

Considering Our End: The Beatific Vision

It is particularly when we stop and take a look at the end for which we are made, our purpose, that we are fueled once again to live life in light of that purpose. We see the goal and we press on towards that goal. Our goal is God.

Why do we not hear as much about the beatific vision these days when it was a huge part of the Christian tradition, as well as the Reformed tradition? Eschatological Naturalism. What is the beatific vision? Blessed vision. Vision that makes us happy. Seeing God.

The center of our eschatology must be the desire for God. If we are merely centered upon the renewed earth and we miss God, then we will fall into idolatry. God desires us to enjoy every good gift as coming from him. They are HIS gifts to us, but we must keep the highest good, God himself, as our main focus.

David says in Psalm 27:4, “One thing I have asked of the Lord that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.” So, we must be sure when approaching the final things, our final end, our hope, what our heart truly desires, is God himself, to see God and have this fellowship with him.

The bible speaks of the eyes of our understanding, which is seeing with our intellect. Paul says in Ephesians 1:18, “having the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” This is how God sees. God does not have physical eyes.

Job confesses that we shall also see God with our eyes. He says he shall see God in his flesh. Job 19:25-27, “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.”

When we approach this topic, it seems to pose a problem for us. We confess in our catechism that God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable. Spirits are invisible. God is invisible. How can we see someone who is invisible? The scriptures confess this as well, 1 John 4:12; John 1:18; Exodus 33:20; 1 Timothy 6:16. God is invisible in his essence.

Ever since the creation of the world, God has been preparing human beings to see him, to see his face. God's invisible attributes are seen through creation, Romans 1. God shows himself specifically in theophanies to his people, making his presence known to his people, Genesis 33:22-32. God's glory dwelling in the tabernacle, Exodus 40:38, to be seen.

John 1:14, “The word became flesh, and dwelt among us”. ἐσκήνωσεν is the Greek word for dwelt and means to pitch a tent, or to tabernacle. Christ is the tabernacle of God. Christ is the cleft of the rock, through which we see God. The Rock is a type of Christ, Exodus 33:18-21. Paul tells us in Colossians 1:15, that Christ is the image of the invisible God. God himself took on human flesh, and we are able to see God through the face of Jesus Christ. He illuminates our eyes in order that we may see him, both the eyes of the intellect and our human eyes. We see more of Christ now, by faith, than those walking on the earth with Jesus saw of him, John 16:7. Since Pentecost, the veil can be said to be removed, 2 Cor. 3.

So now, we anticipate much greater glory than we even experience now, and look forward to when we die. This itself is not the finality of the Beatific vision. God has created all human beings as both body and soul, and we are incomplete even after death, in communion with Christ, as we await the resurrection of the body, Philippians 3:21. We see God through Christ. We never move beyond Christ.

Jesus prayed for us in John 17:13, that we would have his joy fulfilled in us. Our eyes are transformed to see Christ's deity, shining forth through his humanity, we see him as he is, 1 John 3:2. To see the Son is to see the Father, John 14:9, and the Spirit as well. All the fullness of God dwells in Christ, Col. 1:19.

But can we get bored with seeing God? God's infinite being satisfies man's insatiability. Epektasis, a concept of Gregory of Nyssa, is continual straining forward into the knowledge of God for eternity.

Corporately, the whole church will sing his praises.

Johann Gerhard, "To see God - Ahh! That will surpass what is all the joys of the earth. To gaze on the face of Christ, to live with Christ, to hear the voice of Christ, will far exceed the most ardent desires of our hearts. O Lord Jesus, thou most blessed Spouse of my soul, when wilt thou bring my soul into thy royal palace as thine honored bride? What can I want there that thou wilt not supply? What more can we desire or look for when God himself shall be all in all?"

Application:

We ought to make sure we set aside time to consider our end, to ponder; to think of why we are pressing forward. Do we desire God? Do we desire to see him? We must reorient ourselves to this goal, and we do that through pondering our end.

1 John 3:2, How can we say that we long to see him, that we have this hope in us, that we shall be like him, if we are not striving to reflect that image of holiness now? The writer of Hebrews tells us to pursue the holiness without which no one will see God, Hebrews 12:4. Jesus says in the sermon on the mount, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

We must very intentionally set our affections upon God himself in this life. Our eyes are made to behold the beauty of God, in Christ. We ought not to set our sights upon vain useless things, defiling things, wicked things. Our mind, as well, was made to contemplate God, to perceive his glory. How then are we to take our minds and set our thoughts upon vain useless things or wicked lustful thoughts? Our minds are made for God.

Recommended readings for further consideration of this topic:

Michael Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*

Hans Boersma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition*

Isaac Ambrose, *Looking Unto Jesus*

John Owen, *Meditations on the Glory of Christ*

Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*