

RCF

Covenant Classes

Session 7

Perspective of the End Times

I. Introduction

- A. Much teaching has been brought to the church regarding the events of the end times (eschatology). In many instances, end time teachings become confusing and contradictory from one teaching to another.
- B. It is important that we do not allow end time teachings to become an instrument of division or breaking of fellowship among the saints because of disagreement. End time teachings are nonfoundational doctrines, and there appears to be no clearly authoritative orthodox position on many of the minor points of eschatology.
- C. Because of the diversity in eschatology, we gladly embrace those who have varying views of end time events, without compromising the authoritative and divine position of Jesus Christ. It is important for us to explore and evaluate these various teachings so division does not result from slightly differing beliefs of the end times.

II. The Great Tribulation

- A. God has proclaimed the coming of a very severe, yet brief, time period of worldwide distress and tribulation. This coming era of devastation will be the most intense period of catastrophe that mankind has ever experienced. See Jeremiah 30:7, Dan. 12:1, Matt. 24:21, Mark 13:19.
- B. The wrath of God against this evil age.
 - 1. This wrath will be manifested partially through the release of the Antichrist (Beast) – see Rev. 12:9, 13:1-18. Some of the characteristics of this period will include: War (Rev. 6:3-4, Mt. 24:7), famine (Rev. 6:7-8), death by pestilence (Zech. 13:8, Lk. 21:11, Rev. 6:8), fire (Rev. 8:7, 9:18, 16:8-9), torment by locusts (Rev. 9:1-11, 11:6, 18:21), torment by malignant sores (Rev 16:2, 10, 11), earthquakes (Rev. 11:13, 16:17-20), and 100-pound hailstones (Rev 16:21).

2. Wrath will come to judge the nations and people who rejected the witness of the Gospel of the Kingdom being preached to the entire world (Mt. 24:14). The process of the great Proclamation of Matthew 24:14 may precede the great tribulation by a number of years. God will allow the nations to hear His purpose before He judges them for rejecting Him and His purposes.
3. This wrath will culminate with the destruction of the unrighteous economic, political, and religious systems, and the people who have rejected Jesus (Revelation 17-18, 19:17-21).
4. God will test the whole earth during this period (Rev. 3:10).
5. God will shake everything and everyone to reveal what is truly of Him (Matthew 7:25, Hebrews 12:26-27).

C. Wrath of Satan against the saints will come (not the same as the wrath of God).

1. Persecution – Mt. 10:16-23, Jn. 15:18-25, 16:1-4,33; II. Thess. 1:5-8, Revelation 12:13-17.
2. Martyrdom – Mt. 24:9, Rev. 6:9-11, 16:5-7, 17:6, 18:24.
3. To Wear the Saints Down – Daniel 7:25, Rev. 13:7.
4. To Purge the False Believers During the Time of the “Great Apostasy” Matthew 24:10-13, II Thess. 2:3, I Tim. 4:1, II Tim. 3:1, II Pet. 2:1-3, 3:3.
5. The purpose of the great apostasy is to expose the false believers by bringing the wheat and tares to full maturity – Daniel 11:34-35, 12:10.

D. To vindicate the saints in the eyes of their wicked persecutors — Rev. 3:9, Ps. 91.

1. He will protect them from plagues – Zeph. 2:3, Rev. 9:4.
2. He delivers the two witnesses – Rev. 11:5,6,11.
3. He reveals His righteous acts – Rev. 15:4 (probably through them).
4. He judges the social, economic, and religious systems of the wicked, etc. Revelation 17-18.

E. To purge ethnic Israel to prepare them for salvation – Jer. 30:7, Ezk. 20:33-38, Zech. 13:8-9.

III. The Antichrist

- A. The Antichrist (Beast) will be a powerful being empowered by Satan as a counterfeit king to Jesus. This counterfeit king will be in total opposition to Christ and His Kingdom.
 - 1. He is the dominant person in the seven year period of the great tribulation. He will be king of the 10 nation confederation – Dan. 2:40-44, 7:7-8, 8:26, 9:26, Rev. 12:3, Rev. 13:1, Rev. 17:7-18.
 - 2. Satan, the Antichrist, and the false prophet are the counterfeit trinity that will futilely seek to rule the world – Rev. 13.
- B. Biblical passages that describe the Antichrist – Dan. 7:8,18-27,8:9-12,11:22-35, II Thess. 2:3-12, Rev. 13:17.

