

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

## Video Lecture Series

by Rev. William Macleod

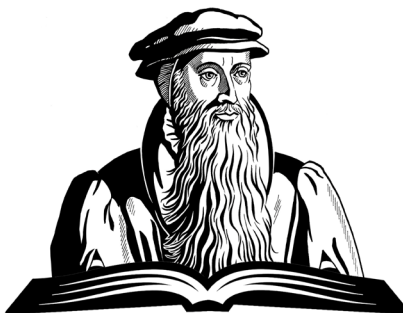
*Module 7:*

**ESCHATOLOGY—**

**THE DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS**

*Lecture 7*

**THE SECOND COMING AND  
THE RESURRECTION**



**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

**John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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### *Module 7 ~ The Doctrine of Last Things*

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## *Module 7 ~ Lecture 7*

# The Second Coming and the Resurrection

Today we come to our seventh lecture in Eschatology, and our subject is The Second Coming and the Resurrection. We have in past lectures looked at some of the events which must precede the second coming of Christ. For example, we believe that the Jews, as a people, must first be converted to Jesus as the Messiah. This, in turn, will lead to worldwide blessing upon the church. Others argue that Christ could come anytime. We must be careful not to be too dogmatic. Prophecy is notoriously difficult to interpret. When Christ came the first time, most people were wrong in their expectation.

When will Christ return? No one knows. Those who have tried to predict it have been proved wrong time and again. Even Jesus, when on earth, did not know when he would return. Obviously, as God, he knows everything, but as a man, he is limited, so he said, “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only”—Matthew 24, verse 36. In these words, he demonstrates the reality of his manhood. The second coming will be sudden and unexpected by most, so Jesus warned, “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh”—Matthew 24, verse 44. There will certainly be dark days just before the end, because Jesus said, “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.” These words are from Matthew 24, verses 9 to 12. Our Lord implies there that there will be a great decline in Christianity. He said, “Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”—Luke 18:8. Will there be any faithful disciples left?

Following the blessing of the millennium, we are told, in Revelation 20: “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever”—Revelation 20, verses 7 to 10. This speaks of a final apostasy, and of great persecution just before Christ returns. After the blessing of the millennium, there will be falling away. Satan will gather nominal Christians and unbelievers, and make a final attempt to destroy the true church. The camp of the saints is surrounded, and the church is threatened with extermination. But then the Lord will act, and fire will come from heaven and destroy Satan’s forces. There will be final

judgment, and Satan himself will be cast into the lake of fire to be tormented forever.

This loosing of Satan just before the end is interesting. It creates a problem for those who follow the amillennial interpretation. Common belief today among Reformed Christians is that the thousand years begins at Calvary. There, Christ, by his great redemptive act on the cross, wrestled with Satan and crushed his head, and in the process, his heel was crushed. Jesus explained that “the strong man” had to be bound before his goods could be spoiled or robbed. In a very real sense, Jesus did bind Satan, the strong man, so that his goods could be plundered—Mark 3:27. If that is what is meant by the binding of the dragon in Revelation 20, what then is this “loosing”? This is the weak point of the amillennial argument. Surely, the work of the cross cannot be undone. The great redemptive act of Calvary was a once-for-all-time defeat of Satan. His head was crushed, and it cannot be healed. So most of the Puritans and older Divines, we understand the millennium as a period of blessing during the New Testament age, and it is followed by a time of falling away.

It takes us then to the glorious appearing. Christ’s return will be clear and obvious to all. None will doubt what is happening: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”—1 Thessalonians 4:16–17. There will be a great shout, which will be heard all over the world, and indeed the universe, and that voice will raise the dead. The trumpet of God will sound, and what a trumpet blast it will be! The second coming of Christ will not be announced on radio, or television, or the social media—there will be no time for that. Jesus explains: “Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be”—Matthew 24:26–27. It will be sudden, largely unexpected, and witnessed by all who are alive.

