

# Theology for Life

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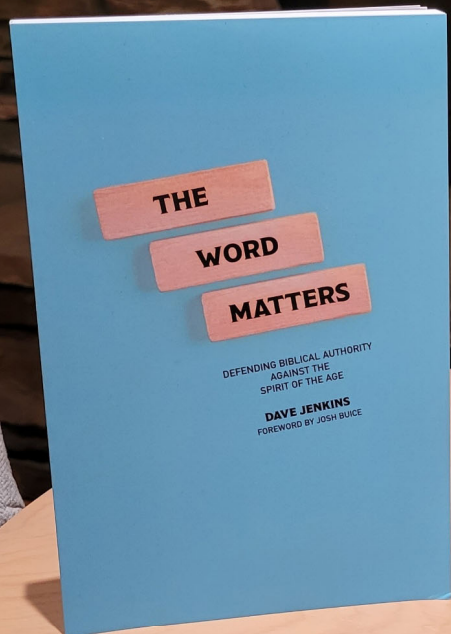
## THE IMMINENT RETURN OF JESUS



### **Inside this Issue...**

- **A Happy End to God's Story**
- **The Activity and Characteristics of the Antichrist**
- **When is Jesus Coming Back and is it Soon?**

In ***The Word Matters***, Dave Jenkins take readers by the hand and helps them understand how serious the issue of biblical authority is and how the Bible is under attack so that they can stand with confidence on the Word of God.

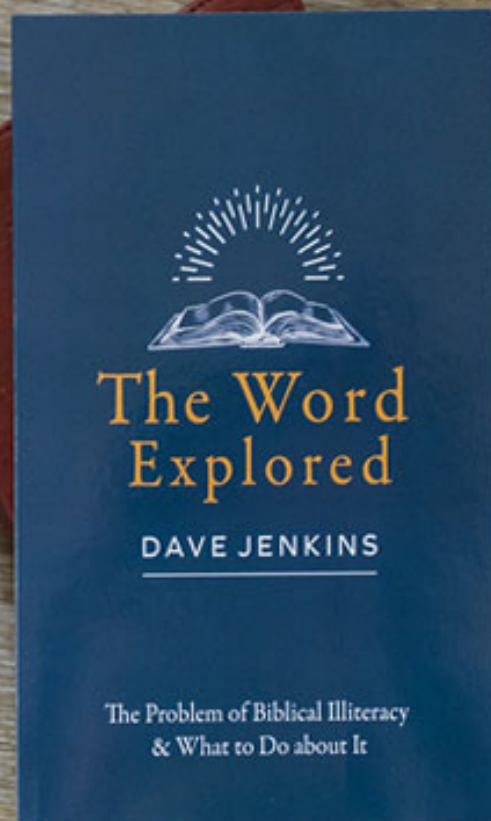


# The Word Matters

DEFENDING BIBLICAL AUTHORITY  
AGAINST THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE



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The Problem of  
Biblical Illiteracy &  
What to Do about It*  
is an easy-to-read,  
biblically-based work  
for lay-people and  
pastors alike.



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## Editor's Corner

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The study of End Times has led to numerous theories and theologies over the centuries. Some of these theologies are good, and others have zero basis in the biblical text. Wherever you land on eschatology (the study of the End Times), what matters is that we, as Christians, are looking to the Lord and His imminent return. Paul, at the end of his life, looked forward to the imminent return of Christ in 2 Timothy 4:8, 13. He also eagerly looks forward to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. Wherever you are in terms of your End Times theology, can you say with Paul that you eagerly look forward to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus? Are you eager for the Lord to return to execute divine justice, judge His enemies, and establish His Kingdom?

As we talk about the End Times in this issue of *Theology for Life*, let's be clear about a few things... Many people suggest that the End Times are mostly speculation. If by "speculation", they mean using charts and postulating a system to find exact dates that the Bible doesn't support, then I'd agree with that suggestion. But if "speculation" means that the whole enterprise of End Times is unimportant and "secondary", and/or that we shouldn't discuss it at all, then I'm not on board. Paul was eagerly looking forward to the Day when the Lord returns, which means we should be also.

The Book of Revelation is highly disputed and often greatly misunderstood (either in part or in its entirety) today. John's goal in Revelation is to encourage the saints to trust in a sovereign God who rules over all history. He ends the Book of Revelation with a call for the Lord to come soon (Revelation 22:20). The study of End Times is not for our speculation; it is for our instruction so we might understand what the Lord has said about the future and how it will come about (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Whether we agree on the exact details of how everything will work out is another matter, but we can all agree that *the Lord will return*. As to the timing of His return, we can respectfully disagree,

but we should not be divisive about it. Instead, we should be willing to open our Bibles, engage each other in discussion, hear the best arguments, and decide which most closely aligns with the *biblical text* (setting aside any non-biblical assumptions and opinions, if revealed).

In theology, we must be biblically rooted in everything. Disagreeing on the timing of the Lord's return means we can agree to disagree on subjects such as the rapture, etc. I can go to a church that teaches rapture or any other non-essential view because it is *not essential* to the Christian faith. The moment these types of issues become a litmus test to becoming a church member is when a Christian should consider looking for a new church home. I am talking about any non-essential issue becoming essential to being a church member—as in what defines a Christian and makes them a Christian. Such churches have a skewed view of core Christian doctrine and may even hold to unbiblical teachings that can lead people from the Gospel.

One of my former pastors in California provided a good explanation of the proper perspective on this topic. He said in his sermon, “If I’m right, as we go up in the rapture, then you’ll tell me. If we are still here and the rapture doesn’t happen, then I will tell you that you are right.” And while his statement may have been a little tongue-in-cheek, my former Pastor and I are pointing out that love for the Lord and one another should be a cornerstone of our theology. Jesus said we should love the Lord and one another (Matthew 22:37-40). The return of the Lord is *imminent*.

What isn’t as clear is when the Lord will return or which of the many End Times theories, if any, is the correct one. More than these ideas, our concern should be whether we are honoring the Lord and obeying His commandments—which all center around loving the Lord and one another (Matthew 22:37-40; John 14:15). After all, in almost every list that is given in the New Testament is love. One example of this is in Galatians 5:22-23 where Paul lists the fruits of the Spirit, which the Holy Spirit produces in our lives through the means of grace. Theology is not to be done in a vacuum. We need one another. We need to sharpen one another and come alongside one another as we gather around the Word. Our goal therein is to know the Lord more, so that we can love Him and one another more.

The Lord is returning, and He is coming soon. How soon? We don’t know, but our concern should be to continue to look forward eagerly to His return and to be busy in the here and now, as we make disciples, who in turn make disciples of the Risen Lord Jesus. Like Paul, we are to eagerly long for the Lord's return and live in light of eternity, as you fix your gaze on your Savior, King Jesus. We pray that by reading this issue, you’ll understand and grow to appreciate the imminent return of the Lord Jesus more.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

## Six Ways Eschatology Helps Christians

By Dave Jenkins



**Eschatology is the study of what Scripture teaches about the end times.** While many Christians treat the subject of eschatology as something to be avoided, the Bible speaks of it, not as something to be avoided, but studied. Eschatology is not as critical as our understanding of the person and work of Christ, but it (eschatology) is vital to a fully rounded biblical worldview. For example, how the people of God understand eschatology impacts how they live their lives and what to expect to occur in the unfolding plan of God as detailed in Scripture.



## Understanding the “Already/Not Yet”

One of the best ways to understand eschatology is to understand the “already/not yet” tension throughout the Bible. The “already” of the end times has occurred in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Such truths include the forgiveness of sin, adoption of the people of God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and more for the Christian.

For example, the Christian is saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, but that faith is never alone. The Christian has eternal life (John 5:24) but not in the fullest sense in that they’ve been glorified by Jesus. The Church is a fellowship of people who are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17), but who also have indwelling sin and are growing in Christ while they wait for their glorification.

Even so, as Christians we can be pessimistic about the outlook on the future. It’s not hard to do so, given our cultural climate. We’re often tempted to put an undue emphasis on the “not yet” of the kingdom of God...but that’s a mistake. Kingdom citizens are to work not in a spirit of defeat, but from confidence in the victory of Christ. Satan’s defeat occurred at the cross, and his final doom is sure (Revelation 20:10). Even so, the Christian's optimism is rooted in Christ by remembering the eradication of evil, which is reserved for the last day (Revelation 20:14).

The *already/not yet* tension exists not only in our understanding of salvation, but throughout the New Testament. Understanding the *already/not yet* tension provides the people of God with the balance needed to apply it’s teaching to the whole of the Christian life and ministry. Let us now look at six ways in which the study of Eschatology helps Christians.

### **One: Eschatology Helps to Teach the Church**

The Church needs the teaching of eschatology because it is the capstone and

crown of systematic theology. When the Church neglects to teach Christians about eschatology, it creates a dangerous vacuum. Abraham Kuyper once said that eschatology sheds light on every biblical doctrine and answers questions that every theological subject raises. Louis Berkhof (*Systematic Theology*, pg. 665) helpfully explains:

*“In theology [proper] it is the question, how God is finally perfectly glorified in the work of His hands, and how the counsel of God is fully realized; in anthropology, the question, how the disrupting influence of sin is completely overcome; in Christology, the question, how the work of Christ is crowned with perfect victory; in soteriology, the question, how the work of the Holy Spirit at last issues in the complete redemption and glorification of the people of God; and in ecclesiology, the question of the final apotheosis of the church.”*

## Two: Eschatology Helps the Christians to Worship God

The conclusion to the study of all of theology, which is the study of God (including eschatology), is worship.

Eschatology is concerned with the area of biblical truth, about the defeat of Satan, the final and perfect judgment of Christ, the New Heavens and a New Earth, and eternal fellowship with Christ. Such biblical truths cannot but aid the people of

God and their worship of the Lord. If our understanding of eschatology leads to more fear than to worship of God, then we are in error, or we are approaching this subject with the wrong attitude or motives, unless we are not truly born again.

