

Heaven on Earth?



by Dr. Andy Woods

2 Timothy 2:18

Well good morning everybody. I hope you all are enjoying this global warming, as I am. If we could take our Bibles and open them to 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 18. Ed Jones did a wonderful job reading the verse for next week, which is okay, a seed is planted. But we're not quite ready to leave verse 18 and I'll show why as we get into this. The title of our message this morning is **Heaven on Earth?** And as has been announced I would invite you to join us on Wednesdays as we're teaching the doctrine of salvation, so you can come early at 6:00 and be fed physically and then come to the Bible study and be fed spiritually, a pretty good deal there.

At first I was tempted to leave verse 18 because there's a little clause in there that we didn't cover last time, but the reason I'm not quite ready to leave verse 18, as you'll see, is Paul, in verse 18 in the clause of it that we didn't cover last week, I believe describes a false doctrine that was destined to come and have tremendous influence in the church for at least the last 2,000 years. And this false doctrine continues to have tremendous influence in the church, even today.

So as we look at this verse together what I want to do today is something a little bit different, you probably won't hear some of the things that I'm going to talk about today from your average pulpit. But we're going to be describing an error that Paul, I think, articulates. And then following that we're going to be dealing with a little bit of history. In other words, we're going to be talking about how this error has sort of historically come into existence. I'll talk a little bit about how this error continues even today in full form and then at the end I'm going to tell you why it matters. Theology matters; ideas have consequences. And it really does matter what you think about some of these subjects that on the surface seem a little bit academic.

So this whole discussion that Paul gets into here in verse 18 comes up in his treatment of the workman. You'll recall that the workman is one of the metaphors that Paul uses to communicate endurance. He tells Timothy what to focus on, particularly in verse 15, the Scripture, and what not to focus on, which is idle speculation. And he kind of gets into the subject that if you get involved in idle speculation the conversation is going to go from bad to worse. And in that 'worse' stage of the conversation, as you get into wrangling about words and arguing about things that the Bible doesn't speak of, what can ultimately develop is a full-fledged heresy.

Now last week we saw Paul pointing out who these heretics were in his day, a couple of individuals named Philetus and Hymenaeus. Now notice what he says there in verse 18 as he actually moves away from their names and he begins to describe, if you will, the actual heresy that these men, all the way back in Paul's day, had already introduced.

Notice verse 18, 'men who have gone astray from the truth,' and here's the main clause we're going to be looking at today, 'saying

that the resurrection has already taken place, and they have upset? or unsettled ?the faith of some.? Paul says these two heretics, that I pointed out by name, are saying or teaching a doctrine and their doctrine is false and Paul not only gives us their names and we talked about the legitimacy of calling out the names of heretics last week, but now he gets into the theology, they are actually saying or teaching that the resurrection has already taken place. Now diagnosing this heresy won't make a lot of sense to you unless we first understand what the correct view is, of the resurrection. So let's talk, just for a minute about the correct view of a future resurrection and then we'll compare it with a wrong view that these two individuals were teaching, and as I'll argue today that error is still being promulgated massively today in the church of Jesus Christ.

When we get into the whole subject of resurrection, first of all, what is a resurrection? We know that Christ rose from the dead and that's all wonderful but even more wonderful than that is His resurrection guarantees our resurrection. Because He rose we will rise. Now what exactly is a resurrection? A resurrection is the time in history when you, as a child of God, are going to be put in a glorified body, a body that doesn't get tired, doesn't need sleep, doesn't get sick, doesn't get old, doesn't get cancer, doesn't get high blood pressure, or cardiovascular problems.

The bodies that we are currently in are in a state of decay. Now it doesn't take a lot to prove this other than pulling out your high school yearbook and comparing it to a modern day picture of yourself. You see dramatic changes in the body. This was part of the curse, where God articulated back in Genesis 3:19 that we would go? we came from the dust and we would go back to the dust. ??For you are dust, and to dust you shall return,? as a consequence of sin. So since that is true there is a coming time in history where I will be changed, or transformed, or put into a resurrected body and that resurrected body is coming yet future.