When Christ returns, he will bring with him the souls of his people who have been enjoying paradise with him: “Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him”—1 Thessalonians 4, verse 14. These returning souls will immediately enter into the bodies which they left at death. Their bodies will be reconstituted by the miraculous creative power of God, and arise, and the soul returns into them. The Thessalonians thought that those saints who had died would miss out on the return and the appearing of Christ in his glory. But no, Paul assures them and us that, before anything else happens, the dead in Christ shall rise first—verse 16. So, before the transformation of the living, the graves will be opened and the dead arise. Then those still alive will be changed, and along with those who are risen, they will meet Christ in the air, and forever be with the Lord.

The portion of Scripture which particularly deals with the resurrection is 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. This chapter begins with Paul describing the gospel which he preached, and which the Corinthians had received, and by which they were saved. Central to that gospel is the vital truth of the resurrection of Christ, which was witnessed by many different people. But there were teachers in Corinth who were saying that there will be no resurrection. The whole idea of the resurrection of the body was ridiculed by the Greek philosophers. When Paul mentioned the resurrection on Mars Hill, in Athens, they brought an end to his sermon: “Some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter”—Acts 17:32. Paul here is writing to the Corinthians, and he argues that if there is no resurrection, then Christ is not risen, and if Christ be not risen, Paul’s preaching was false, because the resurrection was central to his preaching. He said to the Romans that the Lord Jesus Christ was, “delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.” But more than that, Paul was telling the Corinthians that their faith was useless: “Your faith is also vain,”

if there's no resurrection—1 Corinthians 15:14. It implies that Paul himself was a false witness. Further, it implies that the Corinthians are still in their sins, and those that have died believing in Jesus have perished—1 Corinthians 15, verse 18. Without the resurrection of our Savior, our Savior is dead, and a dead Savior cannot save us; he could not even save himself. Paul proceeds with his powerful reasoning: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”—verse 19. When the Apostle reflects on all he has suffered to communicate the gospel—the beatings, whippings, imprisonments, shipwrecks, hunger, thirst, cold, heat, weariness—what was the point of it all? All his many labors were for a lie. Surely the Corinthians will not believe that, and neither will we. So Paul proceeds to assert that Christ is actually risen, and he is the firstfruits of those who died as believers, and in that sense, fell asleep. Since Jesus, the firstfruits, has risen, those who sleep in Jesus will rise too. By man came death, that is, through Adam and his first sin. So also by man, that is, Christ comes the resurrection. Christ rose first, and so those who are in Christ will arise also.

Then comes the end, when Christ delivers up his kingdom of power to the Father—verse 24. This is the kingdom he was given when he ascended after his resurrection. He was made head over all things for the benefit of his church—Ephesians 1:22. He said to his disciples, in anticipation of his coronation: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth”—Matthew 28:18. “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet”—1 Corinthians 15:25. Then he hands over the kingdom of power to his Father. There are no more enemies to be fought and overcome. His success is complete, but he still, of course, remains King and Head of his people. We are told that “the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death”—1 Corinthians 15:26. Christ, in his personal resurrection, conquered death, and then at the end of the world, he will conquer death in raising his people from the dead. Christ, having conquered all and risen victorious over death himself, he also conquers death for his people, and merited their resurrection, so that they too cannot remain under the power of death. Paul challenges the Corinthians by reminding them what he suffered to bring the gospel to them. Why would he put himself in constant danger of hardship and persecution? What was the point of him fighting with beasts at Ephesus, “if the dead rise not?” It would seem more sensible to change one's philosophy, and to live for the pleasures of the moment, “let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die”—verse 32. But then he warns: “Be not deceived,” evil companions will lead astray. Beware of learning from those around you, rather than from the Lord.

