A few years ago a significant number of books were written on what happens after we die. Dr. Elizbeth Kubler-Ross' book "On Death and Dying" and Dr. Raymond Moody's best seller "Life After Life" brought the subject of life after death to the attention of many people. It was common to hear people on the street and in social gatherings talking about a subject that for many years was taboo, i.e., what happens after we die.

For Orthodox Christians the only real evidence for life beyond the grave is to be found in God's word, not in Kubler-Ross or Moody or anyone else. Many of these authors have been involved in mystical experiences and the occult which are tools of Satan, according to the teachings of our Church. The promise of life after death is assured solely by the resurrection of Jesus. "Because I live, you shall live also," said Jesus. No Christian should ever base his faith on anything but the word of God as interpreted by the Church. We should never allow human experience to speak with more authority than the Scriptures on this issue.

In addition to all the talk about life after death, not since the Middle Ages has eschatology been so popular a subject of discussion. Eschatology is just another one of those Greek words for how the world will end. There are those who believe that in the end civilization will emerge perfected after some kind of world-wide calamity. Then there are those who predict that civilization will disappear altogether. Whereas a few years ago we used to believe in evolution, i.e., that the world was getting better and better, most people now believe that things are so bad they can't go on this way much longer. They believe more in a coming catastrophe than in evolution.

The story is told about Bishop Eivind Berggrav, the famed Norwegian war-resister of the Second World War, that when he saw the devastated ruins of London, he exclaimed, "If there is a Third World War, there will be nothing left." "Nothing but God!" Berggrav's British host rejoined.

President John Kennedy once said to the famous evangelist Billy Graham, after playing a round of golf with him in Florida, "I want to ask you a question. Where do you think history is going? What is going to be the climax, the end?"
It is a question that is being asked by many today; a question to which many false and misleading answers are being given; a question which affects each one of us. It is an important question that we shall endeavor to answer on the basis of God’s word and the Sacred Tradition of the Orthodox Church.

WHAT IS ESCHATOLOGY?

What we shall be talking about is called in theology eschatology. It comes from a Greek word, eschatologia, which means the doctrine or study of the last things. Eschata in Greek means the last things. It refers to the study of such events as death, the end of the world, the particular or intermediate judgment, the Parousia, the second coming of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, heaven and hell.

Christian eschatology tells us that the life we now live will not come to an end. It is headed somewhere. Our years on earth, however many or few, are not the whole story. There is more ahead.

We cannot escape eschatology. If we reject Christian eschatology, we will replace it with some other version of eschatology. For example, the statement, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die,” is an eschatological statement. It is talking about the end of your life and mine. It is telling us that death is supreme. It will get all of us in the end. So it behooves us to enjoy ourselves to the fullest before death catches us and puts an end to us.

In a similar way, our Christian faith is eschatological. In contrast to the secular eschatology of “Eat, drink, and be merry...,” our Christian faith tells us: God is more powerful than death. In fact, He sent His Son, Jesus to destroy death. In Christ, death does not destroy life. It fulfills life. God confronts each one of us in Christ to offer us life. In the words of the Apostle John, “He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life” (1 John 5:12). The decision we make about Christ, i.e., whether we receive Him, ignore Him, or reject Him, determines whether we spend eternity with God in heaven or without Him in hell. For the unbeliever, the end of the world may mean annihilation, destruction, catastrophe; for the Christian, however, the end of the world means the beginning of eternity, the inauguration of a new and better life, the coming of the Kingdom of God for each of us personally.
So whether we are believers or unbelievers we are involved in eschatology. Something is going to happen to us at the end of our lives. Depending on what we do now it can be either the greatest good or the greatest calamity.

To see how eschatology fits into God's plan of salvation, let us examine the four stages of grace:

1. **Preparation**, which, simply stated, means God calls us to be converted, to change the whole direction of our life so that it is headed toward God.

2. **Justification**, which is our being cleansed of sin through baptism and after baptism through repentance. We become justified, just-as-if-we-had-never-sinned.

3. **Sanctification**, which is the process of being sanctified or made holy. This is the Christian's gradual growth in Christ. It includes the putting on of Christ and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Here prayer and the sacraments play an important role.

4. **Glory**, which refers to what will happen to us after death, i.e., we shall see God's glory and share in it. This is the last, or the eschatological stage. The first three stages: preparation, justification and sanctification, culminate in the glory stage (theosis). "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4). This is what lies ahead for the believer.

**THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF THE CREED**

Because Christ has overcome sin and death, because He is the living Lord of our lives, we have a future: death is not the last word in human destiny. This powerful theme of unquenchable hope runs through the whole New Testament and is expressed so effectively in the Nicene Creed.

