

Eschatology: End Times

by Greg Herrick

Greg Herrick's sermon on eschatology explores the significance of death, resurrection, and the return of Christ, emphasizing hope for believers.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 12:7, Romans 8:11, 1 Corinthians 15:22, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Ephesians 2:1, Ephesians 4:17, 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Hebrews 4:15, Hebrews 9:27, Revelation 21:8

Topics: "Eschatology", "Resurrection"

Description

Greg Herrick preaches about the theological concept of eschatology, which refers to the study of final things in the Bible. He delves into personal eschatology, discussing physical death, the intermediate state, and spiritual death. Herrick also explores the concept of the second death for those who reject God. He covers the existential problem of death and the Christian hope of resurrection and life with God. Additionally, he addresses corporate eschatology, focusing on the return of Christ, the certainty of His return, the nature of His return, and the final judgment of all people.

Transcript

The term "eschatology" comes from two Greek terms e[scato" and lovgo" meaning (roughly speaking) "last, end, or final" and "study of," respectively. Theologically speaking, then, the term eschatology refers to "the study of final things" in the Bible. It concerns both personal eschatological issues such as death and the intermediate state as well as themes with a more general or corporate focus. The latter would include such ideas as the return of Christ, resurrection, judgment, tribulation, the millennial kingdom, and the eternal state.

Personal Eschatology

There are both personal and corporate aspects to the Biblical portrait of eschatology. On the personal side, all people will experience physical death and the intermediate state. There have been a few exceptions to this rule, however, in the Biblical record (e.g., Enoch; in the future, Christians alive at the Lord's return do not seem to pass through physical death, but instantaneously receive their resurrection bodies), but by and large all people can "count on" going through the experience of physical death (Heb 9:27), followed by conscious existence throughout an interim period until the resurrection of the body.

Physical death is described in scripture as the separation of the soul or spirit from the body; this seems to be the immediate result of the decay and termination of the physical body. James says that the body

without the spirit is dead and the writer of Ecclesiastes, speaking of physical death in general, says that the body returns to the dust from which it came and the spirit to God who gave it (Eccl 12:7; cf. Gen 2:7; 3:19).

But the use of the term death in scripture is not confined simply to physical death. Rather, it is also used to describe the spiritual state of all people (except Christ) born into this world. The apostle Paul says that we are "spiritually dead in sin" until we are made alive with Christ (Eph 2:1-6). As a result of being spiritually dead, we produce works consistent with death, darkness, and profound ignorance of God (Eph 4:17-19).

But those who die in this condition of spiritual death face yet another death. This one, however, is permanent, without hope of change or deliverance. It is referred to as the second death and results in a permanent state of separation from the gracious presence of God. It is eternal punishment for sin and rejecting God's presence in Christ. It is referred to in Revelation 21:8 as the second death.⁵⁶ Here is what John says:

Revelation 21:8 But to the cowards, unbelievers, detestable persons, murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practice magic spells, idol worshipers, and all those who lie, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. That is the second death."

John says earlier in Revelation 20:6 that believers in Christ will not have to endure the second death.

Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy is the one who takes part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Physical and spiritual death are a result of Adam's sin (1 Cor 15:21).⁵⁷ Adam as the representative man was commanded not to eat of the fruit of the tree on payment of certain death (Gen 2:17). This penalty of "death" involved more than spiritual death, for man was banned from re-entering the garden, taking from the tree of life, and living forever in a sinful state (Gen 3:23-24). Thus the penalty of death for sin included physical death as well as spiritual death (see the refrain "and he died" in Gen 5).⁵⁸

The existential problem of death is so grievous that many lose hope and any desire to go on in life. But for the Christian, death does not have the final say in the matter; "loss" is not the final outcome. As sad, fearful, and troublesome as the expectation and experience of death is (Acts 8:2; Phil 2:27), the Christian has the assurance, based on the resurrection of Christ and the ministry of the indwelling Spirit, that resurrection and life with God will be his/her final destiny (1 Thess 4:13). While we grieve for our deceased loved ones now, we grieve not for them--insofar as they are believers in Christ, they are with the Lord--but we grieve for ourselves, in our deep and profound sense of loss. In our time of need let us come to the throne of grace to find mercy and receive grace upon grace (Heb 4:15). The Lord Jesus Christ is no stranger to the suffering of death (1 Cor 15:55-57).

There is the question, however, of what happens to people after they die, but before they are resurrected. This is often referred to by theologians as the "intermediate state" (Zwischenzustand). Several answers have been given to this question. First, there are those who suggest that the soul enters an unconscious state of limbo until the resurrection of the body.⁵⁹ Generally those who argue for "soul sleep," as it is often referred to, claim that this is the significance of the many references to Christians "falling asleep" in the Lord (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-15). But it is highly unlikely that "sleep" is anything more than a metaphor (euphemism)--viewed from the perspective of grieving Christians who are still alive--to refer to deceased

Christian loved-ones who will one day "awake" to be with Christ (and family and friends) in resurrection life. Thus, the point of the metaphor is not that they are now in an unconscious state, but rather that death is not their final destiny, resurrection life with Christ is (see John 11:11-14)! The metaphor indicates that death is only temporary for the Christian. Further, the story of Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 demonstrates conscious existence after death, not "sleep" in the way advocates of "soul sleep" often argue.

Second, Roman Catholic theology customarily argues that the souls of believers are not yet completely purified; hence they go to purgatory to experience cleansing and preparation for heaven and God's presence. Catholics often base this doctrine on elements of church tradition and certain texts, including, but not limited to 2 Maccabees 12:42-45 where Judas Maccabeus is said to have taken up a monetary collection to be sent to Jerusalem as a sin offering; he is thus said to have "made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sins" (NRSV). Other NT passages used to support the doctrine of purgatory include Matthew 5:26; 12:32; 1 Corinthians 3:15, and 2 Timothy 1:18. Even a quick glance at these passages, however, reveals that the doctrine of purgatory cannot be legitimately read out of them. Further, the tenor of NT theology and the necessity of present faith in Christ for salvation makes such a claim patently false. The apostles held out hope only for those who personally trusted in Christ in this life.

