

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing our examination of eschatology, the doctrine of last things. In our last few sessions we have examined how the study of eschatology answers the questions left open by our studies of the other five loci of reformed theology; namely, theology proper, anthropology, Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology. Dr. Spencer, what would you like to discuss today?

Dr. Spencer: Well, I want to move on to discuss the topic that most people think of when you mention eschatology; namely, the events surrounding the second coming of Jesus Christ and the end of the world. We are told, for example, in 2 Peter 3:10 that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”¹ And then a few verses later, in 2 Peter 3:12-13 he wrote, “That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”

Marc Roby: Well, having the elements destroyed by fire and the earth laid bare sounds terrifying, but I do look forward to the promise of a new heaven and a new earth. And I’m sure that a number of our listeners will agree.

Dr. Spencer: And I’m certain you’re right, because it is a topic that has garnered a tremendous amount of attention ever since the time of Christ and, in fact, before then. People are naturally curious about what will happen at the end of this age. But the most important thing for us to know is not *when* this will all happen, or even exactly *how* it will all happen. The most important thing for us to know is how we should live in light of the coming Day of the Lord.

The two quotes I gave from Second Peter a moment ago skipped over a couple of verses. Let me read what I skipped, which is 2 Peter 3:11 through the beginning of Verse 12. Peter wrote, “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.”

Marc Roby: That may strike many as a strange response. Peter first tells us that the heavens and the earth will be destroyed by fire, so most people would think we should be fearful of such a cataclysmic event and want to know when it will happen. But Peter says our response should be to live holy lives and to look forward to this event and speed its coming!

Dr. Spencer: If you aren’t certain of your salvation, you should fear this event, or your own death, whichever will come first. Your question then should be, “What must I do to be saved?”

Marc Roby: Which is exactly the question the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas in Acts 16:30.

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Dr. Spencer: And in Acts 16:31 we read that Paul and Silas replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” But if you are sure of your salvation, then you should long for the coming of Christ and do everything you can to speed its coming.

Marc Roby: That leads to an obvious question; “What can we do to speed the coming of the Day of the Lord?”

Dr. Spencer: We can live holy and godly lives, which includes sharing the gospel of grace! This world will end when all of God’s chosen children have been saved. We can deduce that fact from a few verses. Romans 8:30 tells us that those God “predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” Therefore, we know that all of God’s elect children will be saved, not one will be lost.

We also know that it is the gospel call that God uses to save and Jesus told us in Matthew 24:14 that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Therefore, we can conclude that the end will come when the last elect sinner has been saved through the preaching of the gospel. So, we can speed the coming of the Day of the Lord by faithfully witnessing to people.

Marc Roby: And yet we are told in Acts 17:31 that God “has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

Dr. Spencer: And the fact that God has set a day doesn’t mean that our efforts can’t speed its coming. We have to remember that God ordains the means as well as the end. Therefore, even though he has known from before the creation the exact day of the final judgment, it is still true that our efforts can speed its coming.

Marc Roby: Alright. But we cannot know precisely *when* Christ will return.

Dr. Spencer: No, we can’t. Jesus himself made that point very clear. In Matthew 24:36 he said, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

Many people throughout history have predicted when Christ will return, and they have all been wrong. And I’m sure others will predict his coming again in the future as well. Christians need to know the Word of God and not be taken in by these deceivers. If someone tells you that he knows when Christ will return, I don’t care who he is, he is *not* being led by the Spirit of God and you should run from him as fast as you can.

Marc Roby: No one who is speaking by the Holy Spirit is going to contradict the clear teaching given by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. And there is good reason for God not letting us know the day or hour. Think of how great the temptation would be to not do what we should be doing if we knew the day Christ was returning.

Marc Roby: Well, for example, if we knew for certain he was coming back in two days I can't imagine that very many people would be disciplined enough to go to work tomorrow. I mean, why bother if Christ will return the very next day?

Dr. Spencer: And yet, perhaps it was tomorrow that you were going to lead one of your coworkers to Christ! And if you don't go to work, you can't do that. We can also imagine that if we knew for certain that Christ wasn't coming for another two hundred years, it would be a great temptation to be lax about holiness – we could convince ourselves there would always be time to repent and change later.

Marc Roby: Well, that would be stupid, but it sounds all too likely.

Dr. Spencer: Jesus used parables to illustrate that we must live carefully, as if he were going to return today.

Marc Roby: Which he might do!

Dr. Spencer: That's true. We don't know. And he made that point, for example, in Matthew 24:43-44 where he said, "But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Jesus is not coming to steal anything of course, but his point is perfectly clear. We want Jesus to come when we are busy doing exactly what we should be doing. We would certainly not want him to return while we are in the midst of some sin.

Marc Roby: Yes, we all know what it is like to caught in the act of doing something wrong. Every child has had the experience of having mom walk into the kitchen when you have your hand in the cookie jar, or something similar.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, like having dad walk into the garage right when you are playing with some tool you're not allowed to touch. That is exactly Jesus' point. If we knew exactly when Christ was going to return we would all make sure that he found us praying, or doing some good deed. But we should live *all* of life that way. We should live every moment as if Jesus were there with us.