IV. The Personal Return of Jesus

- A. The Scripture teaches that Jesus will personally return in the sky in the glory of the Father to be viewed by the entire world on the last day of this age. Zech. 12:10, Mt. 24:29-31, I. Thess. 4:13-17, II. Thess. 1:7-10, Rev. 1:7, Rev. 19:11-21.
- B. He will descend and literally stand on the Mount of Olives—Zech.14:3-4, Joel 3:2,12; Psalm 2:6. He will appear in the sky, and the entire world will see Him—Mt. 24:27,30-31; Lk. 21:27.
- C. There is an eschatological view call the “preterist” view that has gained some adherents in recent years. This view believes that Jesus promised to return physically to the earth during the generation in which the apostles lived. Preterists believe that all Scripture related to end times was fulfilled when the Roman army invaded and destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. All eschatological passages that were not fulfilled in an earthly sense were fulfilled in a heavenly sense.

V. Four Views of the Rapture of the Church

- A. The Pre-tribulation Rapture
 - 1. The believers in Christ will be gathered up (raptured) to Christ before the period of the great tribulation begins. Those who are not raptured will be left to go through the great tribulation, out of which some (those who won’t accept the mark of the beast), will be saved.

2. This rapture will not be the second coming of Jesus because He will not set foot on the earth but only gather the saved believers in the air and then return to Heaven until the end of the tribulation.

B. The Mid-tribulation Rapture

1. The rapture of the believers in Christ will take place after 3½ years of great tribulation, at the time the Antichrist is revealed to the world. Views vary on whether or not people can still be saved during the last 3½ years, but the predominate view says that people can still be saved in the last 3½ years through martyrdom.
2. Jesus does not completely return in this view, similar to the pre-tribulation rapture view. His second coming will take place after the great tribulation.

C. The Pre-wrath Rapture

1. The believers in Christ will be raptured just before the revelation of the wrath of God, but after the wrath of Satan. The rapture takes place after approximately 5½ years of the great tribulation. People are not saved after the rapture of the saints; all that is left are the unrighteous who will experience the wrath of God.
2. Jesus physically returns to the earth after the great tribulation but does not take rulership of the earth until after a 45-day period known as the “restoration.”

D. The Post-tribulation Rapture

1. The rapture of the believers in Christ takes place just as Jesus is returning to the earth. The day of the Lord and the second coming of Christ are one and the same. The believers go through the great tribulation with divine protection from God.
2. As Jesus enters this world, He gathers all the Saints to Himself in the air and then descends to the earth. Jesus destroys all the unrighteous and begins His 1000-year reign on earth.

VI. The Rapture of the Church

A. There are five main passages in the New Testament that describe the rapture (gathering up)—Mt. 24:15-31, I Cor. 15:51-55, I Thes. 4:13-17, II Thes. 2:1-12, Rev. 19:6-20.

B. One of these five passages declares only the fact of the rapture without reference to its timing—I Thes. 4:13-17. The other four passages dealing with timing are Matthew 24:15-31, I. Cor. 15:51-55, II Thes. 2:1-12, and Rev. 19:6-20.

C. The Timing of the Rapture

1. Warning: This issue has caused much unprofitable debate and unnecessary division. We believe that God uses ministries from all of the four basic doctrinal positions: Pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, pre-wrath, and post-tribulation. We will accept believers regardless of their doctrinal position of the rapture. We ask for a spirit of liberty on the subject of the tribulation, millennium, and rapture. Our major emphasis is to prepare the church for Kingdom focus and perseverance.
2. Because the Scripture is not absolutely clear on the issue of timing and the events of the rapture, it is likely that all present belief systems lack some element of what will actually happen.
3. We believe the rapture of the church occurs at the same time as the second coming of Christ. The Day of the Lord and the coming of the Lord are the same event (I Thes. 4:15, II Thes. 2:1).
4. Jesus tells us that He will gather His elect **after** the tribulation which is **after** the abomination of desolation. Compare Matthew 24:15, 21, 29-31.
5. Paul tells us that the coming of the Lord will not come until the apostasy comes and the Antichrist appears—II Thes. 2:1-4. The coming of the Lord in II Thes 2:1 is defined in I Thes. 4:15.
6. I Cor. 15:51-55 tells us the Lord will come after the last trumpet at the end of the tribulation (see Rev. 8 & 9).

