

# DOCTRINE OF THE ESCHATOLOGY

## INTRODUCTION

Eschatology, theologically speaking, refers to the study of final things in the Bible. It has both a personal and corporate focus and it seeks to explain concepts like death, the return of Christ, resurrection, judgment, tribulation, the millennial kingdom and the eternal state

## PERSONAL ESCHATOLOGY

### **A. The Concept of Death**

The Bible clearly reveals to us that there are two deaths that the individual can experience.

1. Physical death – Heb. 9:27
2. Spiritual death – Rev. 20:6, 21:8

### Physical Death

- Physical death simply refers to the separation of the soul and spirit from the body; the body returns to the soil, from which it was taken and the soul and spirit return to God (Eccl. 12:7, Gen. 2:7 cp 3:19)
- Physical death is as a result of Adam's sin (1Cor. 15:21-22)
- All men will go through Physical death (Heb. 9:27). There is the exception of a man like Enoch, who did not experience death as all men should and would (Gen. 5:24, Heb. 11:5)

### Spiritual Death

- This is simply a separation from God as a result of sin – Gen. 2:15-16, Isa. 59:2
- Spiritual death is not confined or restricted to or by Physical death – Eph. 2:1-6
- Spiritually dead people only produce works consistent with death – Eph. 4:17-19
- Spiritual death, while a person is still alive is not permanent. However if the person experiences Physical death while they are in this state then they experience what the Bible calls **Second death**, which is permanent – Rev. 21:8

### **B. The State and Location of the Departed – The Intermediate State**

There are several views or positions on this subject and we will look at each one briefly;

1. There are those who suggest that the soul enters an unconscious state of limbo until the resurrection of the body. Generally those who argue for 'Soul sleep', as it is often referred to, claim that this is the significance of the many references to Christians 'falling asleep' in the Lord. (1Thess 4:13-15). But it is highly unlikely that 'sleep' is anything more than a metaphor – viewed from the perspective of grieving Christians who are still alive- to refer to deceased Christian loved-ones who will one day 'awake' to be with Christ (and family and friends) in the resurrection life. Thus the point of the metaphor is not that they are now in an unconscious state, but rather that death is not their final destiny, resurrection life with Christ is (John 11:11-14). Luke 16:19-31 also demonstrates conscious existence after death, not 'sleep' in the way advocates of 'soul sleep' often argue.

2. Roman Catholic theology customarily argues that the souls of believers are not yet completely purified; hence they go to purgatory to experience cleansing and the preparation for heaven and God's presence. Catholics often base this doctrine on elements of church tradition and certain texts, including, but not limited to 2Maccabees 12:42-45 where Judas Maccabeus is said to have taken up monetary collection to be sent to Jerusalem as a sin offering; he is thus said to have 'made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sins'. Other New Testament passages used to support the doctrine of purgatory include Matthew 5:26, 12:32, 1Corinthians 3:15 and 2Timothy 1:18.

A basic glance at these passages of scripture, however, reveals that the doctrine of purgatory cannot possibly be read out of them. Further, the tenor of New Testament theology and the necessity of present faith in Christ for salvation makes such a claim patently false.

3. Another view of the intermediate state is 'instantaneous resurrection.' In this view, propounded in various ways by F.F. Bruce, W. D Davies and others, Paul had no room for the intermediate state of disembodied existence, but rather taught in 2Corinthians 5 that upon death the Christian immediately receive a resurrection body which is presently hidden in the eternal order. But this interpretation of 2Corinthians 5 is dubious at best (see 5:9) and the presupposition that man must have a body or he ceases to exist must be rejected on clear scriptural grounds.

### **The Position of Scriptures**

- The disembodied soul of a Believer goes to be '*with Christ*' and will from there await a '*resurrection body*' at His return (1Cor. 5:8-9, 1Cor. 15:22-23, 1Thess. 4:14,16).
- Those who die apart from Christ will immediately go to hell and from there await resurrection to judgment (Luke 16:23-24, John 5:28-29, Matt. 25:46)
- Believers will be resurrected with a glorious body (John 5:28-29, Rom 8:11, 1Cor. 15:12-58, 2Cor. 5:1-10)

### **CORPORATE ESCHATOLOGY**

Just like many other doctrines in the Christian faith, the doctrine of Eschatology has its fair share of controversies however the following are areas of general agreement:

#### **A. THE RETURN OF CHRIST**

- i. The personal bodily return of Christ is a certainty, although the exact time is unknown- Acts 1:11, 1Thess. 4:16, Rev. 22:12,20, Phil. 4:5, Heb. 9:28, James 5:8, 1John 3:2-3
- ii. Christ's bodily return will be visible to all – Matt. 24:30, Acts 1:11, 1Thess 4:16,
- iii. He will return as judge and savior – Mark 13, Luke 21

## B. THE IMMINENCE OF CHRIST'S RETURN

Christians generally agree that Christ will return however there are imminence is somewhat of a concern as there are several positions which are not as clear cut as we will like it to be in scriptures

- i. Passages like Matthew 24:40-42 and Luke 12:40 seems to teach that the Lord can come at any moment.
- ii. Other passages like certain events must be fulfilled before Christ' return e.g. The gospel must be preached in all the world (Matt. 24:14), the great tribulation must occur (Matt. 24:21), the man of lawlessness must appear (2Thess. 2:3), 'all Israel must be saved (Rom 11:25-32) and signs that must appear (Matt. 24:4-14)

These latter scriptures seem to agree that certain events/signs must happen before the return of Christ.