Third, another view of the intermediate state is "instantaneous resurrection." In this view, propounded in various ways by F. F. Bruce, W. D. Davies and others, Paul had no room for the intermediate state of disembodied existence, but rather taught in 2 Cor 5 that upon death the Christian immediately receives a resurrection body which is presently hidden in the eternal order. But this interpretation of 2 Cor 5 is dubious at best (cf. 5:9) and the presupposition that man must have a body or he ceases to exist--often associated with a strict monistic anthropology--must be rejected on clear scriptural grounds (as we indicated above).

Fourth, a better view of the intermediate state is that the disembodied souls of believers go to be "with Christ" (2 Cor 5:8-9) and will from there await a resurrection body at his return. The apostle Paul said that the dead in Christ will return with the Lord at the rapture and then all will rise (i.e., receive resurrection bodies; 1 Cor 15:22-23; 1 Thess 4:14, 16). Those who die apart from Christ go immediately to hell (Luke 16:23-24) and from there await a resurrection to judgment (John 5:28-29; Matt 25:46).⁶⁰ There seems to be very little indication in scripture that we are given resurrection bodies immediately after death. Rather, the emphasis seems to fall on a future resurrection of believers and unbelievers coordinate with the Lord's return.

Now, regarding the resurrection, certain questions have emerged. But before we entertain them, let us say first of all, that believers will most certainly be glorified in resurrected bodies. This is a doctrine clearly taught in scripture and throughout the history of the church (cf. John 5:28-29; Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:12-58; 2 Cor 5:1-10).

But some have asked about the nature of the resurrection body. Regarding the first question, some argue that since Paul said that "flesh and blood" cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50), our bodies will not have corporeality. But there are several weaknesses in this view. First, it is unlikely that by "flesh and blood" Paul means to contrast non-material with material. Rather, as the next phrase in 1 Cor 15:50 indicates, he is contrasting that which is perishable (our bodies in their present existence under Adam and sin) with that which is imperishable (our glorified bodies). Second, it seems fairly clear in scripture that Jesus' resurrection body was physical (Luke 24:39; John 20:27; 1 Cor 15:49), and since ours is patterned after his, we may expect ours to be physical as well (Phil 3:21). This does not mean that in our resurrected

bodies we will have all the limitations we now labor under, but that we will actually have bodies (they may be capable, as was the resurrected Jesus, of much more than we can now imagine).

There is also the question of the identity of the person who dies and the person who is resurrected. Some philosophers and theologians, who maintain a monistic view of man, cannot even begin to entertain the idea that a person exists apart from their body, i.e., that there is an immaterial soul. For them, then, there is either no life after death, or in the case of some Christian theologians, God must recreate the person at the resurrection; the point is: disembodied existence is impossible. This raises the question of personal identity and who really gets raised from the dead when a person dies. But while this poses a problem for substance monists and others, scripture speaks quite clearly on the identity of the deceased person and the subsequently resurrected person: As to identity, he/she is the same person. Corporeality or physicality is not essential to personhood as the personhood of God himself and angels teach us. Again, despite widespread monism among Christian philosophers and theologians, scripture affirms an anthropology of substance dualism (complex material united intimately with complex immaterial). The soul/person continues after death and as such awaits the resurrection when he/she will receive a glorified body.

There is also the question of the nature of the resurrection body, but we will have to leave that topic until the next update.

Corporate Eschatology

The Return of Christ: Areas of General Agreement

It Is Certain, Though Day Unknown

The triumphant hope living through the pages of the New Testament rests on the facts that Christ rose from the dead, ascended to heaven (where he is currently reigning in fulfillment of Davidic promise), and will certainly someday return. As the apostles were standing, watching Jesus go into heaven, Luke tells us that two men dressed in white appeared and queried them: "Why are you standing here looking into the sky?" Perhaps the disciples were worshipping and struck with awe or perhaps they thought Jesus might immediately return to be with them. In any case, Jesus continued into heaven, but the men told the disciples that in the same way (tropos) that Jesus went into heaven he would most certainly return (Acts 1:11). This, of course, was the firm and widespread belief of the early Christians. Paul taught that "the Lord himself would come down from heaven..." (1 Thess 4:16) and John mentions it frequently as the hope of the saints in the book of Revelation. In 22:12 Jesus says, "Behold, I am coming soon..." and in 22:20 he repeats the same idea. Further, Revelation 22:20 demonstrates that it is and should be the prayer of every Christian's heart, that is, for Christ to return quickly (see also Phil 4:5; Heb 9:28; James 5:8; 2 Peter 3:10; 1 John 3:2-3).

There are perhaps many reasons for the early church's strong belief in the personal return of Christ, but none can be more central than that Jesus himself taught the doctrine. In his great Olivet discourse, Christ announced, in keeping with Daniel's vision of the Son of Man, that he would most certainly return (Matt 24:3; 24:30; John 14:3; Rev 1:7).

Another important aspect that all Evangelical writers agree upon is the fact that the precise date of the second coming is not known and cannot be known. Even Jesus did not know the date of his return; only the Father knows that (Matt 24:36). Therefore, while we can recognize certain signs (which, incidentally, have been occurring since the beginning), we cannot know the hour in which the Son of Man will return.

Indeed, "date-setting"--as it has come to be known in certain circles--is an effective distraction, taking our eyes off what we are clearly commanded to be doing in his absence, namely, serving him with wisdom and diligence, in the expectation of his certain return (Matt 24:36-25:30). Such a fascination with nailing down the date comes from hearts who either know Christ very little or not at all; they lead unsuspecting people down theological "rabbit trails" only to find both themselves and their followers ensnared in the end. Many a cult and wayward Christian group are testimony to that truth.

I am not saying that eschatological teaching is unimportant; not at all. I am talking about those who give 88 reasons for the rapture in '88. They are misguided and no person (Christian or otherwise) need listen to them. In fact, the teaching of Jesus would suggest we ignore them. Thus, the Bible's eschatological focus should be ours and we definitely ought not contradict such clear teachings in scripture (e.g., Jesus says he does not know the time of his return) in favor of our deluded attempts to know the inscrutable.

It Will Be Personal, Bodily, and Visible to All

The idea, stemming in part from many liberal circles, that Jesus would return spiritually, as opposed to bodily, is difficult to square with many passages in Scripture and has more to do with certain antisupernatural presuppositions brought to the text. Again, Acts 1:11 is most certainly envisioning a personal, bodily return. The fact that "every eye will see him" is given its most natural meaning if Jesus' return is thought of as bodily (Matt 24:30). Again, Paul said the Lord himself will return (1 Thess 4:16).