The Creed delineates exactly what we are waiting for in the future. We are waiting for the second coming of Jesus. We are waiting for the resurrection of the dead. We are waiting for the life of the ages to come. To use the words of the Creed, "And I wait for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.... He (Jesus) shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, of Whose kingdom there shall be no end."
This is the end. This is the purpose. This is the great goal toward which the entire creed is marching. If you drop the end of the Creed which talks about the coming of Jesus and the life of the world to come, you might as well stop reciting the rest of it because it has no meaning left in it.

"I believe...in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord.” Why is Jesus one of the focal points of the Creed? The answer is to be found again in the Creed. “Who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven.” That is what it is all about. He, the beloved Son of God, of the same essence with the Father, came down from heaven, was crucified, died and was buried. He rose on the third day and is now sitting at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. But why? What for? Why this strange expedition all the way from heaven to earth? Why this incredible story of God becoming man? Why does God have to die and rise again? Why any of this but for one reason. God did it in order to come and take us with Him to a specially prepared place so that we may be with Him forever. This is what God desires for each of us as the end point, the omega, of our lives. This is our Christian eschatology—yours and mine—which Jesus expressed so beautifully in His priestly prayer to the Father, “Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which Thou has given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). This is why Fr. Florovsky stated that “eschatology is not just one particular section of the Christian theological system, but rather its basis and foundation, its guiding and inspiring principle, or, as it were, the climate of the whole of Christian thinking.... The Christian perspective is intrinsically eschatological.”*

THE LAST CHAPTER

Life is complex. Things never seem to turn out right. Many times it is like a detective story where the plot seems very confused. One is not at all certain what the outcome will be. But in the last chapter the detective summons all the suspects into a room, proceeds to unravel the mystery, shows the pattern running through it, and reveals how he knew the guilty person. It is only in the light of the last chapter that the rest of the book makes sense.

Now, if one had read the last chapter first, then one would be able to make a good deal more sense out of the story. Knowing what happens in the last chapter, one would see meaning and significance in the events as they took place.

In His great love God has allowed us to read the last chapter. He has allowed us to see that we live in a world where the final victory has been won. The cross was not the end for Jesus; neither will it be the end for those who believe in Him. The Risen Christ will have the last word. And the last word is: "In the world you have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

The final chapter is the Parousia, the Second Coming of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment and the establishment of the endless Kingdom of God. If we know this in advance, what a profound difference it should make in our attitude toward suffering, toward evil, toward death, toward everyday life.

DEATH

One of the very vital and existential truths with which Christian eschatology confronts us is death—your death and mine. We do everything to try to repress the reality of death. But Jesus talks about it repeatedly. He talks about it because He has the greatest good news to share with us about how He defeated death, actually trampled upon it by His own death, in order to grant those who are in the tomb—and to each one of us as we face our own death—the promise of everlasting life.

When St. Paul talks about death, he uses a figure of speech which compares the earthly body to a tent that is used for a time and which at death is exchanged for a heavenly house (see 2 Cor. 5:1-4). This reminds us of the words of our Lord Jesus when He spoke of heaven as a place where there would be many rooms for His people to live in. “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:1-3). All this means that when the moment of death comes for the believer, he will move from the tent he is presently living in—his earthly body—and will take up residence in a permanent home Jesus has prepared.
One of the most beautiful illustrations of what death really is like for the Christian believer is the following. There was a little boy who had an incurable illness. Month after month, the mother tenderly nursed him. But as the time went by, the little fellow gradually began to realize he would not live. One day he asked his mother: “Mom, what is it like to die? Does it hurt?”

Tears filled the mother’s eyes as she fled to the kitchen to see about something on the stove. She knew the question had to be faced. She leaned against the kitchen cabinet, her knuckles pressed white against the wall, and breathed a quick prayer: “Lord, tell me how to answer him.” And the Lord did tell her.

She returned to his room.

“Kenneth,” she said, “You remember when you were a tiny boy you used to play so hard that when night came you would be too tired even to undress, and you would tumble into mother’s bed and fall asleep? That was not your bed. It was not where you belonged.

“In the morning you would wake up and find yourself in your own bed in your own room. Your father had come with big strong arms—and carried you into your own bed. Kenneth, that’s what death is like. We fall asleep. Then our heavenly Father picks us up with His mighty hands and carries us to heaven. Later, when morning comes, we wake up and find ourselves not in a strange place but in our own room—in a place where we belong.”

That is what death is for the Christian: moving day. We move from one room in our Father’s house (a temporary room which St. Paul calls a tent) to a permanent room which shall be our very own in heaven. It is, in effect, a true homecoming. As the door closes on this life, God opens a new door to a heavenly life.

As surely as God sent us to earth, He has given us a return ticket. As Jesus said, “I come from God and I go to God.” Life is like a round-trip journey. We come from God and ultimately we go back to Him.

