

# Systematic Theology #6: Eschatology

## PERSONAL ESCHATOLOGY: DEATH

1. The Bible teaches all will die and face a judgment of either damnation or salvation (Heb 9:27; Ro 2:6-11; Jn 5:28-29; cf. Ro 14:10-12).

- The Scriptures teach against the possibility of reincarnation.
- Everyone can know in this life their final destiny (John 3:36).

2. Scripture speaks of physical death.

- Because the first humans sinned against God, they forfeited access to immortality and were condemned to die (Gn 3; Ro 5:12).
- Physical death is both a judgment and an act of mercy by God, because death puts an end to the sins that a person may commit here on earth. Death limits humanity's rebellion against God.
- Physical death is not the cessation of personal consciousness. Jesus taught the Rich Man and Lazarus both continued to experience personal consciousness after death. (Lk 16:19-31).

3. Scripture speaks of spiritual death.

- Due to our inherited sin nature, all are born into spiritual death, separated from God, needing spiritual regeneration (Eph 2:1-2).

4. Scripture speaks ominously of eternal death.

- Jesus warned of the danger of eternal punishment (Mt 25:46). The apostle John referred to it as "the second death" (Rv 21:8).
- Eternal death has historically been understood as everlasting torment, not annihilation or the cessation of existence.

Jesus describes eternal death as a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). He also spoke of anguish and torment in Hades (Lk 16:22-24).

- Eternal death is self-chosen by virtue of the fact that people rejected God in this life.

### **PERSONAL ESCHATOLOGY: JUDGMENT**

1. God is the great Judge who will judge every person (Jas 4:12).
2. His judgments are true and just, because he is omniscient and righteous (Rv 16:5-7).
3. Jesus will carry out God's judgment on everyone who has ever lived (Ac 10:42; 2 Co 5:10).
4. People will be judged for every aspect of their lives; nothing will remain hidden.
  - Their deeds (Rv 20:12-13; Ro 2:6; Mt 16:27)
  - Their words (Mt 12:36-37; Lk 12:3)
  - Their thoughts (Hb 4:12; Mt 9:4)
  - Their attitudes and motives (1 Cor 4:2-5; Hb 4:12)
5. The righteous will receive eternal life, but the unrighteous will receive eternal punishment.

*Romans 2:6–8 (ESV) (God) will render to each one 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 self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.*

6. Those in Christ will not experience God's wrath (1 Th 5:9). Instead, believers will be rewarded for their good deeds (Mt 25:31-40).

### **ESCHATOLOGY**

1. Eschatology is the study of last things; that is, the fulfillment of God's plan of the ages for creation and humanity. God's plan involves the summing up of all things under the authority of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

*Ephesians 1:9–10 (ESV) (God made) known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

2. Eschatology is relevant because the future of the earth and humanity's ultimate destiny are universal concerns. And it is important because it is central to evangelism.
  - The Gospel includes the hope of eternal life in the age to come and the warning of eternal punishment for all who refuse to repent. The early church often preached about Jesus' return.

## **THE SECOND COMING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The Second Coming of Christ involves our blessed hope—the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ and the full manifestation of God's kingdom.

1. The Gospels promise the Second Coming (Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 21).

*Matt 25:31–32 (ESV) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."*

2. The Book of Acts promises the Second Coming.

*Acts 3:21 (ESV) "[H]eaven must receive (Jesus) until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago."*

3. Paul teaches the Second Coming in his letters.

*1 Thes 4:16 (ESV) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.*

See also 1 Cor 1:7; 15:23; Php 3:20, 21; 1 Thes 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:1-11, 23; 2 Thes 1:7, 10; 2:1, 8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13.

4. The other apostolic authors also refer to the Second Coming (Jas 5:7-8; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 1:7, 13; 2 Pet 1:16; 3:4, 11-12; 1 Jn 2:28.)

## **WHEN WILL CHRIST RETURN?**

1. God has set a definite time for the return of Christ, but no one knows when it will be. Therefore, we should live in readiness for his return.

Mark 13:32–33 (ESV) *“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.”*

2. Instead of focusing on the exact timing of Jesus’s return, God wants us to focus on the urgency of the Great Commission. The timing of his return is tied to the preaching of the Gospel.

2 Peter 3:9 (ESV) *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

Matthew 24:14 (ESV) *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

#### **WHAT ARE SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS COMING?**

1. The Second Coming will be personal. Jesus will return physically (Ac 1:11) and will be visible (Rv 1:7).

Revelation 1:7 (ESV) *Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.*

2. The Second Coming will be glorious.

Matthew 24:30 (ESV) *Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

3. The Second Coming will precipitate the resurrection and judgment.

1 Th 4:16 (ESV) *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.*

4. Jesus will come to rescue believers from wrath.

1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 (ESV) *[Y]ou turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

5. Jesus will come to punish evildoers.

*2 Th 1:7–9 (ESV) [T]he Lord Jesus (will be) revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...*

6. Jesus will come to transform us into his image.

*Colossians 3:4 (ESV) When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

7. The Second Coming will precipitate the renewal of creation.

*Romans 8:19–21 (ESV) For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 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.*

8. Jesus will come to establish his universal reign on earth (Mt 25:31).

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why are all three aspects of death significant (physical, spiritual, eternal)?
2. How should Christians respond to the promise of Jesus's return?
  - What is your own response?
  - What aspect of his return inspires the most hope in you?
  - Is there any aspect of his return that causes fear in you?
3. What do you think about attempts to predict the date of Jesus's return? What about correlating current events with biblical passages?

## **HOMEWORK**

1. Review the Scriptures in this lesson. Reflect on the truths they teach and write a brief summary of how this lesson and the texts have impacted you.