It Will Be Magnificent

The return of Christ will not be in obscurity and a "stable" in a small town in the land of Judah. While the world was largely ignorant of his first coming (though in John's view, it too was glorious), they will not be ignorant of his second coming. Jesus warns his disciples not to run after every individual who claims: "Look! Here is the Christ" or "Look! There is the Christ" (Matt 24:23). According to Jesus there is a two-fold reason why we should not bother with such idle speculation. First, many false Christs will appear to deceive many. Second, there will be no mistaking his coming. In other words, there will be no need to run here and there claiming "Here he is," for just as "lightening that flashes in the east is visible as far away as the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt 24:27). Indeed, there will be signs of cosmic proportions associated with his coming (Matt 24:28).⁶¹

He Will Come As Judge and Savior

The twin themes associated with the coming of the Son of Man in the Evangelists' presentation are the judgment of unbelievers and the salvation/reward of the elect. Thus Jesus is returning initially as both Judge and Savior (Mark 13; Luke 21).⁶²

Jesus says that in the period preceding his coming many will be persecuted and put to death because of him (Matt 24:9-12), but the one who stands firm to the end will be delivered (i.e., "saved"). Thus, after the period of great tribulation--a period which Christ said will be shortened for the sake of the elect (24:22)--he will return and gather his own from the four winds. But, he will also judge his enemies and all those who have despised his coming. These are those of whom it is said: they "mourn" (24:30); they will be "cut to pieces and assigned a place with the wicked" (Matt 24:51); they are "foolish" and banned from the "banquet" (25:3, 10-12); "wicked, lazy servant(s)" and "worthless servant(s)" who will not share in their "master's happiness," but instead will be "thrown outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (25:23, 26, 30). The King will separate them as goats and consign them to the

eternal fire with the Devil and his angels (25:41). They will receive "eternal punishment" for their sin (25:46).

The righteous, on the other hand, have an entirely different fate in the hands of the sovereign Lord. He is their Deliverer (1 Thess 1:10) and he will--at his coming--gather them from the four winds (24:31), for they have watched for his coming (24:42); they were wise servants who will be entrusted with a great deal more (24:47). They are the wise virgins who were prepared for his arrival and the banquet, and thus they went in (25:10). Again, they gave proper stewardship to their God-given talents and were entrusted with much, much more (25:29). In the end, the righteous will receive their inheritance, i.e., the kingdom that has been prepared for them since the foundation of the world (25:34). They will inherit eternal life (25:46).

The Return of Christ: Areas of Difference among Evangelicals

The "Imminent" Return of Christ

No evangelical denies the scriptural fact that Christ will return bodily at some point in history. But the precise manner in which this will occur and the immediate results of his return have been variously debated. The questions surrounding the manner of his return have arisen in light of two groups of texts, one which talks about an imminent return (i.e., Christ could return at any moment)⁶³ and one which appears to teach that certain events must be fulfilled (i.e., occur) before Christ could return. Passages such as Matthew 24:42-40 and Luke 12:40 seems to teach that the Lord could come at any moment whereas other passages seem to affirm that before Christ returns the gospel must be preached in all the world (Matt 24:14), the great tribulation must occur (Matt 24:21), the man of lawlessness must appear (2 Thess 2:3) and "all Israel" must be saved (Rom 11:25-32). Others also talk about "signs" that must appear (Matt 24:4-14). In any case, it is these latter passages which seem to indicate that in reality his coming cannot be imminent, for certain signs must precede it. Several solutions have been offered to synthesize these data.

Now it has been typical of many liberal theologians--concerned as they are with stressing the ethical and universal aspects of the kingdom of God within societal structures--to solve this tension by simply affirming that both Jesus and Paul were wrong about the second advent. They were trapped in an outmoded and unscientific Jewish apocalypticism and were simply wrong about a bodily return, and therefore incorrect in their claim that any so-called return would be imminent.

First, it goes without saying that the worldview of the Biblical writers is quite different than the liberal interpreters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The former allows for divine intervention and miracle, whereas the latter has reduced Christianity to a nice (naïve?) ethic and permitted little or no room for the supernatural. In short, because of the modern liberal's commitment to the so-called scientific paradigm he must speak over Scripture at this point in hope of straightening Jesus and Paul out. But, what is left is not Christianity at all, but a powerless religion of some sort. Be that as it may, the bodily return of Christ is clearly taught in Scripture (e.g., Acts 1:11), and so the informed Christian simply regards the liberal to be in error on this point (and many other related points as well) and unhealthily married to the outmoded and untenable worldview of modernism.

We might also note too that the way in which the Biblical writers viewed prophecy is important as well. Just because they use terms such as "soon" (Rev 22:12) and expressions such as "in a little while" (Heb 10:17), in connection with the coming of Christ, does not mean they thought the events were going to come to pass immediately, but only that they viewed the future as an imminent reality. In this way, i.e.,

through prophetic foreshortening, their message has benefit and application to every generation. In summary, there are better and more scripturally sensitive solutions to this problem than those offered by various strands within Liberalism.

Some evangelical scholars have attempted to resolve the tension in these two groups of texts by claiming that the coming of Christ is not an imminent event, but must be preceded by certain other events. Thus they have given preeminence to texts which stress "delay" and regard the first group of "imminence" texts in this light. For example, Louis Berkhof argues that on certain occasions when Jesus referred to his coming he was referring to "his coming in spiritual power at the Pentecost; sometimes to his coming in judgment in the destruction of Jerusalem." Berkhof also points out that the parable of the pounds was spoken to correct the notion that the kingdom of God should immediately appear (Luke 19:11) and in many other situations Jesus and Paul argued that there would be a delay before the kingdom would come (Matt 25:5; 2 Thess 2:2). In short, Berkhof argues that all the texts that speak of an imminent return should be read in light of the passages that speak about delay. For him, predictions concerning the "calling of the Gentiles," the "pleroma of Israel," "the great apostasy and tribulation," "the coming revelation of Antichrist," and all sorts of "signs and wonders" are the locus around which the other texts must be aligned.⁶⁴ The long and short of this method is that the Bible does not teach imminence, but only delay concerning the return of Christ. Not all, however, have agreed with him.