Aristides, a pagan Greek, in 125 A.D. wrote to one of his friends about the new religion, Christianity, and its attitude toward death. A sentence from one of his letters reads, “If any righteous man among the Christians passes from this world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God, and they escort the body with songs and thanksgiving as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby.”
St. John Chrysostom summarized the Christian's attitude toward death when he wrote:

*When a dear one dies, the unbeliever sees a cadaver, but the Christian sees a body asleep. The unbeliever says that the dead person has "gone". We agree, but we remember where he has gone. He has gone where the apostle Paul is, where Peter is, where the whole company of the saints are. We remember that he will rise, not with tears of dismay, but with splendor and glory.*

Thus, physical death, the separation of soul and body, which occurred as a result of sin and as punishment for it, loses its fearful aspect for those who have been redeemed in Christ. It opens the door to a glorious new life with God in heaven. Death is now swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:54). “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:21-22).

Let us apply this faith to a specific example.

What if you had an eight-year-old boy and the doctor told you he had only a few minutes to live, what would you say to him?

Or, what if you were a priest, and the parents of that child came to you, and said, “Father, won’t you say something to Johnny? He has only a few minutes left.” What would you say? What would I say?

Well, this actually happened once. A splendid Christian woman, who happened to be a scrubwoman in the hospital where little Johnny was a patient, had come to know him well. Upon learning that he did not have much longer to live, she walked calmly into Johnny’s room, sat on his bed, took his thin hands between her calloused palms, and said, “Listen, Johnny, God made you. God loves you. God sent His Son to save you. God wants you to come home to Him.” With great difficulty Johnny raised himself up on his elbow and said, “Say it again.” She repeated: “God made you. God loves you. God sent His Son to save you. God wants you to come home to Him.” Johnny looked into her beautiful face and said, “Tell God, ‘Thank you.’”

These beautiful words of the Christian scrubwoman summarize our theology of death.
THE PARTICULAR OR INTERMEDIATE JUDGMENT

Now we face the question: What happens immediately after a person dies? Is there immediate judgment? Do we just sleep until the Second Coming of Jesus? What lies ahead for us the moment after we die? The Orthodox Church teaches that immediately after death a person is judged. He or she experiences a foretaste of the punishment or reward that will be received in its entirety at the Second Coming of Jesus. It is much like a runner who has come in first in a track meet. He knows he has won. He basks in the satisfaction of victory. He is already in heaven as it were, but he has to wait until the banquet in the evening to receive the trophy. It is then that he will be granted his reward officially.

The Synod of Constantinople (1672 A.D.) expressed our belief regarding the Particular Judgment as follows:

*We believe that the souls of the departed are either in bliss or in torment as each one wrought, for immediately after the separation from the body they (the souls) are pronounced either for bliss or suffering and sorrow, yet we confess that neither the joy nor the condemnation are as yet complete. After the General Resurrection, when the soul is united to the body, each one will receive the full measure of joy or condemnation due him for the way in which he conducted himself, whether for good or bad.*

Thus, after death we begin to experience a real foretaste of heaven or hell, but we shall have to wait for the Second Coming before we can receive the fullness of our reward.

The judgment that takes place after death is called the Particular or Intermediate Judgment. It is clear that the soul does not sleep during this time. The word “asleep” applies only to the body. This is why the place where the body is placed is called “cemetery” from the Greek word *Kimitirion*, a place where one sleeps. The soul, however, does not sleep after death. It is fully conscious, experiencing part of its reward.

Can there be anything like repentance after we die? The Orthodox Church teaches that the state of the soul at the Particular Judgment (immediately after death) is fixed and unchangeable, that is, there can be no moral improvement or repentance beyond the grave. The place for such improvement is in this life. “I must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day,” said Jesus, “night comes, when no man can work”
In His mercy God gives us many chances to repent and return to Him. But this should not lead anyone to presume upon God's goodness. One day "night will come when no man can work".

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

We see much of what we believe about the Particular or Intermediate Judgment illustrated in the story of the rich man and Lazarus as told by Jesus. When Lazarus died, "he was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom". That is rabbinic language for paradise. This parable tells us that we are not alone at the moment of death. God sends His angels to carry us, to escort us, into His Presence.

In that life beyond death, Lazarus and the rich man are not asleep. They are very much alive. They recognize each other. They remember their life on earth. "Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish." The rich man in his great affluence had been ignoring poor Lazarus, dying of starvation on his doorstep. Now he was paying the price for his lack of love. Being in torment...he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame." To show that there can be no repentance, no moral improvement, no salvation beyond the grave, Abraham tells the rich man, "...between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us."