**“Christians face trials of all kinds— at times they may range from disease, pain, injustice, or even a mix of everything.”**

### **Three: Eschatology Helps Christians to serve the Lord with Zeal for Biblical Truth**

Eschatology reminds Christians of the Second Coming of Christ, which is both good and dangerous. Good in that it reminds Christians that there is an imminent end of all things, and we are to live with zealous service rendered to Him. Bad in that it can lead to fatalistic inactivity and a “sitting on the fence” attitude in regard to our service to God, often with apathy toward our sin. By having a biblical understanding of eschatology, Christians will be motivated with a greater passion for lost souls, to worship, and to live for the glory of God before His face.

### **Four: Eschatology Helps Christians to Hope in the Lord During Times of Trouble**

Christians face trials of all kinds—at times they may range from disease, pain, injustice, or even a mix of everything. It is vital to have a hope of the final resurrection and glorification, for these truths fuel a faithful endurance to the end.

### **Five: Eschatology Helps Christians in Preparing the Lost for Judgment**

Many people think they don't need to prepare for their last days or death, but that's what Satan wants the lost to think. Satan is described as one who comes to steal and destroy (1 Peter 5:8), and he is very successful at lying to the unregenerate so they think are okay in their sins apart from Christ. The Bible, however, speaks differently, for it tells us that everyone apart from Christ is dead in their trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1-7), destined for Hell. It is only by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, that man may be saved (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:7-16; Ephesians 2:8). Eschatology motivates Christians to pre-

pare the lost to get ready for judgment. If the lost soul will not receive Christ and believe upon all He has done in His finished and sufficient work, then they will go to Hell—a place of unending, unrelenting, conscious eternal punishment.

### **Six: Eschatology Helps Christians Look Forward to Heaven**

Often, as a Christian, I'm guilty of this myself. I can focus so much on what's going on presently in my life that I forget about what's most important. After all, the world, the flesh, and the devil entice us to believe it's false claims instead of biblical truth. Eschatology helps remind Christians that this world isn't our home and to look beyond what is presently happening for Heaven, where they will be with Christ and His people forever and always.

## The Imminent Return of Christ and Missions

By Jacob Tanner



**The return of Jesus Christ is imminent always, impossible never.** For that reason, the Church of Christ must labor all the more diligently to go out into the “fields” of this world and reap that which is *“already white for the harvesting”*.

You may ask, however, “Does eschatology really matter? Is it really all that impactful to believe, one way or another, when Jesus is going to return?” The answer is that, of course, it matters a great deal. Consider the following sentences and see if they sound familiar: “Do you see how bad things are? I mean, really, they can’t get much worse than this, or God is going to need to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah. We’re definitely in the last days. It’s a good thing Jesus will be coming back soon to get us out of here. I’m so glad I won’t have to go through tribulation.”

I've heard sentiments like those in the above paragraph for about as long as I can remember. Growing up in churches that had basically incorporated the eschatology of *The Left Behind* book-series from the late 90s and early 2000s, the eager expectation that most churchgoers I knew held to was one in which the *best* we could hope for as Christians was a quick escape from this world. The expectation I was taught to share in was that, eventually, Jesus would Rapture the

**“Following the Reformation and the rise of Puritanism, the Church of the eighteenth century experienced a golden age of missions.”**

Church (which, by this point, would be a dismal lot, indeed) out of this world and then, after having done so, send seven years of Great Tribulation. At the end, Jesus would return and judge His enemies.

Such an eschatological view should, theoretically, result in a great deal of missions-minded saints, working towards the spreading of the gospel. Those who believe that the world is soon to end, and that Jesus is going to “rapture” the church quickly, should be those who are at the forefront of the missions movements. But my experience was quite different. This eschatological view did not enliven us to missions, but instead encouraged hunkering down. Rather than taking the gospel to the world—or even our neighbors—we cloistered closer together. Rather than go out, we shrank in. The result was that we saw missions work as the sort of thing that only a select few were called to do. Our calling, on the other hand, basically amounted to staring at the clouds, reading newspapers, watching dreadful news reports, and singing “Kumbaya” as we awaited the return of Jesus.

## **Historical Eschatology and the Development of Missions**

While all orthodox Christians agree that Christ will return, orthodox Chris-

tians do disagree on the finer points of eschatology. While my task in this article is not to convince the reader of one eschatological view over another, it is my task to stir you onward to missions-mindedness, and thus I think it essential to encourage you, the reader, toward an eschatology of hope, regardless of where you fall on the millennium scale. Consider some of the following historical truths.

Following the Reformation and the rise of Puritanism, the Church of the eighteenth century experienced a golden age of missions. Men, like William Carey, argued for the need to take the gospel to the heathen nations of the world, while the Puritans who settled the New World brought the gospel and a Christian influence with them where they settled. This “golden age of missions” lasted quite a while and the optimism of these missionaries was contagious. They trusted the promises of God, believed that Jesus was going to return soon, and saw it as their mission to see the world Christianized so that when Jesus did return, He would return to a world welcoming Him with worshipful arms.

Some major differences today are not only an eschatological shift from Amillennialism and Postmillennial to Dispensational beliefs, but a shift from unmitigated trust in the promises of God’s Word to a biblical and prophetic interpretation that is based upon what our eyes can see, rather than pure faith. Though we are commanded to live by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), many have allowed their understanding of Christ’s imminent return to be clouded by newspaper headlines and the negative musings regularly delivered to them in 280 characters or less.

A large driving factor of earlier missions movements was the belief that God was going to save His elect, establish His Kingdom, usher in a period of prosperity, and then return after the nations had been *Christianized*. Today, the emphasis seems to be on seeing souls saved so that as many as possible are

saved from the Great Tribulation. In the past, mission movements were about saving people *for* something (to glorify God, participate in Christ, become citizens of His Kingdom), whereas the emphasis today is saving people *from* something (from the penalty of sin, death, and hell). Neither is wrong and both have their dangers, but the optimism of the former is desperately needed by the Church today. It is not merely that Christ's return is imminent and so sinners must be saved from the wrath to come, but that sinners must be saved before He returns so they can eternally worship Him.

The hopeful optimism of the old missionaries is connected to the way in which the "Great Century of Missions" kicked off with the First Great Awakening and a true feeling of hopefulness for the world. It is understandable why some of this optimism was lost. The last century of missions has been dominated by wars and rumors of wars, and a certain sense of hopelessness for the world. Can anyone be blamed for being less than optimistic about the future? However, a balance between the hopeful optimism of the past and the realistic view of the present needs to be struck. Because Christ's return is imminent always, Christians must see the truth that sinners need to be saved *from sin for* the glory of God.

A prime example of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century missions philosophy comes from Henry Martyn, "[Who] said upon his arrival [in India], 'Now let me burn out for God.'" We must view our lives as flames in the hand of God that are being used to light the path of sinners. Likewise, William Carey's excellent manuscript, titled, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, cuts to the heart of both the need for missions and the optimism experienced by many during this period that the Great Commission would be successful. We must believe that missions will be successful even today, because God has promised it would be so.



Admittedly, this does not mean that the modern missions movement is devoid of hope regarding God's success in converting sinners, but it does mean that a variety of problems have plagued the modern era, including (but not limited to): wars like World War II, the Vietnam, Korean, and Gulf wars; communism and Marxism; the collapse of the West; and racial tension. Consider the difference between the sermon content of Carey's *An Enquiry*, wherein he called

**“We must not lose sight of the fact that our mission has been made by Christ Himself.”**

for Christians to take the gospel to the heathens, and Wimpy Harper's speech at the Texas Baptist Convention in 1958, when he decried the racial animosity of whites toward blacks. While the mission of proclaiming the gospel has not changed, there have been plenty of distractions to focus the attention of Christians and their mission agencies elsewhere.

Because the return of Christ is imminent, we need to get our attention focused back upon the mission. Christians must be realistic about the world in which we live in order to know the enemy and how to best engage in combat. At the same time, because the return of Christ is imminent, the need for Christian optimism and unwavering trust in God's promises has never been more needed.

## Healthy Eschatology and Healthy Missions

The imminent return of Christ is assured because, when Jesus ascended into Heaven, the Apostles who watched Him ascend were promised by angels, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts

1:11). And Jesus later promised, in Revelation 16:15, *“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”* It is not that we are just now approaching the last days; we have been living in the last days ever since the advent of Jesus! We *“are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night”* (1 Thessalonians 5:2). For this reason, we are those running through the streets of a burning city at night, crying for the people inside their homes to awake and flee to salvation, for *“if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into”* (Matthew 24:43).

We must not lose sight of the fact that our mission has been made by Christ Himself. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 holds the following truths: *“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.””*

Jesus, who possesses all authority and has promised to always be with us, now commands us to go forth and make disciples. How? Through the gospel. By calling sinners to repent and believe in Jesus, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (Matthew 4:17). And we can do so with great hope, because Jesus has promised that He will build His Church and the gates of Hell will never prevail against His Church (Matthew 16:18).

Likewise, Jesus has called us to look to a harvest of lost sinners that is *white for the harvest*. This is a harvest that is so rich, so grand, so large, that we are actually called to pray for even *more* laborers to go forth into it (Matthew 9:38). He has promised to gather His elect (John 6:37) and, like bricks, will place each one of us in His Church exactly where we are supposed to be placed, for He is the Builder

of the House (Ephesians 2:20-22). Though His return is always imminent, He will remain at the Father's right hand until the final brick is laid and the whole world is made a footstool beneath His feet (Psalm 110:1; Matthew 22:44; Hebrews 10:13). His return will be to an earth that has been conquered for His glory and of which dominion has been taken (Genesis 1:28).

Understanding these truths simply cannot produce a pessimistic outlook, but instead must create a hopeful optimism in the hearts of Christians that sinners will, in fact, be saved through the gospel and that *"the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas"* (Habakkuk 2:14).

**When the illustration of the white harvest is coupled with these promises, the missions approach we undertake changes dramatically.** Rather than cutting ourselves off from society, we must labor all the more diligently to go forth and, as ambassadors of the Kingdom of Heaven, proclaim the gospel, making disciples, and seeing Christ's Church built.