Grudem respectfully disagrees with Berkhof on this point, arguing that Berkhof's solution is too one-sided and suffers from two related problems: (1) it nullifies the warnings to watch and be ready for Christ's coming because it essentially teaches that Christ cannot come at any moment, and (2) it uses the "signs" of Christ's appearing in a way not intended by Scripture, i.e., as indications that his coming is not for a long time. But surely such signs were given to teach us that his coming is right at the door!⁶⁵

Some dispensationalists have argued that the reason for the tension is because the first set of passages (i.e., texts which speak of an imminent return) refers to a secret coming of Christ for his saints at the rapture, while the second set of passages relate to Christ's second coming with the saints to reign on the earth. Thus the rapture of the church is imminent while the second coming--a different event--will be preceded by many signs and follow the rapture by seven years (in many schemes). This view has the strength of allowing both sets of passages to speak clearly with no contradiction. But some have criticized it on the basis that it is hard to derive two comings out of the passages that speak of the Lord's return, and the portrait of the "rapture" in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 seems to be anything but secret or private (cf. "a loud command," "the voice of the archangel," "the trumpet call of God").

Another solution is to argue that the imminency passages are not speaking objectively about the timing of his coming, but rather subjectively about our experience of his coming. The focus in the warning passages is not on Christ's return per se, but rather on our experience of his return. So, even if his return cannot occur until after certain events, there will nonetheless be certain people who are not ready and who will experience his coming as a thief in the night. Thus these passages are not saying anything directly about the timing of his return, but only how we should live in light of his return.

This solution obviously stresses a very important element in the passages, viz., our need to be ready for his return, but in the end it must be judged unsatisfactory. Texts arguing for imminency--such as "The end of all things is near" (1 Peter 4:7) and "I am coming soon" (Rev 22:12)--are speaking about objective realities and not just our subjective state when he returns.

Another solution argues that all the signs have occurred and Christ could come back at any moment. In this way, the passages which view Christ's return only after a series of events have taken place are given full credence. This runs into two problems, however. First, the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ--if taught in Scripture (and this view supposes that it is)--was being taught at the same basic time as the doctrine of delay. This means that imminency was not correct until the events were fulfilled; it was incorrect when it was first taught. But this brings the inspiration of Scripture into question. Second, many of the events such as the preaching of the gospel and the great tribulation seem to have not yet been fulfilled yet.

A final view argues that his return can be understood as imminent, if we realize that while it is unlikely, the events preceding his return, i.e., the universal preaching of the gospel, the great tribulation, and conversion of the Jews have already been fulfilled. The strength of this view is that both groups of texts are allowed to speak and it does admit a degree of healthy uncertainty in our interpretation of many of the relevant passages. The admitted weakness in this position is that, as we stated above, it is difficult to imagine that the great tribulation and the kind of Jewish response envisioned in (AD 56-57 when Paul wrote) Romans have occurred.⁶⁶

The Nature and Timing of the Rapture

The Nature of the Rapture

Among those who claim that the Bible teaches a "rapture" of the church, there are differences of opinion regarding its nature. The term "rapture" comes from the Latin term *rapio* meaning "caught up" and is thus an attempt in English to capture the meaning of the Greek term *αἶρᾶς* (*harpazo*,) in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. There, the apostle says that saints who are alive at the coming of the Lord "will be suddenly caught up" together with saints who have previously died and together they will join the Lord in the air. The precise nature of this "meeting" in the air and the events that follow are questioned by some scholars.

Some argue that the saints, together with the Lord, immediately return to the earth. Among many things, they cite as evidence the technical meaning of the term *ἀπάντησις* (*apante*,,sis "meet") in 1 Thess 4:17. They say that the term was often used in reference to a special delegation going outside the city gates in order to escort an approaching dignitary back into the city. This, they infer, suggests that Christ and his saints will immediately return to earth.⁶⁷ Others, such as most dispensationalists, argue that after the rapture takes place, the church is taken away to heaven where she experiences the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10) and the marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19:7). These interpreters argue that the technical force of the term *ἀπάντησις* does not obtain in this instance since the saints are not going out to meet the Lord on their own, but are rather "snatched away," as it were. Further, the technical force of the term, if indeed it is present, does not require that the Lord return immediately to earth, only that he do so at some point. This, they point out, will occur after the seven year tribulation.

So then, the contemporary questions about the nature of the rapture are not so much about what the event itself will be like, subjectively speaking, but rather what will happen immediately after "we meet in the air." Will we return immediately or will we go to heaven until the end of the Great Tribulation. Obviously, these questions are closely linked with further questions about the timing of the rapture--questions to which we now turn.

The Timing of the Rapture

The purpose of this section is not to argue for one position over another, but simply to present the various positions and comment on them briefly. Each position mounts exegetical and theological support and is held by devout and informed lay people and scholars within evangelicalism. These are not positions which in any way reveal or test a person's orthodoxy and they should not be viewed as such. Further, the use of a label to identify one group in distinction to another is the bane of summarization and generalization, but which remains helpful as long as readers understand that within each camp there are major and minor differences among various proponents and between camps there are many other important areas of agreement.

First, there are certain scholars who argue that the rapture will occur before the Great Tribulation begins; thus they are referred to as pretribulationists. Dispensational, pretribulationist scholars such as Walvoord, Pentecost, Ryrie, et al. attempt to demonstrate that while God's people have always suffered trials and tribulations, there is yet coming on the earth a definite period (7 years) of unparalleled tribulation in fulfillment of Daniel's seventieth week (Dan 9:24-27; Jer 30:7). The church, however, will be raptured before this period begins (Rev 3:10) and will then return from heaven with the Lord at his second coming seven years later.

A minor offshoot of the pretribulationist rapture argument is the partial rapture position. In this scheme, proponents argue that only the faithful in Christ will experience the rapture before the Great Tribulation; the rest will be raptured during the Tribulation. So the rapture is viewed more as a reward for the faithful than as deliverance for the church, per se.

Second, other scholars have argued that the rapture of the church will occur after the Great Tribulation; thus they are referred to as posttribulationists. Among the various theologians who advocate this position there is difference of opinion over whether there is a definite period of Great Tribulation (though all admit that the church has been in tribulation since her beginning). J. Barton Payne argued that there would be no definite time of tribulation while George Eldon Ladd argued for a period of three and one-half or 7 years of tribulation before Christ returned. Both were in agreement, however, that the rapture would occur only after tribulation (whether general tribulation or the Great Tribulation).