One cannot pass from hell to heaven beyond the grave. The time and place for that is in this life. Jesus calls us to faith and repentance today. For today, now is the day of salvation.

JUDGMENT TODAY

Already in this life God prepares us for the Particular Judgment. Whenever we choose God's will, we experience a bit of heaven in the satisfaction that God bestows on us through the voice of conscience. We enter already by anticipation into eternal life. Likewise, whenever we deliberately disobey God's will, we experience a foretaste of hell through the terrible pangs of conscience. The moral order of God's universe keeps breaking in on us constantly to prepare us for the judgment to come.
Thus, we may distinguish three stages in life:

1. Our life on earth which is the arena of grace and the preparation for heaven;
2. The particular judgment which takes place after death during which time, while the body sleeps, the soul experiences a foretaste of heaven or hell; and
3. The Resurrection of the dead and the Final Judgment at the coming of Jesus when the soul and the body will be reunited for eternity to receive in full their crown of glory or punishment.

This is the faith we live by. This is the faith we die by. When the end comes, we too will be able to say together with St. Paul:

*The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).*

**THE LAST DAYS**

The Scriptures mention six events that will occur before the Second Coming of Jesus:

1. The preaching of the Gospel to all nations (Matt. 24:14).
2. The return of Israel to Christ (Rom. 11:25-26).
3. The coming of Elijah and Enoch in the last days (see Rev. 11).
4. The appearance of the Antichrist.
5. A mass apostasy or falling away from the true Christian faith led by false teachers (Matt. 24:4-5)
6. Wars, revolutions, famines and earthquakes (Matt. 24:6-8)

Commenting on the meaning of these six events that will precede the Second Coming, Bp. Kallistos Ware writes:

*Scripture and Tradition speak to us repeatedly about the Second Coming. They give us no grounds for supposing that, through a steady advance in "civilization", the world will grow gradually better and better until mankind succeeds in establishing God's kingdom upon*
The Christian view of world history is entirely opposed to this kind of evolutionary optimism. What we are taught to expect are disasters in the world of nature...warfare between men...apostasy...tribulation... (the) Antichrist who...will be not Satan himself, but a human being...in whom all the forces of evil will be concentrated and who will for a time hold the entire world under his sway. The brief reign of Antichrist will be abruptly terminated by the Second Coming of the Lord, this time not in a hidden way, as at His birth in Bethlehem, but “sitting on the right hand of power” (Matt. 26:64). So the course of history will be brought to a sudden and dramatic end, through a direct intervention from the divine realm.

The six signs that will precede the Second Coming are sufficiently vague as to keep the exact time of His coming a mystery. How many times, for example, in history have Christians thought that the Antichrist had come in the person of Nero, Hitler or Stalin? How many times have there been mass apostasies from the Christian faith led by false teachers? How many times have there been revolutions, famines and earthquakes which made many believe that the Coming of Jesus was imminent? Despite these six signs we have no exact timetable from God regarding the Second Coming of Jesus. We know neither day nor the hour. “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only... Watch therefore for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (Matt. 24:36,42). He will come “as a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2).

You ask, why did not God tell us when Jesus will come again? For very good reason. He wants us to be constantly prepared, to maintain constant purity in our lives. Augustine put it this way: “This one day God has concealed from us that we may keep a better and closer watch over the other days of life.”

When company comes to your home, you like to know the exact hour of their arrival so that you can have the house clean and ready for their arrival. If you do not know when they are coming, you will have to keep the house clean and neat all the time.

I read recently of a conversation between two of our Roman Catholic brethren:

“Oh, my Lord! He’s coming!”
“Who?”
"Jesus, you idiot. O, Lord! Where's the nearest confessional?"
"Why?"
"Because I'm not ready, that's why! What a way to run a world. Doesn't He know I've been too busy lately? Why didn't He give us a little advance warning?"
"He did."
"When?"
"About two thousand years ago."

**WATCHFULNESS**

The whole theme of the Christian's life is watchfulness, preparedness, expectant faith. The end is always imminent, always spiritually close at hand. We are constantly only a heartbeat away from judgment. "And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes the judgment..." (Heb. 9:27). How well this sense of urgency is captured by the words of St. Andrew of Crete, recited each Lent in the Great Canon:

*My soul, O my soul, rise up! Why art thou sleeping!*
*The end draws near, and soon shalt thou be troubled.*
*Watch then, that Christ thy God may spare thee,*
*For He is everywhere present and fills all things.*

The Lord Jesus said,

*Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at the table, and he will come and serve them.... You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Luke 12:35-40).*

God will one day step into history in the Person of Jesus to judge the living and the dead. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has
done in the body” (2 Cor. 5:10). The purpose of Judgment is not to make us afraid but to drive us to repentance so that we may become truly “His people” by faith, hope and love. God’s judgment is redemptive. He wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth.