Now probably the clearest Old Testament passage on resurrection is Daniel 12:2, and this is what it says: ?Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.? Daniel predicts that in the end times there's going to be two great resurrections. There will be a resurrection unto life for the believer and also a resurrection unto damnation for the unbeliever. And so that's a scary thing to think about if you're in the unbelieving category. The resurrection unto life, we will experience eternal bliss and eternity with God in resurrected bodies, but for the unsaved, they will experience eternal torment in resurrected bodies.

Now you might just want to jump over, hold your place in 2 Timothy and take a look at 1 Corinthians 15:20 just for a minute, Paul's resurrection chapter. And notice, if you will, 1 Corinthians 15:20, Paul says, ?But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.? Go down to verse 23, ?But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming.?

When you really study the imagery that Paul uses, and remember Paul was especially set aside by God to explain the mystery of this unique period of time that we're living in now called the age of the church; anything related to the age of the church it was Paul's task to primarily explain and unfold, including the future resurrection program of the church.

And you'll notice that when Paul focuses on one of the resurrections, the resurrection unto life, the first resurrection that Daniel spoke of, he says that resurrection is going to happen in three phases. He uses this imagery of first fruits and we know that the Jews collected their harvest in three cycles. First fruits came in and that was always a happy time because the initial crop came in and that guaranteed the rest of the crop. And then what followed was the general harvest, but when you study the book of Leviticus, chapter 19:9-10 you'll learn that the Jews were specifically told to not harvest everything but to leave some for the poor so the poor could come and harvest as well, and that's called the gleanings. You might even remember that in the book of Ruth, Ruth met Boaz at that third harvest, the gleanings.

[Leviticus 19:9-10, ?Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. [10] Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God.?)

So just as the harvest cycle had three parts to it, the resurrection unto life has three parts to it. Number 1, Christ's resurrection, which has already happened. Number 2, the general harvest, which is the rapture of the church. The rapture of the church is the point in

time in which everyone who has trusted in Christ, in the age of the church, from the day of Pentecost to the rapture, will be placed in glorified bodies. The dead in Christ, deceased church age saints that are currently in the presence of the Lord, will be resurrected first and we who are alive and on the earth at the time, I hope this does happen in our lifetime because that means we won't have to physically die, can't guarantee that, but we who are alive on the earth at the time will be caught up and transformed second, and there'll be this giant reunion in the sky between the two camps. Paul says comfort one another with these words. You're going to see your deceased loved ones again at the point of the rapture.

But notice there's a third phase called the gleanings; the gleanings would be the resurrection of all Old Testament saints, in other words, those that were believers before the church age started, like Job, Noah, Abraham, Daniel, etc. And then all of those that will be converted during the tribulation period after the church has been removed, they are all non-church age saints. But when you look at Revelation 20:4-5, which we'll be looking at in a few moments, we learn that those folks will be resurrected at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom.

And then a thousand years will pass, called the earthly reign of Christ, the Millennial Kingdom and then another resurrection will occur, the resurrection unto damnation for the unbeliever. Unbelievers of all ages will be resurrected, they will be placed in glorified bodies, you can study this in Revelation 20:11-15, and as their names are not found written in the Lamb's book of life they will be transferred into the lake of fire in resurrected bodies.

[Revelation 20:11, ?Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. [12] And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. [13] And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. [14] Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. [15] And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.?)]

Paul also uses this example in 1 Corinthians 15:23, he says, ?But each in his own order,? the word ?order? there in Greek is the word *tagma*, and many commentators believe that Paul is analogizing the resurrection program to a Roman parade. He's used first fruits, an example the Jews can understand, and then he uses *tagma*, a Roman parade, an example that the Gentiles can understand. And it's very well documented that when the Romans won a great victory or conquered a city or a nation they had a victory parade that followed, the conquering general was out front in the parade, followed by the lead officer, followed by the soldiers who were victorious in battle, followed by the captives, those that were defeated in battle, typically in chains or cages or things of that nature.

So Paul says just as a Roman parade goes by in phases so the resurrection will go by in phases. First Christ was resurrected, He's the general out front. Then the lead officer, that's the resurrection of the church at the rapture. Then the soldiers, that would be the resurrection of the non-church age saints that we talked about just a little earlier, at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom. Then a thousand years pass and then comes the captives, the resurrection of all unsaved people, to stand before the Lord at the Great White Throne Judgment.