The third major interpretive position regarding the rapture of the church is the midtribulationist position; those who hold this view are thus referred to as midtribulationists. In this position the rapture will take place in the middle of the seven year tribulation before the wrath of God is truly poured out in the last three and one-half years (before the battle of Armageddon). Proponents argue that the events of Matt 24:10-27 and other tribulationist events predicted in Daniel 7:25, the Olivet discourse, and Revelation 12:14 are best synthesized in this understanding.⁶⁸

The Nature of the Millennium

1. Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism is the doctrine which affirms that through the work of the Spirit in Christian preaching and teaching in the present time of the church (before the second advent) the world at large will eventually be evangelized and won to Christ. This will turn out in a world characterized by universal peace instead of strife, universal prosperity instead of inequality, godliness instead of evil, and so on, though the time period may be more or less than a thousand years (since, according to some postmill interpreters, the 1000 years of Revelation 20:4-7 can be taken symbolically for an indefinite period of time) and evil will still be present to some limited degree. Thus there is a focus in postmillennarian thought on the present

aspects of the kingdom of God with the result that through Christian influence many economic, educational and social ills will be resolved. Kenneth L. Gentry summarizes the postmillennial position well:

Postmillennialism expects the proclaiming of the Spirit-blessed gospel of Jesus Christ to win the vast majority of human beings to salvation in the present age. Increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in history prior to Christ's return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of people and nations. After an extensive era of such conditions the Lord will return visibly, bodily, and in great glory, ending history with a general resurrection and the great judgment of all humankind.⁶⁹

Postmillennialism (or postmillennial kind of statements) in one form or another, it is argued, can be found as early as Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 260-340) and Origen.⁷⁰ Postmillennial thought also gained ascendancy in the thinking of certain early Reformers such as Theodore Beza (1519-1605) and later in Puritans such as John Owen (1616-1683), Isaac Watts (1674-1748), and in that brilliant mind Jonathon Edwards (1703-1758). A. H. Strong (1836-1921), president of Rochester Theological Seminary (1872-1912) was also an able American exponent of a postmillennial reading of scripture.

In my opinion there are many good and helpful emphases in postmillennial thought. First, theologically speaking, there is a stress in much postmillennial thought on God's sovereign power (to bring about his ends), provision (Christ's presence, the Spirit, the gospel), and purpose in the world. This is good and commendable (and to be found in varying degrees in other eschatological systems of thought as well). Second, though it has been questioned in the past, there is, among most postmillennialists, a genuine desire to read postmillennial doctrine out of scripture rather than into it.⁷¹ The authority of Christ to commission the church to take the gospel to the end of the earth (Matt 28:16-20), the gradual growth of the kingdom as evidenced in Christ's parables (e.g., mustard seed and leaven), and the growth of the church in spite of severe opposition all seem to testify to a postmillennial understanding of scripture.

But there are weaknesses with this view. Indeed, so great are the problems that it is difficult to maintain a postmillennial reading of Scripture. The most damaging criticism offered by opponents, is the fact that the system as a whole is not able to come to grips with all of scriptural teaching regarding the eschaton and none of its exegetical points seem to lead explicitly to postmillennialism. I, for one, could not find a single exegetical argument in Gentry's exposition of postmillennialism that was specific enough to establish postmillennialism as opposed to pre- or a-millennialism. Further, the passages that are often used to argue for postmillennialism, some of which Gentry uses, can be easily and more profitably read in another light.⁷² Again, the system's inability to deal with certain important texts (and themes) which characterize the age of the church as one of suffering and which also demonstrate that the church's hope is not in an age of righteousness coming apart from the literal presence of Christ, raises serious doubts about the correctness of the view as a whole.⁷³ Further, as Blaising rightly implies, since the church has come 2000 years and still sees no evidence of a postmillennial movement in history, one has cause to wonder about this interpretation of Scripture.⁷⁴

2. Historic Premillennialism

Modern Premillennial theologians strongly disagree with their postmillennial brothers and sisters over the issue of the millennium, what it will look like, and how it will come about. For them, the idea that the church will bring a golden age of righteousness and peace through its Spirit-inspired preaching is scripturally unfounded. According to the premillennialists this will only happen in connection with the second coming

of Christ, when the King is visibly and bodily present. To this extent they would also disagree with amillennial interpreters.

But this does not mean that historic premillennialism does not see any of the kingdom existing in the present fulfillment of God's purposes through Christ in the church. It does. But, again, this is not to be equated with the millennial kingdom when Christ will reign personally and bodily on the earth.

Many premillennialists have a special place for the Jewish people in the eschaton, based in several cases on passages like Romans 9-11 where it seems, especially in 11:25-32, that Jewish people will be saved in large numbers at that time. Dispensational premillennialists argue for a much more pronounced role for national (not just ethnic) Israel in the end (see below).

Premillennial readings of scripture stem back to the early church which was for the first three centuries largely premillennial. Christian leaders such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus⁷⁵ were premillennialists, believing that a golden age of blessing and the renewal of Jerusalem would occur at the second coming. But the Alexandrian school, led by such men as Clement and Origen, were opposed to such Jewish, materialistic views of the future. Also, under the weight of Augustine's amillennialism, premillennialism was increasingly abandoned throughout the medieval period and was in short supply throughout the Reformation, and the post-Enlightenment periods of the church. It was really not until the nineteenth century that premillennialism began to make a comeback, especially within British and American expressions of Christianity.

A key passage for all premillennialists is Revelation 20:4-6. They argue that it teaches a literal reign of Christ upon the earth, though not all are in agreement that it must be exactly one-thousand years. Detractors have pointed out that premillennialists have only this one passage upon which to base their system, but this is simply misleading (e.g., 1 Cor 15:22-24).⁷⁶ However, even if there were only one passage correctly interpreted, this should be enough for any of us to believe the doctrine.⁷⁷

One of the key points in the interpretation of the passage involves the repeated use of the verb "live" (e[zh]san) in 20:4, 5. Amillennialists generally argue that the first resurrection (20:4) is spiritual and the second is physical (20:5). But it is difficult to see how the two uses of the term in the same context, without any apparent contrary indication, can mean two different things. Further, a less strained reading of Revelation 20:4-6 suggests that physical resurrection is in view in v. 4 and therefore also in v. 5 (and the aorist is ingressive, i.e., "came to life"). To see both uses of e[zh]san as referring to "spiritual resurrections" seems to beg the question. These are not the souls of the dead reigning with Christ in heaven, but dead saints physically resurrected to reign with him on the earth (see Rev 5:10).

