

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 32: The End

Last Time: *All people after death will face a Final Judgment. Believers will be immediately brought into God's presence and await the future resurrection and new creation. Those outside of Christ will face the condemnation of Hell.*

WCF 32.1 *God hath appointed a day, wherein he will judge the world, in righteousness, by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.*

Eschatology: Study of the Last Things

This study will examine the major views Christians have held regarding the eschatology. Many Christians have put a strong emphasis on the end times, often giving the doctrine a central place in their teaching and living. There have been important reasons for the emphasis, but here are some initial warnings:

- We should seek to be as balanced as the Bible is balanced. The passages used to support these views are few and often difficult to interpret.
- End Times should not eclipse or diminish our study of Christ and the gospel.
- Each view studied has faithful Christians among its advocates. We should seek to find what God's truth is among the different views, yet resist the urge to use this topic as confirmation of something else (i.e., taking the Bible seriously)

The Return of Christ—Review of Three major views

1. Post-millennialism:

1. Kingdom of God is primarily a present reality.
2. Expect conversion of all nations prior to Christ's return.
3. Expect a long period (not necessarily a literal 1,000 yr. period) of earthly peace and Christian goodness to come gradually.
4. Gradual growth of the Kingdom by the continuing spread of the gospel.
5. At the end of the millennium there will be a time of apostasy and flare-up of evil in connection with the coming of the antichrist.
6. The millennium will end with the personal, bodily return of Christ.

2. Historical Pre-millennialism and Dispensational Pre-millennialism:

Points Historical and Dispensational Pre-mil. have in common:

1. Earthly reign of Christ initiated by Christ's return. (Pre-mil.)
2. Earthly millennium will be dramatically and cataclysmically inaugurated by the second coming. (rather than gradual or an extension and perfection of trends already present on earth)
3. Great tribulation will immediately precede the millennium, which will heighten the effects of the millennium.
4. Two resurrections in Rev. 20:4-6 are distinguished by the participants (believers

in first and non-believers in second) but both are physical or bodily. This over against the Post-mil. and a-mil. that only the second resurrection is bodily whereas the first is spiritual, I.e. intermediate soul separate from the body until rapture)

Points of Disagreement:

1. Dispensational Pre-mil claims to read the Bible literally but often misreads it by ignoring the literary intentions of the author. (Rise of Dispensationalism paralleled that of the fundamentalist movement. Fundamentalists defined themselves over against the modernist who rejected literal reading of the Bible from a lack of faith in the supernatural)

Example: Dispensationalists hold to an exclusively futurist and literalist view of the book of Revelation whereas other groups like the historical pre-millennialists view Revelation as more figurative and symbolic, both futuristic and as representing the present age of John.

2. Different understanding of present age: Unlike Historical Pre-mil, the Dis. Pre-mil believe that there are no OT prophecies fulfilled within the "church age" (time between Christ's ascension and Christ's return). Historical Pre-millennialists are more willing to understand tribulation and millennium as less literal and in part being accomplished now.

3. Different understanding of Israel: Unlike the Historical Pre-mil, the Dispensationalists hold that there will be a virtual restoration of the Old Testament Israel during the Millennium, some Historical Pre-millennialists only hold that there will be some special status of Israel (non-political/geographical). Therefore, the Dis. look for a political millennial. Unlike Historical Pre-millennialists, the Dispensational Pre-millennialists see a sharp contrast between Israel and the church.

4. Very different view of tribulation:

a. Dispensational Pre-millennialism holds to a two stage return of Christ with a seven-year tribulation in between. The church will be raptured prior to tribulation.

b. Historical Pre-millennialism holds to a one stage return of Christ whereby the church will remain in the world during the tribulation.

Dispensational view: Two phase return

- Phase 1: "Rapture"- resurrection of believers before the "tribulation" (period of distress)
- 7 Year interval: Followed by a 7-year tribulation and coming of "THE" anti-christ... Phase 2: "Return" of Christ with the church for the great battle of Armageddon and the beginning of Christ's millennial reign.

