



Core Seminar Systematic Theology II Session 26: Eschatology (pt. 2)

PRAYER

I. INTRODUCTION

In the last class, we spoke of the different views of the millennium: amillennialism, premillennialism, and so forth. Today we're going to have a time of extended Q&A that you can ask questions about anything we've covered in the class—tongues, sins that lead to death, etc. so be thinking of your questions now; you can write them down on the inside of your hand out so you don't forget. And your questions don't—they do not—have to be on some obscure, difficult doctrine, please ask anything if there's something you'd just like to clarify—and honestly teachers love easy questions! But in terms of things like views on the millennium, like we discussed in our last class, I know those can seem daunting and honestly, I am not even sure where I land on that, but we concluded our last class with this good word: “The important thing is that all of these views on the millennium have a similar belief that Christ is returning and that judgment is coming.”

Brothers and sisters, I hope you're getting one basic lesson in this class: when you come across a doctrine in the Scripture that you're not sure of, ask yourself what is the basic principle of Scripture that helps me understand this better or at least that I can hold on to. The basic principle we're talking about today, brothers and sisters, is that Jesus is coming back, as the Lord and Judge of the universe. That's not some far off notion, it is our present, urgent reality. We must be prepared.

Ecclesiastes, which is one of my favorite books and speaks of considering the purpose of life, has helpful counsel for us today. After the narrator considers all of life and the actual meaning of life—maybe you're visiting today wondering what on earth is the reason for living—the narrator of Ecclesiastes ends his search for meaning with this conclusion:

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

Sobering words for us this morning as we consider The Final Judgment—that's point two on the front of your hand out...

II. THE FINAL JUDGMENT

This is the judgment in which all people are either condemned or rewarded for eternity. As with our last section, we're not going to delve into exactly when this will take place on the eschatological timetable. But if we look at Scripture on this, the basic message is that there will be one judgment and that it's coming soon.

In his speech to the Athenians, Paul proclaims: ***“God...commands all people everywhere to repent. For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead”*** (Acts 17:30-31).

Illus: Osborne: “We are saved by grace but will be judged by works. There are many other NT passages on the judgment of believers “according to their works” (Matt. 16:27; Rom. 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:12–15; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17). The Bible never says what exactly this “judgment” will be, and we know that we have been forgiven for our sins and will be rewarded for our service to God. It must suffice to say that we will be faced with our evil deeds and then forgiven and will be rewarded for the good we have done.”¹

1Cor. 3:10 *According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.*

Since God's judgment on mankind is coming, what does Scripture say about it? Well, let me give you three biblical statements about the final judgment.

Hebrews 9:27-28 *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, 28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*

1. Jesus Christ will be the Judge

In the NT God is judge in Matt. 6:4; 18:35; Rom. 14:10; and Christ is judge in Matt. 7:22–23; 25:31–46; 2 Cor. 5:10.

Jesus Himself will be the Judge at the time of the final judgment. He is the one appointed by the Father who we just read about in Acts 17. One day our acceptance or denial of Jesus here on earth will be brought to bear its full weight as we come under his judgment. It is Jesus, the one whom we have followed or opposed, who will judge us.

NT New Testament

¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 722.

2. Unbelievers will be judged and condemned to eternal punishment

It's at this time of the final judgment that unbelievers will be condemned before the Lord. Paul says in Romans 2:6-8, **"God will give to each man according to what he has done...for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil there will be wrath and anger."**

Those who do not believe in Christ will be condemned because they have not turned from their sin and repented. They have not accepted the teaching of Jesus. Those who are condemned will receive the punishment of Hell.

Hell is "a place of eternal, conscious punishment for the wicked."² In Scripture, hell is often referred to a place where men will weep and there will be gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:30). It's a place where the fire never goes out (Mark 9:43), where there will be no rest (Rev. 14:11).

Hell is a real place and is the real result of judgment. One notable trend in evangelical eschatology is to reject the doctrine of eternal punishment and advocate "annihilationism," which means that unbelievers are finally destroyed and no longer exist. But Scripture doesn't support this view. In Matthew 25:46, Jesus says, **"Then [the wicked] will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."**

It's difficult to think of someone being in perpetual suffering forever, but we must not force our skewed sense of justice on God's perfect justice. He is an infinitely holy and eternal God, and to make offense against him is to be dealt the worst punishment possible. And the only way to avoid his fury is through Jesus Christ who endured God's wrath on the cross. The only difference between heaven and hell is God's grace in Christ.

3. Believers will be judged according to our works.

There are two aspects to the judgment for Christians. In one sense, we'll be judged as righteous and will be eternally rewarded for our position, granted by God's grace, as co-heirs with Christ.

Christians will not be finally condemned. We will all pass from death to life. That said, the second sense in which we will be judged is by how we lived as Christians. Scripture seems to indicate that there will be varying degrees of reward depending on how we have lived. We will be judged for the works that we have done.