3. Dispensational Premillennialism

In terms of eschatology, Dispensational premillennialism differs from historic premillennialism primarily in its insistence that Israel as a nation will be regathered at the end times, converted, and the land promises made with her fulfilled in the millennial kingdom (e.g., Gen 12:1-3; 15:18-21). Thus, the point is not that many Jews will be saved in the end, but that the nation of Israel will exist and will inherit the promises made to national Israel in the Old Testament.

Previous forms of dispensationalism made these kinds of distinctions in keeping with the insistence that God had two peoples: the church was his heavenly people and Israel was his earthly people. This tenant cannot be maintained in light of NT evidence to the contrary (cf. Eph 2:11-22); there is only one people of

God. But, some progressive dispensationalists have argued that this does not mean that the nation of Israel cannot be regarded as "in Christ" (in some eschatological future) and still a political entity. It seems that even in the eternal state "nations" will be understood to be nations (Rev 21:24). So then, within an overarching soteriological equality and unity joining the people of God, there remains the possibility of structural differences (not inequalities in any sense of access to God) in the millennium. It is not unreasonable, then, that God should deal with Israel in this way and such an interpretation appears to reflect a reasonable reading of OT texts as well as NT passages such as Romans 9-11, especially 11:25-32.

4. Amillennialism

Generally speaking, the term "amillennial" refers to the conviction, held by many godly and informed Christian scholars down through the ages, that there will be no future, earthly millennial period after Christ's return. This, however, is to view the system from a purely negative point of view. Positively stated, amillennialism believes that the church is the expression of the millennial reign of Christ now, where "millennial" is understood to refer not to a literal thousand year period--though some reformers understood it this way⁷⁸--but to the reign of Christ as experienced between his exaltation and parousia. This reign is over the new people of God, the church, which replaces Israel in the outworking of God's eternal plan.

The amillennial scheme of end time events is really quite simple and straightforward. Lewis and Demarest summarize it well:

The amillennial order of events is: Christ's present, spiritual reign over the church; increasing apostasy on earth; the Great Tribulation; Christ's second coming with deceased saints; the destruction of evil powers; the general resurrection of believers and unbelievers; the Last Judgment; and the eternal state. Amillennialism thus affirms that at the end of the age there will be one return of Christ, one resurrection and one judgment.⁷⁹

Thus it (i.e., in its varied forms) has simplicity as a commendable feature and has been held down through the ages but such notable theologians as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and present day thinkers such as Abraham Kuyper, Hermann Bavinck, and Louis Berkhof.

Amillennialists give several reasons to support their eschatological views. First--and these are in no particular order--there is apparently only one passage in all of the Bible that can possibly be adduced to demonstrate an earthly thousand year reign of Christ, i.e., Revelation 20. No other text in the Old Testament or New Testament affirms such an idea, so it is best not to understand Revelation 20:4-6 in this way. Second, the entire book of Revelation is symbolic and we ought not, therefore, regard the "thousand years" in Revelation 20 as referring to literal years. Third, the binding of Satan referred to in Revelation 20 is consistent with what Jesus said would happen during the period of the church (e.g., Luke 10:18) so there is no need to place this in the eschatological future. Fourth, the "first resurrection" in Revelation 20:4-5 is not literal, but a spiritual resurrection into the presence of God in heaven. Besides, scripture teaches only one literal resurrection (e.g., John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15), not three or more as advanced by many premillennialists. Fifth, against many premillennialists, amillennialists generally affirm that there is no place for Israel in the future. The church has replaced her in God's plan.

Several things can be said in response to these arguments. First, even if Revelation 20 were the only passage in the Bible that taught an earthly, thousand year reign of Christ, that should be enough to convince us. The Bible need only affirm a doctrine in one place, so that when properly understood, it

should be regarded as authoritative. Further, there are many OT passages that can be better viewed as referring to an earthly reign of Messiah before the eternal state rather than as a reference to his eternal reign in heaven (Isa 11:2-9; 65:20; Zech 14:6-21). There are also other New Testament passages that can be reasonably read in this light (1 Cor 15:24; Rev 2:27; 5:10; 12:5; 19:15).

Second, it is true that the genre of Revelation is apocalyptic--though this is not the only form of literature in the book--and contains much symbolism. But this fact does not preclude an earthly kingdom in Revelation 20 and a straightforward reading of this text. Though genre is always an indispensable tool for interpreting, informed opinion on all sides of this debate demonstrates that appeals to genre are inconclusive. What is more important in this case is the immediate context and the actual words that are used in Revelation 20:4-6. And, it is here, that the premillennial position is simpler, less strained and therefore more probable.

The context describes, albeit in apocalyptic language, several important historical facts. The description of Christ's bodily return and the destruction of the beast and false prophet are historical descriptions of future events. Thus, the context describes what will occur in history at Christ's return.

Is the binding of Satan literal? Actually, many amillennialists argue that it is, but that it happened at the first advent with Messiah's ministry.⁸⁰ Appeal is often made to texts such as Matthew 12:28-29 and Luke 10:18 and correspondences are forged between Rev 20 and these gospel passages. But it can be reasonably asked whether these texts should be regarded as referring to the same event. It has been debated, but a straightforward reading of the context of Revelation 20 would argue that what happens in Revelation 20 follows chronologically what happened in Revelation 19, i.e., the return of Christ. Therefore, if this is true, the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 cannot be the same event as that referred to in the gospels during the earthly reign of the messiah.

But there are other more cogent arguments to demonstrate that the binding in the gospels is not the same as that in Revelation. First, it is said in Revelation 20:1 that an angel did the binding, not Christ himself. Thus the portrait in the gospels is quite different, too disparate it would seem to be the same. Second, the purpose for Satan being bound in Revelation 20 is so that he will not "deceive the nations anymore." But in what sense are we to understand this if it is the same as the binding that took place in the ministry of Christ and now occurs through the ministry of the church? According to 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 6:10-18, and 1 John 4:4, Satan is quite free to roam and tempt whom he wills (cf. also 1 Pet 5:8). But the binding in Revelation is much more absolute than the gospels or epistles will grant. So it is more reasonable to conclude that Matthew 12 and Luke 10 do not refer to the same event as Revelation 20:2-3. This does not mean they are not related, however. The earlier and "inaugural" binding during Christ's ministry and the church age anticipates the later binding in Revelation 20:2-3, which itself sets the stage for Satan's final overthrow and destruction in Revelation 20:10. This is all in keeping with the progressive realization of God's kingdom on earth.