Reasons to reject 2 phase view of Christ's return:

1. Same words are used in scripture to describe what Dispensationalism divides into 2 events. (parousia, 2 Thess.2:8, apokalypsis 1 Cor. 1:7 and epiphaneia 1 Tim. 6:14)

2. When the NT describes the "tribulation" (period of distress), it does not indicate that the church will be removed from the earth before the distress! (note Mt.24 – warning would not even be applicable)

3. All other passages in NT speak of only one coming. Only Rev. 20 can be interpreted to be a 2 phase coming, yet in context that is highly figurative.

3. A-millennialism

1. Like both Post-mil. and Hist. Pre-mil., A-mil. holds that a faithful reading of scripture isn't necessarily a literalistic reading of scripture.
2. Like both Post-mil. and some Hist. Pre-mil., the millennium and tribulation are understood to be symbolical but not necessarily a literal 1,000 year period.
3. The present age consists both of the millennial reign of Christ and the tribulation simultaneously. The kingdom of God has come partially now but is not yet fully consummated. I.e. the binding of Satan already is taking place for the gospel to have any progress at all but Satan still is the "prince of this world."
4. The second coming of Christ will inaugurate the final age and state for both believers and nonbelievers. Both will be raised in a general resurrection for judgment and immediate entrance into their ultimate future states.
5. Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled both within the history of the church and in the New Heaven and Earth.
6. The Lord could return virtually at any time.

Hoekema:

"One who is a believer in Jesus Christ, therefore, is in the kingdom of God at the present time, enjoying its blessings and sharing its responsibilities. At the same time, he realizes that the kingdom is present now only in a provisional and incomplete state, and therefore he looks forward to its final consummation at the end of the age. Because the kingdom is both present and future, we may say that the kingdom is now hidden to all except those who have faith in Christ, but that some day it shall be totally revealed so that even its enemies will finally have to recognize its presence and bow before its rule. (Lk.13:20-21)"

[See Developments in Eschatology Chart]

Why does it matter which view you hold?

1. Dispensational/fundamentalists: Tend to see the kingdom of God as totally or mainly future. May lead to pessimism about social and personal change. Leads to a "fortress mentality" of pulling out of the world.
 - a. Low view of culture: Rather than being agents through which God can exercise his rule in culture, we must isolate ourselves from culture, praying and waiting for the return of Christ.
 - b. Tends to be fatalistic (regarding this world) and triumphant regarding the world to come.
 - c. Radical discontinuity between present and future.
 - d. Therefore, low view of education, low view of getting involved, etc.
2. Post-Millennialism/Pentecostal: Tends to see the kingdom exclusively as "already" present. Leads to an optimism about the kingdom to breakdown strongholds of corporate or individual evil and forgetting the incompleteness of the kingdom of God.
 - a. leading to a naiveté regarding the sin in the heart, leading them to trust too quickly in the divine origin of their own impulses.
 1. Naiveté regarding church power
 2. Naiveté regarding personal impulses

- b. expecting "quick and simplistic fixes" for complex problems, leading to a undeveloped view of suffering. Faith as the catch-all solution
- 3. Mainline/liberal (both Pre-mil., Post-mil. and a-mil.):
 - a. Tend to negate that the "kingdom" is "from God" rather than from "man"
 - b. Confuses "gradual" with "anti supernatural"
 - c. This together with an optimism about the Kingdom being exclusively present, Leads to a strong trust in education or politics to usher in the kingdom.

Implications of the amillennial "now and not yet" tension

1. Present or future Kingdom of God is not one of invisible or visible, but impartiality and completeness.
 - Now: Enjoy the rights and privileges of Christ's Laws, government, sacraments and mission as in the visible Church. (albeit imperfect and fallible)
 - Not yet: Consist of "land" and "all peoples" (heaven)
2. We mustn't equate the kingdom of God with culture, nor should we say that what we do in culture is unrelated to the Kingdom.
3. This helps us understand suffering of believers as part of the "not yet"

WCF 33.3. *As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin; and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity: so will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come Lord Jesus, come quickly, Amen.*

Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life

Summary: There are different views on how the Bible describes the Last Days. Amillennialism faithful represents the "now and not yet" tension found in the NT. This teaching has implications for our life and how we relate to suffering and the world, however it should not take prominence over the gospel.