

Firm Foundation

The Doctrine of Eschatology

Prolog

Eschatology, the study of last things, is a major preoccupation among many Christians. It is imperative that we be able to respond to people who are asking questions concerning this particular doctrine. The need for clear thinking on this issue, however, is not founded alone in our responsibility to the Christian who is simply searching for answers. The need for clear thinking is rooted more firmly in the close relationship of justification by faith and eschatology. Luther points out that "Justification by faith without the eschatological dimension is subjectivistic and individualistic self-hypnosis." George Forell has rightly said that ". . . eschatology becomes utopianism when it is not informed by justification by faith. And justification by faith apart from eschatology becomes a dry, rationalistic abstraction."

In its proper perspective, then, eschatology is part of everything that is taught in the Christian Church. The study of last things, however, is not a simple task. It is not simple because of the number and nature of the subjects that are listed under this category. Included in this doctrine are the topics of death, resurrection, judgment, eternal life, eternal damnation, and the kingdom of God.

In an effort to maintain order in this study the topics listed will be studied in the following order:

- 1 Temporal Death
- 2 The State of the Souls Between Temporal Death
and the Resurrection
- 3 The Second Advent of Christ
and Millennialism
- 4 The Resurrection of the Dead
- 5 The Final Judgment
- 6 The End of the Word
- 7 Eternal Damnation
- 8 Eternal Life

The most extensive discussion in this study will involve the third chapter regarding the millenium and its various understandings, the only basis for an intelligent discussion regarding this subject, and the historical/confessional perspective of the same.

1

Temporal Death

Its Nature: What is the nature of physical death according to Scripture? Luke 12:20

Matthew 27:50 and John 19:30

What is its cause? _____

What should be said of those who attribute death to the nature of man instead of the guilt of sin?

a) _____

b) _____

The Subject of Death: Who is effected? _____

What must first be confronted if immortality is to be had? _____

There is a question that is frequently asked at this point: "Why Christians, though they have remission of sins, still must die?" The fact of death has been used to attempt to prove that death cannot be the result of sin. But Scripture addresses the death of the Christian with two points:

a) _____

b) _____

2

The State of Souls Between Death and Resurrection

Holy Scripture says very little of the state of souls between death and the resurrection. In speaking of last things, it directs our attention primarily to Judgment Day and the events clustering around it. (1 Corinthians 1:7; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff.; 2 Timothy 4:7-9; Titus 2:13) But this does not address the state of the souls between death and the resurrection.

According to 1 Peter 3:19-20 what is the state of the souls of the unbelievers? _____

What is the state of the soul of believers? _____

What of "Soul Sleep?" _____

What of purgatory? _____

Finally, before leaving the subject of the souls departed, we record the following facts:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

The Second Advent of Christ

What does Matthew 25:31 teach regarding Jesus' second coming?_____

Acts 1:9,11_____

Matthew 24:27,30 and Luke 17:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; Matthew 24:44; What do

these passages add to the discussion?_____

Matthew 25:32_____

Hebrews 9:26,28_____

Luther remarks: "He will then not be bedded in the manger, nor ride on an ass, as He did in His first advent, but burst forth from the clouds in great power and glory."

This return is to be maintained as a positive fact against both the direct denial of it by the scoffers who say: "When is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter 3:3-4) and the forgetfulness of the Christians who, according to their flesh, are very apt to fail to remember the return of Christ. (Mark 13:37 and Matthew 24 and 25.)

What does Matthew 24:36 say about this second advent?_____

Does this stop men from trying?_____ What does that show us concerning the 'saint and sinner' understanding of man?_____

The Signs Revealed in Scripture of the End Times

The following remarks are recorded by Luther.

The signs are abnormal conditions or disturbances (a)_____

(b)_____

(c)_____

Consider what happened at Christ's death:_____

What happens at our own death?_____

Luther states it as follows: "Heaven and earth will creak and crack like an old house ready to crash and collapse and act in every way as though they divined that the world is soon to an end and that The Day is close at hand."

What is the cause of man's failure to recognize the abnormalities as signs of the
approaching advent of Christ?_____

When we recognize through the Revealed Word what God had in mind for mankind, we can begin to identify some of the conflicts and incongruities caused by sin which undermines any and all relationships in creation. Let's identify some of those conflicts which are "normal."

