

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Rev. William Macleod

STUDY GUIDE

Module 7:
**ESCHATOLOGY—
THE DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS**

Lecture 2:
THE DOCTRINE OF DEATH



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module 7

Eschatology—the Doctrine of Last Things

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Module 7:

Eschatology—The Doctrine of Last Things

Lecture 2:

The Doctrine of Death

Introduction

Death is a huge reality that faces everyone of us. All around us, we see people dying—grandparents, parents, siblings, sometimes even our own children. Scripture says, “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”—Hebrews 9:27. Nothing seems more natural than death. Benjamin Franklin wrote, in a letter to Jean-Baptiste LeRoy, in 1789, with regard to the American Constitution, “Our new constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency, but in this world, nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes.” It may indeed be possible to avoid taxes, but there’s no escape from death. Every living creature around us is dying. Everyone of us, from the moment we are born, are terminally ill and slowly dying.

Theme: *The Doctrine of Death*

I. The Origin of Death

1. There was no death at the creation of the world.
 - a. God covenanted with Adam, promising life for perfect obedience, and threatening death for disobedience.
2. Death entered the world when Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God.
 - a. Natural death—began to work in their bodies, they would eventually die.
 - b. Spiritual death—they felt guilt and shame, under God’s wrath and curse.
 - c. Eternal death—separation from the blessings of life with God.
3. Imputation
 - a. Adam is covenant head of all mankind, so all mankind fell in Adam.
 - b. Christ is the head of the covenant of grace. We are saved by faith in Christ.
4. The long lives of the patriarchs.

- a. After the flood of Noah, God said man's days will be 120 years (Genesis 6:3).
 - b. Psalm 90:10 says our days are 70 or 80, if some are stronger.
5. The whole of creation is under God's curse and suffers pain and death.
- a. Death and sickness and suffering is universal.

Questions:

1. What does the Bible teach us about the original of death?

2. What are the three types of death? can we apply this in our life?

3. What is imputed to those who are yet under the headship of Adam? What is imputed to those who come to faith in Jesus Christ?

4. What implications are there for us when we read about the long lives of the patriarchs in the Old Testament?

5. How do we know that all of creation is affected by sin? What does it mean that death is universal? What does the groaning world look forward to?

II. The Death of Christians

1. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross—"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).
 - a. He did not die in weakness like you and I. He died in strength.
 - b. Death had no claim on him, because he was without sin.
 - c. He willingly offered himself as a sin offering for us.
2. When the time comes for us to die, we have no choice.
 - a. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7).
3. Death for the Christian.
 - a. A doorway to glory.
 - b. An exciting new beginning.
 - c. Often called "falling asleep"—nothing more peaceful.
 - d. No more enemies
 - e. The soul goes to heaven, the body rests in the grave till the resurrection.
 - 1) The Christian's body is still united to Christ in the grave.
4. Death for the unbeliever.
 - a. A sentence of condemnation.
 - b. Cast down to destruction, desolation, consumed with terrors (Psalm 73:18–19).

Questions

1. What is the ultimate difference between the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, and the death of every other human being?

2. What does death mean to the Christian? What does it mean to the unbeliever? How do we know that unbelievers will be brought to destruction and desolation?

3. What did God promise man in Genesis 3:15? How did God cover their nakedness in verse 21?

4. How does God's covenant with Noah dispel modern fears about climate change?

5. How does God's covenant with Abraham give to the church an optimistic Eschatology?

III. Some False Teachings About Death

Error 1. *"Soul sleep" says that at death, the soul goes into some kind of suspended state.*

- a. Taught by a small sect in Arabia in early church.
- b. Taught by some Anabaptists during the Reformation.
- c. Held to by the Irvinites in early 20th century.
- e. Jehovah Witnesses teach this today.

Refutation:

- a. This would require two final judgment days.
 - 1) The judgment day is not to settle a person's final state, but for vindicating God's justice, displaying the wicked and the good, and for openly acquitting God's people.
- b. But the Bible tells us that at death, the Christian's soul goes right to heaven.
- c. Scriptures teach there is a consciousness of the soul after death (Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:21–24); 2 Timothy 4:6–8).

Error 2. *Purgatory—A Roman Catholic doctrine that there are three states after death.*

- a. The unbaptized wicked souls go to hell.
- b. A small number of saints who have earned God's favor go right to heaven.
- c. Most Christians go to purgatory for purification before going to heaven.

d. The Roman Catholic church has the power to reduce one's time in purgatory.

Refutation:

a. Scripture teaches that when death comes, the soul enters its final state (Ecclesiastes 11:3).

b. Purgatory denies the sufficiency of the work of Christ to fully atone for all our sins (Romans 8:1).

c. Our sufferings can never atone for our sins (Isaiah 53:5).

d. Christ purged our sins before he ascended up to heaven (Hebrews 1:3)

e. There are only two places in the next world: heaven and hell, per the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31).

Questions:

1. What is the teaching called “soul sleep”? Why is it false?

2. Are there two judgment days? What is the purpose of the final judgment day?

3. Why must the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory be wholly rejected? How is it an attack on the work of Jesus Christ?

4. What do we learn from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus about the states which exist beyond death? What states does the Bible tell us there are after death? How does this debunk the doctrine of purgatory?

IV. The Intermediate State

1. At death, the body and the soul are separated, as the result of sin.
 - a. The lifeless body is buried in the earth.
 - b. At death, the souls of believers immediately go to be with the Lord in heaven.
 - c. The Christian's resurrected body is their "eternal house" (2 Corinthians chapter 5).
 - 1) All effects of sin are removed from the Christian's resurrected body.
 - d. The body and soul are reunited.

Questions:

1. What is the intermediate state? What does 2 Corinthians chapter 5 teach us about the intermediate state of the Christian?

2. What will happen to the souls of Christians in heaven at the moment of the resurrection?

3. What is the Christian's "eternal house"?

V. Self-Reflection

1. Read and meditate on 2 Corinthians chapter 5, then consider how the believer in Christ should be preparing for death. How do these things which happen after death affect the way we live in this life? Some of us may be afraid of death in different ways. What encouragements have you gleaned in this lecture which might prepare you to face that moment?
