

The Traveling Pulpit

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Eschatology, The Study of Last Things

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” (Rev. 21:1-4)

Introduction

The subject of eschatology deals with the doctrine of last things which include the study of death, the second coming of Christ, resurrection, the end of the age, judgment, Heaven, and Hell. Holy Scripture clearly teaches that human history is moving toward a divinely directed goal. That goal will be reached according to the sovereign determination of Almighty God. Not all Christians believe the same things in this area of eschatology. There are some cardinal (essential) truths of the “word of God” (I Pet. 1:23) which should never be compromised, such as the virgin birth, bodily resurrection, etc. However, there are other areas of doctrine that are less clear and should not become a test of orthodoxy and fellowship.

I consider the second coming of Jesus Christ a cardinal doctrine in the Christian faith. All the various views found concerning the second coming are not cardinal doctrines. Some of the most commonly held views are pre-millennial, post-millennial, and a-millennial. Even amongst these three positions, you will find different opinions. Perhaps you’ve heard of some folk who claim to be pan-millennial believing that it’s all going to pan out according to God’s pre-determined plan and refuse to

take any other position. I believe it's going to pan out the way God has planned, but I also hold to more specific aspects. However, the purpose of this article is not to discuss the various views and differences in detail, but to stick with the Scripture regarding eschatology in general. It's a beautiful study that will bless the heart of any genuine believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Study of Death and the Intermediate State

Most Christians will meet the Lord in death rather than in His second coming (I Cor. 15:50-57, I Thess. 4:13-18). The eternal destiny of a redeemed sinner is much different from that of an unredeemed sinner. Heaven awaits a "born again" (Jh. 3:3) believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hell awaits all who have not trusted Christ alone as Lord and Savior (Matt. 25:41, Lk. 13:27-28). The question that many people ask, is "what happens to a believer between the time of his death and the resurrection of his body?" That's a good question! We can rest assured that it is not in an unconscious state that some people call soul-sleep. Neither is the soul in a state of purgatory, being purified and made ready for heaven.

Between the time of death and the resurrection of the body, is a time that is called the INTERMEDIATE STATE or the DISEMBODIED STATE. It is a soulish state of conscious existence of both the righteous and the wicked after death and prior to the resurrection. At death, the soul leaves the body, thus leaving it disembodied. We are made in the very "image of God" (Gen. 1:27). In fact, "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). Notice how God uses the words, "us" and "our." There is only one God, but He magnifies Himself in three persons that we call the Trinity. Just as He is a Trinity, God made man a trinity. You are only one person, but God made you a trinity like Himself. We have a "body" (I Thess. 5:23), "soul and spirit" (Heb. 4:12), but yet we are one person. Currently, we're living in a "body" of flesh that is mortal, but also housing a "soul and spirit" which are eternal. Scripture refers to this body as a "tabernacle" (II Cor. 5:1, 4, II Pet. 1:13) or in other words a tent. Someday, we're all going to leave these earthly bodies and the real you (your soul and spirit) will dwell somewhere forever. Before your birth, you did not exist, but after our physical birth, you will never cease to exist somewhere (Heaven or Hell) eternally.

During this intermediate period, the Christian is in the presence of the Lord (II Cor. 5:6-8) which is the actual state of Heaven. While the soul of a saint is in the presence of the Lord, he is awaiting the time when he will be reunited with a new resurrected glorified body. Jesus promised the repentant thief on the cross a state of "paradise" (Lk. 23:43). Paul wrote about being "caught up into paradise" (II Cor. 12:4). "Paradise" (Rev. 2:7) is a word that refers to the presence of the Lord. Wherever God is, there is "paradise," a state of blessedness, rest, and joy. It is a conscious state and the "sleep" mentioned by Paul in writing to the Thessalonians was simply used as a synonym for death, referring to perfect heavenly rest (I Thess. 4:14).