1)_____

2)_____

3)_____

How, according to Christ, are we to regard these events?_____

Another sign is recorded in Matthew 24:5. What is it and why?_____

In Matthew 24:42 what is Christ connecting to the end of the world?_____

To what extent have these signs been fulfilled?_____

Matthew 24:42 also makes another point regarding the second coming of Christ. What is that?_____

What is God accomplishing through this purposeful ambiguity?_____

Fictitious Signs of Judgment Day

The first of these is the millenarian kingdom, still lying in the future, in which Christ, together with His Christians, particularly the risen martyrs, is to rule visibly here on earth. The idea of such a kingdom of Christ on earth took root very early in the Christian Church and was given the name chiliasm and is more commonly known today as millennialism. There are many varieties of millennialism today. We will define only three views which seem to , in a very wide sense, identify the basic issues.

a) Very Extreme: _____

b) Extreme:_____

c) Subtle:_____

Individual teachers of millennialism manifest various differences even in the fundamental ideas.

Now that the term has been defined we can break it down even further. There are different categories to be assigned for the above definitions.

1) Premillennialism:_____

2) Postmillennialism:_____

3) Amillennialism:_____

These ideas, except for a proper understanding of amillennialism, have no basis in Scripture, for Scripture itself explains that passages to which millennialism appeals as speaking of the spiritual glory of the New Testament Church, which dawned with the coming of Christ into the flesh and the preaching of the Gospel in the world. Much of the remainder of this chapter will be involved in studying the following passages: Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:6-9; Zechariah 9:9-10; Joel 2:23ff.; 3:18ff.; Micah 4:1-4; and especially Revelation 20.

Before that task is taken-up let us re-establish the proper use of Scripture. The question to be answered is what is the purpose of Scripture and how is it to be approached? (Notice the correlation to the Great Commission.)

- 1) _____

- 2) _____

- 3) _____

It would be a terrible mistake to use God's Word without remembering why He gave it to us. In fact, many fail to use the Bible properly, either mistakenly or knowingly, and, as a result, they miss the main teaching of Scripture, namely, to make us wise unto salvation.

In addition to this three-fold purpose of Scripture, a few points should be added concerning interpretation for the sake of those who are not acquainted with Revelation.

- 1) _____

- 2) _____

- 3) _____

These points will be restated as appropriate in the course of this study.

Let us begin by looking up Isaiah 2:2-3. What is it saying? _____

Hebrews 12:22: _____

When reading verse 4 of Isaiah 2 what do we learn to be the nature of life on Mount

Zion? _____

We must not forget the rest of Scripture. What did the angels proclaim at the birth of

Christ? _____

What does Jesus say in John 14:27? _____

John 16:33 _____

What does Paul call the Gospel? (Ephesians 6:15; Philippians 4:7) _____

In other words, what these Old Testament texts prophesy of a future peace in the world is realized in its "full, actual value" not in a still future millennium, but in the appearance of the Son of God in the flesh, in the reconciliation of the world to God, in the proclamation of this news in the world, and in the sending of the Holy Spirit, who through this message works faith in people's hearts, thus creating children of peace in the whole world and among all nations. **By faith in the Gospel the Christian Church on earth possesses a peerless state of peace.** We are partakers of the eschatological banquet with all of the trimmings (that is peace, assurance, comfort, joy, etc.) even as we live in faith.

Look up Matthew 10:34. What does this mean? _____

With what then are these Old Testament passages of peace connected? _____

In addition to this what does the Old Testament teach regarding the nations coming to

Mount Zion? Hosea 1:10 _____

The Old Testament prophesy says that there will be an abundant spiritual knowledge in Zion (e.g., Isaiah 11:9; Joel 2:28ff.).

Where is the fulfillment of this to be found? _____

What is said of the raising up of the tabernacle of David and of the fruitfulness of the land of Canaan--so that seedtime and harvest occur simultaneously, the mountains drop sweet wine, and all the hills flow with milk (Amos 9:11f.; Joel 3:18ff.) is mentioned as being fulfilled in Acts 15:13ff.

What issue do these things address? _____

Turning to Revelation 20, we find that this passage, aside from all other points, cannot be used to prove a millennial reign of Christ on earth because the "reigning with Christ a thousand years" (vv. 4,6) takes place in heaven.

What does this passage (v. 4) say of the souls of believers? _____

Compare Psalm 2 with Revelation 2:26-27. _____

It is true that the reign of believers over the world will become manifest only on Judgment Day. But what of the meantime?

