

Session 2 The Varying Importance of End-Time Beliefs

**For additional study material pertaining to this session, see mikebickle.org*

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. This is a working document that we will add to from time to time.
- B. We recognize varying degrees of importance regarding biblical, end-time doctrines and themes. We use four categories of ideas related to the end times—those of *primary importance* (essential doctrines), those held as our *core convictions*, those *helpful for clarity*, and personal *opinions*.
- C. Jesus spoke of some truths as being weightier than others (Mt. 23:23), and He considered the commandment to love God to be “greater” than other commandments (Mt. 22:37-38).
²³“You tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.” (Mt. 23:23)
- D. It is important to present the biblical message of the end times with humility and in a way that promotes unity, yet without compromising important truths. This is captured in the well-known saying “*In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, diversity; and in all things, love.*”
- E. The Lord wants His people to be bold, with strong convictions about what the Bible makes clear, yet with humility and proper nuance. We acknowledge the value of people whose views differ from our own, and we must always posture ourselves to continue to learn and listen to others.
- F. In our zeal to be faithful to the Scriptures, we acknowledge that some end-time themes are best stated as opinions and suggestions, instead of as statements that are unnecessarily dogmatic. Scripture allows for interpretative diversity concerning the specific details and timing of events.
- G. Any presentation of a detailed narrative of future events from a biblical perspective must be tempered, knowing that church history is littered with self-confident teachers who proudly overstated their position or were dogmatic where the Scriptures were not. It is best to delineate between primary truths and our personal opinions when presenting details of end-time themes.
- H. No group has more than part of the full truth of Scripture about the end times. Only as the *whole Body of Christ receives understanding* will we know the full biblical storyline.
- I. We are to respect others with differing views on the end times, as long as biblical eschatological essentials are upheld and sound, contextual Bible interpretation is implemented. Teachers must be careful not to imply that their view on the end times is the only correct one.
- J. I emphasize that there are varying levels of importance of end-time doctrines and themes, and that our staff, students, interns, and others in this spiritual family do not need to embrace *all* that we say about the end times. I do not ask anyone to accept my views; rather, I urge you to think for yourself (Acts 17:10-11), and, in the right spirit and context, to boldly challenge all ideas that you hear, and refuse any teaching that you do not see with your eyes in your Bible.

II. PRIMARY IMPORTANCE: ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

These are truths that have been upheld historically by the Church as essential doctrines of salvation. They define what is essential orthodoxy as related to end-time themes. The truths below do not include all the important doctrines in our statement of faith, but only those pertaining to the end times. We agree with the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

- A. ***Authority of Scripture***: We fully agree with the reformers who used the phrase ***Sola Scriptura***. Our one source for understanding God's plan for the end times is Scripture alone. We do not base our views on prophetic experiences or "personal revelations." The only sure commentary on the Word is the Word itself.
- B. ***Second coming***: The literal, bodily, second coming of Jesus to reign forever as King of kings
- C. ***Resurrection of the saints***: The physical, bodily, resurrection of the saints
- D. ***Heaven***: Living with Jesus in the New Jerusalem on the new earth for all eternity
- E. ***Eternal judgment***: the punishment of the lost. We stand strongly against the heresy of universalism that teaches that there is no hell and that all people will be saved.

III. CORE CONVICTIONS

Below are core convictions that our leadership holds related to the end times. We do not require our staff, students, interns, or other members of this spiritual family to embrace these truths, yet it is necessary for all who teach at IHOPU to uphold our core convictions. Part of our calling is to be a "messaging ministry," committed to being faithful witnesses of Jesus, His plan of salvation, His commitment to build the Church and disciple nations, and of His end-time plans.

- A. Our leadership team has worked through our core convictions for many years, even decades. We have based them on the Scriptures, with the confirmation of many teachers in the Church.*
- B. Our leadership team has been thoroughly exposed to different views held by others in the Body of Christ. We are aware of these differing views and are firmly settled on our core convictions.
- C. We welcome any to challenge our views as they seek to establish their own core convictions. We value this process for them. We are committed to our core convictions, but remain open to change our views related to biblical end-time themes that are of lesser importance (see page 4).
- D. We seek to be clear about our core convictions, so that people do not join us thinking that they might change them. We love and honor believers who disagree with our core convictions, and encourage them to find a spiritual family where they can enjoy unity related to their convictions.
- E. Our primary end-time theology is ***historic premillennialism with a victorious church***. After many years of searching the Word and studying the writings of other ministries, our leadership team is firmly convinced that this is the end-time position that is most faithful to what we believe the Scriptures teach. Our core convictions express this theological perspective.