We must also reiterate what we said above regarding typical amillennial exegesis of the "resurrections" in Revelation 20:4-5. Amillennialists generally argue that the first resurrection (20:4) is spiritual and the second is physical (20:5). One of the reasons they do this is to avoid bracketing the 1000 period off with two bodily resurrections (which would seem to point to an earthly reign after the return of Christ). But it is difficult to see how the two uses of the term in the same context, without any apparent contrary indication, can mean two different things. Further, a less strained reading of Revelation 20:4-6 suggests that physical resurrection is in view in v. 4 and therefore also in v. 5 (and the aorist is ingressive, i.e., "came to life"). Again, these are not the souls of the dead reigning with Christ in heaven, but dead saints physically

resurrected to reign with him on the earth (see the promise in Rev 5:10).

Third, the idea that the church has replaced Israel in God's plan has certain merit, but, as we implied above, needs refinement in light of Romans 11:25-32. The church presently participates in Abrahamic and therefore Davidic and New covenant blessings, as amillennialists affirm, but she has not utterly eclipsed God's promises made to the nation of Israel or at least ethnic Jews. In Romans 11:26 it is not likely that "all Israel" refers to the elect number of Gentiles and/or Jews during the church age, but refers to an eschatological ingathering of Jews coordinate with Messiah's return and reign. If this is so, then an earthly millennium--of the sort envisioned in premillennial thinking--may well be the time and place for the fulfillment of Israel's OT hope (a hope, I might add, that also involves all nations).

So where is the strength of amillennialism's replacement theology? It is ultimately in the Biblical recognition that there is only one people of God for all time with a soteriological equality binding them together. But it has an inherent weakness in that it does not recognize structural (political) differences present in eschatological texts. Indeed, at face value, nations are still regarded as nations in certain texts referring to the eternal state (cf. 21:24).⁸¹ Romans 11:25-32 does speak of a future restoration of Jews (probably national Israel) as Jews. Of course, they will not be saved apart from faith in Christ, but the salvation of "all Israel" will represent God's faithfulness to fulfill his promises to the nation, which promises are taken up with earthly, political and spiritual realities.

Resurrection, Judgment, and The Eternal State

The Resurrection of All People

The Bible teaches that there will be a resurrection of all people and that all will be judged (John 5:28-29).

The Final Judgment of All People

Though some liberal theologians have often denied the fact, it is quite certain that the Bible teaches a final judgment, after which individuals will go to their allotted destinies, i.e., heaven and eternal bliss or hell and eternal punishment. Biblically speaking, this "day of judgment" is most certain and will be the culmination and fulfillment of numerous judgments of God against sin and evil throughout history.

Examples of God's judgment against wickedness and his rewarding of righteousness abound in the Old Testament. He judged man for his sin in the Garden (Gen 3) and he later judged him in the Flood, though he rewarded Noah's faith and righteous behavior (Gen 6:8-9). He judged Abimelech (Gen 20), Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Exod 7-11), the Amorites and those living in Canaan at the time of Israel's conquest (Gen 15:16; Joshua 10-12) as well as unbelievers among the Israelites (Joshua 7). The Lord judged king Saul and rejected him as king over Israel (15:26). He also judged David for his sin with Bathsheba; David's son died (2 Sam 11-12; cf. 12:18) and his kingdom fell into turmoil (2 Sam 13-20). God repeatedly judged the nation of Israel for their sin (e.g., Judges) and threatened to send both the northern and southern kingdoms into captivity. This eventually occurred in 722 BCE (Israel in the north) and 586 BCE (Judah in the south; Lamentations). He also judges the nations of the earth for their continuous sin and rebellion (Isa 13-23; Jer 46-51; Ezek 25-32; Dan 2-7). Though his ways in judgment are not always easy to discern or accept (Hab 1-3), he is nonetheless the just judge of all the earth (Gen 18:25).

In the New Testament, Paul makes it clear that God still judges today. In Romans 1:18--a verse that heads up a rather long section on God's judgment in 1:18-3:20--the apostle says:

For⁸² the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness...

Notice that Paul does not say that the wrath of God "was revealed," but rather "is revealed" or "is being revealed." The wrath of God (ojrghV qeou` , orge,, theou) refers not to some irrational passion within the Godhead, but to his settled hatred for sin expressed or continually revealed (ajpokaluvptetai, apokalu,,ptetai; cf. 1:17) in his giving people over to debilitating entrenchment in their sinful folly (vv. 24, 26, 28).⁸³

People and nations today continually suppress the knowledge of God, deliberately turning from knowledge of the true God to idolatry (the worship of money, sex, power in its various forms, etc.). As a result, just as the Israelites demanded that God give them a king, so people today demand that they be left to their own devices; they demand autonomy. Therefore God gives them over to their sin (cf. 1:24, 26, 28; Eph 4:17-19). The fallout involves escalating wickedness, sorrow, grief, pain, and misery. Man is by nature as incurably religious as he is morally and spiritually foolish.

2 Peter 2:9 also talks about God's present, ongoing punishment of certain people: "if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment."

So God has been and continues to judge individuals and nations for their sin. He does it retributively as well as therapeutically (i.e., so that people might "wake up" and turn from their sin). But all these judgments will find their culmination and vindication at the final judgment. There will come a day when God will finally judge all men (and angels) and in the process all sin will finally be condemned and all God's acts of judgment will be shown to have been necessary, just, and holy. At that time every mouth will be silenced (Rom 3:20) and every knee will bow (Phil 2:9-11). Again, the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that there is coming a "day" when there will be a final judgment.

