

Part 7 – Eschatology

Section 1: our future as individuals

What will happen to us when we die?

General Introduction to Eschatology:

Eschatology means the study of the last things. Jesus Christ in the Gospels has much to say about the future, as do many other books in the Bible, especially Daniel in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New. If we believe that He is the “Way the Truth and the Life” and that He is returning to earth then we can confidently declare many truths about what will happen to us and all mankind. Many of Jesus’ teachings are not easy,



especially with regard to His teaching about what will happen to those who are lost. However, it would be both illogical and dishonest to take the sweet without the sour; the positive without the negative. So His declarations should cause us to be compassionate rather than compromising in our thinking. A mark of the truth is that Jesus doesn’t try to

woo us with nice things but is open and honest.

Individual Eschatology - Our destiny as human beings.

The first thing to know about the future is what will happen to us as individuals. We can’t change the world too much in a lifetime, but we can secure our own destination in eternity. Only then we will be in a position to help those around us.

What will happen to me in the future?

Let’s look at some statements of Jesus:

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.” John 5:24

“My Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.” John 6:40

“Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life.” John 6:47

The word “believe” is “pisteuó” in Greek and doesn’t just mean a mental

assent but a lifestyle of total consecration and laying down our lives for one another. We believe and therefore we act. The word “believe” means to trust in Jesus, to place our whole life in His hands. The amazing promise of Jesus is that if we believe we will have eternal life.

What happens when we die?

The scriptures make the following declarations:

Death is a result of sin: “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned” Romans 5:12

“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” Romans 3:23

Believers are victorious over death: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Cor 15:55-57.

What happens if we die before the Lord comes back?

In Lk 23:43 Jesus said to the thief on the cross: “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” We’re left in no doubt that upon death the thief was in heaven that day. (See also 2 Cor 5:8, Phil 1:23)

Fear of death is broken.

The fear of death enslaves people. Hebrews 2:14-15 says: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” While we shouldn’t live in a foolhardy way, if we have truly believed in Jesus we don’t need to live in fear of death. He has paid the price for us and won for us the victory over death! So we can exhibit a healthy boldness. However, it’s important to be sensitive towards those who don’t yet have this hope of eternal life, realising that while we’re encouraging them to put their faith in Jesus, the Scriptures teach us that the fear of death is influencing their lives.

Jesus makes it very clear on several occasions that there will be a great divide between those who have believed and those who have not. For instance:

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe

stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." John 3:18

"Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left."

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Matt 7:13-14

Jesus also makes it clear that belief is not intellectual assent but a matter of the will: "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God." John 3:19-21

The proof that we have eternal life:

1 John 3:14 makes a very clear statement when it says: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other [the brethren]." This is followed up by verse 16: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." We are left in no doubt here that outworking our faith means genuinely loving one another. To put it another way, having believed in Jesus, as long as we have laid down our lives for one another, truly preferring one another in honour, then we have daily proof that we have eternal life.

Now that we've established the key difference between the believer and the unbeliever, here are some general terms we find in the study of theology:

1. Physical death. The Scriptures speak of this as a separation of body and soul. Matthew 10:28 says: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

2. The intermediate state. This is the condition of man between death and the general resurrection.

a. Sheol and Hades. Sheol is Hebrew and mentioned 66 times the Old Testament. It means place of death or the underworld. Hades is Greek and occurs 11 times in the New Testament. “Hell” or Gehenna is Greek and occurs over 50 times in the New Testament.

b. Purgatory, Limbus Patrum and Limbus Infantum. Roman Catholic teaching says that imperfect souls go to a place of purging before being admitted into heaven. Limbus Patrum is the place where the Old Testament saints were detained until Christ set them free between His death and resurrection. Limbus Infantum is the supposed abode of all unbaptised children. They remain there without any hope of deliverance, suffering no positive punishment indeed, but excluded from the blessings of heaven. None of these ideas find any support from scripture.

c. Annihilationism. This is the idea that unbelievers ultimately cease to exist. This idea has no support in the Scriptures and Jesus makes it very clear that those who don’t show love to their needy brothers and sisters “will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” Matt 25:46. (see also Rev 14:11, 20:10). The chilling shock of this fact should drive us to compassion and action.

Conclusion:

The truths we have looked at make us feel secure in our faith and also drive us to extreme compassion for those around us. Let’s restate what was said at the beginning: Jesus’ teachings and other scriptures predict many things about the future, both positive and negative, pleasant and unpleasant. According to Him, there will always be a broad way that leads to destruction and a narrow way that leads to life. Let’s be compassionate rather than compromising, and allow the study of eschatology to make us passionate about working together for His Kingdom.

Songs: My Jesus love Thee, I know thou art mine.

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