2Cor. 5:6 *So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,* ⁷ *for we walk by faith, not by sight.* ⁸ *Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.* ⁹ *So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.* ¹⁰ *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*

App: This is not meant to inspire terror, but to inspire us to godly living. (v9b – "we make it our aim to please Him.")

² W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1148.

Illus: Luther: “I have two days on my calendar.... “Today and than Day.””

We will be judged on what we have done with what we have been given. We will give an account before God for how we have lived. God will bring to light all that is now hidden. But all the sins that will be made public on that day will be as those which have been forgiven. This judgment is one of the reasons why God’s grace should never be taken as a license to sin.

John 5:28 “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”

Romans 2:6-8 says, “God will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury.”

This passage teaches that eternal life will be “according to works.” But this does not mean that it will be *earned by works*. In Romans 6:23 says, “The *free gift of God* is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.” Eternal life is not *earned*. It is *free*.

But eternal life *is* rendered *according to our works*. This is made plain not only in Romans 2:6-8 but also in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:6,21; Ephesians 5:5; James 2:14-26; Hebrews 12:14; Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 10:25-28 and many other places that teach the necessity of obedience in the life of faith and in the inheritance of eternal life.

Piper: So we must learn to make the biblical distinction between earning eternal life *on the basis of works*, (which the Bible does *not* teach!) and receiving eternal life *according to works* (which the Bible does teach!). Believers in Christ will stand before the judgment seat of God and will be accepted into eternal life on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus. But our free acceptance by grace through faith will be *according to works*.

“According to works” means God will take the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and the “good deeds” by which we let the light of our faith shine (Matthew 5:16), and he will accept them as corroborating evidence of our faith.

The place of our works at the judgment is to serve as corroborating evidence that we did indeed put our trust in Christ. Therefore when we are acquitted and

Our welcome into the kingdom will not be *earned by works* but it will be *according to works*. There will be an “accord” or an agreement between our salvation and our works.

**Our deeds are not the basis of our salvation, they are the evidence of our salvation.
They are not foundation, they are demonstration.**

Illus: 1 Kings 3:16-28 - The woman’s actions didn’t make her the mother. They demonstrated that she was the mother.

III. THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

We defined heaven a minute ago, but we should expand our definition to acknowledge that heaven is an actual place. It's not merely a state of mind or a symbol, it's real, and if you are a Christian, you will be there bodily for eternity once you have been glorified.

Heaven is the place where God most fully manifests his presence – it is the abode of God. Listen to the Apostle John's vision of God dwelling with man. As I read this, realize that if you're a Christian then this is your destiny, this is the consummation of redemptive history.

Revelation 21 says, **“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.’”**

While heaven is mentioned frequently in Scripture, there's not a lot of detail surrounding what exactly it will be like. This is because we won't be finally taken up with streets of gold or foundations of precious jewels. No, we'll be taken up with God and his glory! We will see the face of the eternal and invisible God and live in an endless succession of time worshipping and enjoying our Creator as was meant to be.

These truths and images about the future should kindle the immense joy and hope in us. Christian eschatology is an eschatology of hope; regardless of how all of the much-disputed details turn out, we know how the story ultimately ends.

How much should this inspire us to godly living, to view the challenges of today with an eternal perspective, and to share the good news of this redemption that God is working out before our very eyes?

Illus: Sam Storms: “When we get to [the new heaven and the new earth] there will be nothing that is abrasive, irritating, agitating, or hurtful. Nothing harmful, hateful, upsetting or unkind. Nothing sad, bad, or mad. Nothing harsh, impatient, ungrateful or unworthy. Nothing weak, or sick, or broken or foolish. Nothing deformed, degenerate, depraved or disgusting. Nothing polluted, pathetic, poor or putrid. Nothing dark, dismal, dismaying or degrading. Nothing blameworthy, blemished, blasphemous or blighted. Nothing faulty, faithless, frail or fading. Nothing grotesque or grievous, hideous or insidious. Nothing illicit or illegal, lascivious or lustful. Nothing marred or mutilated, misaligned or misinformed. Nothing nasty or naughty, offensive or odious. Nothing rancid or rude, soiled or spoiled. Nothing tawdry or tainted, tasteless or tempting. Nothing vile or vicious, wasteful or wanton! Wherever you turn your eyes you will see nothing but glory and grandeur and beauty and brightness and purity and perfection and splendor and satisfaction and sweetness and salvation and majesty and marvel and holiness and happiness. We will see only and all that is adorable and affectionate, beautiful and bright, brilliant and bountiful, delightful and delicious, delectable and dazzling, elegant and exciting, fascinating and fruitful, glorious and grand, gracious and good, happy and holy, healthy and whole, joyful and jubilant, lovely and luscious, majestic and marvelous, opulent and overwhelming, radiant and resplendent, splendid and sublime, sweet and savoring, tender and

tasteful, euphoric and unified! Why will it be all these things? Because we will be looking at God.”³

Questions or Comments?

PRAYER

“Amen, Come, Lord Jesus!”

³ Sam Storms, *One Thing: Developing a Passion for the Beauty of God* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2004), 178-179.