On the true meaning of the "binding of Satan for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:2), Scripture gives all needed information. It teaches that all mankind is in the power of Satan because of its burden of guilt. But Christ by His propitiatory death has put an end to this lordship of Satan. Read John 12:31; 16:11. How does Christ put it?

When does the reign of Satan end in the individual?_____

Scripture declares this to be the case. Read Acts 26:17ff. To the Colossians Paul writes that all who believe the redemption through Christ's blood, even the forgiveness of sins, are delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Co. 1:13-14).

There are no other means of freeing men from the power of the devil than the preaching of the Gospel and faith in the Gospel. Such factors as science and education, recognition and world-wide influence of the Church since the days of Constantine, are in themselves no means of binding Satan. In fact, it was the harassed and persecuted Church which through its faith in the Gospel overcame Satan and the world.

Since it is certain that Satan is chained for believers only through faith in the Gospel, what must we say regarding the beginning of the "thousand years?"

In Revelation 20 what is joined to the "thousand years?"_____

What immediately follows this?_____

What is the "little season?"_____

On what is this assault?_____

Our general conviction is that we are now in the "little season." Why does that make sense?

What of Gog and Magog?

What are the marks by which we recognize millennialism as being anti-Scriptural?

1)

2)

3)

What is the real harm and danger of premillennial theology?

Trailing thoughts:

4

The Resurrection of the Dead

How does human reason deal with the resurrection of the dead?

1 Corinthians 15:35 _____ Acts 17:32 _____

How important is it for the Christian to confess the resurrection of the dead? _____

Whose work is this? 2 Corinthians 1:9; Romans 4:25 _____

Who rises? John 5:28 _____ Acts 24:15 _____

What rises? _____

What of the risen bodies of the faithful? _____

5

The Final Judgment

To what is the visible return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead closely associated? _____

Who are the subjects of Judgments? _____

What is going to be the basis for judgment? 2 Corinthians 5:10_____

What of the evil works of the believer?_____

6

The End of the World

What does Luke 21:33 say regarding creation?_____

But while heaven and earth pass away and are changed, God will continue forever, and so will the words of Christ. (Luke 21:33)

How should this passing away be described?_____

Luther: "In short, whatever belongs to the nature of these temporal goods, whatever constitutes this transitory life, and activity, shall all cease."

7

Eternal Damnation

In a measure the conscience of natural man still convinces him that damnation awaits men after this life because of their sins. This knowledge belongs to the sphere of the Law, and the Law is still active in natural man not only as a curb, but also as condemning judge (accuser).

Romans 2:15_____

Holy Scripture teaches the truth of an eternal damnation so clearly and emphatically that one cannot deny it without at the same time rejecting the authority of Scripture.

If we lay claim to the existence of heaven, what are we then compelled to do in order to maintain consistency?

Matthew 25:46; John 3:36:_____

There are places in the Bible in which the term "eternity" is used in the sense of limited duration. Exodus 12:14, 24; 21:6:_____

We must, however, take the predicate "eternal" in its proper, or strict, sense, in the sense of forever, in all Scripture texts which use it to describe the duration of the penalties of the wicked in the 'life' to come.

2 Thessalonians 1:9_____ Matthew 18:8_____

Mark 3:29_____

The Apology also understands it as such. Apology Article XVII, (p. 224)_____

Also see the Augsburg Confession Article XVII, (p. 38)_____

Are objections to this understandable?_____

What are these objections based upon?_____

What are some of the false objections?_____

One systematition wrote the following observation on this subject:

By eternity of the punishments of hell, our old theologians understood an uninterrupted continuation of punishments in intensity as well as duration and an everlasting confinement of the damned in the eternally unchangeable place of torment The numerous criticisms of this ecclesiastical conception, however, induced more recent theologians to assume the possibility and probability of an improvement of the damned and with it an

improvement of their state. They drop the absolute eternity of infernal punishments and either assume a conditional eternity, that is, if the damned would never reform, hence declare the punishments eternal only in the case of such as will never let the punishments improve them; or they regard them as only relatively eternal, that is, in this respect eternal, that the damned forever lag behind the perfection and blessedness of the pious, even though they reform and become happier, so that, because of their irremovable retardation in virtue and bliss, they always feel the eternity of their punishment.