D. The Church will not Experience God's Wrath (Exodus 7-10)

1. We are saved from His wrath and condemnation (Rom 8:1, 5:9)
2. Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come (I Thes. 1:10, 5:9, II Thes. 1:8-10).
3. The church will be “kept” by God’s protection at this time as Israel was kept from the plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7-10). Jesus promised to keep us from wrath (Jn. 17:15). The keeping of Rev. 3:10 and Jn. 17:15 is not in reference to physical removal but rather divine protection (Rev. 3:10, Jude 24).
4. Do not confuse the wrath of God against rebellious sinners with the wrath of the Antichrist against God’s purposes and people (Mt. 10:16-39, Jn. 16:33, Acts 14:22, Phil 3:10, Col. 1:24, II. Thes. 1:5-8).

VII. The Millennium

A. A millennium is a period of 1000 years. In the Biblical context “the millennium” is the 1000-year reign of Christ beginning at His second coming to the earth and ending with the final judgment of all things.

B. Revelation 20:1-6 describes the millennial reign of Christ on the earth. God will bind Satan during this time, and Jesus will personally rule the earth. The result will be a 1000-year period of peace, prosperity and blessing for the entire earth. This is the time that the Kingdom will fulfill its glorious destiny on this present earth.

C. The ultimate destiny of God’s Kingdom on earth – Daniel 2:44, Ps. 47-48, and I Cor. 15:28.

1. It will ultimately triumph over every sphere of life by destroying every power, authority, and rule that is contrary to it—I Cor. 15:24, Eph 1:21.
2. This millennial Kingdom involves a whole new Biblically based social order ruled by regenerate people who are filled with the gifts, fruit, and wisdom of the Spirit.

D. The doctrine of the millennial Kingdom is a significant revelation of Scripture. The Old Testament saints looked to God to bring into existence a whole new world order based on His ways. They accurately envisioned it to be a Golden Age of God’s rule on earth, experiencing the fullness of the promises of Deuteronomy 8:28 and Isaiah 60-61.

E. The millennial age is the time that God will fulfill the covenants He made with Israel.

1. The Abrahamic covenant concerning the land and the seed—Is. 10:21-22, 19:25, 43:1, 65:8-9; Jer. 30:22, 32:38; Ezk. 34:24, 30-31; Micah 7:19-20, Zech. 13:9, Mal. 3:16-18.
2. The Davidic covenant concerning the messianic king and kingdom—Is. 11:1-2, 55:3, 11; Jer. 23:5-8, 33:20-26, Ezk. 34:23-25, 37:23-24; Hs. 3:5, Micah 4:7-8.
3. The Palestinian covenant – entire possession of the land – Is. 11:11-23, 65:9, Ezk. 16:60-63, 36:28-29; Hos. 1:10, 2:1, Micah 2:12; Zech 10:6.
4. The new covenant – new heart and indwelling Spirit — Jer. 31:31-34, 32:31-34, 32:35-39, Ezk. 11:18-20, 16:60-63, 36:22-32; Rom. 11:26-29.

VIII. Three Views of the Millennium

A. Pre-millennial View:

1. Jesus will return physically **before** a literal 1000-year period on earth in which the Gospel will fully triumph over every sphere of life in society throughout the entire earth.
2. The curse over all aspects of the physical creation will be reduced. The entire creation will be restored, and all the nations will be Christianized for 1000 years with Jesus as the one world leader. Jesus will literally live in Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be the governmental capital and center of God's purposes for the entire earth.

B. Post-millennial View:

1. Jesus will come **after** the Gospel fully triumphs over every sphere of life. Jesus' coming is "post" or "after" the millennial triumph.
2. The Church will gain a complete earthly victory in Christianizing society before the second coming of Christ.

C. A-millennial View:

1. There is no literal 1000-year period where the Church experiences a complete earthly victory over all the political, economic, and social institutions on this present earth.
2. There is a great spiritual victory over sin by a triumphant Church before the Lord's return. All prophecies of earthly dominion and victory are to be re-interpreted spiritually and fulfilled figuratively in the Church.

