

Essentials of Christianity (pt 32)
10/24/2010

Introduction _____

Good morning! Today is the beginning of the end. We'll be covering the last topic in our study on the essentials of the Christian faith. This was definitely the longest topical study we've ever done.

I hope it has been fruitful for everyone. Over the last few months since we've been engaged in this, I have received some very good feedback; so I'll take that as an indication that, for the most part, it HAS been beneficial.

Eschatology: The Doctrine Of Last Things

Today, to wrap this up, we're going to begin a survey on the subject of **Eschatology: the doctrine of last things** (beginning of the end).

The term "eschatology" is taken from two Greek terms *eschatos* and *logos* and simply means the study of what is last, or words or discourse concerning what comes last. As we think about this in Scripture, we realize that there is a lot in Scripture about what is going to happen in the end. Some of it has already been fulfilled in part. For example, the prophets will speak of, in the latter days, "I will pour out my Spirit upon mankind." So there is a sense in which we ought to see ourselves as living in the time of the eschaton, the time of the last things that are taking place.

This is why a number of theologians, in fact most Evangelical theologians, have now adopted an understanding of eschatology that is called "already, not yet" or "inaugurated" eschatology. That simply

refers to the fact that we understand, from a biblical point of view, that much of what was prophesied to happen in the last days is already being fulfilled, yet there is more to come. We would err if we thought that all of what the Bible spoke of as future has already happened. We would also err if we think of the Bible's teaching about the last times as being strictly in the future. The fact of the matter is, we are living in an age right now in which some of the reality of the last times is taking place for us now. ¹

In this study of eschatology, we will be focusing primarily on the "not yet"; that is, we will look at aspects of biblical teaching that focus upon what is yet to happen, what we can anticipate happening in the future. ²

This is a field of study that has generated a great deal of debate amongst God's people. But there are a number of aspects of **eschatology** that are **foundational**: core beliefs that are **non-negotiable**.

This is a field of study where one must be careful about what they exclude from the list, lest one drift into an unorthodox position.

You see, because of some of the mystery that is involved with the subject of the end times, many well meaning believers have placed the category of eschatology on the lowest rung of the ladder, in terms of its importance.

Commenting on this one writer said,

¹ Bruce Ware, *Systematic Theology--Overview* (BiblicalTraining.org, 2004).

² Bruce Ware, *Systematic Theology--Overview* (BiblicalTraining.org, 2004).

It is quite customary in treatises on systematic theology to find an abbreviated eschatology and to discover a prevailing agnostic attitude that much cannot be known. This curtailment of such an important phase of biblical theology is a severe hindrance to the edification of the present-day church. Creedal systems and traditionalism have held the field in this realm of theological thinking as in no other. When one considers that approximately 25 percent of divine revelation was prophetic when written, it is a tragedy to reduce this realm of theology to such an abbreviated level.³

A worthy eschatology is concerned with things to come, and should realize that all **fulfilled** prophecy given in the Bible left no room to wonder. Those who had an ear to hear would know how certain prophecies would be fulfilled.

Sometimes it was after the fact. Sometimes people **did misinterpret** the timing of certain prophecies. The disciples did. And there is some mystery involved with some eschatological scripture, because God intended it to be that way. He just said “be ready!”

But there are a lot of aspects of eschatology that are essential, that we cannot be in the dark about because they belong to the category of **core beliefs**.

The list of non-negotiable subjects in the field of eschatology includes the following:

Death
Resurrection
Judgment
The Eternal State

³ Merrill f Unger and R.K. Harrison, *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois., 1988).

Return of Christ
Hell
Heaven

Let's briefly review the value of a study such as this. The NT is full of references to the value of eschatology. **Turn to Isaiah 55: 9-11.**

Eschatology helps to...

1. Understand God's Cosmic Purposes. It helps so much to realize that God has a plan for the end, or for the consummation, of all things and has had this plan from the very beginning. God is not playing it by ear, moving ad hoc or making adjustments as he goes along, wondering whether things are going to come out in the right way in the end. No, the God of the Bible is a God whose plan and purposes have been set, and he is accomplishing those purposes. **READ Isaiah.**

^{NAU} Isaiah 55:9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

¹⁰ "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;

¹¹ So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

2. Gives us Hope and Endurance

It gives tremendous hope to us to realize that these purposes mean God will be victor in the end; we are on the winning side. We do not need to fear that, ultimately, Satan will somehow triumph or evil will win out over good. And we can endure affliction and persecution; we can endure the trials and tribulations of life, whatever God calls us to. We can live our lives with abandon, realizing how brief this life is.

Turn to Romans 16:19-20

^{NAU} Romans 16:19 For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.

²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

Quote

^{NAU} 2 Corinthians 4:17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

¹⁸ while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

3. Helps us Reassess our Values and a Motivation for Holiness.

We realize that, what matters is what lasts for eternity and so much of what the world values now will perish. This realization of the transient nature of this life causes us to want to seek lives that are characterized by holiness.