Our mission, then, exists for two reasons: (1) because Christ's return is imminent, we long to see sinners saved from the wrath of God that Jesus will bring with Him upon His remaining enemies; and (2) because Christ's return is imminent, we long to see Him return to a world that has, by and large, turned to Him as Lord and Savior and is now waiting to welcome back her King with worshipful arms of praise. The imminent return of Christ necessitates missions.

#### References:

1. Robin Hadaway, *A Survey of World Missions* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2020), 79.

## The Activity and Characteristics of the Antichrist

By Dave Jenkins

The word “Antichrist” evokes imagery of the End Times, and in particular, of the Book of

**Revelation.** It’s in Revelation where we learn about the end game of Satan, along with his unholy Trinity: the false teacher, the antichrist,

and Satan himself. In 1 John, the Apostle John, wants to help his readers understand that there isn’t only *the* Antichrist in the future, but that there are antichrists in the world even now.



The antichrists that John speaks of in 1 John 2:22 are those that deny Jesus is the Christ. These false teachers deny the Son, and thus the Father, because of

the full identity of life and purpose shared by the Father and Son (1 John 1:2; 2:23). The life shared by the Father and Son is the same life that is manifested to the people of God in Christ (1 John 1:2), proclaimed to them in the gospel (1 John 1:3), and promised to all who believe in Christ (1 John 2:25). Since Jesus *is* the Christ, our eternal life is sure in Him (John 3:36; 5:24; 1 John 5:11-12).

### **The Antichrist is a Christological Rebel**

In 2 John 1:7, the Apostle says, *“for many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.”* Likewise, 1 John 4:2-3 helps us understand that only those who confess the Son (Jesus), and the Incarnation are those who come from God. Those who do not confess that Jesus is the Christ who has come in the Incarnation are antichrists. 1 John 2:22 says, *“Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.”* In 1 John 2:18, we read, *“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore, we know that it is the last hour.”*

There are only four references to the word antichrist(s) in the Bible, and I’ve just quoted all of them. The frequency of the references does not mean that it is insignificant. Nor does it mean that these antichrists will be representative of the diabolical Antichrist in Revelation 13:1-10 (or of the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2:3).

### **Standing Fast for the Deity of Christ**

From Cerinthus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century to Joseph Smith in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and from the earliest Arians to Jehovah Witnesses today, Christians face challenges to the deity of Jesus from all sides. Christians should not be offended to see these significant religions under the antichrist categories or say that the fight is with them. Our real spiritual battle is not with flesh and blood, and people are

not opponents to be won against. Instead, we preach the gospel faithfully from the Word and make disciples of all the nations. We also contend for the faith, that has been once and for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3), by speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

## The Meaning of 1 John 2:19 and Our Assurance

First John teaches that there will be those who fall away from the faith and abandon orthodoxy. Such people are those who have made empty professions of faith and who never possessed true, saving faith. Those born of the Lord by the Holy Spirit will by grace persevere (Philippians 1:6). First John 2:19 applies to all who deny the faith and exit the local church fellowship. It is the leaving of the false teachers, however, that prompted John's writing of this particular verse.

The false teachers were counted as those *many antichrists that will come* (1 John 2:18). While we await the day of the final Antichrist, we have lesser antichrists who will come beforehand and who are here even now. Those antichrists are liars. Thankfully, those who possess eternal life (and therefore the Holy Spirit) through Christ Jesus are able to recognize the spirit of antichrist when it is present. As 1 John 2:22 teaches, it is the one who denies Jesus is the Christ that is a liar and an antichrist.

**“Christians are those who walk in the light, not in the darkness.”**

In this denial of the faith is not only a denial of Jesus the Messiah, but of the Incarnation. The Incarnation is critical to biblical orthodoxy and an important way Christians can be assured of salvation (1 John 1:1-4). The false teachers John is countering accepted the view of Cerinthus, who called Jesus the Christ, but de-

nied the apostolic definition of the title. Instead of seeing the Christ as the eternal Son of God, who became Incarnate, followers of Cerinthus were convinced Jesus was a mere man, His entire life only possessing the *spirit* of Christ.

## **Responding to Challenges to the Deity of Christ Today**

Muslims today call Jesus the Christ but deny the Incarnation. First John 2:23 teaches that to call Jesus “the Christ” means we must accept the apostolic testimony about His person. To fail to accept this testimony about His person is to reject the work of Christ.

Many today sing praises to the Lord Jesus but deny critical biblical truths about His person and work, including the *deity* of Christ and His substitutionary work. When Christians confess biblical truth, we are affirming that the Messiah is no mere man but the Incarnate Son of God.

## **The Apostle John Aims to Aid Christian’s Assurance**

John wrote 1 John towards the end of the first century to help his audience (and Christians today) to be assured of their salvation. False teachers had come into the church and tried to tempt genuine Christians to abandon the faith (1 John 2:19). These teachers had caused some to doubt their faith, so John aims to correct the errors of these teachers by giving three tests to determine the authenticity of our faith. These tests are belief in the Incarnation, expressions of holy living, and love for God and one another (1 John 1:1-5). Now, if someone denies that Jesus is the Son of God become Incarnate, then they have the spirit of the antichrist (1 John 2:18-25).

Christians are those who walk in the light, not in the darkness. This “walking in the light” is not perfectionism, but instead means they have their hearts set on obedience to the gospel. Such Christians eagerly admit their sin when they learn of it and flee to Christ for forgiveness (1 John 1:5-26). Genuine Christians love God rather than the world and love their fellow brothers and

sisters (1 John 2:7-17).

## **Holiness as a Mark of Those Who Are Born Again**

In 1 John 2:28-29, the Apostle gives the mark of the holiness of those who are born again. In verse 28, John teaches (for the second time in his letter) that his readers (both then and now) must abide in Jesus. To abide in the Lord Jesus, according to 1 John 2:28, refers to the practice of personal righteousness (1 John 2:29). The foundation of this is found in verse 27, which emphasizes the fact that to abide in Christ is to believe apostolic doctrine. Biblical doctrine informs right living, and right living corroborates with biblical doctrine (1 John 1:6).

The personal righteousness John is speaking of assures the people of God of their salvation because it reflects the character of God the Father. In 1 John 2:29, the author uses "him", which is a reference to God the Father. It is only those who practice righteousness that have been born of God. Just as children resemble their parents, so too will there be a resemblance between the Heavenly Father and His children.

John helps readers understand that Christians will not be ashamed at the Second Coming if they abide in Christ (1 John 2:28). Our efforts do not get us into heaven, but they do reflect that we have been born of God. Furthermore, they give confidence to Christians knowing they are in Him and He in them. If you are not confident today of the final judgment, ask yourself if you neglect the righteousness of God. If so, repent and endeavor to walk in holiness, just as God is holy.



## What Does Eschatology Have to Do With Apologetics?

By David Van Bebber



**The study of End Times, or eschatology, is an area of doctrine where there is a great deal of contention among evangelicals.** Conflict-

ing views about how the Millennium will play out, the Rapture, and how the return of Christ occurs creates such strong disagreement that some Christians are afraid to discuss this aspect of theology. While at the same time an unhealthy fascination with the return of Christ causes others to look at every newspaper headline as a sign of Christ returning tomorrow or next week. The popularity of books and movies discussing the return of Christ only seem to amplify these tensions. Likewise, failed predictions about the return of Christ leave many confused.

Books such as Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins' *The Left Behind* series, and the numerous films that followed and proceed them give powerful testimony to the return of Christ. But there are many critics of these books and movies. Conflict specific to eschatology is nothing new. Wayne Grudem notes, "*There have been many debates — often heated ones — in the history of the church over questions regarding the future.*" Theological debate is healthy though, and dedication to understanding prophecy about the return of Christ is beneficial to the Church. Often, however, those with differing opinions on End Times, or eschatology, often fail to acknowledge the places where unity exists.

Acknowledging contention among Evangelicals on the specifics of the return of Christ, Grudem directs Christians to have grace on this matter. While eschatology is fundamental to Christian Theology, it is not a first-level doctrinal matter. Millard Erickson, commenting on the importance of eschatology points out that "*There is...a wide range of views of the status of eschatology.*" While viewed as an important doctrine, there is no specific agreement about how important an eschatological schema is to Christian Theology in general. Affirming that Christ will return is a first-level doctrine, but how that will play out is not as foundational.

Convincing other Christians that one's specific schema of eschatology is correct is a popular undertaking. Yet, the end of the world or how history will run out, should not be viewed as just an in-house debate (Acts 17:30-31). Scripture records, "*[God] has put eternity into man's heart*" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Therefore, every person, at some level wonders about the end of time. Even renown atheist-philosopher Bertrand Russell speculated about the end of the world. Why then do Evangelicals overlook this "point of contact"?

It is the belief of this author that Evangelicals commit a great disservice in

failing to connect eschatology with defending the faith. Further, failing to encourage a robust understanding of eschatological schemas or view of End Times and the Millennium, has served as a disservice to apologetics and evangelism. End Times, or eschatology, proves to be an issue where Christians can engage cultural, societal, and deep human questions. By surveying and defining eschatology and apologetics before exploring relevant passages of Scripture that speak to End Times, I will provide an answer to both why and how eschatology is important to apologetics.

## Eschatology Defined

The term eschatology might sound odd to some and might be unfamiliar to others. *“Eschatology is the study of the last things.”* As a whole, the doctrine explains how God’s inerrant word speaks about the return of Christ and the final judgement. When individuals express their view of “the Rapture” or “the Millennium”, they are describing their view of eschatology. Two key terms that are foundational to the discussion of eschatology are “Rapture” and “Millennium.”

In defining the term “Rapture”, Ryrie writes:

*“The English word comes from a Latin word, rapio, which means to seize or snatch in relation to ecstasy of spirit or the actual removal from one place to another...it means to be carried away in spirit or body. Thus the rapture of the church means the removal of the church from earth to heaven.”*

Many are familiar with the term *rapture*, and every eschatological scheme affirms the concept of the Rapture at some level. The major disagreements among proponents of each view of End Times are how and when the Rapture will occur. The truth of the Rapture is the biblical and universal position among the Church and rooted in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, *“Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”*

Just as important to eschatological definitions is the term *Millennium*. The interpretation of this term is a place of disagreement among eschatological schemas. Differences about how “the last things” play out are not necessarily tied to a denomination or a single confession of faith, however. James Spivey notes, “*The Millennium causes more debate among Southern Baptists than particularly any other Christian doctrine.*” It is difficult then to provide a single agreed upon definition for the term *millennium*. A person’s understanding of the definition of the Millennium is based on one’s eschatological system. Therefore, it is only fair for one to survey the three major views of the Millennium when seeking to understand the term.