THE VICTORY MADE MANIFEST

The Second Coming of Jesus is the goal toward which all of life is moving, the harbor toward which the ship of life is sailing. The victory of Christ achieved by His resurrection remains to the world a hidden victory, seen only through the eyes of faith. The Second Coming of Jesus will be that point in history when the victory of Christ will be seen and made manifest to all eyes, and the world will come to know what the Church already knows: that Jesus Christ is Lord!

The Second Coming of Jesus shows us that God has a plan for the world, that history is not a haphazard collection of chance events which are going nowhere. The Second Coming tells us that the world is going somewhere. It has a supreme purpose. The whole of creation is marching toward the time when Jesus will come again as Judge and Lord of all. Every one of us will appear before Him to give an account of our life. This is how much God cares for each one of us personally; this is how much what we do in life today and every day matters to Him. At the end of life each of us will have a personal and private audience with the Lord of the Universe! Every liturgy reminds us of this when it invites us to pray for “a good defense before the awesome judgment seat of Christ”. The whole of life, then, for the Christian is a preparation for the Parousia, the Second Coming of Jesus. When the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away; we shall see Him not as in a mirror darkly but face to face (1 Cor. 13:9-12). We shall be looking upon His glory forever (1 Thess. 4:17) in a “new heaven and a new earth” (2 Peter 3:3-13).

WHAT WILL HAPPEN ON THAT DAY?

1. The Bible tells us that when the Lord returns: “All the tribes of the earth will...see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory: and He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the earth to the other” (Matt. 24:30,31).
2. At the return of the Lord the dead are to be raised up. “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven...and the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive...shall...meet the Lord...” (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

3. At the return of the Lord, judgment will take place. St. Paul writes, “This judgment will issue in...Christ’s personal coming from Heaven with the angels of His power. It will bring full justice in dazzling flame upon those who have refused to know God or to obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Their punishment will be eternal exclusion from the radiance of the Face of the Lord, and the glorious majesty of His power. But to those whom He has made holy His coming will mean splendor unimaginable. It will be a breath-taking wonder to all who believe—including you, for you have believed the message that we have given you” (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

Bp. Kallistos Ware writes,

The Orthodox attitude toward the Last Judgment and Hell is clearly expressed in the choice of Gospel readings at the liturgy on three successive Sundays shortly before Lent. On the first Sunday is read the parable of the Publican and Pharisee, on the second the parable of the Prodigal Son, stories which illustrate the immense forgiveness and mercy of God towards all sinners who repent. But in the Gospel for the third Sunday—the parable of the Sheep and the Goats—we are reminded of the other truth: that it is possible to reject God and to turn away from Him to Hell.*

Judgment means that we shall be seen by God one day as we truly are, with all our masks and pretension stripped away. This is what happened to Peter after he denied Jesus. He saw Jesus once. Jesus looked at him and Peter couldn’t return the look. He was judged, seen as he truly was. It was that look that helped Peter realize the great sin he had committed. It led him to repentance and forgiveness.

We may expect mercy from God. There is no sin He will not forgive if we repent. It is only for unrepented sin that there is no forgiveness—not because God refuses to forgive but because we do not seek forgiveness. We would all like to be given a second chance after death. But

* The Orthodox Church. Bp. Kallistos Ware. Viking-Penguin Press. NY.
God gives us a second chance—a thousand second chances—in this life. He became man in the Person of Jesus; He died on the cross to forgive us; He rose from the grave to destroy death for us; He forgave the penitent thief just before he died to show how many second and third chances He is willing to give us. He continues to plead with each one of us personally with His Spirit through the voice of conscience. His love and mercy are continually offered to us through the Church and the Bible, but even God cannot force people to love Him or it is not true love. Part of the meaning of human freedom is that it gives us the awful privilege of saying “No” to God and refusing His love.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

One of the events that will occur at the Second Coming of Jesus is the resurrection of the dead. By resurrection of the dead we mean the raising of the bodies of all those who have died and the reunion of the body with the soul by the power of the Almighty. St. John of Damascus tells why the resurrection of the body is necessary:

*If the soul alone exerted itself in the battle for virtue, then it alone should be crowned. If it alone was defiled...in justice it alone should be punished. But since neither soul nor body had existence the one apart from the other, nor did the soul apart from the body exercise itself in virtue or vice, quite rightly are both to receive their due reward together.*

The Greek Orthodox theologian Androutsos called the resurrection:

...a creative act of divine greatness and might, dissolving the rule of death and raising up all the dead along with the living before the divine bar of judgment. Just as God created all things out of nothing, so, through the same creative power He restores human bodies to their first essential form.