While in the intermediate state, the unbelieving unregenerate soul enters into the "torments" of Hell (Lk. 16:22-23). The story of the "rich man" and "Lazarus" teaches us that Hades is a place of suffering for a lost soul. From this teaching of Scripture, it's clear that there is no such thing as the annihilation of the dead. The Greek word, Hades (Matt. 11:23, 16:18), and the Hebrew word, Sheol, refers to the realm of the dead. Sometimes the word Hades (Lk. 16:23) is translated "hell," when it could refer to death in general. That does not change the fact that there is a Heaven to gain and a Hell to shun (Lk. 16:26). The "saved" (Rom. 10:9) enter immediately upon death into a conscious state of comfort, but the "lost" (Lk. 19:10) enter upon death into a state of punishment until the time of their final judgment at Christ's second coming.

The Study of the Resurrection of the Body

Instead of viewing death as the end of life, it should be seen as just the beginning of one's eternal existence (Jh 5:28-29). God has not decreed for the human "soul" (Gen. 2:7) to spend eternity in a disembodied state. Therefore, a "resurrection" awaits both the "lost" and the "saved" alike. However, the two different destinies to which they will be resurrected are total opposites. The "resurrection" of

Christ is the basis of a believer's hope to be raised from the dead (I Cor. 15:3-8, 20-22). For the Christian, "eternal life" (Jh. 10:28) begins with the new birth at which time he is "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). In the "resurrection," we'll not have the same type "body" as we have now, but it will be a supernatural "body" (I Cor. 15:35-44).

No person, either "lost" or "saved," will be a disembodied spirit forever, but real people with real identities and personalities. We believe that the resurrected "body" of the believer will be like the resurrected "body" of Christ (Jh. 20:1-31, I Jh. 3:2). Following His glorious "resurrection," Jesus was recognized, but was not limited to the laws of the universe (Lk. 24:31-43, Jh. 20:19-20, 24-29, 21:10-14). For the Christian, he will receive his new resurrected "body" when Christ returns (I Cor. 15:51-52). The unrighteous will also be resurrected, but not with the same benefits and privileges as the "saved: (Rev. 20:12-13). Those who believe that the "lost" and "saved" will be resurrected at the same time, believe in what is called a GENERAL RESURRECTION of the dead. Personally, that is what I see in the Bible. Most Premillennialists believe in multiple resurrections and judgements. I mention this to remind you that such matters are not an issue of fellowship.

The Study of Christ's Second Coming

As I mentioned in the introduction of this study, there are many different views pertaining to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. I've already narrowed these down to three, but allow me to define them for your benefit. I encourage you to study all three in more detail because the majority of people who hold to a particular view have never studied anything else. So, let me "whet your appetite" with these three definitions. Premillennialists believe that Christ will return to this earth for His church before His 1,000 year earthly reign. Postmillennialists believe that Christ will return after the millennium. Amillennialists believe the 1,000 years are not literal, but symbolic and represents the reign of God in the hearts of believers. Historically, the major schools of thought are: Amillennialism, Historic Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, Dispensational Premillennialism, and Preterism. Those who are full preterists believe all or most of the events found in the Book of Revelation took place prior to 70 AD. Partial preterists believe that some, but not all of the events in Revelation took place before 70 AD. I personally take the partial preterist view.

Let me say and make myself profoundly clear that we should not allow any particular view to become a test of faith, just so long as a literal return of the Lord is believed and anticipated. I'm not ashamed to tell you what I believe. I'm sure some of you are waiting for me to say. If I'm ashamed of what I believe then I ought not to believe it. Personally, I hold to what is known as the Amillennial view, but will quickly admit that I hold to it for lack of a better major school of thought on this subject. I once was a die-hard dispensationalist, but the more I studied the Bible the more problems I had with that particular view.

Regardless of one's view, it is essential that we believe in the literal return of our Blessed Redeemer. His returning to this earth is a solid teaching of Holy Scripture (Jh. 14:28, Acts 1:11, I Thess 4:16). The promise of Christ coming again and giving us a new glorified "body" gives believers a great hope for the future.

The Study of Judgment and Reward

No one will escape the judgment of God, knowing that for some, it will be the judgment of sin and for others the judgment of rewards (Rom. 14:12). The believer is safe in the blood of Christ from the judgment for his sins, but he will be judged for his Christian works (I Cor. 3:11-15, II Cor. 5:9-10). Carnal works done in the name of Christ will go unrewarded, but only that done in the power of the Holy Spirit will be recognized. When one stands before God, there will be no deceiving Him with religious lingo and terminology (Matt. 7:21-23).