In Matthew 25:32-33 our Lord compared the final judgment to the separation of sheep and goats. The sheep will go into eternal life and the goats will go into eternal punishment (25:46). The point is, there will come a day when there will be an irreversible and final reckoning. This is often referred to variously as "the day of the Lord" (Isa 13:6, 9; Jer 46:10; Joel 3:1 Eng; Amos 5:18-20) or in light of NT revelation, "the last day" (John 6:39), "the day of Christ" (cf. 1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16) or "the day of God's righteous wrath" (Rom 2:5) and "the day of God's visitation" (1 Peter 2:12; cf. 2 Pet 3:12; 1 John 4:17). To be sure, that "day" does include vindication and reward for God's people, but it involves only judgment and loss for the world apart from Christ.⁸⁴

Again, Romans 2:5 speaks to this final day of judgment: "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed." 2 Peter 2:9 says that God is holding the unrighteous for the day of judgment. Jude 6 speaks rather vividly about God's final act of judging: "And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home--these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day."

Acts 17:31 also speaks about the final day of God's judgment:

For he has set a day (hJmevra, he,,mera) when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

Perhaps the passage that speaks most clearly to the certainty of final and irrevocable judgment is Revelation 20:11-15:

20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 20:12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 20:13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 20:14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 20:15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

There are many indications that John is speaking about the final judgment in Revelation 20:11-15: (1) it occurs after the second coming of Christ (19:11-21), the completion of the millennial kingdom and the final judgment of Satan (Rev 20:1-10); (2) no further judgments are mentioned in Revelation before the final state begins (21-22); (3) the vision as a whole is predicated on Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days who comes to judge every human being at the end of history (Dan 7:14); (4) John refers to a great white throne which suggests not only a just judgment, but also a climactic or final reckoning; (5) the outcome of the judgment involves eternal consequences; thus no further judgment is necessary (20:10, 15); (6) earth and sky have fled suggesting the end of human history as we know it under Adam and sin; and (7) all the dead will be there, both great and small.

Though virtually every evangelical commentator on scripture agrees with the doctrine of a final judgment, some would argue that it actually involves three different judgments: (1) a judgment of believers after the rapture (i.e., the judgment seat of Christ; 2 Cor 5:10); (2) a judgment of the nations at the second coming to determine who will enter the millennium (cf. Matt 25:31-46); and (3) a judgment of all the wicked dead at the Great White Throne judgment after the millennial reign of Christ (Rev 20:11-15). Others would argue that all these judgments are really just one judgment, i.e., they all take place at the Great White throne judgment. We do not have space to develop the differences and the strengths and weaknesses of each view, but what is more important than whether the "final judgment" is at one time or spread out over three times is that (1) all men will most certainly be judged; (2) the outcome cannot be changed; there is no further appeal.

But there is more to the final judgment than just its facticity. First, although it is obvious that God will be the judge, within the councils of the trinity, the Father has determined to give all judgment to the Son (John 5:22-23, 27; Acts 17:31). Jesus Christ, Daniel's Son of Man, will be the judge of all humanity, including the living and the dead (Matt 25:31-33; John 8:26, 50 [the Father is the judge]; John 9:39; 12:47-50; 2 Tim 4:1, 8). Further, the Son will judge wisely and justly (2 Tim 4:8).

Second, both men and angels will be judged (Acts 17:31; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6), but there is an interesting twist to this idea; saints will also be involved in carrying out judgment (1 Cor 6:2-3) The idea that God will use his redeemed people in the execution of judgment has antecedents in the Synoptic tradition (Matt 19:28; Luke 12:29-32; 16:25) and may ultimately go back to the Old Testament where we see God using certain individuals to judge his people (cf. Judges) and the Israelite nation as a whole to judge other nations (e.g., the conquests in Joshua).

The fact that God has used his people to judge other people in the past and will do so again at the future, final judgment, may be connected to man's charge to rule in light of the imago dei (Gen 1:26-28; 9:6-7; Psalm 8:4-6). If this is so, it is understandable that glorified Christians, as those who have been completely restored in God's image, will judge angels and people in the final judgment. Thus, the saints will judge angels and people in the final judgment because this is a function of the restored image. In another way of speaking, believers will judge the living and the dead because of their inseparable connection to Christ the Judge, their personal share in his kingdom with its power and authority (cf. Rev 5:10), and the fact that they love what He loves and hate what he hates. In an important sense, and to an important degree, we will be just like him in our glorified states and will know his mind on these issues in a way only faintly grasped now (cf. 1 Cor 2:15-16).

Third, we said that all men will be judged. Therefore, Christians will be judged as well. Paul, speaking of believers in Romans 14:10, 12, says that "we will all stand before God's judgment seat" and "each of us will give an account of himself to God." He says basically the same thing in 2 Cor 5:10 although this time he refers to the judgment seat of Christ:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or bad.

The judgment of Christians, however, seems to contradict Paul's teaching about justification by faith. If we are justified, why then are we judged? It seems that the idea of justification precludes entering into judgment. After all, didn't Paul say, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1)? But the problem is not as insurmountable as first appears. It is true that the doctrine of justification includes both the idea of eternal forgiveness as well as the eternal possession of the righteousness of Christ. But Christ's judgment of the believer is not to determine eternal destiny, per se, but to determine degree of reward. Though some evangelicals have spurned the doctrine of rewards for believers it seems fairly certain that the Bible does indeed teach it:

1 Cor 3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. 3:11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. 3:12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw--3:13 the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. 3:14 If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. 3:15 If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

Again, Jesus talks about reward for faithful service (Luke 19:11-27) and Paul talks about receiving what is due according to our deeds (2 Cor 5:10). Again, the point about degree of reward seems to be clearly taught in Colossians 3:23-25:

3:23 Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, 3:24 since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward (antapovdosin, antapodosin); you serve the Lord Christ. 3:25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no favoritism.

Thus, according to these texts Christians will be judged to determine their degree of reward or the measure of their inheritance (e.g., ten cities, five cities, etc.[Luke 19:16-19]). This does not mean that

throughout eternity men will suffer pangs of conscience for what they should have done with the grace of God given them while on earth. In the eternal state there will be neither death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev 21:4) and each man who enters, enters into the joy of his master (Matt 25:21, 23).

Therefore, the problem with the doctrine of rewards is not that the scripture does not teach it.⁸⁵ The problem involves coming up with a model that satisfactorily integrates ideas of justification, reward, and the absence of shame/presence of joy in the eternal state (though many will experience shame at Christ's second coming [1 John 2:28]). This is a similar kind of struggle we face with other clearly biblical doctrines, e.g., the trinity, the incarnation, the imputation of sin, the concursive inspiration of scripture, etc. Some have suggested that the degree of reward is known only to God and the person who receives it. Pe

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