According to St. Paul the bodies of the dead, when raised, will be incorruptible and spiritual bodies like the body of the Risen Christ during His appearances to the disciples following the resurrection. As a spiritual
body it will no longer need the marriage relationship and will not be susceptible to death. It must be borne in mind that the Scripture passages of the New Testament that deal with the resurrection of the dead and the General Judgment do not give all the details about what will occur. In the words of one respected Orthodox theologian, “…nor must they be taken literally, since they are pictures portraying to us the inconceivable grandeur of that day.”

When trying to describe the resurrection of the dead, St. Paul uses an analogy from nature. He reminds his readers that when they sow grain, the seed must first “die” before it can produce new life. Though the “body” of the seed is different from the “body” of the full-grown wheat, there is still continuity between them.

What is reaped is different than what is sown, and yet it comes from what is sown.

He goes on to explain that the same is true with the resurrection of the dead. It is “sown” a physical body, he says, but it is raised a spiritual body.

What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.
It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.
It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.
It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.
(1 Cor. 15:42-44)

In the resurrection we shall not have our weak earthly bodies but new bodies, fashioned by God. Yet there shall be continuity between them. It will be our present body but transformed and renewed as St. Paul describes in Phil. 3:20:

But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself. (italics added)

In the final analysis, the questions of “How are the dead raised?”, “With what kind of body do they come?” (1 Cor. 15:35) remain beyond human understanding: “Lo! I tell you a mystery!” (1 Cor. 15:51), says Paul. The main truth is that God, in His own way and fashion, will transform us so that we may continue to live in constant fellowship with Him, glorifying Him through all eternity.
Speaking of the continuity between the earthly and the resurrected body, St. Cyril of Jerusalem writes,

*It is this selfsame body that is raised, although not in its present state of weakness; for it will “put on incorruption” (1 Cor. 15:53) and so be transformed…. It will no longer need the foods which we now eat to keep it alive… for it will be made spiritual and will become something marvelous, such as we cannot properly describe.*

Both the Old and New Testaments agree that body and soul cannot be split apart. We are both *psyche* (soul) and *soma* (body). We are a unity (psychosomatic). We are not just one or the other; we are both, and God will keep body and soul together for all eternity. Thus, eternal life is a transforming rather than a junking of life on earth. When God came to earth to save man, he took on not only a human soul but also human flesh. He came to save the whole man, body and soul.

God created man to be a unified being of body and soul and to remain so for all eternity. It was the fall of Adam that brought about the separation of body and soul in death: “Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return” (Gen. 3:19). Through the Resurrection of Jesus, God’s original plan for man is restored. At the Second Coming the body will be resurrected to be reunited with the soul.

This is the faith of the New Testament. This is the faith of the early Christians. This continues to be the faith of the ancient Orthodox, Catholic and Apostolic Church: that through His Resurrection the Lord Jesus has completely conquered death. As a result of His victory, the dead will rise again “in Christ” to enjoy eternal life in spiritualized and transfigured bodies and in a totally new creation. St. Gregory Palamas said, “When God is said to have made man according to His image, the word ‘man’ means neither the soul by itself nor the body by itself, but both together.” Both together will be saved. Both together will be transfigured. Both body and soul will spend eternity together in a new heaven and a new earth.

St. Athanasius speaks of the resurrection of the body as the great monument of Christ’s victory over death:

*The supreme object of his coming was to bring about the resurrection of the body. This was to be the monument to his victory over death, the assurance to all that he had himself conquered corruption and that*
their own bodies also would eventually be incorrupt; and it was in token of that and as a pledge of the future resurrection that he kept his body incorrupt.

THE GENERAL JUDGMENT

Following the resurrection of the dead at the Second Coming of Jesus, the General Judgment will take place. As Jesus said,

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at his left. Then he will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food...." Then he will say to those at his left hand, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food...." And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matthew 25).

The same Jesus who came humbly in Bethlehem to be our Saviour will come again in glory at the end of time to be our Judge. The purpose of His first coming was to prepare us for the Second Coming. The One who will meet us at the end of the road is the One with Whom we may walk hand in hand on the road of life right now. In fact, we may even minister to Him in the persons of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the imprisoned, the sick. The single most important criterion by which we shall be judged is the royal virtue of love: love of God and love of neighbor. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren you did it to me" (Matt: 25:40).