**“One of the primary tasks of an apologist is to appeal to those who are lost...”**

According to *The Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, the Millennium is, “*An indefinitely long period before the end of the world...the main thing is the conception of a glorious period of peace and joy in which the elect shall dwell under the immediate personal rulership of Christ, on earth, after his return.*” Louis Berkhof, in expressing the three primary views of the Millennium, explains:

*“There are some who connect with the advent of Christ the idea of the millennium, either immediately before or immediately following the second coming...Some of those who expect a millennium in the future hold that the Lord will return before the millennium [Premillennialist]...others believe that his second coming will follow after the Millennium [Postmillennialist] ...There are large numbers, however, who do not believe the Bible warrants the expectation of the millennium [Amillennialist].”*

The three views of the Millennium simply stated are that the Millennium

is the current reign of Christ now (Postmillennialist), the Millennium is the further reign of Christ following His return (Premillennialist), or that the Bible does not communicate a millennial reign of Christ in a literal sense (Amillennialist).

Christians should understand that there are strengths within each of the systems. There are respected theologians holding to a variety of eschatological schemas and views of the Millennium and Rapture. Few theologians believe that holding to a particular eschatological system is going to be something that keeps one out of the Kingdom. Holding to different systems of eschatology should push Christians deeper into a desire to know God and His Word. Further, eschatology should motivate Christians to not only remember that Christ will return, but it should drive them to proclaim the gospel. It is in the proclamation of the gospel that a Christian, motivated by the reality that Christ will return, will be required to defend the gospel, and engage in Apologetics.

## **Apologetics Defined**

The concept of Apologetics is a biblical defense of the Christian faith. At the heart of the study and practice of Apologetics is the desire to “...*in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame*” (1 Peter 3:15-16).

An apologist’s goal is “*to persuade people to commit their lives and eternal futures into the trust of the Son of God who died for them.*” Apologists have a calling to prioritize the message of the gospel. Further, successful apologetics hinges on the use of effective communication and making the most of every opportunity to present Christ.

One of the primary tasks of an apologist is to appeal to those who are lost and persuade them concerning the truth of the gospel. In other words, Christian

Apologetics centers on rebutting, refuting, and “destroying arguments” (2 Corinthians 10:5) against the Christian faith. As Rob Phillips argues, “[Apologetics] is a reasonable defense of Christianity.” Further, Christian Apologetics seeks to build up believers, defend the Christian Worldview, challenge disbelief, and persuade non-believers as a means of evangelism. It is most directly the evangelistic element of Apologetics where eschatology and defending the faith connect at the deepest level.

## Connecting Apologetics and Eschatology

Scripture is the ultimate authority for any truly Christian eschatology. Christians start with God’s Word when seeking to understand the redemptive, cosmological, and the historical impact of the return of Christ. Starting from that foundation, any Christian can contend with certainty about the end of the world when engaging unbelievers “*who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth*” (Romans 1:18). Because Christians know that Christ will return, they desire to engage the lost world with the truth of the Gospel. While all eschatological systems have differences, they have foundational agreement on the reality that Christ will return, and those without Christ will face judgment. Further, whatever view of End Times one takes, all Christians have a unique point of contact with the lost. Why then are defending the faith and eschatology two areas of doctrine that connect a believer with the lost world? Scripture provides an answer to that question addressing questions central to a biblical worldview and deep concerns written on the hearts of humanity.

## People are Fascinated by the End of the World

Matthew 24:3-5 warns, “*As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’ And Jesus answered them, ‘See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they*

*will lead many astray.””*

One of the significant markers of a cult leader is for them to predict the end of the world. Frequently, those who have a nominal understanding of the Christian

**“But further, Christians can point people to the truth that they do not know when Christ will return.”**

faith will become worried or even fascinated with these predictions. For example, in 2012, when the Mayan calendar predicted the end of the world because the calendar itself ended, many people were questioning, “What does the end of the world mean?” Those who defend the faith have ripe opportunities to point to the reality that the world *will* end. However, Christians know that it will end with the return of Christ. Whatever eschatological system one holds to, there is a great deal of agreement upon the reality that Christians are sure Christ will return suddenly, personally, visibly, and bodily.

Those who seek to defend the faith, regardless of their eschatological system, should be prepared not to point to their system but to point to God's Word and the consistent truths that it demonstrates regarding the reality that Christ will return. Further, a Christian apologist who is seeking to glorify the Lord by defending the faith can likewise point a nominal Christian to the reality that believers should long for the return of Christ. But further, Christians can point people to the truth that they do not know when Christ will return. Not only will this provide peace to a worried person, but when a cult leader's prediction ends up proving false, it will remind confused people about the true nature of the words of Christ. *“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only”* (Matthew 24:36).

A Christian, who is grounded in the certainty that God has spoken on the

future with clarity that Christ will return to judge the world, can point non-believers to the steadfast nature of God's Word. Further, a Christian who is not afraid of confronting false prophecies and false teaching can assure those confused by the teachings of false prophets.

## People Seek to Understand the Signs of the Times

Matthew 16:4 explains, "*An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign.*" While the specific context of Matthew 16 applies to the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were seeking to test Jesus for a sign, this is not the only passage in Scripture that demonstrates people looking for some sign from Heaven. Whether people are looking for some validation for a text of Scripture, looking at the words of Nostradamus, read *The Bible Code*, or a book by Hal Lindsey, many spend time fixated on the apocalypse.

One of the beauties of the words of Christ is that He predicts quite clearly that there will be "*wars and rumors of wars*" (Matthew 24:6). These words in and of themselves should remind believers of God's sovereignty over His creation. Christ knows the history of the future, and nothing surprises Him. Those who

**"A well-trained apologist has this as a point where he can demonstrate to non-believers that the foundational truths are the same."**

do not know Christ are often troubled and anxious when world events are unnerving. The Christian who has confidence in Christ and His return, whatever the eschatological system, can provide assurance that we do not have to be troubled (John 14:1; Philippians 4:6).

Christians are not called to be

"Newspaper Prophets" scanning world events consumed with the next sign of the end. Instead, and regardless of one's eschatology, when times are troubling, Christians have hope in God's promise to



slay death (Revelation 20:14). The Apologist will always remind those who are consumed with worry that *“the gates of hell shall not prevail against [the Church]”* (Matthew 16:18).

## **Eschatology is Unique Among Christian Doctrine**

In Matthew 24:36, Jesus explains, *“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”* Eschatology is unique in that the truth of Christ’s physical return is a primary doctrine. However, how that system works itself out is where there is disagreement. This presents an incredible reality that while Christians have clarity on foundational truths, it is all right if they have some disagreement in how some of the prophecies of Scripture are fulfilled.

A well-trained apologist has this as a point where he can demonstrate to non-believers that the foundational truths are the same. However, there is charitable disagreement among faithful believers regarding secondary and tertiary matters. Why is this useful?

## **Eschatology Demonstrates Conviction That the Secret Things Belong to the Lord**

Deuteronomy 29:29 clearly states, *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”* Eschatology reminds Christians that they do not know everything. *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isaiah 55:8-9).

A Christian’s ability to comprehend God’s thoughts are limited by his fall-  
enness and his covenant relationship with the creator as God’s creatures. A per-

son's mind can only contain finite knowledge. There are things that Christians cannot understand. That is one of the beauties of the God of Scripture. God's thoughts cannot be fully contained in the mind of humanity. The Lord's knowledge is more excellent than a person's comprehension.

This points to a unique aspect of the triune God of Scripture. While the Lord has revealed Himself to humanity, full knowledge of Him is beyond humanity. Eschatology should humble Christians because God is greater than His creation. His thoughts are too large for people to be able to contain. Again, this humility should smack of difference when it comes to people in the world.

## **Eschatology Reminds Christians that Despite Different Understandings of Scripture, God Has Spoken Clearly**

Take into consideration the verses listed below:

- Psalm 19:7, *"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."*
- 2 Corinthians 1:13-14, *"For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand — just as you did partially understand us..."*
- Matthew 12:3, *"Have you not read . . ."*
- Matthew 21:42, *"Have you never read in the Scriptures. . ."*

Wayne Grudem defines the clarity of Scripture as follows: *"The Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God's help and being willing to follow it."*

Further, while there is disagreement on how the return of Christ will take place, it is historically unchanging in the history of the Church that Christ will

return. This allows an unbeliever to know that Christians have never disagreed on this. The return of Christ is foundational to all of Christianity.

## **The Reality of Christ's Return Should Drive One's Desire to Proclaim the Gospel**

*Matthew 26:31-34 and 41 says, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."*

Christians believe that Christ will return and that those who do not have Christ as their Lord will be condemned to Hell for all eternity. Unfortunately, the lack of a consistent emphasis on the truth—that Christ is coming back for His Church—has prevented the Church from driving forward with the gospel. People need to remember that Christ will return, and they should respond to it. This urgency that the judgment is coming should drive the Church. Regardless of the eschatological system, all believe that the return of Christ is imminent. The specific way that the immediacy of Christ's return will come is one of the differences, yet no matter the system, the urgency for the lost should motivate Christians to proclaim the gospel.

Believers can remember that we do not know the hour or the day. Those who are without Christ face judgment without a Savior. While the ultimate judgment could be hundreds of years from now, Christians are reminded that we do not know when an individual's life could end, and those without Christ

are without hope. Whether Christ returns tomorrow or hundreds of years from now, the lost are doomed and need the righteousness of Christ to atone for their sins.