Heaven will be the eternal home of the redeemed and Hell the eternal destiny of the lost. The Bible doesn't say a great deal about Heaven and our eternal state, but what it does say, pictures it as a wonderful place. It's not imaginary, but a real place (Jh. 14:2). Jesus will be there (Jh. 14:3). No sin or suffering will be there (Rev. 21:4, 27, 22:1-3). There will be different levels of reward (Matt. 25:14-30).

Most likely, we will probably know one another in heaven, but our relationships on earth will not be the same in heaven (I Cor. 13:8-12, Matt. 22:22-23). We'll praise God forever (Rev. 5:11-13, 15:2-11).

On the other hand, the Bible also has something to say about Hell, which can best be learned from the Greek word, Ghenna (Matt. 10:28). Gehenna (Matt. 5:30) was the garbage dump in the valley of Hinnom, just south of Jerusalem. It burned continually. Hell is a real literal place that the Bible describes as a place of "fire" and "torment" (Rev. 20:14-15). It's a place where the "worm" never dies (Mk. 9:48) and the punishment never ends. I cannot even begin to tell you what eternal Hell is going to be like, but it is worse than the human mind can imagine. I'm thankful that because of the grace of God, I'm never going to find out. I'm deserving of it, just like you, but there came a day when the Holy Spirit convicted me of my sin, showed me that Christ took my sin upon Himself, suffered my Hell for me on the cross, gave me a repentant heart, and faith to trust Christ alone. That is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me and if you also are a redeemed believer, that's the greatest thing that has ever happened to you.

Closing

The consummation of history will occur at God's appointed time regardless of our own personal view of eschatology, when the "first heaven and the first earth" pass away and a "new heaven and a new earth" come into focus. None of us have all the answers as to what the future holds, but for the Christian, we know Who holds it and Who is in charge of it. We are to wait expectantly for that day to come (II Pet. 3:13) and until then we can rejoice in the glimpses of glory that God has given to us. This world, as we know it, is not a place where the saint of God desires to live forever. At present disappointments, cares, sicknesses, and sorrows plague us all. But, in Heaven and in our eternal glorified state, the sad difficult experiences of this life will be known no more to the child of God!

When Christ returns, our every enemy will be defeated and His kingdom will be delivered to the Father. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jh. 18:36). You're invited to visit the publications page on our web-site and read about ***The Kingdom of God/The Kingdom of Heaven (Rom. 4:17, Matt. 3:2)***. The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom comprised of God's elect from all four corners of the globe (Rev. 5:9). The most important step that one can ever take in this life is the step of faith. Trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is not only beneficial in this life, but in the life to come. Have no doubt about it, God is in control and He alone holds the destiny of the world in His Omnipotent Hands! Praise the Lord! Jesus is coming again!

A Ministry Update

It seems like only yesterday that I was sitting at my desk writing the first edition of last years "**Traveling Pulpit.**" Well, here we are entering 2016 and are reminded that time marches on. With all the violence and turmoil taking place in our country and around the world, we wonder just how long this world will hold together. One thing is for certain it is someday coming to an end the way we know it today. When Christ comes again, it not only involves the Christian receiving a new glorified body, but the renewal of the entire universe (Rom. 8:18-25, II Pet. 3:1-18). I say along with the songwriter, "What a Day that will be," and along with the apostle John when he closed the Book of Revelation by saying, "He which testified these things saith, surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

God has continued to allow the outreach of COGM grow with more "hits" on or website this past year for which we praise His name. We continue on six radio stations with the Wilkins Radio Network and this quarterly Bible Study that we send out by email and postal mail. My most recent book, "**The Twelve Disciples, Learning Discipleship From the Original Apostles,**" is available free of charge to anyone requesting a copy. Currently, I'm finishing my book on "**Church Government, Which Form Is Most Biblical?**" Hopefully, it will be going to the publisher soon. As always, thank you for your prayers and to all the financial supporters of this little ministry. You are making it possible for us to reach the WORLD with the WORD over the internet as well as our nation over the radio and the printed page.

Because Of God's Sovereign Grace.....BWM