

Systematic Theology, Lesson 36: Eschatology: The Doctrine of Last Things, Part 2

1. Review

- a. Purpose of eschatology: Eschatology is not an end in itself but should stimulate growth in Christ.
- b. Division of eschatology: Eschatology is divided into two major sections: personal eschatology and general eschatology.
 - i. Personal (or individual) eschatology
 1. Physical death
 2. Intermediate state
 - ii. General (or cosmic) eschatology
 1. Return of Christ (second advent)
 2. Millennium
 3. Resurrection
 4. Judgment and eternal punishment
 5. New heavens and earth (eternal state)

2. Physical Death

- a. Physical death is the _____ of physical life by the separation of body and soul.
 - i. **Luke 12:4:** I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do.
 - ii. **Ecc 12:7:** then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.
 - iii. **James 2:26:** For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

- b. Physical death is the destiny of every human being unless the Lord prevents it.
- i. **Ecc 8:8**: No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; and there is no discharge in the time of war, and evil will not deliver those who practice it.
 - ii. **1 Cor 15:22**: For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.
 - iii. **Heb 9:27**: And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment.
 - iv. **Heb 11:5**: By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.
 - v. **2 Kings 2:1, 11**: And it came about when the LORD was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. . . . As they were going along and talking, behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven.
- c. Physical death is the positive _____ for sin.
- i. **Rom 6:23**: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - ii. **Rom 5:12, 17, 21**: Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned . . . For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. . . . so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 - iii. **1 Cor 15:21, 56**: For since by a man came death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. . . . The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
 - iv. **Jas 1:15**: Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.
- d. If physical death is the positive punishment for sin, why do believers die?
- i. The believer has no personal punishment for sin remaining.

1. **Rom 8:1**: Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
 2. **Rom 5:16-17**: The gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment *arose* from one *transgression* resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift *arose* from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.
- ii. The believer experiences personal death not because of personal punishment for sin but because death has not been totally defeated yet.
1. **1 Cor 15:26**: The last enemy that will be abolished is death.
 2. **1 Cor 15:54-55**: But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?”
- iii. Thus, for the believer, physical death is another _____ to our final salvation (i.e., glorification).¹
1. **Rom 8:23**: And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.
 2. **Heb 12:22-23**: But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect.

e. Implications of physical death

- i. For the believer, death is not to be fearful but joyful.

¹ For more on glorification, see: Dan Burrus, “Systematic Theology, Lesson 29: Soteriology, Part 7,” lecture available at gracelakeville.org.

1. **Ps 23:4:** Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
 2. **Rom 8:38-39:** For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 3. **Rev 14:13:** And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."
- ii. For the believer, death is sorrowful and full of grief, but not without _____.
1. **John 11:35:** Jesus wept.
 2. **Phil 2:27:** For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow.
 3. **1 Thess 4:13:** But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.
- iii. For the unbeliever, death is a fearful event that brings great sorrow.
1. **Heb 9:27:** And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.
 2. **Rom 9:1-3:** I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

3. Intermediate State

- a. The intermediate state refers to the time of separation of the physical body and the soul before the second advent of Christ, resurrection, and judgment.

- i. **2 Cor 5:2-4:** For indeed in this *house* we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.
 - ii. **John 5:28-29:** Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment.
- b. Souls of believers go _____ into the conscious presence of the Lord.
- i. **Luke 23:43:** And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”
 - ii. **2 Cor 5:8:** we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.
 - iii. **Phil 1:23:** But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better.
 - iv. **Heb 12:23:** to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect.
- c. Souls of unbelievers go _____ into conscious eternal punishment.²
- i. **Luke 16:22-24:** Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.”
 - ii. **Rev 20:13-14:** And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

² More on the doctrine of eternal punishment will be discussed in a subsequent systematic theology lesson.

d. Implications of the intermediate state

i. People do not enter purgatory upon death.

1. Purgatory is a doctrine taught in the Roman Catholic Church where the souls of believers go to be further purified from their sins before they can enter into God's presence in heaven.
2. Purgatory does not exist because it is not taught in Scripture.

ii. People do not enter a state of " _____ " at death.

1. "Soul sleep" is a doctrine that has been taught at various times in the history of Christianity. It teaches that at death believers enter a state of unconscious existence until Christ returns.
2. Sometimes appeal is made to those passages that speak of death as "sleep," but "sleep" is used as a metaphor for death.
 - a. **John 11:11-13:** This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep. The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep.
 - b. We use metaphors and expressions for death like "passed away," "kick the bucket," "cash in the chips," "depart this life," "drop like flies," "give up the ghost," etc.

iii. Physical death is the not the cessation of existence (i.e., annihilation).

4. **GCBC Statement of Faith** ("Last Things" subsection "death"):

We teach that physical death involves no loss of our immaterial consciousness, that the soul of the redeemed passes immediately into the presence of Christ, and that, for the redeemed, such separation will continue until the rapture which immediately follows the first resurrection, when our soul and body will be reunited to be glorified forever with our Lord. Until that time, the souls of the redeemed in Christ remain in joyful fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

We teach that the souls of the unsaved at death are kept under punishment until the second resurrection, when the soul and the resurrection body will be united.