

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 5/19/19
“What’s Next? A Biblical Theology of the End Times”¹

At last week’s monthly business meeting I announced that the combined board has approved a proposed revision to our articles of faith. Most of the proposed changes are just clearer wording and clarifications. But the one area where we are proposing a rather significant change is article 17, which deals with eschatology. It’s important that you know why we’re recommending this change, so I want to spend some time addressing that question.

First, a word about the process. This is a congregational church, so an amendment to our articles of faith must follow a prescribed process. It started with the pastors and deacons, and eventually included the trustees (what we call our combined board). They reviewed our current document, compared it with the Scriptures, and eventually consulted other churches’ articles of faith. Your combined board unanimously recommends the proposed document you’ll be seeing.

But we do not see this as a done deal. As a congregation we now invite you to participate in the process. We want to share our recommendations with you, and our reasons for it, and then hear your response. What questions do you have? How can we make this even better than the proposal?

We’ll post the recommended proposal tonight, and make available copies for those interested. We’ll teach on it this evening, and then again next month on a Sunday evening, as well as potentially in July.

Our intent is for the church to vote on the proposal at the end of the summer, or early fall.

Now the question *why*. Why the proposed change, particularly to the eschatology statement? Our current articles of faith state that we believe in “the personal, visible, premillennial, pretribulation return of Christ.” We are part of the Ohio Association of Regular Baptist Churches whose doctrinal statement affirms these same tenets. We have not stopped believing these tenets. These will still be the convictions communicated in the public teaching of this church.

But the question we’re addressing is this. Must a person believe each of these points of eschatology to be a *member* of WBC? Presently, if a person does not believe in a pre-trib position they cannot join our church, for to join a person must affirm their agreement with each detail in our articles of faith. Is it wise for us to make this a prerequisite for membership?

There are truth is, godly people differ when it comes to eschatology. It’s not like Christology, or Soteriology. The Scriptures are clear and there is no room for variance there. But eschatology is different. There are some future events that are very clear (Christ is coming back. Christ will judge the world. Christ will establish His eternal kingdom and His people shall reign with Him. etc). But other points are not so clear.

What changes are we recommending? In essence, we are recommending a position that affirms the core of our current position (Christ’s coming is pre-millennial) but doesn’t require a pre-tribulational affirmation.

Now let’s back up and set the stage for what’s ahead by doing a biblical theology of the end times.

¹ For previous related material see the Doctrine series 9/6/06.

Eschatology. The Doctrine of Last Things.

What do you think of when you hear the word "Eschatology"? Some people seem to think of charts and graphs diagramming the order of future events. As a general rule, we tend to go to 2 extremes.

One is to be overly dogmatic about that which is a complex issue. Remember, that was the problem of the religious leaders of Jesus' day. Jesus didn't fit into their "theological chart." They wanted a Messiah who would give them political and economic freedom. They were sure that's what the Messiah would do, based on their "proof-texting" from the OT scriptures.

Application: Be careful of labeling other Christians "heretics" because they hold a different view than we do on what the 10 toes represent on the beast in Daniel's vision!

The other extreme is to say, "Eschatology doesn't matter. It's too confusing. Who cares?"

Key: The focus on Eschatology in the Bible is not on future events as such. God didn't give us a chart of the end times. What is the focus?

See the first words of Rev 1:1, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ..." Eschatology in the Bible focuses on a Person, Jesus Christ.

Phil 3:20 "For our citizenship...from which we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus..."

So Eschatology is important. It is the climax of the Christian life. It is our hope. We live with the anticipation that Jesus Christ is going to appear, and when He appears He is going to culminate the redemption He secured at His first coming.

Outline of our Approach to Eschatology:

- I. The Foundation for Eschatology: The Plan of God
 - A. The Doctrine of Creation (Gen 1-3)
 - B. The Doctrine of Redemption (II Cor 5:19, 21)
 - 1. Christ's First Coming (I Cor 15:3)
 - 2. Christ's Second Coming (I Cor 15:22ff)
- II. The Focus of Eschatology: The Person of Jesus Christ
- III. The Fulfillment of Eschatology
 - A. New Man
 - B. New People
 - C. New Age
 - D. New Creation

Before we can understand the Doctrine of the Last things, we must understand what the Bible teaches about the "First things." Eschatology is merely the final chapter of the book.

