

Concise Theological Statements in Revelation

Although Revelation is a book full of symbols, which need to be interpreted carefully, it is also a book filled with precise theological statements interspersed throughout the text. These are clear and very descriptive, perhaps more powerful and concise than found elsewhere. For instance, a more powerful, simple and clear description of hell cannot be found other than in Rev 14. What follows is a selection of these.

The Lordship of Christ

Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. ... 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,' says the Lord, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.' ... 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last.' ... 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.' Rev 1:5, 8,11, 17-18

The Lordship of Christ is first asserted in that he is the ruler over all earthly empires. He sets the bounds of the nations and appoints kings and governments to serve his purpose. Men only reign on earth as they comply with the eternal plan of God. This was spoken to John at the end of the first century and thus Jesus is king over the earth now. This accords with his statement that after the resurrection God gave him authority over all things as a man on the Throne (Matt 28:18). Those groups who claim that Christ is not Lord now (e.g. some Dispensationalists) are utterly wrong and dishonour the Lord.

Christ also affirms that he is the beginning and the end, the first and last. This means that he is the self-existent one, one of the fundamental attributes of God (called aseity). He is the Word that was with God when the world was made (Jn 1:1ff); he is the Creator and the Second Person of the Trinity. He is Lord because he is God.

He is the same person who died and was raised. He is Jesus Christ, who came to earth as God in human form, suffered as a man and died for the sins of men but was raised in glory and ascended to heaven.

He is the one who has the keys of Hades and death. What does this mean? Well the key-holder is the one who opens the door, the one who has power over what the keys lock. Anyone coming in or going out needs to permission of the one who holds the key. Hades is the place of departed spirits; it is the realm where men go after death awaiting the Last Judgement when they will be sentenced to hell. The one with the key both locks those who are to be condemned in Hades after death and who releases those chosen from death by giving them resurrection life. Christ thus is Lord of life and death; he gives life to the elect, his chosen people, but seals the fate of the reprobate. Further, with this key he raises the reprobate to judgment in the flesh on the Last Day. They do not merely disappear after death in annihilation, but are raised to sustain an everlasting punishment.

Christ is thus Lord of all things. He is the eternal one, the creator, the one who always was, the one who died and was raised and the one in control of life and death. There is no greater Lord.

The salvific work of Christ

Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings

and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Rev 1:5-6

Jesus is, first, the faithful witness; that is, he brings us the truth about God from heaven. There were many previous witnesses, in the form of the OT prophets, who brought messages from God (Heb 1:1) but Christ is THE faithful witness, the Son of God, the Lord and Creator of the Earth, who brings the message of salvation to men. Since he is the faithful witness, it is vital that men must listen to him.

Then it is explained that the beginning of salvation is that God loves us. This is spoken to those who accept the witness of Christ; the elect. Christ does not love everyone or everyone would be saved; he loves the elect, his bride. If he loved others than his bride he would be guilty of adultery; thus Christ cannot love any other than the elect. For this reason he only prays for the elect (Jn 17:9) and his atonement is only effective for those he prays for. Salvation is as wide as God's love – to the elect alone. Since he loves us and since this love stems from eternity (Eph 1:4-5) he comes to bring salvation to those he loves. Those who are adopted as sons are those who were loved from eternity.

The Lord brings sanctification to those he loves. Forgiveness of sins is the result of washing in the blood of Christ; that is, being included in the atonement provided by Christ. Only the cross brings the grace that has the power to forgive sins, and this grace is given to the elect alone, those loved by Christ. Those loved by God have their sins washed away and benefit from the merits of Christ's death and resurrection.

Subsequent to receiving justification, pardon for sins and a new righteousness, believers are adopted as legal heirs in God's family with Christ. Now sons of God united with Christ, believers become new creatures not just forgiven old creatures. They thus become kings and priests to God the Father. This means that a) they are given delegated authority to share in the rulership of the world with Christ; b) that all believers are equal in justification and have a direct relationship to God the Father without any intermediary. Every Christian can pray, worship and have intimate fellowship with God by the Spirit as a result of the work of Christ.

The outcome of all this is that believers alone truly worship God. They have the privilege of being called to worship God for all eternity in harmony of fellowship in a restored and purified world where God dwells. Thus the praise to God for his great salvation begins even now, 'to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen'.

This summary of Christ's work of grace shows that the foundation is the particular love of God for the elect and it ends in the genuine worship of God by his purified saints.

The Return of Christ

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Rev 1:7

This is a very uncomplicated statement about the Second Coming, yet one which immediately dispenses with many forms of complex eschatology. What does it tell us?

First, that Christ is coming with the clouds, which was affirmed when he ascended to heaven in the same way.

'Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory' (Matt 24:30).

A cloud is always associated with the glory of God, such as the cloud that hid God on Mt Sinai, or the cloud associated with the voice of God during the Transfiguration (Matt 17:5). The glory of God seen in the cloud cannot be hid but is one of shocking glory, known to the Jews as the shekinah glory. There is no secret appearing here, but a glorious return involving unusual and mysterious cloud formations, which alone would alarm men.

Then there is no mention of any subsequent appearing. There is only one return and that is a glorious return involving the majesty of heaven. This eradicates any idea of a secret rapture.

Then we are told that every eye will see him. This means that the appearance of Christ in a cloud of glory will be a global event, despite the apparent physical problems that this would cause since the earth is a globe with one half in darkness when the other is in light. By God's power Christ appears to the whole Earth and all men see him. This is a world-shaking event before anything else occurs.

But we are then told that when all eyes see him; this includes the dead. Even those Roman soldiers involved in the crucifixion will be raised up to witness this earth-shattering cataclysm. The whole race of men from all time is resurrected on this last day to witness the glorious appearing of Christ.

Finally all the tribes of earth will mourn when they witness this. At this point all men will realise that the Bible was true, the Christian Gospel was genuine and that they no longer have any time to repent and believe. They realise that the witness of Scripture that hell is real and that sin must be paid for are both true and that they now face imminent judgment. The one that they had cursed for many years is now shown to be the Lord of Glory; the one they had derided is now seen in terrifying majesty, and they wail on account of their coming eternal ruin.

This one simple verse teaches all these things very clearly. Huge complicated books on the Second Coming are not necessary if you believe this verse. All you need to know is here.

God's eternal purpose fulfilled

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. ... 'Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.' Rev 21:1-3

God's plan is described in pure simplicity, and yet fully. God's decree is to build a new world where heaven and earth are united, the material and the spiritual conjoined. Here God will dwell with men; only pictured in the Tabernacle and Temple; only spiritually in the church, but now in material reality. The church is the people of God and he moves amongst them.

The benefits of heavenly life

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Rev 21:4

The new man in a new body in the new Earth has no more pain. All the taint of sin has gone since the old nature is now removed from the believer and sanctification is complete. In addition, the saint has uninterrupted fellowship in the flesh with God. Consequently, none of the painful things associated with life now occurs – no death, no sorrow, no crying, no pain, but eternal life, complete joy, happiness, elation, blessedness.

Summary of the Gospel

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. Rev 21:6

The Gospel is predicated on knowing the one who is the Alpha and Omega, the one who has existed by his own power from the beginning, i.e. God in the person of Christ. He gives eternal life, it is not something that can be found or worked for, it must be given. This presupposes that Christ gives this life to those he chooses since not all have life and the life is a gift. Eternal life is given to those who thirst, and this thirst is only found in those who have been made thirsty by God, who have been drawn by him. Natural man is not thirsty for the things of God. Finally, eternal life is given freely, without price. It is by the grace of God alone that men are saved. Grace is a gift that cannot be worked for and is not gained by fulfilling certain conditions, but is a free gift. Those who do not thirst for this life are not true believers. Someone who claims to be a believer but has no thirst for God is not saved.

Hell

If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *h*is mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name. Rev 14:9-11

It does not need significant tools of interpretation of identify the power behind the beast. All schools of thought agree that it is the devil who lies behind whatever the beast is. So, we can say that what is in view here is worshipping Satan or supporting the devil. Those who are punished are those who are not of God but are of the devil.

Clearly the mark on the hand and forehead simply refer to thinking and doing. This is sin of mind and deed. What is punishable are the acts of sin and the root of sin in the heart. The punishment is wrath, divine anger unloosed against sin. There is no escaping the fact that God is angry with sin and expresses wrath against it. His indignation is poured out in fulness of wrath on unrepentant sinners. This is pictured as being wine, something that has taken a long time to ferment and concentrate. It is concentrated wrath.

Now regarding the details of the punishment in heaven, we can leave aside speculating on what fire and brimstone represent, but what we can be certain of is that the punishment is a torment. Twice torment is mentioned to emphasise this and the word can be translated as 'torture'. This punishment is done in the presence of angels and Christ. Finally the punishment is eternal; it is clearly stated as being 'forever and ever'. It is also continual in duration, since there is no rest day and night.

A more powerful and terrifying statement about hell will be hard to find.

Conclusion

This is a mere summary of a few doctrinal statements of many that are found in Revelation. Those who never read this book, due to its inherent difficulties, are missing a great deal that is beneficial. This is one of the reasons that a promise of blessing is attached to the reading and obeying of this and no other book (Rev 1:3).

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