

SAN PEDRO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Adult Discipleship Class | Summer 2025

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Christian Doctrine

by Shirley C. Guthrie

Chapter Nineteen

A Summary Worksheet

Christian Hope for the Future: Guthrie's Understanding of Eschatology

Introduction

Chapter Nineteen closes Guthrie's constructive theology with the question that has been implicit since the doctrine of sin: "What's Going to Happen to Us?" Having spent the earlier chapters establishing who God is and what God has already done — in the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection, the Spirit, and the church — Guthrie now asks what all of that means for the future, both the world's and our own. His answer is characteristically restrained: Christian hope rests entirely on God's proven character, not on speculation about details God has not given us.

Chapter Nineteen — "What's Going to Happen to Us?"

The Doctrine of the Christian Hope for the Future

Christian Hope, Hopelessness, and False Hopes

Guthrie opens by naming the alternatives people actually live by. Hopelessness expects nothing and prepares for nothing. False hopes pin ultimate confidence on things too small to bear the weight — human progress, technology, political movements, or a private escape from the world altogether. Christian hope is neither. It does not deny how bad things are, and it does not locate its confidence in anything we can build or achieve ourselves. It rests entirely on the same God who has already acted in Christ's incarnation, atonement, and resurrection — trust that the one who has already been faithful will finish what he started.

Christian hope is not optimism about what we can build. It is confidence in what God has already begun and promised to finish.

Some Guidelines for Asking the Right Questions

Guthrie is wary of eschatology practiced as a puzzle to be solved — timelines, charts, and confident predictions about exactly how and when the end will come. He redirects the question: not "when" or "how," in speculative detail, but "whose" future it is, and what kind of future God's own character and God's past actions lead us to expect. Read this way, apocalyptic material in Scripture functions less like a blueprint and more like a pledge — the same God revealed in Jesus Christ will be the one who brings history to its end.

The right question is never exactly how or when God's future will come, but whose future it is.

Christian Hope for the World

Guthrie insists Christian hope is not private escape from a doomed world into a purely spiritual heaven; it is hope for the world itself — the renewal, not the abandonment, of God's creation.

The same God who raised Jesus bodily, in this world, promises a new heaven and a new earth, not a rescue operation that leaves the material world behind. That hope has practical consequences now: because the world's future belongs to God, Christians can work for justice, peace, and the healing of creation without either despair, since the outcome does not finally depend on us, or complacency, since that same hope calls us into the work.

| *Christian hope for the world is not escape from it, but the promise of its healing.*

Christian Hope for Individuals

On personal death, Guthrie follows the same pattern set back in his chapter on Christ's resurrection: our hope is not the bare immortality of a disembodied soul but bodily resurrection, patterned on Christ's own. Death is real and is taken seriously as loss, not minimized or explained away — but it is not final, because the God who raised Jesus is the same God who holds our own future. What that resurrected life looks like in detail, Guthrie leaves appropriately open; what matters is who holds it.

| *Our hope is not that some part of us survives death, but that the God who raised Jesus will raise us too.*

Putting It Together

Chapter Nineteen brings Guthrie's whole project full circle. The same God who came all the way into human life in the incarnation, dealt with sin at the cross, was raised as the world's rightful Lord, and remains present through the Spirit is the God in whom Christian hope for the future rests. Guthrie's eschatology, like the rest of his theology, refuses shortcuts in either direction: it will not trade hope for grim resignation, and it will not trade the hard reality of death and evil for cheap, easy optimism. Its confidence lies entirely in God's character, already shown in everything that has come before.

Christian Doctrine — Chapter Nineteen

Discussion Questions

Read through these questions before Wednesday if you can. There are no right answers to perform here — just honest thinking about what you actually hope for, and why. Write your initial thoughts and bring them with you.

1. Guthrie distinguishes real Christian hope from both hopelessness and “false hopes” pinned on human progress or private escape. Which false hope do you find most tempting?
2. Guthrie redirects eschatology away from predicting “when” and “how” toward asking “whose” future it is. How would that shift change the way you'd talk about the end times with someone who is anxious about it?
3. Guthrie insists Christian hope is for the world's renewal, not an escape from it. How does that shape the way you think about caring for creation, or working for justice, right now?
4. Guthrie says our hope is bodily resurrection like Christ's, not merely a soul surviving death. Does that distinction change how you think about your own mortality?
5. Guthrie leaves the specific details of resurrected life open, insisting what matters most is who holds that future. Are you at peace with that much uncertainty, or does it unsettle you?