- F. ***Historic premillennialism and the victorious Church***—this represents our core beliefs related to the end times. Many Bible scholars and teachers throughout church history have held to historic premillennialism and/or a victorious Church.* This theological view includes the following:
1. The victorious Church walking in unity, intimacy, and maturity (purity, power, wisdom). Unity includes the whole Church working together in love and honor (Jn. 17:21-23). Jesus loves the whole Church and is returning for a large, unified, international Church.
¹³...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God [intimacy], to a perfect man [maturity]...to the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13)
 2. The theme of a victorious church includes a global harvest and a prayer and worship movement from every nation preceding Jesus' return (Mt. 24:14; Rev. 5:9; 7:9, 14).
 3. The Millennium is Jesus' literal, 1,000-year reign on the earth with the saints (Rev. 20:1-6). We believe the Church is to impact society with the kingdom, but we do not embrace the postmillennial view that society will be fully Christianized before Jesus returns.
 4. The Antichrist is a real man who will be the most powerful demonic leader in history.
 5. A post-tribulation rapture at the end of the Great Tribulation, which lasts 3½ years
 6. A futurist view of most of the prophecies found in the books of Revelation and Daniel.
 7. Global temporal judgments preceding the return of the Lord
 8. The abomination of desolation is the primary sign that Jesus gave for recognizing the beginning of the Great Tribulation. It includes the image and mark of the beast (Rev. 13).
 9. A falling away from the faith (Mt. 24:9-13; 2 Thes. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; 4:3-5; 2 Pet. 2:1-3)
 10. Eternal rewards and reigning on the earth with Jesus (Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4-6; 22:5)
- G. Jesus as Bridegroom, King, and Judge: Jesus is a Bridegroom with desire, a King with power, and a Judge who is zealous to remove all that hinders love.
- H. The salvation of Israel, the battle for Jerusalem, and supporting the messianic remnant now; the persecution of Israel and widespread anti-Semitism, even including prison camps
- I. The eternal, conscious torment of the damned in the lake of fire (Rev. 14:10-11)
- J. In light of our core convictions, we are committed to raising up forerunners who prepare themselves and others spiritually by understanding the unique dynamics seen in the 150 chapters of the Bible whose primary theme is the end times.* Forerunners proclaim Jesus as Bridegroom, King, and Judge and declare what the Scriptures say about the unique dynamics of His end-time plan. They are to equip people so that they are not *offended* by Jesus' leadership, *deceived* by the enemy, *seduced* by the culture, or *fearful of* and *confused* by what will occur in the end times.

IV. HELPFUL BUT NOT ESSENTIAL

These themes are helpful for those seeking to understand the broader storyline in the Scripture related to the end times. Understanding these themes helps us to grasp many end-time passages that are commonly neglected based on their being difficult to comprehend outside the context of the broader biblical storyline. These are not core convictions that we require our teachers, staff, or students to embrace.

- A. Seeing the structure of the book of Revelation as *sequential* (instead of recapitulation) and the three numbered-judgments series (the seals, trumpets, and bowls) as *literal* (instead of symbolic)
- B. The 2-fold definition of the Day of the Lord—the narrow day (24 hours) and the broad day
- C. Identification of the Harlot Babylon
- D. The descent of the New Jerusalem in *proximity* to the earth at the beginning of the Millennium, and *resting on* the earth at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10) with regard to the heavenly and earthly realms being joined together at the time of Jesus' return (Eph. 1:10)
- E. Signs of the times: identifying *what* they are and *how* they are fulfilled in today's society
- F. Daniel's 30 days (Rev. 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5; cf. Dan. 7:25; 12:7, 11)
- G. Jesus marching up from Edom to Jerusalem (Isa. 63), and His royal procession being seen by "every eye" in every part of the earth (Mt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7; cf. Zech. 9:14; 12:10; Mt. 26:64)

V. OPINIONS THAT ARE NOT CENTRAL

Opinions based on implications drawn from Scripture—these are not central to our core convictions.

- A. My personal *opinion* (not prophecy) that we *may* be in the early days of the generation that the Lord returns is not a conviction held by all in our leadership team. I share this opinion because of my sense of urgency as to the importance of people studying the 150 key end-time chapters.*
- B. The identification and timing of the 144,000 people sealed during the Tribulation
- C. The hastening of the Day of the Lord involves a combination of significant issues, such as the sovereign timing of the Father and the maturity of the Church worldwide (2 Pet. 3:11-14). The end-time global prayer movement is an important part of this, but it is not the only vital issue.
- D. The Church is not to pray for Jesus' return until after the abomination of desolation occurs. We pray, "Come, Lord Jesus!"—come *near us* (in intimacy), *to us* (in revival and justice), and *for us* (at the second coming). The *whole Body of Christ* will be involved in "singing back" the King.

VI. QUESTIONS FOR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION (e.g., *FCF FRIENDSHIP GROUPS*)

1. Identify one point that inspired or challenged you. Why? What will you do differently to apply it?
2. Identify one point that you want to impart to a younger believer. Why? How will you approach this?
3. Identify one point that you would like to gain more understanding of. How will you seek to gain it?