## The Study of Eschatology Demonstrates a Conviction Regarding the Authority of God's Word

With regards to the authority of Scripture, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 gives us an excellent explanation: *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."*

God's Word is the ultimate standard for the Christian. There is no higher authority than the Word of God. Christians are told repeatedly to proclaim the

**"The believer sought the Lord, and the Lord, who always fulfills His promises, will bless the believer."**

gospel among the nations. Christians are likewise told that salvation is found in no other name than that of Jesus Christ.

When one upholds Scripture as the ultimate standard concerning all things, he recognizes that Christ will return. Knowing about the return of Christ and

attempting to understand how that takes place demonstrates submission to the authority of God's Word.

Taking Christ at His word, that He will return, is demonstrated in knowing as much as one can know regarding the prophecies of how that will occur. Nevertheless, knowing one's eschatology demonstrates that one takes the impact and ramifications of the return of Christ seriously. A Christian can spend his entire life attempting to determine how Christ will return, and he might even get it wrong, but his time was not wasted. The believer sought the Lord,

and the Lord, who always fulfills His promises (2 Corinthians 1:20; Hebrews 10:23), will bless the believer.

Pointing a lost person to the ultimate authority will always prove useful. There will be blessings in this life and the next for the individual who takes God seriously enough to pick up His Word and attempt to understand what it means for Christ to return. Again, due to the fallen nature of humanity, a Christian

**“Christians should remember that there is no hope in the naturalistic position...”**

might get some of this wrong. Even if one has the wrong eschatological system but can proclaim the gospel clearly, those who come to know Christ from the testimony of a believer, regardless of the eschatological system, will be saved.

Demonstrating how Scripture is the ultimate authority in one’s life and living that out when one takes the study of es-

chatology seriously is the biblical calling.

### Final Thoughts

Not only is there great confusion in the world regarding ultimate authorities, but there is much anxiety in the hearts of humanity when it comes to world events and the end of history. Eschatology points to the ultimate authority of God’s Word; it also calms fears and uncertainties about the end of history. Christians should remember that there is no hope in the naturalistic position—that humanity is simply a bag of fizzing chemicals that will one day fizz-out. Naturalistic materialism teaches that there is “an inescapable heat death” of the universe that awaits everything. According to the second law of thermodynamics, all matter loses energy until nothingness is all that exist. This concept is referred to as *entropy*.

*“Entropy must forever increase: it cannot stand until it has increased so far that it can*

*increase no further.” According to the naturalistic and materialist worldview, “When the fires of the suns of the universe have been extinguished, and no more heat energy flows into the “cosmic heat sink” of space, the randomness of bouncing molecules will then overwhelm every sense of directionality in the universe. Time will end, for time is directional. This is a legendary future condition called the heat death of the universe.”*

In this position, there is no hope, no judge, and no final judgement. Yet, naturalistic materialism is the prevailing worldview of our culture. Scientists themselves shudder at the ramifications of this system. Why? It is untenable, impractical, and rejected by humanity (Ecclesiastes 3:11). So, this leaves humanity asking the question, “What will the end be like?” The hopeless answer that modern science provides regarding the end of history presents an opportunity for believers to speak “truth into unbelief.”

The Lord has endued humanity with an innate longing for something beyond time. The pessimistic promise of the Naturalistic worldview regarding eternity is insufficient in the hearts and souls of humanity. The Lord has spoken though on the true end of time, and Christians have access to this Revelation. No matter one’s eschatological system, Christians have certainty on foundational truth about the end of history. Even though there are disagreements among mature believers, Christians have a point of contact with the lost when it comes to speaking about how history will truly end. The lost need to hear the hope of the Lord’s return, as this hope is diametrically opposed to the pessimism of the naturalistic position.

It is not helpful if Christians avoid discussing eschatology and fall victim to “eschatophobia”, the fear of speaking about End Times. If Christians believe that Christ will return, they must proclaim this truth. There is a lost world,

where many are fearful of the concepts and questions about how this world will end. Christians have certainty in the fact that Christ will return. He will “*judge the living and the dead*” (1 Peter 4:5). So, no matter one's eschatological schema, Christians must preach Christ crucified. A questioning world needs to hear the hope of the gospel and what the Lord has revealed about the end of history. Whatever the system of eschatology one believes, the foundational truth that Christ will return presents a chance for a believer to “*make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you*” (1 Peter 3:15).

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## Watching and Waiting for the Return of the Lord Jesus

By Dave Jenkins

Every Christian believes that the Lord Jesus's return is imminent, meaning that it could happen at any time, any moment. In Titus

2:13, Paul calls this, *"waiting for our blessed*

*hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."* Knowing the Lord could come back today causes some to stop what they are doing and *only* wait for Him. Yet, there is a difference between knowing Jesus *could* return today and knowing He *will* return today.

In Matthew 24:36, Jesus says, *"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."* The timing of the



Lord Jesus' return is something the Lord has not revealed to anyone, so until He calls His own to Himself, the Church should continue to faithfully serve Him.

## **The Return of Jesus is a Great Motivation for God's People**

The return of Jesus is presented in the Word of God as an excellent motivation for action. In 1 Corinthians 15:58, the Apostle says, *"Therefore, my beloved*

*brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."* And in 1 Thessalonians 5:6,

**"Jesus could return at any moment and at any time."**

Paul concludes a lesson on Christ's coming saying, *"So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober."* Jesus never called the

people of God to "hold the fort" nor retreat, but to work while they can (John 9:4).

The Apostles all lived with the idea that the Lord Jesus could return at any time. Rather than disobey the command to make disciples (Mark 16:15), they made disciples and spread the gospel. As a result, the disciples lived life to the fullest as if every day were their last. Today, every Christian should view each day as a gift from the Lord and use it to glorify God, living in light of the Apostles' example and continuing the work of making disciples.

## **The Importance of the Imminent Return of the Lord Jesus**

Jesus could return at any moment and at any time. When Jesus spoke of His return during His earthly ministry, it prompted questions from the disciples. One of these questions (found in Mark 13:4) was, *"When will these things happen?"* Jesus responded (verses 32-33) by saying, *"But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Fa-*

*ther. Be on guard; keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come."*

With any discussion of the End Times, it's vital to explain that the Lord does not intend for His people to fully understand His plans. What the Bible does say is that Jesus' return is near, and His people are to eagerly wait for it (Romans 8:19-25; 1 Corinthians 1:7; Philippians 4:5; Jude 21). James encourages Christians to *"be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near"* (James 5:8). Revelation 1:3 and 22:10 teach that the return of the Lord is "near".

Jesus taught the disciples to watch and wait for His return, saying, *"You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect"* (Luke 12:40). "Be ready" here means imminence. Throughout the New Testament, the Church is told to be ready (Philippians 3:20; Titus 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:6). The disciples and the Early Church expected the Lord Jesus' return, and Christians today should patiently watch and wait for His return.

The salvation of the people of God, according to 1 Peter 1:5 is *"ready to be revealed in the last time."* The Lord Jesus' return will set in motion the events described in Revelation 6-18. Like the five wise virgins in the parable of Jesus (Matthew 25:1-13), every Christian must be ready. Matthew 25:13 says, *"Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."*

## **True Assurance in Christ**

Having a false assurance of salvation in Christ is a real problem in our world today. Many people today live their lives thinking they are "good"; that the Lord is pleased with them. After all, they think they are good people, taking care of their families, and thinking their merits ("good" works) will save them.

Unfortunately, the presence of good works alone does not prove anything. One doesn't have to be saved to refrain from lying, stealing, or murdering. Nor does one have to be saved to love one's family or be a productive citizen. Paul tells Christians that while non-Christians suppress the knowledge of God, they

still have the law of God written on their consciences and can live up to its standards in an external way (Romans 2:14-16). External conformity to the law is possible for people who do not know Christ, although non-Christians are unable to do what is pleasing to the Lord.

Apart from God's grace, all people are dead in their trespasses and sins, and therefore cannot be motivated to do good works by a genuine love for the Lord (Ephesians 2:1-10). If good works are to be in any way evidence that we are genuinely saved, then, as Christians, we must couple works with the right (biblical) doctrine, knowing that believing in the biblical Christ alone saves them (John 3:16). Good works are further evidence of genuine saving faith that alone can justify sinners *only* if they believe in the Christ revealed in the Scripture.

## Two Groups of Christians

There are only two classes of people in the world. First are those who are genuinely saved. As a result, they are assured of their salvation because they believe in the biblical Jesus and see evidence of genuine faith in service to God and neighbor (James 2:14-16). The combination of the right belief and right action does not always give people genuine salvation. It is possible for someone to be saved and yet to believe they are unsaved. After all, Satan accuses the people of God, which encourages them to call into question the state of their salvation. Further, their sin can make it hard for them to believe that Christ loves His chosen ones and has redeemed them.

The second class of saved people consists of those who are saved but have no personal assurance of their salvation. Such Christians do not have to languish in uncertainty, for they can know they are saved if they know the biblical Jesus. Revelation 12:10 calls Satan "*the accuser of the brethren.*" Satan loves to bring up the sins of the God's people and use it to cause them to doubt their salvation. The Holy Spirit convicts Christians of their sin, but He does so, not to

bring despair, but genuine assurance. Satan tries to convince Christians that true assurance is impossible, so when they hear such a charge, they can know it comes from the devil and not from the Lord.

## Paul and the Return of the Lord Jesus

In 2 Timothy 4:8, Paul is facing his impending execution with joy, knowing that “*a crown of righteousness*” awaits him in the presence of the Lord. Now,

**“Jesus, however, motivates every Christian to do good works that will gain an everlasting reward.”**

he is not referring to being saved by good works here, but only by the righteousness of Jesus (Galatians 2:15-16). Once a person has been justified by faith alone, they will do good works to please the Lord and thereby earn a reward in the life to come. A true Christian understands, however, that such works do not earn anyone a place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Though every saint-sinner is imperfect, the Lord will reward each Christian a crown for the good works they have done, and because they have loved the appearing of the Lord Jesus (2 Timothy 4:8).

Matthew Henry spoke truly when he said, “*It is the character of all the saints that they long for the appearing of Jesus Christ: they love his second appearing at the great day; love it, and long for it.*” It is very easy to become content with the comforts and material success of this life. A love for the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus, however, motivates every Christian to do good works that will gain an everlasting reward.

