

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Eschatology– Study Last Things– Part 1 Introduction & Individual Eschatology

Introduction

- This is one of the final subject of systematic theology.
 - This is fitting because it's about the end or final things.
- Eschatology; from ἔσχατος and λογος.
- There are two general subdivisions.
 - Individual Eschatology: This covers death and the intermediate state.
 - Cosmic Eschatology: This covers the return of Christ and all that goes along with it.
 - Most people only think of eschatology in terms of cosmic eschatology, but it is crucial to understand individual eschatology.
- Like every other doctrine, eschatology should affect the way you live now, otherwise your eschatology is likely wrong and misguided.
- In this lesson, we will talk about eschatology in general and then focus on individual eschatology.

Historic Treatment

- Historically, this doctrine has been treated with less emphasis.
 - It's not that it wasn't talked about or studied, but in the last two centuries years or so, it has received much more attention. Furthermore, each generation has its own anticipation of the end.
 - But in terms of formal and systematic study, it is more a modern phenomenon.
 - Also, is not merely theologians concerned, but disciplines outside of theology have become interested in eschatology as well.
- The early church expected the near return of Christ.
 - Premillennialism dominated first 300 years of church history, but Augustine's Covenant type theology led to amillennialism being dominant.
 - Reformers made eschatology a popular theme, but their target was the papacy as Antichrist. They were amillennial.
 - Periods of intense persecution led to reflection on the doctrine.



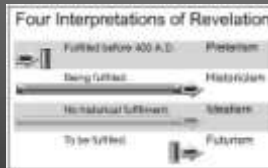
Reasons for Current Interest

- Rapid change in technology and culture.
- The rise of the Third World and theories of dialectical materialism.
- Certain schools of psychology emphasize hope. (Victor Franco).
- Current threat of global destruction has people thinking about it.
- There are two trends that stem for popularity in eschatology.
 - Eschatomania and Eschatophobia.
 - The former looks for prophecy in the Newspaper. They take OT passages long past fulfilled and think some statement of the UN or some trend in the US is the fulfillment.
 - The latter seeks to say nothing of prophecy because they do not want to be associated with the modern trend. The neglect is unjustified.
 - Finally, some Christians are lazy. Just because a subject is difficult doesn't mean we should ignore it. If God revealed it, then we are supposed to learn it.



Classifying Eschatologies

- Among Christians there exists not just one eschatology, but a number of them. And then there are secular views too. Therefore, we use various questions to enable us to classify the different eschatologies.
- Question 1: Is eschatology thought to pertain to the future or present?
 - Futurists see it as pertaining to future.
 - Preterists see the events as being fulfilled in the lifetime of the writer.
 - Historicists think it was future when written, but fulfilled generally in church history.
 - Idealists see it as timeless and symbolic of Christian life in all ages.
 - Eclectic: Blends the four, but one approach leads the blend.



Classifying Eschatologies

- Question 2: Is the future of life here on earth seen optimistically or pessimistically.
 - Postmillennialists see things improve greatly.
 - Premillennialists believe that things will get worse.
- Question 3: Is divine activity or human effort what causes the eschatological events to happen.
 - Once again different millennial schemes depend on their answer to this question.
 - And liberal theologies play into this as well.
- Question 4: Is the focus of eschatology "this worldly" or "other worldly."
 - This sets amillennial thought apart from the others.



Classifying Eschatologies

- Question 5: Does the particular view speak of hope for the church alone, or the human race in general?
 - Sets postmillennialism apart from the others.
- Question 6: Is there a special place for the Jewish people in eschatological occurrences?
 - This causes Covenantalists and Dispensationalists to part ways.



Modern Treatments of Eschatology

- Modernized Eschatology (liberalism) – promises of scripture will be fulfilled in the West.
 - Culmination of 19th century progressive thought.
 - The promises of Scripture were being fulfilled in the progress of the West—in a Protestant liberal kind of way.
- Demodernized Consistent Eschatology (A. Schweitzer) – Jesus overestimated what He could accomplish and failed in His mission.
 - His views challenged liberalism since he tried to interpret the words of Jesus based on context.
 - He was obviously wrong, but his critique of liberalism actually demolished it.
- Realized Eschatology (C.H. Dodd) – Preterism. Jesus fulfilled everything He was supposed to in His first coming.
 - Also challenged liberalism, but had less consequences than Schweitzer's view.



Modern Treatments of Eschatology

- Existential Eschatology (R. Bultmann) – Promises of the resurrection are to be understood in terms of our personal experience.
 - What does it mean to me?
- Liberation Eschatology (Moltmann) – it is also called the Theology of hope and promises deliverance to the Third World when they rise up.
- These views show us that eschatology is more than an “in-house” debate.



We cannot use electric lights and radios and, in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medical and clinical means and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament.

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer —

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