

Eschatology

Introduction

Eschatology means the theology (study of) last things. That study can cover all things that were future at the time of their writing, or it can include only those things that are still future from our present vantage point. It deals with the consummation of all things, both those things that relate to individuals and to the world.

Our study for the next 14 weeks will be from the vantage point of things that are still future for us.

God must have wanted Christians to study Bible Prophecy because He put so much of it in His divine revelations to mankind, which we call the Bible. Fully, 28 percent of the Bible was prophetic in nature at the time that it was written. Dr. John Walvoord, dean of prophecy at Dallas Theological Seminary, teaches that half of the 1000 Bible prophecies documented in the last century have already been fulfilled. This assures us that the rest of Bible prophecy, which has so much to do with our own future, will also be fulfilled.

In Paul's second letter to Timothy, Paul exhorted Timothy to "Be diligent to present himself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." (2:15)

Therefore, before we can begin a study of the last things of history, we must first go over the different methods of interpretation and some basic rules of interpreting prophecy correctly and biblically to indeed handle the word of God accurately.

Allegorical Method

Theologian Bernard Ramm defines the allegorical method this way:

“Allegorism is the method of interpreting a literary text that regards the literary sense of the vehicle for a secondary, more spiritual and more profound meaning.”

In this method the historical-grammatical import is either denied or ignored and the emphasis is placed entirely on a secondary sense so that the original words or events have little or no significance. It substitutes the real meaning for a deeper, more spiritual one.

A few dangers to consider when using the allegorical method:

1. It does not interpret scripture.
2. The basic authority in interpretation ceases to be in the scriptures, but in the mind of the interpreter.
3. It does not allow for the interpreters conclusions to be tested.

The allegory method of interpreting scripture takes away the authority of scripture, leaving us without any basis on which interpretations can be tested. Thus, reducing scripture to what “seems reasonable” to the interpreter.

Literal Method

The literal method of interpretation is that method that gives to each word the same exact meaning it would have in normal, ordinary, customary usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking.

The advantages of interpreting using the literal method are:

1. It grounds interpretation in fact.
2. It exercises a control over interpretation that experimentation does for the scientific method.... justification is the control of interpretation.
3. It has the greatest success in opening up the word of God.
4. It gives a basic authority by which interpretation can be tested.

The use of Figurative Language

It is generally recognized that figurative language is used both to embellish a language by way of adornment and to convey abstract ideas by way of transfer.

A rule to guide us as to when to interpret literally and when figuratively has been carefully stated by David L. Cooper

“When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages, self evident and fundamental truths, indicate otherwise.”

It's important to remember that the purpose of figurative language is to impart some literal truth, which may more clearly be conveyed by the use of figures than any other way. The literal *meaning* is of greater importance than the literal *words*.

Rules to keep in mind when interpreting prophecy

1. Interpret literally
2. Interpret according to the harmony of prophecy (2 Peter 1:20,21).
3. Observe the perspective of prophecy.
4. Observe the time relationships.
5. Interpret Christologically (1 Pet 1:10,11; Rev 19:10).
6. Interpret historically.
7. Interpret grammatically.
8. Interpret according to the Law of Double Reference.
9. Interpret consistently.