## A Happy Ending to God's Story

By William P. Farley



**Most good stories have at least three parts.**

First, a happy beginning, then a section that threatens that happiness in some way, and finally, a resolution of the threat and a happy ending.

The Bible is God's story. It begins with the creation of a delightful paradise. *"And God saw everything that he had made*

*and behold it was very good... So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy"* (Genesis 1:31, 2:3). But tragically, God's story has a second phase. Adam sinned (Genesis 3:1-7). His sin plunged humanity and all creation into a vortex of pain, alienation from God, death, and relational conflict.

Centuries later, the third phase began—a move towards a happy ending. The point of this article is that the third phase will not be complete until Christ

returns. Christ's Second Coming is the culmination of God's salvific work. Without it there is no ultimate salvation.

Forty days after his resurrection, Christ ascended into Heaven and sat down at the Father's right hand:

*"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).*

So, why is Christ's return necessary for the restoration of God's story, and what does it have to do with our salvation?

## God's Plan

God's story begins with the creation of man on the sixth day. God gave Adam and Eve these marching orders:

*"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:26–28).*

This text tells us that God created Adam and Eve with several goals in mind. First, He created them in His image and likeness. This means God created Adam and Eve to be holy as God is holy. The image and likeness are moral. Another term for God's moral perfections is His glory.

So, God created Adam and Eve to image forth the beauty of His moral glory. This was for their happiness and God's delight. Then, God commanded the happy couple to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. Ultimately this would

mean billions of descendants filling the earth with God's image and likeness—i.e., God's moral glory.

Second, He created them to exercise dominion. Adam would rule like God, as a servant ruler. It would be creation's happiness and well-being—if necessary, even at his expense.

Third, God created Adam and Eve immortal promising that if they abstained from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and ate of the Tree of Life, they would never die.

## Sin

As we all know, Adam and Eve transgressed God's command in Genesis 3. The immediate result was the dissolution of God's original goals for humanity. First, sin dealt a serious blow to God's image and likeness. Theologians call this Original Sin. Sin seriously defaced and corrupted the "image and likeness", which God created Adam to display. Adam would now be fruitful and multiply, but his progeny would reflect a corrupted version of his image and likeness—one in which God could take little pleasure.

Second, God's dominion passed to the Serpent, who is now the "Prince of this World" (Ephesians 2:2). Influenced by the Serpent Adam's dominion would now be Adam's fulfillment at the expense of those he ruled. He would enhance himself by oppressing and using others.

Third, with sin also came death—first spiritual, then physical—and the death was not just for Adam, but to all of God's creation under His dominion.

## Second Adam

Therefore, Christ must return. He returns to eradicate the effects of sin and restore all that God initially intended for humanity:

*"Christ...will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (Hebrews 9:28).*



Christ's salvation is comprehensive. One of Christ's titles is the "Second Adam." This concept appears in 1 Corinthians 15:47, Romans 5:15-21, as well as other places. The idea is that Jesus, as a true human being, is a Second Adam coming to repair the damage done by the first Adam. Because Christ is also fully God, the repair work is guaranteed. He will return to consummate the three goals we extracted from Genesis 1:26-28. In the words of Peter, He comes to restore "all things" as predicted by the prophets (Acts 3:21).

### Image and Likeness

First, the Second Adam returns to fill the earth with a repaired and perfected image and likeness. Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" that Adam's sin forfeited (Colossians 1:15). Most importantly, the cross is a graphic picture of what the image and likeness look like in action. Jesus went to the cross in perfect obedience, simultaneously expressing holiness, righteousness, justice, love, wisdom, mercy, grace, and sovereignty—all aspects of the "image and likeness" God created Adam to exercise.

New Birth begins the restoration; sanctification continues it: "*Beholding the glory of the Lord we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another*" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The restoration is only completed when Christ appears. Then, "*We will be like him for we will see his as he is*" (1 John 3:2).

Scripture implies that when sufficient numbers have been converted to "fill the earth", Christ will return, raise the dead, and fill a "new earth" with His perfected "image and likeness", billions of Believers made perfect:

*"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands"* (Revelation 7:9).

## Dominion

Second, Christ (the Second Adam) will return to restore the dominion

forfeited by the first Adam. After His death and resurrection, Jesus ascended to the Father's right hand to receive all power and authority (dominion). He now governs the nations and history towards its final redemptive end.

**“Christ will also return to judge the living and the dead...”**

He will return in glory to restore God's kingdom (dominion) on Earth, abolishing all sin and resistance to His rule, establishing His gracious authority for the joy of His saints:

*“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).*

This is the goal of history, and Christ's return will consummate it.

## Immortality

Third, the Second Adam's return will restore immortality. Death is God's enemy, and the last enemy to be destroyed will be Death. That will happen at Christ's return when He raises the dead:

*“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Philippians 3:20–21).*

Christ will also return to judge the living and the dead, but since this is not part of Genesis 1-3, that is a topic for another time.

## Conclusion

If all of this is true, how should we respond? Dr. Wayne Grudem says it this way:

*“No matter what their differences on the details, all Christians who take the Bible as their final authority agree that the final and ultimate result of Christ’s return will be the judgment of unbelievers and the final reward of believers, and believers will live with Christ in a new heaven and a new earth for all eternity. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will reign and will be worshiped in a never-ending kingdom with no more sin or sorrow or suffering.”*

This is one reason Christ’s return is so important to Believers. Without it there is no salvation. Without it God’s story has an unhappy ending. And deep in our hearts, every human being knows this is wrong. God’s story would not be God’s story without a happy ending. *“He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”* (Revelation 22:20).

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## When is Jesus Coming Back and is it Soon?

By Dave Jenkins

One common objection to Christianity is the claim made by non-Christians that since Christians believe Jesus is coming back



**soon, and that He hasn't yet, that He won't come at all.** Today, many people equate "coming soon" to going through the drive-thru line at their fast-food restaurant of choice. So, when they come to the question, "Is Jesus coming back soon?" they think *immediately*. When Jesus spoke of His return, He spoke in terms of "soon" not meaning immediately, but that He would come back in the Father's timing. In Revelation 22:20, Jesus says, "*Surely I am coming soon.*" The Apostle John then adds the words, "*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*"

## The Meaning of “Soon” and the Return of Christ

The Greek word “soon” (Revelation 22:20) is *tachu*, which is translated as “soon, quickly, or without unnecessary delay”. Within the New Testament, *tachu* is used most often in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7; 12; 20). What is meant by “soon” is that the sovereign events of history have been set in motion that will usher in Christ’s second arrival without any unnecessary delay. This is why all of history is moving according to the timetable of God, who is in control of all of history.

It’s not only the Lord Jesus who spoke of His own soon return. Speaking of the return of Christ, Peter says, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The Lord Jesus’ return is soon in that the plan of God is advancing and is only delayed so the elect may be saved (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:5).

## The Return of the Lord Jesus is Imminent

The Lord Jesus’ return is not only soon, but it is also imminent, meaning it could happen at any moment. The Apostles even thought that the Lord Jesus’ return might happen in their lifetime and spoke of the Lord Jesus’ return as the last days (1 Corinthians 10:11; 1 Peter 1:20; Hebrews 1:2) urging the people of God to be ready and watchful. Jesus intends Christians to believe in His imminent return because He spoke of being “ready” (Luke 12:40; 21:34-36; Mark 13:33).

Jesus also mentions in Matthew 24:36 that no one can know the day or hour of His return, so Christians should live in the expectancy, understanding that He is going to return at any moment. Jesus wants every generation to live in the awareness that His return will be sudden, and at that time all people will have to give an account for how Jesus will find them in that moment. So, the answer to the question, “Is Jesus returning soon?” is a resounding “YES”, and He

will return without unnecessary delay.

Acts 1:7 confirms this concept when the author wrote, *“He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”*” This was Jesus’ response after the disciples asked Him if He was going to restore Israel. The point here is simply this: no one knows when He will return, but He *will* return at the appointed time.

Matthew 24:36-44 contains a general principle (meant for all audiences across the centuries) that is critical for understanding this subject. The timing of the Lord Jesus’ return is not for anyone to know, and Scripture nowhere encourages the people of God to attempt to determine the date. Instead, Christians are to *“stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming”* (Matthew 24:42). Christians are to *“be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”* (Matthew 24:44). The principle of Matthew 24:36-44 is that no one can know the date or time of the Lord Jesus’ return.

Throughout this article, I’ve repeatedly stressed the biblical principle of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 24:36-44 because many throughout Church history have attempted to prophesy the exact date and claimed to know precisely when He is returning. While many dates have been proposed, all of them have been proven wrong. Those teachers who predicted the Lord Jesus’ return most often have questionable, if not heretical, doctrinal positions on many vital Christian doctrines. Based on Matthew 24:36 and Acts 1:7, Scripture warrants us to believe that it is not God’s desire for Christians to calculate the exact day or hour of the return of the Lord, and any-

**“Jesus will then set up the Kingdom of God on Earth (Zechariah 14:9).”**

one who undertakes such a task is misguided at best. What *is* vital is that the people of God live in light of the imminent return of the Lord Jesus (2 Timothy 4:8).

## The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus

The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus is mentioned in the Old Testament 1,500 times and at least once in every twenty-five verses in the New Testament. Amos 3:7 highlights this fact when it says, *“For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.”* The point Amos makes here is vital because it helps Christians understand that the return of Christ brings about the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God, which is God’s absolute rule over all of His creation. To accomplish this, Jesus ushers in two different judgments, two different resurrections, and two different eternities.

Revelation 19:11-16 highlights how the Lord will be ready for war and the nations will be gathered to fight against Jerusalem. Zechariah 14:2 tells us this is for the battle of Armageddon and that it will be the Day when He returns (Revelation 19:4). Further, this will be the day Revelation 19:6-7 speaks about in which the enemies of God will be all defeated, along with the Antichrist and the false prophet (Revelation 19:20). Jesus will then set up the Kingdom of God on Earth (Zechariah 14:9).