If you like charts, we can put this on a chart. You see the Old Testament, the death of Christ and then that parenthesis is the age of time that we're living in now called the church age, which will conclude with the rapture. And then will come the tribulation period and the return of Christ and the inauguration of His long awaited Kingdom. Once that happens, toward the beginning, perhaps even before the Kingdom starts non church age saints are resurrected. And then a thousand years will pass and then you'll have a resurrection of all unsaved of all ages to stand before the Lord at the Great White Throne Judgment.

What is my point in rehearsing this? Paul clearly taught that the resurrection, not just for the church but for non-church age saints was yet future. And yet what are Hymenaeus and Philetus communicating in their heresy? They are teaching that the resurrection has already happened. You're in your resurrected state already. As I'll be showing you in a minute, they are actually arguing that we are now in the thousand year kingdom. If this is the thousand year kingdom (as I like to say) I must be living in the ghetto section of town because I don't see kingdom conditions, as I'll show you in a minute because the Scripture is very clear when it talks about this

issue of the kingdom.

So Paul's view of a future resurrection was something that was dominant in the church for 200 years. The church for the first two centuries believed largely the way I'm describing it. Now here's Justin Martyr, a very early church father, he says: "But I and every other completely orthodox Christian feel certain that there will be a resurrection of the flesh, followed by a thousand years in the rebuilt, embellished, and enlarged city of Jerusalem as was announced by the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the others." [Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 80.]

Justin Martyr, a very early church father, said the resurrection is future, just like Paul taught; the kingdom is future. And he even said if you don't think this way you're not even an orthodox Christian. Now I find that very interesting because the line that we're being fed constantly today is eschatology doesn't matter, it really doesn't matter what you think about the rapture and the kingdom and the future resurrection; we need to focus on orthodox core Christianity. And may I just say to you that that's not the way the church thought in the first two centuries. They thought that if you denied these simple truths you were outside the pail of orthodox truth.

Philip Schaff, a very well-known church historian says this about the first two centuries of the church. He says: "The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age? that would basically be the first couple of centuries of church history, [A.D. 100?325] is the prominent chiliasm,? now chilia means thousand in Greek, so if you were a chiliast they didn't call you a premillennialist back in that day, they called you a chiliast, which actually is a compliment because chilia means a thousand; if you were a chiliast you believed in a future thousand year kingdom of Christ. ??that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. It was indeed not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr,? who I just quoted from, ?Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and? others. [Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vol. 2 , p. 614.]

What developed in the first two centuries of the church was the School of Antioch. Antioch is on the northern tip of the nation of Israel and a school of Christian thought, a seminary, if you will, using modern day vernacular, developed there, and that school stood strong on the doctrine of the millennial reign of Christ yet future and the resurrection yet future. In fact, if you were connected to that school in any sense, and many of the early church fathers were, you came out of there believing very strongly in a future resurrection, future kingdom, future thousand year reign of Christ. And they stood on that premise because of the concept of literal interpretation.

What is literal interpretation. David Cooper summarizes literal interpretation this way: "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise." [David L. Cooper, The World's Greatest Library Graphically Illustrated (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1970), 11.]

In other words, you take the Bible for what it says in its plain sense, unless there's an obvious symbol or figure of speech found in that passage. The school at Antioch held to this principle, later articulated by David Cooper, and consequently they believed in a future kingdom and a future resurrection.

Here's my statement: "When the plain sense makes good sense seek no other sense lest you wind up with nonsense." Whenever you have an opportunity to take the Bible at face value, including prophecy and eschatology, we would do so. And that's what gave rise to the school of Antioch. And as you do that what you begin to discover is God has unfinished business with the world and the nation of Israel through not only a tribulation period but a kingdom that follows.

People today toss around this word "kingdom" constantly but what you'll discover is the New Testament nowhere defines what the kingdom is. Therefore to fill that word "kingdom" with meaning you have to go into the Old Testament where the word "kingdom" is developed. When we talk about kingdom what are we talking about? We're talking about Jerusalem, and by the way, read this week Isaiah 2:1-4; Isaiah 11:6-9, we're talking about Jerusalem is the center of worldwide spiritual and political authority; we're

talking about perfect justice, world peace, peace in the animal kingdom, and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

Isaiah 2:1-4, ?The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. [2] Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. [3] 3And many peoples will come and say, ? let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths.? For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. [4] And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war.?

Isaiah 11:6-9, ?[6] And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. [7] Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. [8] The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. [9] They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.?

