



Eschatology – A Study of the End Times

Lesson 3: Spiritual Vision Model versus New Creation Model

Introduction

As we study eschatology, we are studying the end times or last things. But eschatology also reveals events to come that are associated with the final “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21).¹ As we think about the restoration of all things, what will that look like? Another way we could ask this is, what will the future Heaven be like for believers in Christ? Will Heaven be a place of spiritual existence where people are sitting on clouds playing harps? Or will Heaven be a physical place where both spiritual and material realities are present? In order to help understand what the future is going to be like, we are going to study two models or two paradigms that concern God’s purposes and eternal life. These two models are: The Spiritual Vision Model and The New Creation Model.

Overview of The Spiritual Vision Model

The Spiritual Vision Model addresses the nature of reality and eternal life. This model recognizes material and spiritual realities in the universe. However, there is a dualism that exists in this model in which spiritual things are viewed as good or better while physical things are perceived as bad or lesser.² In the Spiritual Vision Model, the emphasis is on the spiritual over the material and earthly, tangible things are viewed as distractions to the more important spiritual things. Spiritual Vision Model thinking adapts the worldview of the Greek philosopher, Plato, who held to a very strong distinction between spirit and matter with the spiritual being of much greater importance.³

In the Christian version of the Spiritual Vision Model, there is an affirmation of the material having a purpose in the plan of God, such as the resurrection of the body. However, there still exists a strong distinction between the value of the spiritual and the material. Christian Spiritual Vision Model thinking focuses exclusively on individual spiritual salvation and spiritual blessings and gives very little emphasis to the earth and its creatures. These material things are

¹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, gen. eds. *Biblical Doctrines: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 828.

² Michael Vlach, *The New Creation Model: A Paradigm for Discovering God’s Restoration Purposes from Creation to New Creation* (Cary, NC: Theological Studies Press, 2023), 25.

³ Ibid.

merely a backdrop, or a temporary background, for the accomplishing of God’s greater spiritual purposes.⁴

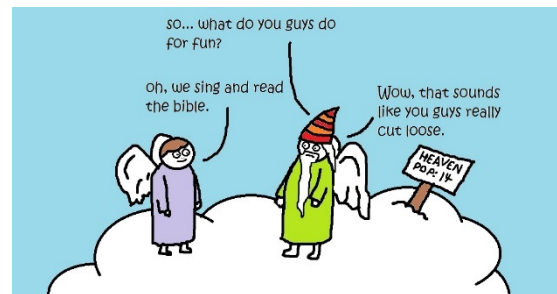
The Influence of The Spiritual Vision Model

While most early church believers were not Platonists, Plato’s ideas have influenced the thinking of the church throughout her history. The influence of Plato through the teachings of Philo (ca. 20 BC–AD 50) and Origen (AD 185 – 254) came to embrace the spiritual view that human spirits are better off without bodies and that Heaven is a disembodied state.⁵ A mixture of Plato’s ideas with Christianity has been called “Christoplatonism.” Randy Alcorn, in his book *Heaven*, says, “Christoplatonism has had a devastating effect on our ability to understand what Scripture says about Heaven, particularly about the eternal Heaven, the New Earth.”⁶

Examples of Christoplatonism in the church is seen in statements such as: “God is interested in saving the soul, not the body.” Or “God’s kingdom is spiritual, not physical.” Or “A Christian’s eternal destiny is Heaven, not Earth.” The Spiritual Vision Model has also largely influenced society. For example, the picture of the mug shows a man with angel wings sitting on a cloud thinking “...wish I’d brought a magazine.” The comic below shows one man asking another man what they do for fun in Heaven. He responds, “Oh, we sing and read the Bible.” The other man responds, “Wow, that sounds like you guys really cut loose.”



In a children’s book by Maria Shriver called *What’s Heaven?*, she says, “I imagine it’s a beautiful place where you can sit on soft clouds and talk to other people who are there. At night you can sit next to the stars, which are the brightest of anywhere in the universe. Everyone there is happy to be in such a peaceful place where God will love them forever.”⁷



The Spiritual Vision Model and Eternity

The Christian Spiritual Vision Model, although not as extreme as Platonism, is still very spiritual and anti-material. The ultimate experience in the Spiritual Vision Model is for a Christian to leave earth for Heaven forever in an entirely spiritual realm. Space and time no longer exist and there will be no more social or cultural interactions since this would distract one from the main purpose of worshiping God, mainly through singing. The believer may have a resurrected body, but the body is not significant since the person is in the presence of God apart from earth. The believer is engaged in mental contemplation and worship of God. The eternal state of the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004), 52.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Maria Shriver, *What’s Heaven?*, (Golden Books, 2007).

believer is existence in a spiritual realm where the soul's experience in Heaven is apart from anything physical or social.⁸ Leon Morris denied the material reality of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 stating, "When John speaks of streets paved with gold, of a city whose gates are made of single pearls, and the like, we must not understand that the heavenly city will be as material as present earthly cities . . . He [John] is concerned with spiritual states, not with physical realities."⁹

With this model, the kingdom of God is no longer the earthly kingdom that the Old Testament prophets predicted. Spiritual Vision Model beliefs are that the Old Testament promises regarding physical land and national Israel are fulfilled in the church and absorbed into the person of Christ. Even today, there are still many Christians who think of Heaven as a place in the sky where they will spend eternity without a physical body sitting on clouds all day long singing songs to Jesus.

