

Lesson 28 THE LAST THINGS

28.1 The Return of Christ

1. Signs **preceding** the Return

The Church confesses that at the last day the Lord Jesus will return to earth, “corporally and visibly”, coming back in the same way He ascended. The Church also has been told about the signs preceding His coming:

- a. a highly developed culture Genesis 6; Daniel 12:4; Matthew 24:38f
- b. false Christs, Matthew 24:4; Acts 20:28f; Revelation 13
- c. wars and rumours of wars, Matthew 24:1-12; Revelation 6
- d. widespread apostasy, 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1f; Matthew 24:12
- e. desolating sacrilege, Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15; Revelation 15
- f. completion of mission to all nations, Matthew 24:14
- g. appearance of antichrist Revelation 13; 2 Thessalonians 2
- h. global upheaval and tribulation, Matthew 24; Revelation 18
- i. persecution of true believers, Matthew 24:9f, 22; 2 Peter 2, 3; Revelation 6

2. Signs **at** the Return

Although there will be many antichrists, and many signs and wonders performed by them, the Church will endure through Christ’s power and promise, Revelation 13:10. The Church is to be constantly watchful and vigilant, Matthew 24:36f. The Lord will return as a thief in the night, at an hour no man expects Him (verse 44). Yet He will

be known in His coming. It will be accompanied by the following signs:

- a. He will come upon the clouds, Matthew 24:30
- b. He will come with the trumpet sound, Matthew 24:30; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15:51f
- c. Angels accompany Him with glory and strength, 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 18
- d. Cosmic upheaval will ensue, 2 Peter 3:12; Revelation 6:12f
- e. The Church will escape the great tribulation, and meet the Lord in the air, Revelation 7:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:17
- f. The voice of prophesy will have been silenced, Revelation 11:8f

28.2 The Judgment of all Men

1. The **resurrection** of all men

When Christ returns in glory He will come as a Judge, Hebrews 9:28. Prior to the final judgment, all men will rise from the dead, and stand before Him. They will be called to give account to the Lord concerning what they have done in the body, 2 Corinthians 5:10. However, the resurrection of the just will differ from the resurrection of the unjust.

- a. the resurrection of the **just**, Revelation 20:1-6:

The believers will rise with a new and glorified body, incorruptible, immortal, powerful, spiritual, 1 Corinthians 15:42f; 1 John 3:2; Job 19:25-27. We will be transformed in such a way that we can see the Lord, 2 Corinthians 3:18, and share His glory, 2 Peter 1:4.

- b. the resurrection of the **unjust**, Revelation 20:11-14:

The unbelievers will rise in the flesh, but their resurrection is one of shame and dishonour, Isaiah 66:24; Daniel 12:2. They will have full knowledge and awareness of their lot, Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 31, but will live in constant pain, affliction, shame and alienation, Mark 9:43f.

2. The Final **Judgment**

- a. the **standard** of judgment

The final standard of judgment is the Judge Himself, specifically whether men have believed in Him and His work. This judgment will be fair and just, since the Lord Jesus executes judgment as a Man, that is, as one of us, an equal, Acts 17:31; 2 Timothy 4:1.

- b. the **testimony** in the judgment:

All men will be called to give account to their works, and what they have done in the body. This does not imply judgment by meritorious works, but judgment according to the fruit of faith, or the fruit of unbelief. Here there is no neutrality.

28.3 The Final State

1. For **Believers**

After the judgment, the old world will be destroyed, and give way to a new heaven and a new earth. This involves the complete renewal and purification of God's creation, so that all semblance of evil both in heaven and on earth will be removed, Revelation 22:22;

2 Peter 3:13. The glory of the new age is beyond understanding or description, 1 Corinthians 2:9; we do know that there will be degrees of glory and exaltation, and that all believers, the whole Church, will worship and praise God in His sight forever, 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Revelation 7, 15, 19.

2. For **Unbelievers**

In Scripture **hell** is described most often as the place of eternal fire, or eternal wrath. It does not belong to the created world, but came into existence with the fall into sin. All unbelievers live forever, but their existence is one of continual punishment. In this punishment God is glorified, and the elect are vindicated, Revelation 6:9, 18, 19. Those who “again crucify to themselves the Son of God,” Hebrews 6:6 (NASB), commit a most grievous sin, punishable by eternal death.

There are also grades of punishment in hell, Luke 12:47, 48, so that each receives the just reward for what he has done. Hell like hades today, is a place of anguish and torment, Luke 16: 23, 24, a place of sorrow and everlasting shame.

28.4 **False Doctrines on the Last Things**

1. Dispensationalism

Dispensationalists break up the moments of the last days, and take the one thousand years of Revelation 20 in a literal sense. Christ’s first return is solely for believers, who meet Him in the air. This is called the **rapture**. This is followed by the great tribulation, lasting three and one-half years. Then the millennium dawns, a period

of 1000 years, after which Christ will come a second time, and bring the final age.

2. Millennialism

a. Pre-millennialism

Although the premillennialist view is a part of Dispensationalist theology, many Bible believing groups in America who are not Dispensationalist are nonetheless premillennialist. Central to this belief is a literal reign of one thousand years in the city of Jerusalem by the Lord Jesus. Many Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel are applied erroneously to the state of Israel today.

b. Post-millennialism

This relatively less common doctrine holds that the one thousand year reign will take place before Christ returns, so that He returns after (*post*) its completion. The one thousand year period will be marked by a gradual return to the gospel, and gradual growth and flourishing of Christianity.

We reject all of these views because of their literal interpretation of Revelation 20:6, 7. The period of one thousand years referred to there is to be interpreted in a metaphorical way. It concerns the time from Christ's ascension to His final return in glory.

Exercises Lesson 28

I. Reference Passages

Study and Review: Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 19, 22, 52.
Belgic Confession, Article 37.
Canons of Dort, Chapter V. 2, 13, 15.

II. Review Questions

1. Which of the signs preceding Christ's return are already prevalent today?
2. In what way does the actual judgment take effect in this life?
3. Who is the antichrist, and what is his role?
4. When did Satan loose all his power? How is his power limited today?
5. How does Christ exercise His kingship over all the world?
6. What is Christ's final standard of judgment?

III. Extra Questions

1. May we speak of certain "levels" or grades in heaven?
2. What role will the angels have in heaven?
3. Explain the premillennialist doctrine. Where does it err?

4. When did **hell** come into existence? How?