We're talking about something that's going to be established by God, where Jesus will actually be physically present in Jerusalem ruling and reigning on planet earth. All of God's promises to Israel at that time will be fulfilled; there will even be a brick and mortar temple, the world will be filled with righteousness, the curse will be rolled back to a very large extent, they will beat their swords into plowshares, there will be great prosperity on the whole globe. And there will also be tremendous changes in geography, such as Ezekiel 47 predicting the Dead Sea coming back to life.

[Ezekiel 47:8-12, ?Then he said to me, ?These waters go out toward the eastern region and go down into the Arabah; then they go toward the sea, being made to flow into the sea, and the waters [of the sea] become fresh. [9] It will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there and [the others] become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. [10] And it will come about that fishermen will stand beside it; from Engedi to Eneglaim there will be a place for the spreading of nets. Their fish will be according to their kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many. [11] But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. [12] By the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all [kinds of] trees for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.]

Why do we call the Dead Sea the Dead Sea? Because everything in the sea is dead. Why is it dead? Because of the high salt content of that Dead Sea, which kills all life. And so in essence that Dead Sea will be made to live again and fish and animal life will team in that Dead Sea.

And the school in Antioch said you know, we look at all these prophecies and passages and we don't see them happening today so therefore the kingdom must be future. This is what the church believed for 200 years. So our system of thought here is based on, notice number 1, a consistent use of a plain or normal, literal method of interpretation. You arrive at these conclusions when you make a decision to take the whole Bible at face value, including prophecy and eschatology.

Sadly, what happened in history is the school at Antioch was eclipsed by the school at Alexandria. Antioch is up north; another rival school developed down south in Alexandria, Egypt, and this is where people began to say the kingdom is now in spiritual form. Why would they say that? Paul, in the book of Colossians, chapter 2 and verse 8 gave this warning, he says: ?See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.? Paul warned the church in Colossae not to submit to an overarching philosophy that you don't find in the Bible, because what happens to people is that they fall in love with the philosophy. Once they fall in love with the philosophy the Bible is no longer the authority but their personal philosophy is, and they start to read the Bible through the lens of their philosophy.

That is exactly what happened in Alexandria, Egypt, because the philosophy of the day was something called Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a hotbed there in Alexandria, Egypt. The Gnostics taught dualism, which simply means this: The spiritual world is good, the physical world is bad. Now I can't think of a more unbiblical philosophy because does anybody what God said after He created the world in six days, which includes food, procreation, the sexual relationship between man and woman, taste, all of these physical things? Remember what God said? He didn't just say it was good, He said it was what? Very good, Genesis 1:31. [Genesis 1:31, ?God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.?]

But you see, Gnosticism had come on the scene and had taught that look, the spiritual world is good and the physical world is bad. Now if you believe that it's going to do tremendous damage to your interpretation of the Bible, even including the incarnation of Christ who came in a physical body. That's why John, in his epistle, is railing against people that are denying that Jesus came in a physical body; John is railing against an early form of Gnosticism or Gnostic thought.

What happened at Alexandria is they said well, if the physical world is bad, all of these promises of a future earthly kingdom and banqueting in that kingdom and the city of Jerusalem being raised up and all of these kinds of things, those are mere carnal ideas, because after all, we know that true spirituality is not being in a physical kingdom, it's being stuck on a cloud somewhere? right? Maybe you're wearing a white sheet, strumming a harp, singing the Hallelujah chorus 10,000 times, being bored out of your mind.

In other words, what happened is all of these promises are interpreted, not in a terrestrial, earthly manner, but in a celestial manner. And what began to develop at the school of Alexandria to dismiss these prophecies is what is called allegorical interpretation. What is allegorical interpretation? Allegorical interpretation is you use the language of the text to bring in a higher meaning (that only you know what that meaning is, by the way). I mean, the point of the text is not the text, it's the spiritual meaning, right?

So there was an allegorist around the time of Christ named Philo, he took the four rivers there that are described in Genesis 2, in Eden, the Tigris and the Euphrates and the Pishon and the Gihon and he would say what is your interpretation of those rivers. And if I was back in that day I would raise my hand and say I know the interpretation; those are four rivers. And you see, that's boring, to say something like that. I mean, how does that relate to our lives and things like that. No, no, no, no, those are four parts of the soul, and everybody would say whoooo, that is spiritual. And what you find today, even in our church world today is there's a lot of sermons you get from people that are highly allegorical.