Remember that the Lord Jesus as Judge on the last day will not condemn those who have sinned, but those who have sinned without repenting. He forgives and saves those who have repented of their sins. For this reason He came into the world: to SAVE. That was the purpose of His coming; that was the dream of His heart; to save us all so that we might be with Him in His glory forever—not one missing!
Bp. Kallistos Ware writes,

*The Last Judgment is best understood as the moment of truth when everything is brought to light, when all our acts of choice stand revealed to us in their full implications. When we realize with full clarity who we are, and what has been the deep meaning and aim of our life. And so, following this final clarification, we shall enter—with soul and body reunited—into heaven or hell, into eternal life or eternal death.*

Daniel Webster was once asked, “What is the greatest thought you have ever had?” Pondering a moment, he replied, “The greatest thought I have ever had was my accountability to God.” Without this fact of the ultimate justice of God, when all the inequities will be balanced and the injustices corrected, life would be a “tale told by an idiot”. Nothing would make sense. Everything would be unreasonable, nonsensical, meaningless.

There have been those in the history of Christianity who have believed in the so-called millennium. This is a teaching that holds that when Christ returns, He will reign on earth with His disciples for one thousand years. Based on a literalistic interpretation of Revelation 20, and espoused by heretics in the early Church (Gnostics and Montanists), the idea of an earthly millennium was rejected by the Church. It is mentioned neither in the Nicene Creed, nor its doctrines, as are the Second Coming and the General Judgment.

**HEAVEN**

What is heaven?

Orthodox theology teaches that the bliss of heaven consists (1) in deliverance from suffering, pain, grief, corruption, etc., (2) the enjoyment of the vision of God, (3) the reunion with all other righteous souls. There is also a gradation of blessedness corresponding to the moral state of each soul.

Heaven is spoken of in Scripture as “Kingdom of God”, “everlasting life”, “bosom of Abraham”, and “paradise”.

In 2 Corinthians 12, St. Paul used guarded language to speak of a contact he had with the glorious heavenly reality. He writes:

(Continued on next page)
I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up in the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know. God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” (vv. 2-4).

St. Paul is speaking here about himself. He speaks as carefully as he does because he continued to be so astonished by the memory of the event that he could scarcely believe that it actually happened. Above all, he did not wish to fall into the trap of boasting to others about it. Paul had been given a vision of Paradise, and he knew something special about the future beyond the grave; and what he knew gave him reason to tell us that the future of believers is glorious beyond imagination. “Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it ever entered into man’s imagination what things God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

One great Christian said once that if the Lord told us too much about heaven in the Scriptures, we would be so homesick for heaven we wouldn’t do any work here. God is wise not only in what He tells us but also in what He does not tell us.

One of the great characteristics of heaven will be joy. Jesus Himself compared the Kingdom of God to a marriage feast. Christian joy results from the marriage of God to His people, from His constant presence in their midst. The joy of the final stage of the Kingdom of God overflows in the Gospels. For example:

—at the birth of Christ, the angels proclaim: “I bring you good news of great joy” (Luke 2:10);

—in His final discourse with the apostles at the Last Supper, Jesus says, “These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11);

—in the early Church we read, “And the disciples continued to be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52).

This joy is not something that will pass. It will continue eternally in heaven.

“Blessed are the pure of heart,” said Jesus, “for they shall see God.” Heaven is where this promise will be fulfilled. We shall enjoy the open vision of God. “We shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). The vision begins on earth. At the Transfiguration the disciples were able to see the divine light which shone from the Person of Jesus. St. Paul says that we are like
spiritual mirrors that receive and reflect the glory of God. The Church Fathers tell us that man’s purpose in life is to be able to see the divine light as much as we are able. We too become transfigured and progress slowly from glory to glory until we attain to the likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Already in this life Christians can experience the vision of God. The ascetic Fathers sought to experience this vision of the divine light through prayer and meditation. We call this theosis or participation in the divine glory. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face,” says Paul (1 Cor. 13:12). Heaven is to be with God “face to face”. Our eyes are destined to gaze upon the fullness of God’s glory forever.

Fr. John Meyendorff holds that this “face to face” vision of God is not to be as Origen believed, “a static contemplation of divine ‘essence’, but a dynamic ascent of love, which never ends, because God’s transcendent being is inexhaustible and...contains new things yet to be discovered through the union of love.”* As St. Irenaeus wrote, “Not only in this present age but also in the Age to come, God will always have something more to teach man, and man will always have something more to learn from God.” In other words, we shall not be idle in heaven; we shall be constantly learning and growing.

“I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). This is what lies at the end of the road for the believer. “To him who overcomes,” says the Risen Christ, “I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7).