How are we, as believers, to respond to such objections and false concepts? _____

THE NATURE OF ETERNAL DAMNATION

What is its nature? Matthew 25:41; 8:12: _____

In an effort to better understand this, let us answer this question: For what is man made? _____

What is the nature of this? _____

What does removal from the face of God mean? _____

Romans 2:9 _____ Luke 16:23 _____

Luke 1:24 _____

Mark 9:43-44 _____ Matthew 8:12; 13:50; etc.

To illustrate the terrible agony setting in with this banishment from the sight of God, the dogmaticians point to the agony of a fish removed from its element. But there is a difference: the fish which is removed from its element soon dies, whereas the man who is banished from communion with God must by God's judgment live on "guilty of the eternal judgment" Mark 3:29.

A number of questions still need to be discussed. One of them is:

"Is hell-fire physical or hyper physical?" _____

As a rule our old theologians concluded their presentation with the remark: "Is it wiser to be concerned about escaping this eternal fire by true repentance than to engage in an unprofitable argument as to the nature of this fire."

One thing is certain, hell contains no atheists, because the damned actually experience God as the righteous Judge.

Another question is "To what degree is this torment?" _____

Finally, "Is there a specific location for hell?" _____

THE CAUSE OF ETERNAL DAMNATION

John 3:36; Mark 16:16: _____

Ephesians 5:6 _____

What is the purpose of the doctrine of eternal damnation? _____

What weakens the purpose of this doctrine?_____

What part of God's nature is revealed in this doctrine?_____

8

Eternal Life

THE FACT OF ETERNAL LIFE

We know that there is eternal life and that believers will come to behold God as He is and to enjoy unspeakable bliss in soul and body. What is the only source of this knowledge?_____

How do you think Paul dealt with Plato's immortality of the soul?_____

The hope of eternal life can spring only from faith in the Gospel of Christ as its only source. Think of some Bible passages to support this statement:_____

THE NATURE OF ETERNAL LIFE

What is it that causes heavenly bliss? 1 John 3:2_____

1 Corinthians 13:8-12: To what is the Christian's knowledge of God through God's

Word in this life compared?_____

What will that knowledge be?_____

We will see God but will we see each other? Matthew 17:3-4_____

Will the blessed see the damned? _____

Some Particulars . . .

There are two sides to eternal life.

1) 2 Timothy 4:18; Revelation 7:16-17; 21:4 - _____

2) 1 Peter 1:8; Psalm 16:11; John 17:24 - _____

But trying to describe heavenly life is almost impossible. Look up Colossians 3:3.

What conclusions can we draw from this passage? _____

The Bible does give some conceptions of the glory of our inheritance. What are they?

Matthew 25:10; Revelation 19:9 _____

Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:39 _____

Luke 22:30 _____

What of the bodies of believers? 1 Corinthians 15:44; Philippians 3:21; Matthew 13:43- _____

2 Corinthians 12:4 _____

Are there degrees of bliss? _____

Luther writes:

"It is true, there will be a difference in yonder life, according as they have labored and lived here. For example, St. Paul was an Apostle, Samuel or Isaiah a Prophet, etc. One will have greater brightness than the other because he worked or suffered more in his office.... Thus everyone will have his distinction and glory according to his office, and still one God and Lord will be in all, and one and the same joy and bliss. In his person none shall be more or have more than the other, St. Peter no more than you or I. None the less there must be a difference because of the works. For God did not do through Paul what He did through Isaiah, and vice versa. For that reason everyone will bring along his works, through which he will shine and praise God so that people will say: St. Peter has done more than I or another. This man or this woman has led such a fine life and done such great things. In short, all are to be alike before God in faith and grace and celestial bliss, but they are to differ in their works and their honor."

Degrees of glory will not cause envy, but only praise of God, because sin has been completely eliminated.

What about the third heaven or seventh heaven? _____

THE LOCATION OF HEAVEN

Can a specific location be established now? _____

Will there be a specific location? _____ How can this conclusion be made? _____

THE SUBJECTS OF ETERNAL LIFE

Who will be the citizens of heaven? _____

John 3:16,18 makes clear that faith is the way to salvation. What else does verse 18 tell the Christian not to do? _____

What is he to do? Luke 24:47 _____

For what purpose? Acts 26:18 _____

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCTRINE

What is the purpose of this doctrine: Matthew 5:12 _____

From this practical viewpoint the whole Christian faith should be taught and particularly eschatology.