One of the first sermons I ever heard as a new Christian was the gates around the city of Jerusalem, as described in Nehemiah 2, there's a sheep gate there, and the preacher said you know what that gate means? Jesus loves the sheep. And then there's a fish gate there and the preacher would say you know what that means? Jesus said go and make fishers of men, get out there and evangelize. And then there is a water gate, and they would say the water is the Holy Spirit and we need to have a walk of dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Now there's a dung gate there, they never mentioned that one.

But you see, those are interesting ideas about evangelism and Jesus loving the sheep and the Holy Spirit, but you listen to that kind of thing and you say great sermon, wrong passage. If I wanted to talk about those subjects there are a plethora of other places I could go in the Scripture. What is Nehemiah 2 saying when it mentions a fish gate? Here's the answer?they took fish in and out of the gate. Water gate?they took water in and out of the gate. And so forth. But who wants to hear a sermon on that. So this drive to be relevant, this drive to be spiritual, was pushed in Antioch and they began to allegorize the Bible. Specifically they allegorized and spiritualized prophecy.

What's wrong with allegorical interpretation? Well, number 1, you're not interpreting the Bible. Number 2, the authority is being transferred from the text to the interpreter. The authority is no longer what the Bible says but what someone's cunning imagination, I like to call the sanctified imagination, will conjure up. Number 3, there's no way to test the interpreter; I mean, how do I know that what they're saying about these different gates is accurate. And finally, number 4, there's no way to control the interpreter's imagination.

Bernard Ramm warns: ?To say the principle meaning of the Bible is a second sense meaning and that principle method of interpretation is spiritualizing is to open the door to almost uncontrolled speculation and imagination. For this reason we have

insisted that the control in interpretation is the literal method.?

But you see, allegory won the day in Alexandria and what happens to people, and by the way, this is a good little saying, you might want to keep this in mind, ?he who spiritualizes tells spiritual lies.? Even though the sermon might give you the liver-quiver and appear like it is relevant, they're really not telling you what that passage says. So what happened to all of these kingdom promises? They became spiritualized. Well, what do you do with world peace? Oh, that's Jesus reigning in your heart. What, for example, do you do with the Dead Sea coming to life? Oh, well that just means that we go from death to life as new creatures in Christ, don't worry about geography and topography, God doesn't care about that, what matters is the spiritual application to you.

And what you'll discover is people that become intoxicated with a non-literal method of interpretation begin to develop tremendous pride. In fact, their pride becomes so severe that they actually look down on the poor fundamentalist literalist. Eusebius writes this of Papias: ?Papias . . . says that there will be a millennium after the resurrections of the dead, when the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this earth. I suppose that he got these notions by a perverse reading of the apostolic accounts, not realizing that they had spoken mystically and symbolically.? We all know those are not literal. Look at this, I have it underlined, ?For he was a man of very little intelligence, as is clear from his books.? A lot of Christ-like love in that statement. ?But he is responsible for the fact that so many Christian writers after him held the same opinion, relying on his antiquity, [for instance Irenaeus and whoever else appears to have held the same views.?] and so forth. [Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 3.39.12-13]

It's just a way of illustrating what happens to people when they feel they have some sort of advantage on Scripture that the rest of us do not have. That's what the allegorical interpretation led to. Now I was a graduate of law school, I noticed the same thing happening in the field of law. If you look at the United States Constitution as a living breathing document you're considered smart and intelligent. If you look at the Constitution as a literal document that must be interpreted the way our Founding Fathers set it up you're looked at as not that smart. The whole battle here is the battle of authority; where is the authority going to reside? In the text or in the mind of the interpreter?

One of my favorite Supreme Court justices is Clarence Thomas; I feel that he has written some brilliant opinions and dissents but you see, he is out of touch with the legal world because he interprets the Constitution as it was written. And so what people do is they attack the man's intelligence, constantly, just like Eusebius was attacking the intelligence of Papias.

Here is just one I found, a critique of Clarence Thomas. ?He is the dumbest Justice to ever sit on the bench?He waits to see how Scalia votes, and he votes the same. He rarely issues comments or engages in questions during any Supreme Court hearing?He rarely grants media interviews (because he knows he will look stupid). He rarely writes opinions. He believes in a narrow interpretation of the Constitution. He is an idiot.?