In establishing His Kingdom, Jesus will judge those who are alive at the time of His Second Coming. The judgment we are speaking of here is known as the “judgment of the sheep and the goats” or the “judgment of the nations” (Matthew 25:31-46). Those who survive this judgment because of faith in the Lord Jesus will enjoy a thousand years of peace-filled reign. Those who are guilty of not believing in the Lord Jesus will be thrown into the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41). Satan is then bound and forbidden to do anything (Revelation 20:1-3).

There will also be a resurrection of all Christians (Revelation 20:4-6). Res-

urrected Christians will join the whole of God's people who are alive at the time of Christ's Second Coming and those He brings with Him to Heaven, and they will live with Him during the thousand-year earthly reign of Christ.

Satan will be released at the end of that millennium, and one final battle will occur, which will be won immediately by the Lord Jesus (Revelation 20:7-9). The result of this battle will be Satan's absolute demise and banishment forever into the lake of fire. Next will be the second resurrection and another judgment. Non-Christians at this time will be resurrected and judged at what is known as the Great White Throne Judgment and, based on their works, will be also consigned to the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

## **Two Different Eternities**

The reality of the Lord Jesus' return means there are two eternal destinies, one with Him and one without Him (Malachi 4:1-2). At the return of the Lord Jesus, evil is defeated, the earth is restored, and the Lord wins the final battle. Whether you recognize it or not, your response to Jesus' return demonstrates whether you believe in the first coming of the Lord Jesus. The Christian's blessed hope is not only to go to heaven, but that they will be with the Lord Jesus forever in Heaven. Dear Reader, your answer to the question, "Is Jesus coming back soon?" is vital because it speaks to your idea of the first coming of the Lord Jesus, and about His finished and sufficient work.

## **A Personal Appeal to Non-Christians and Christians**

I plead with you today to be reconciled to God because we are not promised tomorrow. And the Lord knows not only the number of every hair upon your head, as well as your thoughts, but also knows the length of all your days. Repent and trust in Christ alone, for He is mighty to save through His grace. Dear Christian, do not shrink back in fear, but stand fast on the Lord Jesus and declare the His glory to those perishing in darkness.



## What Do We Do in the Meantime?

By Justin Huffman



**Meantime. It is a tough word, with tougher implications.** Merriam-Webster defines meantime as *“the time before something happens or before a specified period ends.”* In other words, living in the “meantime” often involves waiting for the end of some present situation, while eagerly

looking forward toward some new situation. It will almost always require patience and perseverance to slough through the “meantime” to finally arrive at some future, anticipated time.

When we are considering the “meantime” between Christ’s ascension and Christ’s second coming, the challenge is as real as it gets. Like Paul, we might at times be crying out, *“Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* And so, like John, we will often be praying, *“Come, Lord Jesus!”* We will need to be constantly keeping in mind the instruction to *“therefore encourage one another”* with words that remind us of our duties in the present, and the sure promises of things still

to come (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

How, then, do we endure this “meantime” as we await Christ’s return? While there are many passages to which we could turn for answers, let us consider at least three ways that the Scripture encourages us to “meantime” well.

### **Walk Before God, and Be Blameless**

Abraham is pointed to throughout Scripture as an example of faith, and specifically of obeying God during periods of waiting. For example, Genesis 16:16 concludes by specifically stating that Abram was 86 years old when Hagar bore Abram’s child Ishmael. The very next verse, in Genesis 17:1, frankly, dates the next narrative as being when Abram was 99 years old—a period of 13 years: *“When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless’.”*

Did Abram go 13 years without even hearing from God? It certainly seems possible. Abram had to live by faith during a painful time of waiting and probably of divine silence as well.

It has often been observed that God never says, “Understand me”, but He does say, “Trust me.” God’s timing is usually not what we would want or expect, yet we must continue believing in His goodness and wisdom, and obeying His Word, even when we go through lengthy periods of seeming dryness or difficulty.

It may have been years since you felt like you really “heard” from God in the sense of His obvious blessing on your life, clear answers to big prayers, and a joyful apprehension of His presence with you. Yet God has spoken to us clearly in His Word, just as He had spoken clearly to Abram; and we must—like Abram—continue in faithfulness to God’s Word in the difficult times of waiting, lengthy though they may be.

Abram was following God despite his personal struggles throughout each day of those 13 years. But then, in Genesis 17:1, God begins His address to discouraged, doubting, disheartened Abram by pointing to Himself as the one true God.

God reminds Abram of who his God is, and that God is able to do anything! God reminds Abram: I am *El Shaddai*, God Almighty. *“Abram, I have all power, and so it is time for you to ‘ponder anew what the Almighty can do!’”* And strikingly, the next words out of God’s mouth are: *“because I am God Almighty, your job is to walk before me as a blameless servant.”*

On one hand, God is sympathetic to Abram’s doubts and fears, and is answering with promises and confirmation of his concern. Yet, on the other hand, doubting God is never appropriate or excusable. God is God, so the only proper response to that reality is for us (as humans—ininitely lesser and fallible) to trust His Word and obey His instructions. Faithlessness and fear (lack of trust in the Lord), no matter how understandable from our perspective, are always sinful.

So, God holds Himself up in front of Abram, not only so that Abram can be encouraged by the sight, but also so that Abram will be convicted. God does the same thing over and over again in the lives of believers in every generation. Christian, God is still God. He could change your circumstances in a moment if He wished to. Christ Himself may come back tomorrow, or He may not. Yet according to His unfailing love and superior wisdom, God is allowing the trials—and the timing of His return—in your life right now.

Your job, then, is not to understand all His reasons, but to trust His perfect plan and obey His clear instructions in the meantime. Rest in Him. Wait on Him. He is God Almighty, and there is nothing He will not do for your good and His glory in the end.

## Exhort Each Other Daily

The writer of Hebrews commands Christians to “*exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*” (3:13). I was thinking recently about cases where a person who has been a professed believer, maybe even a well-known Christian leader, falls into public sin or even apostasy, and walks away from the Christian faith. Sadly, there have been many such cases in the news lately.

We often think, and maybe even say afterward, that in hindsight there were some tendencies we could see in that person’s life that led to their eventual demise. We may hear others (or even ourselves) say things like:

- “I did notice he treated his wife very coldly, so come to think of it, adultery is not that surprising.”
- “I do recall now that they were always seeking approval from people, so I suppose it’s only natural that they followed that bad crowd.”
- “I did hear her constantly complaining about her circumstances, so I guess we shouldn’t be shocked that she ended up declaring that she was angry with God and deciding not to be a Christian anymore.”

But the fact is, those tendencies toward destructive sin, even apostasy, are alive in every one of us every day! There is not a human alive who does not struggle every day with some sin that, if left unchecked, will bring him or her to spiritual ruin.

This is why daily repentance, deep and meaningful accountability within the church body, and a willingness to be lovingly counseled and rebuked is so absolutely crucial to the Christian life. We must not put off until tomorrow the repentance that is needed today.

We—every one of us—have the potential to destroy our marriage, be consumed with bitterness, be blinded by self-righteousness, succumb to peer pressure, give in to hopeless depression, or to give way to sexual temptation.

As a Church, we are no less vulnerable than we are as individuals! Do you think that your local church is indestructible just because it has orthodox articles of faith, or has been blessed at times in the past, or has existed for a certain number of years? Certainly not!

What is true of us as individuals is also true of each church. Doubtless this is why the writer of Hebrews later invokes the urgency of Christ's approaching return, exhorting believers toward "*not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near*" (10:25).

It is essential as a church, just as with individuals, that we are in a state of constant self-examination, humility, confession, and spiritual pursuit of Jesus, until His return. Unity does not come naturally; usefulness does not come effortlessly; growth does not come without learning and change; and power does not come without utter submission to God's Word.

We glibly read over the admonition to exhort each other *daily*, and we are barely moved by the warning that sin can deceive us—any of us—and literally bring us to ruin in a single day. Yet the reality is we are all *daily* in need of confession and repentance, *daily* in need of counsel and accountability within the body of Christ, and *daily* in need of long-suffering grace in order to strive together as Christians. Do not put off this vital warning until tomorrow. As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, tomorrow may just be too late.

## **Know Your Labor is Not in Vain**

After dedicating an entire chapter to the subject of the resurrection of

Christ in 1 Corinthians 15, and the resulting general resurrection of every believer in the final day, Paul concludes the chapter with this word — “Therefore”:

*“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain”* (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Based on the abundant proofs for the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and based on the truth that Christ is the first-fruits of what all believers will experience through Him, and based on the fact that we will all be changed from perishable to imperishable — *therefore*, beloved, be steadfast!

Do not settle *into* this world, do not settle *for* material and temporary pursuits, but do *be settled* in your Christian labors! Be immovable in your convictions, immovable in your determination, immovable in your confidence in what Christ has done and so what must therefore also certainly come to pass as a result. Be always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that, in the Lord, your labor is not in vain. In fact, the opposite!

So, whether you are changing diapers and laboring to the point of exhaustion to raise your children in the nurture and instruction of the Lord; or whether you are working two jobs to fulfill your biblical obligation to provide for your family and support the work of the church; or whether you are a young person struggling to make Christ-centered decisions in the face of an uncertain future; or whether you are a sin-battered believer, seeking yet again to gain the victory over some besetting sin in your life; or whether you are feeling the call of God to sign up to risk your life in order to take the gospel to new places where Christ is not yet known; or whether, after a lifetime of service to Jesus Christ you are feeling the effects of old age and being tempted to despair as death approaches — Beloved, be steadfast.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave guarantees that everyone

who believes in Him will one day also be raised from the dead—which in turn guarantees that your current labors for the Lord are not in vain. Live this day, then, in the eternal reality and significance of even this “meantime”, until Jesus Christ comes again.

## Reading and Interpreting Revelation Correctly

By Dave Jenkins

**The Book of Revelation opens with a prologue (Revelation 1:1-8), builds within the main body (Revelation 1:9-22), and concludes with an epilogue (Revelation 22:6-21).** The prologue and epilogue are linked by an angel sent to show the servants of the Lord “what must soon take place” (Revelation 1:1; 22:6, 16). Additionally, Revelation gives blessings on those who read and keep the prophecy (Revelation 1:3; 22:7, 9), provides John’s self-identification (Revelation 1:1-4; 22:8), and the designation of God as Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8; 22:13). The body of





the Book of Revelation contains four series of seven messages or visions: letters to churches (Revelation 2-3), seals on a scroll (Revelation 4:1-8:1), trumpets (Revelation 8:2-11:19), and bowls of wrath (Revelation 15-16).