Turn to

^{NAU} Romans 13:11 Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.

¹² The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

¹³ Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.

¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Quote

NAU 2 Peter 3:11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

NAU 2 Peter 3:14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,

4. Motivation for Witnessing.

Obviously, a study of eschatology provides a motivation for witnessing as we realize that this is the day of salvation, now is the time when people have the opportunity to hear the gospel, believe in Christ and be saved. So we need to take seriously the mandate of Christ and the empowerment of the Spirit to be witnesses for him in the various contexts in which God puts us.⁴

NAU 2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

So let's take a look at the essential categories of eschatology.

Death: All people will experience physical death and the intermediate state. There have been a few exceptions to this rule, however, in the Biblical record (Enoch; in the future, Christians alive at the Lord's return do not seem to pass through physical death, but instantaneously receive their resurrection bodies), but by and large all people can count on going through the experience of physical death, followed by conscious existence throughout an interim period until the resurrection of the body.

⁴ Bruce Ware, *Systematic Theology--Overview* (BiblicalTraining.org, 2004).

Physical death is described in scripture as the separation of the soul or spirit from the body; this seems to be the immediate result of the decay and termination of the physical body. James says that the body without the spirit is dead and the writer of Ecclesiastes, speaking of physical death in general, says,⁵

NAU Ecclesiastes 5:15 As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand.

NAU Ecclesiastes 12:7 then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

Physical death results because of sin. Through the sin of Adam in the garden, death spread to the entire human race; no one is exempted.

NAU Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned--

NAU Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

NAU James 1:15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Death, however, should not be understood as annihilation. Life continues on for believer and unbeliever alike after the death of the body. Luke 16:19–31 graphically describes the continued existence of both Lazarus and the rich man after death. Lazarus, the poor beggar, continued in eternal bliss, described as “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22), while the rich man was in eternal torment in Hades (Luke 16:23).

⁵ Bible.org

⁶ Paul P Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody, Chicago, 1989).

2 Peter 2:9 says, "The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment awaiting the day of judgment."

Here is a very clear statement that those who are unrighteous are not in some kind of unconscious experience, soul sleep or something like this, but rather they are consciously experiencing punishment awaiting this day of judgment. The term that is used here is indicating the ongoing nature of this punishment they are enduring.⁷

For the believer, death means to “be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). Paul desired death so that he might “be with Christ” (Phil. 1:23).

But the use of the term death in scripture is not confined simply to physical death. Rather, it is also used to describe the spiritual state of all people (except Christ) born into this world. The apostle Paul says that we are “spiritually dead in sin” until we are made alive with Christ (Eph 2:1-6). As a result of being spiritually dead, we produce works consistent with death, darkness, and profound ignorance of God (Eph 4:17-19). Those who die in this condition of spiritual death face yet another death.⁹

Resurrection: I do not know of any of the world's religions who deny the reality of human death. Resurrection on the other hand is a different story.

Turn to Acts 17:29-34: read

^{NAU} Acts 17:29 "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man."

⁷ Paul P Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody, Chicago, 1989).

⁸ Bruce Ware, *Systematic Theology--Overview* (BiblicalTraining.org, 2004).

⁹ Paul P Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Moody, Chicago, 1989).

³⁰ *"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,*

³¹ *because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."*

³² *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this."*

³³ *So Paul went out of their midst.*

³⁴ *But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.*

Turn to:

NAU Joh 5:28 "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice,

29 and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

This is just one of many scriptures which speak of a resurrection for both the believer and the non-believer.

There will be a resurrection for everyone. Even the rapture is technically a resurrection.

The Bible makes reference to a first and second resurrection. It's important to understand that the resurrection is not an event it is a category. Some people mistakenly believe that a general resurrection of both believers and unbelievers that will take place in conjunction (altogether) with the return of Christ, followed by a judgment of both.

This does not square with what the scriptures teach.

Turn to **Rev 20:4-6**

^{NAU} Revelation 20:4 *Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*

⁵ *The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.*

⁶ *Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.*

In verse 4 one group came to life to reign with another group during the 1000 year reign.

While the rest, verse five says, were resurrected after the 1000 year reign.

The resurrections do not occur at the same time but happen sequentially:

- * You have the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the first fruit of many to be raised (Romans 6:9; 1 Corinthians 15:23; Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:18)
- * Resurrection of the church at the rapture
- * Resurrection of all martyred tribulation saints at the second coming (Jews and Gentiles).

That's just part of the first category.

Then there's the second one.

Revelation 20:11-15:

^{NAU} Revelation 20:11 *Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.*

¹² *And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.*

¹³ *And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.*

¹⁴ *Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.*

¹⁵ *And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Death and resurrection will occur. This is non-negotiable.

Next is judgment and the eternal state.