[http://juneauempire.com/opinion/2011-09-22/outside-editorial-law-and-clarence-thomas#.Tn5rqNSo1_p]

Same sort of thing that Eusebius said about Papias, I don't know how he could be an idiot, he's a graduate of Yale Law School, he ran the EEOC, his opinions, if you take the time to read them, are extremely well researched and reasoned. But you see, what is happening today is if you hold to authorial intent then you're not nuanced enough, you're not sophisticated enough, you're really not bright enough because after all, we want to control the text, not let the text control us.

So from this Alexandrian school came forth people like Origen, Augustine, and then something else happened in history, a man named Constantine came to power in Rome and Constantine made Christianity a formally approved religion. This happened around 313, that was massive in the church because prior to that point in time, from Nero, around the 60's, up until just before Constantine took the throne, the church was persecuted heavily. And some guy comes on the throne and says you know what, persecution is over, throwing Christians to the lion's den is over, burning Christians at the stake is over, Christianity is not only legal but it's going to be the formal religion of the Empire.

If you lived through that transition do you know what you would thing? The kingdom has come! So Constantine gave great impetus to this kingdom now teaching. And consequently this teaching became etched in stone, particularly with Augustine who wrote a book, The City of God, in the 4th century. The most influential theologian that has ever lived is Augustine, and his influence to my

mind is not a good influence, it's a bad influence, because he took these Alexandrian teachings and codified them into a written form that was brilliantly put together. And from that point in time the entire church thought prophecy is not literal, we are in the kingdom, and there is no future resurrection. And that became so solidified in thinking that even the Protestant Reformers, who tried to get back to literal interpretation, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, in the 16th century, even those guys dragged into their new theology that old Alexandrian baggage.

The viewpoint that I'm giving, to give you another title for this, is called premillennialism; that's the correct view. Pre means before, millennium means a thousand year kingdom. In other words, Jesus is going to come back first, 'pre' at the end of the tribulation period, and the kingdom will follow. We are not going, if I'm understanding my Bible correctly, to have the kingdom without the King. That's Antioch. Alexandria, though, gave rise to amillennialism; 'a' is a prefix meaning a negation, as you know.

So an amillennialist does not believe in a future earthly kingdom because the only kingdom we're ever going to get and the only kingdom we're ever going to experience is right now with Jesus reigning and ruling in our hearts. The kingdom is now, they say. It's this period of time that started with Christ's first coming and extends to His second coming and you raise your hand and say wait a minute, the Bible says the kingdom is going to be a thousand years, there's been two thousand years between those time periods, at least. And they said oh, you poor simpleton, are you still stuck with your own literal interpretation? I pray that you'll see the light at some point.

So you cannot hold to these views if you jettison a literal approach to the Scripture. A kissing cousin of amillennialism is postmillennialism. It just incorporates the idea of progress, the church is going to take dominion over the earth through its activities, and then Jesus is going to come back and find everything in apple pie order. Jesus comes back post, or after, the Millennial Kingdom which we will set up. In other words, we who are postmillennial are supposed to be setting up the kingdom now without the King here. See the difference? When Paul makes this statement here, back to 2 Timothy 2:18, 'saying that the resurrection has already taken place,' I believe Paul is warning of what would happen as I've just described it historically. He's warning of an early form, already happening in his day, of amillennialism. Well, if you're an amillennialist what do you do with all these resurrections that we talked about? The rapture, a first resurrection at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom, a resurrection of the unsaved.

Take a look at Revelation 20:4-5 just for a minute if you could. These verses describe those latter two resurrection. John says, 'Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. [5] The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.' How do I handle this? Very easy, it's yet future. But what do you do if you're an amillennialist? What you say is the 'first resurrection' happened already. They all say this. The first resurrection is passed. Well, I don't feel resurrected today, I doubt I look resurrected, you guys certainly don't look resurrected. And they say well, you're taking it too literally, resurrection is just our regeneration. We believe in Jesus and we're brought from death to life.

The problem with that is when you study the word resurrection in the Bible, it's the Greek word anastasis, you know what that word always means? Resurrection! Every single time, it's never talking about something spiritual, it's talking about something that is physical.