Revelation moves from “things that are” — the seven churches (chapters 2-3), to “things that are to take place after this”, peaking in the enemies of God being destroyed and the Church finally being presented as the Lamb’s Bride in a New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 1:19; 4:1). In Revelation 12:1-6, John portrays the dragon's defeat in its desire to destroy the child of the heavenly woman (Revelation 12:1-5), followed by her flight for safety into the wilderness (Revelation 12:6).

Earlier visions sometimes portray later events, and later visions describe earlier conditions. Revelation 6:12-17 show the shaking of the earth and sky so that the stars are cast to earth by a great wind. In Revelation 7:1-8, John explains that the angels are restraining the winds of woe until the people of God are sealed. Later, John sees the sun, moon, and stars in the sky, partially darkened (Revelation 8:12). The principle of repetition or recapitulation is given to elaborate on God’s purposes and confirm their certainty as seen in Scripture (Genesis 1:1-2:25; 37:5-11; 41:1-32; Daniel 2:1-45; Acts 10:10-16). In Revelation, recapitulation means that the order in which John received visions does not necessarily indicate the order of the events they symbolize.

## **Some Keys to Reading Revelation Rightly**

When we examine the Book of Revelation, we can recognize that it is one of the hardest books of the Bible to read and interpret. The key to reading Revelation is to have a consistent understanding and application of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the art and science of biblical interpretation.

A normal hermeneutic means that, unless the Bible passage under

consideration—indicative of the use of figurative language—it should be interpreted normally. In other words, Bible readers are not to look for other (secret) meanings beyond that of the natural meaning of each word (or phrase), nor are they to spiritualize Scripture to assign meanings that aren't there. The clarity of Scripture teaches us that all Scripture is given by God and therefore is sufficient and authoritative for His people. When applied to our hermeneutic, this means that the meaning of the biblical text is to be understood as it is written normally.

**“John uses the technique of symbolism from the start of his letter, all the way to the end of Revelation.”**

Revelation is full of colorful descriptions of visions, which proclaim the last day before the return of Christ and the ushering in of the New Heavens and New Earth. The Book of Revelation is full of prophecies that find their fulfillment about the end times rooted in the Old Testament. The mention of the Antichrist mentioned in Daniel 9:27 is developed fully in Revelation. Other examples of this include Daniel 7-12, Isaiah 24-27, Ezekiel 37-41, and Zechariah 9-14, which contain prophecies that find their fulfillment in Revelation.

John uses the technique of symbolism from the start of his letter, all the way to the end of Revelation. Instead of portraying characters and events directly, John describes them indirectly, utilizing symbols. Jesus is described as a Lamb, and churches are represented as lamps on lampstands, and Satan is pictured as a dragon with seven heads and ten horns. The symbols are sometimes familiar and sometimes unique and strange. Whenever a work of literature presents many symbols instead of realistic details, readers should recognize the

technique of symbolic reality, meaning that, as they enter the work in their minds, information is presented primarily through symbols. The Book of Revelation is one of the most sustained examples of symbolic reality in existence.

The main interpretative question is, “What do these symbols refer to?” In many cases, historical background studies can help modern readers understand how such symbols were meant to be understood by John’s audience. One cannot go wrong by relating the strange symbolic details to familiar New Testament images of the end times, including the following:

- Moral degeneration.
- Cataclysmic natural and military disasters.
- Tribulation, including the persecution of Christians.
- The Second Coming of Jesus.
- The Millennium.
- The intermediate and final judgments.
- The final dissolution of the earth.
- The glorification of Christians in heaven.

## **Interpretation Revelation Rightly**

In John Bunyan’s book, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian stops at the Interpreter’s House to be shown a number of visions designed to teach important spiritual lessons. First was a picture of a man looking to heaven, holding a book, wearing a crown, and pleading with men to listen. The meaning was that Christians should listen only to faithful and holy Bible teachers. Second, he was shown a large parlor filled with dust. A man came to sweep, but the dust merely flew around the room. Then a girl came and sprinkled the room with water, after

which the room was easily swept clean. This vision illustrated how the broom of the law cannot clean the heart until it has been sprinkled with the water of the gospel.

Further visions illustrated a variety of spiritual lessons important to the Christian life. The reader of *The Pilgrim's Progress* realizes that Bunyan is presenting allegories because of the way in which he names his characters. The man who witnesses the gospel is called Evangelist, the pilgrim is Christian, he is nearly led astray by Pliable and Obstinate, and he receives his visions in the house of a man named Interpreter.

Revelation is not an allegory like *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but a book of apocalyptic visions. Still, like Bunyan's masterpiece, Revelation functions in a way that cues how we should read it. From the very beginning, Revelation employs symbols to depict redemptive-historical realities. In chapter 1, Jesus appears amid golden candlesticks that represent the churches (Revelation 1:12), holding stars in His hand that symbolize angels (Revelation 1:16, 20), and with a two-edged sword coming from his mouth that depicts the sharpness of His message (Revelation 1:16). We are clearly to interpret these images symbolically. The same is true of John's use of numbers, including "seven" to depict the completeness of the Holy Spirit (Revelation 1:4).

In interpreting the detailed visions of Revelation found in chapters 11, 12, and 13, we must remember the kind of literature we are reading. Some Christians assert that we must interpret these passages literally, as giving a more or less straightforward description of historical events, either past or future. The nature of Revelation urges Bible readers to interpret these visions symbolically, just as the nature of *The Pilgrim's Progress* compels readers to interpret John Bunyan allegorically.

The Book of Revelation unveils the spiritual war in which the Church of Jesus is engaged—that cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan, along with his evil allies (demonic and human). In this conflict, the Lamb of God—Jesus—has already won the decisive victory through His finished and sufficient work. The

**“Louis spent the rest of his life mired in warfare and died, better and worn out, in 1715.”**

Church continues today to be assaulted by Satan, the dragon (in its death-throes), through persecution, false teaching, and the allure of material affluence and cultural approval. John reveals the spiritual realities lying behind the Church’s trials and temptations during the time between Christ’s first and second comings. He also affirms the certainty of the triumph of Christ in the New Heavens and New

Earth—those visions which both warn the Church, and fortify it to endure suffering, and to purify it from the defiling enticements of the present world order.

In 1685, the French king, Louis XIV, revoked the Edict of Nantes, which had guaranteed religious freedom to the French Protestants, known as the Huguenots. Thousands of Christians were slaughtered in barbaric ways, and in some parts of France, the Reformed Church was eradicated. Louis had ordered this persecution to force the Protestants into returning their allegiance to Roman Catholicism, bringing peace to the kingdom. However, the ruthless persecution embittered the Protestant nations around him, into which thousands of Huguenots fled. Louis spent the rest of his life mired in warfare and died, bitter and worn out, in 1715. Before that century was over, Louis’ kingdom would be

bloodily savaged by the French Revolution.

During that same century, the nation of England, which had harbored many Huguenots, experienced a flowering of the gospel in the ministries of John Wesley and George Whitefield. The monarchies of those nations that rejected the gospel have disappeared. Meanwhile, blessed by the gospel they cherished, and the persecuted church they succored, Britain and Holland's royal houses remain to this day.

This record from Church history reflects the vision of Revelation 11, which is widely regarded as one of the most difficult passages in this challenging book. However, this difficulty is largely removed if we remember that Revelation is a visionary picture book rather than a literal narrative of future events. Revelation 11 gives a stirring depiction of the Church bearing testimony during the tumultuous age of the gospel through its biblical symbols. The vision provides one of the most potent descriptions of the Church's mightiness in its witness and the violence of the world's warfare against the gospel. It concludes by depicting the witness of a resurrected Christ by the power of God, to the great consternation and despair of the opposing world.

## **Revelation and the End of All History**

Revelation contains a compelling message of faithfulness to Christ amid the spiritual war against Satan and sin, as the people of God wait for the Second Coming of Christ. The death and resurrection of Jesus changed the course of the history of the world. The return of Jesus will bring about an even more dramatic of a change in the history of man. When Jesus returns, He will destroy all His enemies with a *word* from His mouth, then will establish His Kingdom with the New Jerusalem. History is not moving about willy-nilly in the hands of God. History is moving forward to the glorious conclusion of Christ's returning and

the establishment of His Kingdom forever and always. Revelation tells the glorious story of the return of Christ and is vital for Christians to read and study, so they grow in their understanding of the person and work of Christ and the end of history.

## Recommended Reading on the Imminent Return of Christ

During this season at Servants of Grace, we've been considering the imminent return of the Lord Jesus and how important it is for our life and godliness. Paul eagerly longed for the day of the Lord's return (2 Timothy 4:8, 13).

As you read this issue of *Theology of Life*, it is our prayer that you've grown in your appreciation and understanding of the imminent return of the Lord Jesus. If you've found this subject interesting and want to study the issue further, please check out the recommended reading list below. These books are at the top of this genre in both excellence and readability.

### General Eschatology:

- *The Christian Faith* by Michael Horton
- *Reformed Dogmatics* by Herman Bavinck
- *Jesus Wins: The Good News of the End Times* by Dayton Hartman
- *A Theology of the New Testament* by George Eldon Ladd

### Biblical Theology

- *From Eden to New Jerusalem* by T. Desmond Alexander

### The Book of Revelation

- *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches (Preaching the Word)* by Jim Hamilton
- *The Book of Revelation (The New International Greek Testament Commentary)* by G.K. Beale



## **General Eschatology: Final Judgment, Heaven and Hell**

- *The Last Things: Death, Judgements, Heaven and Hell* by Paul Helm
- *Hell on Trial* by Robert A. Peterson

I hope these books will give you even more perspective on the return of Jesus Christ and the prophecies surrounding that event.

In Christ Alone,  
Dave Jenkins  
Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

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## Servants of Grace Ministries

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