What is the resurrection body like? The body of the Christian which rises from the grave will be fit for eternity in heaven. In this life, our bodies are subject to aging, disease, death, and decay. But the resurrection body will be glorious, powerful, spiritual, and eternal, which will neither hunger nor thirst. It will not need sleep, as there's no night there. Christ was able to pass through closed doors with his resurrection body, and to move quickly from one place to another, and indeed was not constantly subject to gravity. It is possible that the resurrection saints will have a similar body. They are able to meet Christ in the air when he returns.

At the point of Christ's return, the dead Christians will rise first, then those saints who are alive will be transformed, and given similar resurrection bodies. “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory”—verses 51–54. At this point, death is forever conquered for the believer, and all the effects of the curse—the curse on Adam and the

human race—are removed.

The law says that sin must be punished by death, and the sinner returned to the ground out of which he was taken: “Dust thou art and unto the dust shalt thou return”—Genesis 3:19. But through the work of Christ, at the resurrection, God’s people will be able to say, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”—1 Corinthians 15:55–57. We see the godly died as the snake of death steals them, because we are all sinners. Without sin, there would be no death. But one day, the full effects of the atonement will be seen, as Christ removes the sting from the snake. We have witnessed the grave devouring all our Christian friends. It seems completely victorious, but one day, we will be able to look the grave on the face and say, Where is your victory now?

Do the wicked rise too? What happens to the ungodly when Christ returns? It will be a terrifying time for the wicked. Their false religion will be shown up for what it is. The atheists will be shown to be fools. God reveals himself in creation, and has left a witness to himself in every conscience, so it is the fool who says in his heart that there is no God—Psalm 14, verse 1. Oh, the fear that will be everywhere when the final trumpet sounds. “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”—Revelation 6:15–17.

Many who never prayed in their lifetime will now pray, but it’s too late. They know now for sure that they will receive according to their deeds, and that there is no escape. They are all sinners, and there’s no escape. Their consciences will condemn them, and every mouth shall be stopped. Some have argued that only the godly who are entitled to eternal life will arise from the dead. However, Scripture makes plain that the resurrection will be general. It is stated that good and bad will rise from the dead. Daniel’s prophecy reveals this: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”—Daniel 12, verse 2. “Many” here does not mean that some will not arise, but rather that the numbers who will arise are enormous and very many. Our Lord, when on earth, declared that there would be a general resurrection: “Marvel not at this,” Jesus said, “for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation”—John 5:28–29. The same truth is revealed in the Book of Revelation: “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works”—Revelation 20, verse 13.

The wicked will have bodies that cannot die, but yet are always dying. Immediately, the unconverted die, they go to hell in their souls, and so in their consciousness, and they begin to suffer there. At the end of the world, they will return in their souls to enter into their bodies. All the bodies of the ungodly will be resurrected, just like the godly. The new bodies they will be given will be suited for suffering in hell forever. Eternity in hell—what a thought! The resurrected ungodly shall feel pain in their new bodies as well as in their souls. At present, in hell they are suffering, but with their resurrection bodies, they will suffer even more. “And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever”—Revelation 14, verse 11.

Now thinking about the treatment of dead bodies. It’s important to remember that the bodies

of believers are precious and should be treated with great respect. In regeneration, we are united to Christ. We are all composed of a body and a soul, and as such, are united to Christ, both our body and our soul are united to Christ. So even the dead body of the believer is mysteriously united to the Lord. The Westminster Larger Catechism gives a wonderful answer to question #86: “What is the communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death?” And the answer to that question, question #86 is: “The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is, in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies, which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves as in their beds, till at the last day they be again united to their souls. Whereas the souls of the wicked are at their death cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, and their bodies kept in their graves, as in their prisons, till the resurrection and judgment of the great day.” These are great truths drawn from the Scriptures. The body of a believer is precious, being still united to Christ. It rests in the grave as on a bed. Therefore, the mutilation of bodies is wicked. It appears most Scriptural, like the saints of old, to bury a body rather than cremate him. The common modern practice of cremation arose from those who were atheists and thought that by burning a body, they could destroy it, so that there could be no resurrection or day of judgment for them. However, it does not matter what happens to the body after death. God will raise him, even if it is burned to ashes and scattered by the winds and waves to the four corners of the earth, God will cause it to arise. Even if it is sent into distant space, God the Almighty will gather it up and bring it back, resurrect the individual, and judge him. Suppose cannibals ate the body, and other cannibals ate those cannibals. God, the Almighty Creator, will assure that the individual is raised and that the body’s identity will continue. It is worth remembering that every few years, every cell in our body is changed, yet the identity remains. Christ left no part of his body behind in the grave—all was transformed into his resurrection body.