Now they say the first resurrection is happened, and I like to raise my hand and I say well, when is the second resurrection going to happen. And they say oh, that's literal, the resurrection for the unsaved is literal. Okay, so you're telling me that the first resurrection is not literal but the second resurrection is literal, and they say that's exactly right. The problem is it's the same verb in Greek, 'came to life,' the exact same verb, so how could it jump in meaning right in the middle of a sentence?

What is Paul saying here? I know some of you are tuning out and it's going to pay dividends to track with me; I'm going to show you why this matters big time in just a few moments. What is Paul saying here? 'men who have gone astray from the faith saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.' You see, Paul was dealing with this problem right out of the gate. Paul preached a sermon on Mars Hill and he got to the resurrection of Christ and Acts 17:32 says, 'Now when they?' that's Paul's listeners, 'heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer,' well, why would these Athenian Greeks sneer at a

bodily raised Christ? Because they're steeped in Gnostic thought that the physical world is bad. This is why Paul, to the Corinthians, who had bought into this philosophy, who had been taken captive by empty deception, this is why Paul has to write the resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, to rescue them from their philosophy.

1 Corinthians 15:35-36, Paul writes, 'But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?' [36] You fool! That's not very politically correct, is it? To call someone a fool? Paul was pretty amped up about this. 'You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies,' and he goes on.

Related to a resurrection past in amillennialism is the idea that we are in the kingdom now. What is the view of Sugar Land Bible Church on the kingdom? Our view is that we are not in the kingdom now, the kingdom is yet future. In fact, we are praying the way the Lord taught us to pray, 'Thy kingdom? what? 'come.' Now how could I pray that if it's already here?

Take look at some of our position statements when you get a chance. The dispensation of the Law, the present dispensation of the church 'and the future Dispensation of the Millennial Kingdom,' look at that Look at that. In interpreting the Bible we believe that these are distinct and should not be intermingled or confused. [SLBC Position Statements ' No. 4, 'the Dispensation of the Mosaic Law, the present Dispensation of Grace, and the future Dispensation of the Millennial Kingdom. In interpreting the Bible, we believe that these are distinct and should not be intermingled or confused.']

We teach that a literal thousand year period of time, the millennium lies ahead in the future. That's our angle that we come from. The doctrinal statement, position statements are less important than the words of Christ. Pray this way, 'Thy kingdom come.' Let me tell you something; this may sound simple to you, what I've been explaining but this is falling out of favor like you wouldn't believe in the church today, because almost everywhere I go, almost every website I get onto, when I examine someone's mission statement for their organization, they say something like this: we are bringing in the kingdom, we are building the kingdom, we are doing kingdom work. What is happening today is a recycling of the ancient heresy from Alexandria, Egypt. If you're younger you're being subjected over and over again, through literature, and podcasts and You Tube channels to the emergent church. The emergent church is all about the fact that we are in the kingdom now. One emergent church writer says, 'The Kingdom of God is a central conversation in emerging communities? And let me tell you 'Kingdom of God' language is really big in the emerging church? [Doug Pagitt, cited in Oakland, 163]

Brian McLaren says, 'If Revelation were a blueprint of the distant future, it would have been unintelligible to its original readers?In light of this, Revelation becomes a powerful book about the kingdom of God here and now, available to all.' [Brian McLaren, cited in Oakland, 158.]

A lot of people say aren't you going to promote Rick Warren and his books? No! Part of the reason is his view on the Kingdom. Here he's speaking: 'I stand before you confidently right now and say to you that God is going to use you to change the world?I'm looking at a stadium full of people right now who are telling God they will do whatever it takes to establish God's Kingdom 'on earth?' as it is in heaven.' What will happen if the followers of Jesus say to Him, 'We are yours'? What kind of spiritual awakening will occur'? [Rick Warren, cited in Oakland, Kindle edition.] Rick, count me out! Jesus is going to establish the kingdom.

Russell Moore says this, 'The locus of the kingdom of God in this age is within the church, where Jesus rules as king? he calls it an 'in breaking of the future kingdom.' [Justin Taylor, 'An Interview with Russell Moore,' www.thegospelcoalition.org]

One other thing before we do the applications. I wrote my Master's thesis and doctrinal dissertation on this subject. So you really need to be in prayer right now that I do not tell you everything I know, [laughter] because this sermon may never end. Verse 18 says, 'saying that the resurrection has already taken place,' what Hymenaeus and Philetus is doing is they were taking prophecies yet future and pretending like they already happened. This is a doctrine that we call preterism. Preterism is a Latin word that means past or gone by.