The believer who walks with Jesus on the road of life already has eternal life. “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,” said Jesus (John 6:54). Not “will have” but “has”! Heaven is a continuation of our communion with Jesus that begins on earth. As Fr. Stavropoulos writes:

When a person receives the holy sacrament, he receives concurrently the promises of an indescribable communion with Christ in the age to come.... The Kingdom of God, as a communion of Christ with human beings in the Holy Spirit, is already realized in this life through the mystery of the Eucharist. The Kingdom of the age to come will be the complete and perfect form of the communion which already exists between Christ and the faithful.**

*Cf. Transfiguration and Inner Life: The Mystical Theology of Fr. John of the Ladder, Meyendorff, Fordham University Press.
**Cf. The Kingdom of God: A Christian and a Church, Meyendorff, Fordham University Press.
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Cf. The Kingdom of God: A Christian and a Church, Meyendorff, Fordham University Press.
HELL

As heaven begins on earth so does hell. An outstanding psychologist has written, “There is a very tangible and a very present hell on this earth. It is this—the hell of neurosis and psychosis—to which sin and unexpiated guilt lead us.” We are the ones who create hell when we misuse the gift of free will to say “No” to Him. To exclude God from our lives is to be in hell. God did not create us for hell. He created us for the Kingdom of heaven. We are the ones who create hell for ourselves through our prideful rebellion and disobedience. God came in the person of Jesus to set us free from hell. We see the Risen Christ in the Easter icon smashing the gates of hell to smithereens. Not one of us can enter hell without first passing over the hill where there is the God-man enthroned on a cross, with arms outstretched to embrace, with head bent to kiss, with heart open to love and forgive. The question that bothers me most is not “How can God’s love tolerate the existence of hell?” but “Why should God die on the cross to save unworthy me from a hell which my sins so rightly deserve?” This is the great mystery.

Having been created free, man cannot be forced into a union with God. He is allowed the privilege of facing the eternal consequence of either his “yes” or his “no” to God. To deny hell is to deny free will. God does not forgive those who do not want to be forgiven. Bp. Kallistos Ware writes, “If anyone is in hell, it is not because God has imprisoned him there, but because that is where he himself has chosen to be. The lost in hell are self-condemned, self-enslaved; it has been rightly said that the doors of hell are locked on the inside.”

Aristotle taught that the ultimate nature of a thing is determined by its telos or end. So it is that the ultimate meaning of man is to be found in his end. And man’s destiny, his end, is to return to God, to spend eternity with Him, to see Him “face to face”. Because the Christian is secure in his eschatological hope, he can live in this world with a kind of abandon, not fearing “what might happen” to him. St. Paul expressed it this way:

Our Christian eschatology offers us great perspective for living. It revises our whole attitude toward our possessions.

*If you buy anything, you should remember that you do not have it to keep. If you make use of this world's goods, remember that you have no chance to use them up, for the structure of the world is passing away (1 Cor. 7:30-31).*

To see the direction toward which the whole of life is moving is to see more clearly exactly what our true mission in life is:

*The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be sane and sober and say your prayers; above all, have intense love for one another; be hospitable; and use your gifts in the service of God that He may be glorified in everything (1 Peter 4:7-11).*

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God... (for) we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:10-13).*

Poetically speaking, history began in a garden and it will end in a garden. Once, by sin, man cut himself off from the garden and the tree of life (Gen. 3:23), but in the end, God will bring him back to his proper home and he will find the tree of life freely offered for his use (Rev. 22:2).

Eschatology forces us to ask ourselves some very basic questions: What is the direction of my life right now? If I keep following this way, where will I end up? Am I headed toward God or away from Him? Is my relationship to my Saviour a living one? Or one of lip-service only? If I should die right now, where would I find myself? What would be my personal eschatology? Where would I spent eternity?
SUMMARY

1. Eschatology is the study of the last things, i.e., death, the end of the world, the Second Coming of Jesus, etc.
2. Simply stated, our Orthodox Christian eschatology is expressed in the Nicene Creed when it says that Jesus "will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end.... I wait for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come."

3. The end of life for the Christian is moving day. We move from a temporary room in our Father's house (which St. Paul calls a tent) to a permanent home in heaven.

4. At the Particular Judgment, which takes place immediately after death, we receive a foretaste of our reward or punishment which will be received in its entirety at the Second Coming of Jesus.

5. God never told us exactly when Jesus will come again. He wants us to maintain a constant state of watchfulness and purity.

6. On the last day: Jesus will return, the dead will be raised, judgment will take place, the new heaven and new earth will be established.

7. The resurrection of Lazarus is a living image of the general resurrection of the dead which will occur on the last day. Every dead body will be resurrected and united again with the soul as a spiritual body similar to the one Jesus had after the resurrection.

8. Life continues eternally beyond the grave in the same direction as in life. If we lived with Christ on earth, we shall continue to live with Him in heaven. If we lived without Him on earth, we shall continue to live without Him in the life beyond.

9. Having been created with free will, man is allowed the privilege of facing the eternal consequence of either his "yes" (heaven) or his "no" (hell) to God. To deny hell is to deny free will.

10. Christian eschatology offers us great perspective for living. To see the direction toward which the whole of life is moving is to see more clearly exactly what our true mission in life is.