When we rise, our bodies will be perfect, and like that of Christ. Paul wrote to the Philippians: “For our conversation is in heaven”—or our citizenship is in heaven—“from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself”—Philippians 3:20–21. Our body today is a humble body—a body that belongs to our state of humiliation. But one day, we will have a glorified body. Further, our body will be transformed to be like that of Christ—God is able.

What about those who have deformed bodies in this world? Deformed bodies are the result of the fall, and in heaven, all the results of the fall and sin are going to be removed. Every body will be perfect. What about those who die as infants? They too will have a perfect, normal, grown human body. The same is true even of children lost by miscarriage or killed by abortion. Once the body is conceived in the womb, God creates a soul which unites with the fetus, and a separate human being is made. Elect infants who die in the womb will be part of the heavenly family of God around the throne, but they will be there as adults. For all we know, all such infants who die in the womb or as infants are elect, and so will be in heaven.

Jesus was asked by the Sadducees about marriage in heaven. They did not believe in the resurrection, and tried to catch out our Lord by asking about a woman who successively had had seven husbands, and then died childless. Who would be her husband in heaven? Jesus replied, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven”—Matthew 22:29–30. So there



will be no marriage in heaven, or special relationships of that kind. But will there be male and female? We see no reason why not. Sometimes it is asked, Will we know one another in heaven? If we know one another on earth, then why not in heaven? We will not be more ignorant there. Peter, James, and John seemed immediately able to recognize Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration. The disciples had some difficulty recognizing Jesus after his resurrection, but it seemed to be because they did not expect him to be risen. Also, we are told on at least one occasion that God withheld their vision: “But their eyes were holden that they should not know him”—Luke 24:16.

It’s not simply men and women who will experience transformation when Christ returns. The universe will be, as it were, born again. Paul describes the whole creation as under the curse of God and longing for the regeneration, which will involve the formation of the new heavens and earth: “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”—that’s Romans 8, verses 19 to 23. The creation, as it came from the hand of God in the beginning, was very good, and is so described even by God himself. However, when man sinned, even the inanimate creation was affected. “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”—Genesis 3, verses 17–19. Thorns and thistles, weeds and nettles were produced. Also death and disease affected all life. Further, even the physical world was affected with storms, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, volcanoes. These things show the creation writhing in agony, waiting for the day of deliverance, when Christ will come again and restore the creation. The whole creation is waiting for the revelation of the children of God.

Peter speaks about the change which will take place in the world. He answers the mockers who object and say, Why has Christ not yet returned? They say, The years are passing, and Christ has not come. But Peter responds, noting that it was like that in the days of Noah. Then there were scoffers too. God gave to the ancient world one hundred and twenty years in which to repent. “But beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”—2 Peter 3, verses 8–9. The Lord, in his kindness, gives people plenty of time to repent and prepare for his return. But then, one day suddenly he will come. And Peter describes what it will be like: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation with godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”—2 Peter 3, verses 10–13.

The world will end with the coming of Christ. The heavens will be rolled up like a scroll and pass out of existence—Revelation 6:14. The earth will be consumed with fire, and out of the

conflagration will come the new heavens and the new earth. Then will be final judgment and the eternal state. Amen.