D. Each one of these views has a strong point:

1. Pre-millennial – Emphasizes the necessity of Jesus' personal presence for victory on earth to be fully achieved.
2. Post-millennial – Emphasizes the need for a strategic plan to proclaim God's ways to all sphere's of life now instead of waiting for the second coming before we believe God to begin to disciple the nations.
3. A-millennial – Emphasizes the full victory and triumph of the Church over sin and Satan. The restored Church full of glory is emphasized.

E. We believe the best position is to believe God for all three areas of emphasis. The Lord's personal presence before a full earthly triumph yet with the plan to at least partially impact the various spheres of life. We also believe God for a restored Church.

IX. Present Beliefs on the End Times

- A. “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.” I Cor. 13:10-11.
- B. We believe that God will move upon the earth with a great harvest of souls through a witness of the Holy Spirit’s power that will bring multitudes into the Kingdom of God – Matthew 24:14.
- C. We believe in a great apostasy and falling away from the faith during end time events – II Thes. 2:3, I Tim. 4:1, II Pet. 2:1.
- D. We believe in the post-tribulation position of the rapture and in the pre-millennial position of a literal 1000-year reign of Jesus on this current earth. We will fully accept believers who hold views on these doctrines.
 - 1. We are presently more interested in having right attitudes about the future than claiming full understanding of it in a doctrinal way.
 - 2. We value attitudes of diligence that lead to kingdom planning. We have faith for a spiritual victory in the Church. We believe it is essential to prepare the Church for persecution and endurance.
 - 3. We believe in a restored Church that will substantially impact society. We must greatly touch our society around us without the necessity of claiming a full earthly triumph over all social and political institutions before the Lord’s coming.
- E. We believe in a literal second coming of Jesus after a time of great tribulation and a literal Antichrist.
- F. The timing of a second coming:
 - 1. We have very little understanding of specifics as to the time He will return. The beginnings of the last days were proclaimed by Peter at Pentecost –Acts 2:17.
 - 2. We believe there will be great moves of the Holy Spirit throughout this age in which we live. These will be accompanied with economic decline and recovery. We do not necessarily believe the next move of the Holy Spirit is the end of this period of God’s last visitation to the earth, nor do we believe that the next decline of economics is necessarily the great one described in Revelation 18.
 - 3. We believe it is essential to have a long-term plan and then to teach our children to have one. This is the attitude we believe is pleasing to the Lord who said, “*Occupy until I come*” (Luke 19:13).

X. The Final Judgment

- A. After the millennial reign of Jesus on the earth, the final judgment or “Great White Throne” judgment will take place. This judgment will end the order of creation and establish a new order (Rev. 20:11-15).
- B. This judgment is sometimes called the “judgment of works” as opposed to the judgment at the point of death that is the “judgment of faith.” The judgment of works will not be a judgment to determine whether someone goes to heaven or hell. That judgment is the judgment of faith that happens as soon as someone dies. The judgment of works is the judgment that measures each person’s thoughts, actions, and deeds while that person was on the earth. Some believe that this judgment will determine a person’s amount of rewards in heaven or degrees of punishment in hell.
- C. Everyone’s eternal condition changes at the great white throne judgment. The destiny of each person is set, but the final dwelling place of both the righteous and the unrighteous begins after the great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:7-10).
- D. The final dwelling of the unrighteous:
 1. People who are declared unrighteous at the point of death immediately go to a place of conscious torment called hell (Hades, sheol, the grave). Hell is a place of horrible torment that will eventually be cast into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is a state of eternal conscious death where there is no relief and no hope. Everyone who does not have faith in Jesus as Savior will ultimately end up in the lake of fire.
 2. The lake of fire is also known as the second death or the lake of burning sulfur. Those who are cast into the lake of fire will be tormented forever and ever.
- E. The final dwelling of the righteous:
 1. Those who are judged righteous at the point of death will immediately go to heaven to be with Jesus. When Jesus died and rose from the dead, He made a way for the righteous to be in the presence of God. Before that time, the righteous went to paradise, also known as Abraham’s bosom.
 2. After the millennial reign of Jesus on earth, Jesus will create a new Heaven and a new earth. These will be the dwelling places of the righteous forever. The new Heaven and new earth will have no death or disease. No one will ever grow old. There will be no sin, no sin nature, no devil, and no demons. This will be a perfect eternal state of conscious existence (Rev. 21-22).