Key: Eschatology is the culmination of God's redemptive activity in which He is reclaiming what is rightfully His. What do we mean by that?

Simply this. If we don't understand the Doctrine of Creation, and the Doctrine of Redemption, we won't understand the Doctrine of Eschatology.

I. The Foundation for Eschatology: The Plan of God

A. The Doctrine of Creation--Genesis 1

Q: When God created the universe in Gen 1, what did He say about it?

Gen 1:31--"It is very good."

Q: What was the climax of God's creative work?

Gen 1:27--Man

Q: What did God create Mankind to do?

Gen 1:28--Have dominion over the world, as God's Representative.

Q: Did mankind fulfill that purpose?

Gen 3--No. Mankind rejected God's authority and purpose.

Q: In spite of Man's blatant disobedience, what did God do?

Gen 3:15--He inaugurated a plan to reconcile alienated mankind to Himself. Listen. Right there in Gen 3, God committed Himself to the task of reclaiming what was rightfully His.

Q: How would God accomplish that? The answer is...

B. The Doctrine of Redemption--2 Corinthians 5:19-21

Q: What did God do to reclaim an alienated world that was rightfully His?

5:19--He reconciled the world to Himself.

Q: On what basis did God reconcile the world?

5:21--He redeemed a people for Himself in Christ.

Key: There's the message of the Bible. God is redeeming a people for Himself. He is reclaiming and restoring a universe that was wrecked by sin. He committed this task to His Son, Jesus Christ.

Q: By what means will Christ restore the world to His Father?

By two comings—We see them both mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15...

1. The First Coming of Christ

15:3 "Christ died for our sins..."

2. The Second Coming of Christ

15:22-28 "...when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom of God to the Father..."

Christ came into the world the first time to establish the Kingdom of God. At that time, it was not a geographical kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom. Jesus rules as King in the hearts of His people (Lk 17:21).

At His second coming, He will establish His earthly Kingdom. Why? To fulfill the next phase of His redemptive program, that is, to reclaim the world.

Is the Millennial Kingdom His ultimate goal? No. The goal of God's redemptive program is not the Millennial Kingdom. It's bigger. When the Son hands over the reclaimed Kingdom to the Father, and inaugurates the New Heavens and Earth, the plan will be accomplished.

II. The Focus of Eschatology: The Person of Jesus Christ

The focus of Eschatology is not on events so much as on a Person, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is coming again!

Note: There are over 250 clear references to the return of the Lord in the NT.

Mt 24:37, 42, 44 "Watch for you know not what hour your Lord doth come."

Mk 13:26 "And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds..."

Lk 21:27

Jn 14:1ff "I go to prepare a place for you...I will come again..."

Acts 1:11 "...This same Jesus shall so come again in like manner..."

I Thes 4:13 "The Lord shall descend from heaven..."

II Thes 1:10; 2:1

I Pt 1:7 "...at the appearing of Christ..."

I Jn 3:2 "...when He shall appear..."

Rev 22:7, 12, 20 "Behold, I come."

Q: Why is Christ going to return? Rev 21:5 "I make all things new."

Key: Our Eschatology must focus on a Person, Jesus Christ.

Eschatology is not a game like trivial pursuit, or putting together an intellectual jigsaw puzzle. It focuses on a Person. He is the King who has already come. And He is the King who is yet to come again.

Q: What will He do when He comes the second time? We'll see next time.

Application: For discussion...

1. Why is Eschatology often such a source of controversy in the church?
2. What should our attitude be towards Eschatology?
3. What is the practical value of having a good statement on Eschatology in our Articles of Faith?

Next Time:

III. The Fulfillment of Eschatology

- A. New Man
- B. New People
- C. New Age
- D. New Creation