Marc Roby: Which, in a very real sense, he is.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he is. He knows everything we think, say or do. We can't hide anything from him. And that is one of the major points we get out of the Bible's teaching about the end times; that we should be ready at any time for Christ's return and the final judgment. We should live holy and godly lives in anticipation. There is a Latin phrase that is used to describe this. We should live all of life *Coram Deo*, which means, before God. In other words, we should live in light of the fact that God does, in fact, know everything we think, say and do all the time.

Psalm 139:1-4 say, "O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying

down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.”

Marc Roby: Alright, we have established that we do not and, in fact, cannot, know exactly *when* Christ will return and that we should live holy and godly lives all of the time as a result. But what *do* we know for sure about the second coming?

Dr. Spencer: Well, first, we know that it will in fact happen. In Hebrews 9:28 we read that Christ “will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” And in John 14:2-3 Jesus told his disciples, “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” He also told us in Matthew 16:27 that “the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”

Marc Roby: Alright, the basic fact of Christ’s second coming is clear. What else do we know for sure?

Dr. Spencer: That God wins. He will defeat every enemy. In fact, Satan is already totally defeated. God allows him a certain amount of freedom for now, but it is all under God’s complete control.

Marc Roby: Yes. We see that clearly, for example, in the book of Job. When God challenged Satan to examine his godly servant Job, who feared God and shunned evil, we read in Job 1:9-11 that Satan responded, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

Dr. Spencer: That is a classic passage about the absolute sovereignty of God. He had put a hedge around Job to protect him from Satan. And, as I’m sure most of our listeners know, God then allowed Satan to attack Job. In the next verse, Job 1:12, we read that “The LORD said to Satan, ‘Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.’ Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.” So, we clearly see that God put very specific limits on what Satan was allowed to do.

Marc Roby: The severe trials endured by Job are difficult for many to accept and understand as coming from a loving and sovereign God.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, they are. But it is a great display of God’s absolute sovereignty and should provide great comfort to God’s people. Satan has absolutely no power over us whatsoever beyond what God allows. And that is why we can believe God’s Word when we are told in 1 Corinthians 10:13, for example, that “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” And also in James 4:7 we are told, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Marc Roby: Those are comforting promises made possible by God's sovereignty. But the story of Job is still difficult for many.

Dr. Spencer: I understand that. And God hasn't explicitly told us all of his reasons for allowing Job's severe trials. But certainly he was teaching Satan, Job, Job's friends and us all a lesson about his sovereignty, the limits of Satan's powers, and the need for us to have an eternal perspective in dealing with life's troubles. We must be patient and trust God and his promises.

There are only two eternal destinies and the most important thing we must do in life is to make sure that we all surrender to Christ and will be acknowledged as his on the day of judgment. In the end, Satan and all his demons and all those who have rejected Jesus Christ will be eternally destroyed.

Marc Roby: Yes, certainly we read in Revelation 20:10 that the devil, "was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." And then we read of those who will join him in the next chapter. In Revelation 21:8 says that "the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

Dr. Spencer: Many professing Christians today deny the existence of eternal hell. But they do so based on purely human reasoning. It seems unfair for a person to suffer eternally for sins committed in a finite lifetime. But there are three serious problems with that argument. First, our sins are against an infinite God, so they are infinite. Second, no one in hell repents. In fact, they go on hating God and so they continue to sin forever. Far from paying off their debt they increase it! And third, and by far most important, the argument is based on human reasoning alone, not the Bible.

Marc Roby: But, of course, there is nothing inherently wrong in using human reasoning. We must use that to understand the Word of God.

Dr. Spencer: Oh yes, we must. But our reasoning must always be used to understand what the Word says, not to try and overrule it. And the Bible is absolutely clear that there is an eternal hell, just as there is an eternal heaven. The best single verse to make this point is in Chapter Twenty-Five of Matthew's gospel where Jesus tells us about separating the sheep, which represent his followers, from the goats, who represent those who have not been born again. He puts the sheep on his right and the goats on his left and then, in Matthew 25:46, Jesus tells us that those on his left "will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." In the original Greek, the same exact word is used for eternal in both places in that sentence. Therefore, if someone is going to try and argue that hell is not really eternal punishment, they are going to have to also argue that heaven is not eternal life.

Marc Roby: And I don't know anyone who makes that argument.

Dr. Spencer: Nor do I.

Marc Roby: Well, we are nearly out of time for today, so is there anything else you want to say before we close the session?

Dr. Spencer: I just want to summarize that the most important single thing for Christians to focus on is not *when* Christ will return, or *how* he will return, or any other detail about the end times. The most important thing for us to focus on is doing God's will here and now. We must be faithful to complete the work God has given us to do. We should listen very carefully and obey what I read earlier from 2 Peter 3:11-12. He wrote, "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming."

Marc Roby: That's a great place to end for today, and I look forward to discussing the end times more in our next session. But let me remind our listeners that they can send questions or comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. And we'll do our best to answer.