Eschatology: The Doctrine of the Future
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Bibliography


Introduction

1. Definition: The word “eschatology” is derived from the Greek word “eschatos” (ἔσχᾰτος), which means “last” or “end.” It is particularly used in reference to “the end of the world,” “end of days,” “the last days,” or “the end times.” Therefore, the doctrine of biblical eschatology refers to the study of “last things,” and all the events and figures that accompany the time leading to the end.

   a. Doctrine of the Future: While the doctrine of eschatology may describe the events at the end of world history, those events do not represent the true end. Scripture teaches that there is no true end of existence for any human, but an “eternal state” of being. Believers in Christ will live eternally in heaven, while unbelievers will suffer eternally in the judgement of hell. Therefore, a better description of eschatology is the “doctrine of the future,” because this doctrine seeks to understand everything God has revealed about the future, for which there is no true end.

   b. Eschatology in the Past: Many today associate eschatology with end times events such as the second coming of Christ, the great tribulation, and the final judgment, but eschatology is not limited to the future from our perspective. Everything that God has revealed about the future from the beginning is considered “eschatological.”

   • Old Testament Eschatology: Throughout Old Testament history, God revealed the future of his work in creation. He foretold about future judgments (the flood, the exile, and final judgement), future events (creation of Israel, slavery in Egypt, establishment of kings), future deliverances (exodus, healings, return from exile), and the future coming of Messiah. God revealed these future events through prophecies, which were recorded in the books of the Old Testament.

   • New Testament Eschatology: While the New Testament contains many eschatological events yet to be fulfilled, there are future events described in the New Testament that were
fulfilled in that era (The angelic announcements of Christ; John the Baptist’s preaching concerning Christ; Jesus’ words concerning Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, the church, and the future of the disciples, etc.).

c. **Eschatology in the Future**: The most common understanding of eschatology today refers to the events of the future yet to be fulfilled (e.g. end times/apocalyptic events). Future eschatology is often divided into two categories:

- **Personal Eschatology**: These are future events that affect us as individuals, such as physical death, the intermediate state, the eternal state, glorification, eternal judgement, etc.

- **General Eschatology**: These are future events that affect the entire universe, such as the second coming of Christ, the millennium, the Battle of Armageddon, the judgment seat of Christ, the final judgment, heavenly rewards, the new heavens and the new earth, and hell.

d. **Biblical Eschatology**: A study of eschatology could include many sources. People throughout the world believe they can understand the future through astrology, the occult, palm reading, ghostly encounters, a “sixth sense” – even fortune cookies! However, the only real means of knowing the events of the future come to us through the divine revelation of God, which is recorded in Scripture. Therefore, because God knows every detail about the future, we can be certain that all He reveals in Scripture is sure to pass. We can also be sure that any predictions of the future that contradict Scripture will not to pass.

2. **Warnings**

a. “**Eschatomania**” – This refers to the preoccupation with eschatology that consumes all of a believer’s time and study. There are pastors and teachers who always find a way to elaborate on the end times. They usually include large detailed charts of various theories, and keep track of current political and social events, particularly those that involve the nation of Israel, as “fulfillments” of prophecy. Some eschatological fanatics even practice date-setting and make predictions. We must warn ourselves not to become so fascinated with the future that we forget about God’s calling in the present (worship, sanctification, evangelism, etc.).

b. “**Eschataphobia**” – This refers to the fear of eschatology, or the avoidance of discussing it. Such resistance comes as a negative reaction toward those who are overly fascinated with the topic, or as a means of not wanting to enter the conflict of those who argue over views. Some are fearful of eschatology because of its difficulty.

3. **Goal**: Our goal in this study of eschatology is to grow in our relationship with God by understanding the true victory, assurance, joy and eternal life that awaits those who trust in Jesus Christ. We are called to “comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18).

4. **Topics**: Death and the Intermediate State, the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection, the Great Tribulation and Millennium, the Final Judgment, the New Heavens and the New Earth.
Death and the Intermediate State

1. Death

   a. **Reality of Death**: While believers have been given eternal life in Christ, the Scriptures teach that earthly death is still a reality for all humans.

      • Ecclesiastes 3:2 – “A time to be born, and a time to die.”

      • Job 14:1, 5 – “Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble...his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass.”

      • James 4:14 – “What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.”

      • 1 Corinthians 15:24–26 – “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

   b. **Reason for Death**: Earthly death came as a result of Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden, when God cursed them (and everyone after) by shortening their days. Not only did death spread throughout the human race, but death spread throughout the animal and plant kingdoms, and the universe.

      • Genesis 3:19 – “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

      • Romans 5:12 – “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

      • Romans 8:20 – “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

   c. **Why do Christians experience earthly death?**

      • **Death is not a punishment for sin.** Paul declares, “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). All of the penalty for our sins has been paid.

      • **Death is the final outcome for living in a fallen world.** In God’s wisdom, He decided to not apply all of the benefits of our salvation all at once. As a result of living in a fallen
world, Christians still experience earthly death. The “last enemy” will not be destroyed until Christ returns.

- **Death is used by God to complete our sanctification.** God uses the pain and suffering (leading to death) to draw us closer to Him and strengthen our faith.

- **Death is used by God to test of our faithfulness.** When a believer is martyred for their faith in Christ, it proves that preserving one’s physical life is of lesser importance than remaining obedient to God.

2. **The Intermediate State** (What happens when people die?)

   a. **The souls of believers go immediately into God’s presence.** For believers, death is a temporary separation of the soul from the body. Once a believer dies, though their body remains on the earth and is buried, their soul goes immediately to the presence of God and rejoices.

      - **2 Corinthians 5:8** – “Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

      - **Philippians 1:23** – “I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”

      - **Luke 23:43** – “Today, you will be with me in paradise.”

   b. **The Bible does not teach the doctrine of purgatory.** The fact that the souls of believers go immediately to God reveals that there is no such place as purgatory. In Roman Catholic teaching, purgatory is the place where the souls of believers go to be further purified from sin until they are ready to be admitted to heaven. According to this view, a believer pays for their own sins in purgatory, which satisfies the wrath of God. However, while gaining no support in Scripture, this doctrine denies the atonement of Christ as fully sufficient for salvation.

   c. **The Bible does not teach the doctrine of “soul sleep.”** This doctrine teaches that when believers die, they go into a state of unconscious existence, and the next thing that they are conscience of will be when Christ returns and raises the dead. This doctrine has been supported in the Bible when such language as “sleep” or “falling asleep” is used to describe death. However, “sleep” is always used as a metaphor for death, not a reality.

      - **Hebrews 12:22-24** – “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,”

   d. **The souls of unbelievers go immediately into eternal punishment.** Scripture gives unbelievers no hope of having a second chance to trust Christ after death.
• **Luke 16:24-26** – “And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’”

• **Hebrews 9:27** – “And just as it is appointed for man to die one, and after than comes judgment.”