Overview of The New Creation Model

The New Creation Model seeks to emphasize both the spiritual and physical realities as a part of God's plan and believes that both matter to God. The New Creation Model addresses the creation realities of both Genesis 1–2 and the New Creation realities of Revelation 20–22. New Creation Model thinking does not deny the importance of spiritual realities, but it sees both the spiritual and physical as important in God's plan and purposes. Both the spiritual and physical realities of God's creation were very good (Gen. 1:31) and both were negatively affected by the Fall, but both will eventually be restored by God (Acts 3:21).

The New Creation Model sees the mandate of Genesis 1:26–28, to rule and subdue the earth and its creatures, as important in God's plan. Although Adam failed this mandate in the Garden of Eden, man will one day fulfill this mandate when Christ restores all things. This model also includes the importance of human relationships and institutions such as marriage and families and accounts for physical realities such as: societies, culture, houses, farms, agriculture, architecture, food, music, education, work, art, technology, science, and government.¹⁰

The New Creation Model does not deny the importance of God's plan in individual, spiritual salvation, but it also deals with God's plan with nations as national entities. The Abrahamic Covenant shows that God's purposes involve blessing all nations (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). The nation of Israel is also seen in the Bible as being a means by which God will bless all the nations (Gen. 12:2–3). Israel, as a nation, is not only the vessel through which the Messiah comes, but it is also a key player in the end times (Rom. 9–11). Nations, such as Egypt and Assyria, will also become the people of God and worship alongside the people of God, Israel (Is. 19:16–25). Nations, along with their kings, will also exist on the new earth (Rev. 21:24, 26).

⁸ Vlach, 26.

⁹ Leon Morris, *Revelation* in Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 231.

¹⁰ Vlach, 22.

The New Creation Model and Eternity

A New Creation perspective connects protology (the study of first things) with eschatology (the study of last things). In Genesis 1, God created all things in six days and deemed it as “very good” (Gen. 1:31). God’s purpose in creation was not to create a physical world just to destroy it all one day. He said that what He created was “very good!” This understanding of first things helps to understand the last things. Unlike many eastern religions, including Platonism, that deems the physical as bad, the New Creation Model sees the physical being restored in the future and for all eternity (Acts 3:21). While this model sees the universe as consisting of both material and immaterial realities (Col. 1:16), there is no dualism that sees one as more important than the other. God created both mankind as a complex unity of both body and soul to live on a physical earth which will be restored in the future.

The New Creation perspective asserts that eternal life in the kingdom of God will be lived in the restoration of all that was negatively affected by the Fall. This model teaches that there is a resurrection of the body for both the believer and the unbeliever. Eternal life for the believer is associated with embodied life on a restored earth with nature and the animal kingdom functioning in harmony. This model also believes that eternal life on the new earth will have continuity with our current life experiences on the present earth, minus the effects of sin, death, and the curse.¹¹ The experiences of the eternal state will be far greater than the original pre-Fall situation of Genesis 1–2, but there will be some connection to it. Man was originally created to rule and subdue the earth and all it contains, and man’s final destiny will involve living and reigning on the earth (Rev. 22:5).

We must acknowledge that embracing the New Creation Model does not mean that we can know everything there is to know about eternity. As Michael Vlach says, “Studying passages about Messiah’s coming kingdom and Eternal State is like looking through a keyhole.”¹² What we read about in Scripture regarding things to come can give us a helpful framework, but we do not have all of the answers this side of the kingdom. While there is still much that we do not know about the future and the Eternal State, for much of history the church has erred on the side of the Spiritual Vision Model and has made the future and eternal things so “other” that it has made things hard to grasp. While those who hold to the New Creation Model do not claim to know every detail of the future, they do believe that there is much that we can know about the future as God has revealed it in His Word.

As we study eschatology, it is important to remember the New Creation Model. We want to make sure that we do not downplay God’s glory in the physical realm. Since God created the physical, we don’t want to deem something as unnecessary or evil just because it has been tainted by sin. God created the physical for His glory. We must also be careful that we do not rob ourselves of the joy of the future reality that is to come when we will be on a new, restored earth ruling and reigning with Christ bringing glory to God just as He purposed in His plan.

¹¹ Ibid, 23.

¹² Ibid, 24.