## C. NATURE AND TIMING OF THE RAPTURE

- a. **Nature of the Rapture:** Although the word 'rapture' does not appear anywhere in the English translations of the Bible it is a direct translation of the latin word 'rapio' which means to be 'Caught up' which describes what the Apostle Paul says will happen to the saints that are alive when the Lord returns (1Thess. 4:17).
- b. **Timing of the Rapture:** Scholars disagree generally as to the exact timing of the rapture

1. There are certain scholars who argue that the rapture will occur **before** the Great Tribulation begins; thus they are referred to as **pretribulationists**. Dispensational, **pretribulationist** scholars such as Walvoord, Pentecost, Ryrie, et al. attempt to demonstrate that while God's people have always suffered trials and tribulations, there is yet coming on the earth a definite period (7 years) of unparalleled tribulation in fulfillment of Daniel's seventieth week (Dan 9:24-27; Jer 30:7). The church, however, will be raptured **before** this period begins (Rev 3:10) and will then return from heaven with the Lord at his second coming seven years later.
2. Other scholars have argued that the rapture of the church will occur **after** the Great Tribulation; thus they are referred to as **posttribulationists**. Among the various theologians who advocate this position there is difference of opinion over whether there is a definite period of Great Tribulation (though all admit that the church has been in tribulation since her beginning). J. Barton Payne argued that there would be no definite time of tribulation while George Eldon Ladd argued for a period of three and one-half or 7 years of tribulation before Christ returned. Both were in agreement, however, that the

rapture would occur only after tribulation (whether general tribulation or the Great Tribulation).

3. The third major interpretive position regarding the rapture of the church is the **midtribulation** position; those who hold this view are thus referred to as **midtribulationists**. In this position the rapture will take place **in the middle of** the seven year tribulation before the wrath of God is truly poured out in the last three and one-half years (before the battle of Armageddon). Proponents argue that the events of [Matt 24:10-27](#) and other tribulational events predicted in [Daniel 7:25](#),

#### D. THE MILLENIUM

Just like several other doctrinal issues, the millennial reign of Christ also has several views from different scholars and we will examine some of them in this lecture;

##### 1. POSTMILLENNIALISM

*Postmillennialism* is the doctrine which affirms that through the work of the Spirit in Christian preaching and teaching in the present time of the church (before the Second Advent) the world at large will eventually be evangelized and won to Christ. This will turn out in a world characterized by universal peace instead of strife, universal prosperity instead of inequality, godliness instead of evil, and so on, though the time period may be more or less than a thousand years (since, according to some postmill interpreters, the 1000 years of [Revelation 20:4-7](#) can be taken symbolically for an indefinite period of time) and evil will still be present to some limited degree. Thus there is a focus in postmillennarian thought on the present aspects of the kingdom of God with the result that through Christian influence many economic, educational and social ills will be resolved. Kenneth L. Gentry summarizes the postmillennial position well.

##### 2. HISTORIC POSTMILLENNIALISM

Modern Premillennial theologians strongly disagree with their postmillennial brothers and sisters over the issue of the millennium, what it will look like, and how it will come about. For them, the idea that the church will bring a golden age of righteousness and peace through its Spirit-inspired preaching is scripturally unfounded. According to the premillennialists this will only happen in connection with the second coming of Christ, when the King is visibly and bodily present.

##### 3. DISPENSATIONAL POSTMILLENNIALISM

In terms of eschatology, Dispensational premillennialism differs from historic premillennialism primarily in its insistence that Israel *as a nation* will be regathered at the end times, converted, and the land promises made with her fulfilled in the millennial kingdom (e.g., [Gen 12:1-3](#); [15:18-21](#)). Thus, the point is not that many Jews

will be saved in the end, but that the *nation of Israel* will exist and will inherit the promises made to national Israel in the Old Testament.

#### 4. **AMILLENNIALISM**

Generally speaking, the term “amillennial” refers to the conviction, held by many godly and informed Christian scholars down through the ages, that there will be no future, earthly millennial period after Christ’s return. This, however, is to view the system from a purely negative point of view. Positively stated, amillennialism believes that the church is the expression of the millennial reign of Christ now, where “millennial” is understood to refer not to a literal thousand year period—though some reformers understood it this way<sup>78</sup>—but to the reign of Christ as experienced between his exaltation and parousia. This reign is over the new people of God, the church, which replaces Israel in the outworking of God’s eternal plan