus, in fulfillment of His promise not to leave the disciples as orphans (v. 18), on the day of His resurrection Christ breathed Himself as the Spirit into them to be not only with them but in them (20:22; 14:20). The thought of rapture is alien to the context of John 14 in particular and to the Gospel of John as a whole.

These three errors issue in eschatological incoherence, that is, in a view of eschatology that is consistent neither with itself nor with the Scriptures. On the one hand, the writer asserts that the Lord Jesus was leaving the disciples in order to prepare a heavenly home for them and then return, as it is alleged, at the end of the age to take—to rapture—them to be with Him in this heavenly home. On the other hand, the writer says that the church will “later return to earth with Christ when He comes again to set up His kingdom.” This requires that the disciples leave, and even forsake, their heavenly home, their “apartments” in heaven, and come to earth with Christ. Thus, the heavenly home turns out to be merely a temporary abode, a heavenly motel. Does the Bible reveal that the Lord Jesus went away to prepare an apartment, or a motel room, for the believers and then return at the end of the age to take them to this abode, only to stay there for a very brief period of time? Certainly not! According to the truth, in John 14

the Lord Jesus revealed that He would go by dying on the cross and come in His resurrection and that the blessed result of this going and coming is that we, the believers, would have a way to be in Christ and with Christ in God. This standing in God the Father spontaneously gives us a place in the Body of Christ, in God's dwelling place.

Misaiming concerning Levels in Heaven

Misaiming: "Are there gradations in heaven whereby one Christian, as a result of a lifetime of good works, has a higher rank or better quality of existence in heaven than someone who just squeaks through at his last breath?...I would answer that question with an emphatic yes. There are degrees of reward that are given in heaven....Christians are shocked when I say there are various levels of heaven....The only way we get into heaven is through the work of Christ, but we are promised rewards in heaven *according to our works*....Somebody put it this way: Everybody's cup in heaven is full, but not everybody in heaven has the same size cup" (R. C. Sproul, *Now That's a Good Question!*, Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1996, pp. 287-288).

Truth: The first error here is the assumption that believers in Christ will spend eternity in heaven, whereas the truth is that all the believers, as redeemed, sanctified, transformed, and glorified sons of God, will spend eternity as organic parts of the New Jerusalem, which will descend out of heaven from God to become the center of the new heaven and the new earth.

The second error, and the more important one given the nature of the question addressed, is the assertion that there are gradations in heaven, that there will be different degrees of reward, and that the inhabitants of heaven will have "cups" that differ in size. This notion is contrary both to what the Bible reveals concerning eternity and to what it teaches concerning reward. The idea of different circles, or gradations, in heaven may abound in Dante's *Paradiso*, but it cannot be found in the Word of God. In Revelation 21 and 22, for instance, there is no indication that in the New Jerusalem—the ultimate consummation of God's eternal economy—there will be degrees of reward or gradations of rank and quality of existence.

However, the New Testament does clearly and emphatically say that the faithful, overcoming believers will receive various kinds of rewards not in heaven nor in the New Jerusalem but in the millennial kingdom, that is, in the coming thousand-year kingdom prior to the age of eternity with the new heaven and new earth. What the writer ascribes to heaven, the

Bible ascribes to the millennial kingdom, to the glorious manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens where Christ and His overcoming believers will reign as kings on earth. Central to the truth here is the distinction, made in Scripture, between heaven and the kingdom of the heavens. Although there will be no rewards in "heaven," there will be rewards (as well as punishment) during the age of the kingdom. The mistaken notion of gradations in heaven must be discarded and replaced with the truth of reward in the kingdom. Those who adhere to the concept of rewards in an eternal heaven would be well advised to restudy the Scriptures to ascertain the divine truth concerning heaven, the kingdom of the heavens, the New Jerusalem, and the rewards to be bestowed upon the overcomers. The Lord does not promise "rewards in heaven," but He does warn us concerning both reward and punishment during the coming age. We cannot afford to be careless with this truth.

by the Editors

Continued from page 68

Husband, and becomes His counterpart, just as Eve came out of Adam, her husband, and became his counterpart (Gen. 2:21-24). She is prepared by participating in the riches of the life and nature of Christ. As the holy city of God, she is wholly sanctified unto God and fully saturated with God's holy nature to be His habitation.

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, God likens His chosen people to a spouse (Isa. 54:6; Jer. 3:1; Ezek. 16:8; Hosea 2:19; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:31-32) and a dwelling place for Himself (Exo. 29:45-46; Num. 5:3; Ezek. 43:7, 9; Psa. 68:18; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Tim. 3:15). The spouse is for His satisfaction in love, and the dwelling place is for His rest in expression. Both of these aspects will be ultimately consummated in the New Jerusalem. In her, God will have the fullest satisfaction in love and the utmost rest in expression for eternity.

After all God's redeemed saints are raptured to the heavens, they will constitute the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from God. This indicates that our dwelling place for eternity will not be heaven but the New Jerusalem on the new earth.

*Footnotes from the Recovery Version
of the New Testament on Revelation 21:2*