A preterist believes that the book of Revelation, by and large, has already happened. It was written in the 60's? now that's a big

problem because it was written in the 90's; it's hard to be a prediction about A.D. 70 if it was written after A.D. 70, isn't it. It was written in the 60's Preterists say; most of it was fulfilled in A.D. 70 when Titus sacked Rome. A.D. 70 is the sacking of Jerusalem, and watch this, it's God divorce decree over the nation of Israel. God divorced Israel and transferred Israel's blessings (spiritually speaking) to the church. The church, in this system of thought is the new Israel.

Isn't it interesting that they only transfer Israel's blessings to the church, never her curses. The preterist essentially believes that Jesus came in His incarnation; He came again in judgment on Israel in A.D. 70, that's what the book of Revelation primarily is about. But there'll be some kind of bodily return in the future and a lot of Preterists today don't even believe there'll be a bodily return of Christ. Preterism!

One of the biggest promoters of preterism in the world today, a name that you know, is R. C. Sproul. I like many of the things R. C. Sproul says, however, the man is a Preterist. I didn't miss hear him on the radio; he's written a full length book about it. Read it for yourself, called *The Last Days According to Jesus*. This scholar really today behind the Preterist movement is a man named Kenneth Gentry, he is the source that most of these popular preachers and teachers are drawing from. He's a name that you may not know unless you're into scholarship. Gentry says, "the preterist view does understand Revelation's prophecies as strongly reflecting actual historical events in John's near future, though they are set in apocalyptic drama." [Four Views of Revelation, p. 38.] What did he just abandon there? Literal interpretation. You can't believe this way, the way he thinks, unless you draw back from Alexandria Egypt the end time prophecies are non-literal.

So these individuals will take prophecies that we consider to be future and pretend like they already happened. For example, the book of Revelation talks about two witnesses who preach and are killed and are seen by the whole world as they rise from the dead and they're raptured to heaven. You say well Andy, what does that mean? I know the answer, there's two witnesses, they're killed, the whole world sees them and they rise from the dead. They say oh, you poor, poor literalist, really what that is about is these two witnesses probably are a small body of Christians who remained in Jerusalem to testify against it.

In Revelation 12 there is a woman, Israel, fleeing from the beast, in the second half of the Tribulation period. Not so to the preterist. In Revelation 12 John backs up chronologically in order to show the mother church in Jerusalem, Acts, which was being protected from Satan's resistance. Everything is shifted to the past, you see.

What do you do with Revelation 13, the coming beast? What they say is that was Nero. There is no future antichrist, the beast is Nero. Well, how do you get that? Very simple? gematria. What is gematria? Gematria, if you knew Hebrew or Greek you would understand this, if you lived in the first century you would understand it, it's kind of archaic to us but every letter has a number attached to it. So you could add up anybody's name, convert it into Greek, attach the right number to the right letter and everybody's name can be translated to a number. And that's why one night I woke up very nervous, my palms were sweating, and my wife says what's the matter? And I said how do I know I'm not the antichrist? So I went out and looked at my gematria table and converted my name to Greek and fortunately I didn't add up to 666.

But you see, what the Preterists do is they take Nero's name, use Hebrew gematria, run the calculations and it adds up to 666. There are a lot of problems with this. First of all, why are you taking these numbers literally when you just told us that the thousand year kingdom is non literal. Secondly, why are you using Hebrew gematria; the book of Revelation was written to a Greek speaking audience. Furthermore, how come no church fathers understood the beast was Nero.

Furthermore, why did you throw the title in? Nero Caesar? Well, they need "Caesar" to get the number to run right. Nero did not usher in persecution for exactly forty-two months, he never controlled the entire planet, he never forced people to receive a mark on their right hand or their forehead to participate in the global economy. Nero never coerced the entire world to worship an image of him. He never rose from the dead. He never associated with a miracle working false prophet, and he never received global veneration. The details of the text when literally understood do not fit Nero; they point to a future time period. What do you do with Rev17, the great harlot of Babylon? That's the city of Jerusalem that God divorced.

Gentry says: "I am convinced beyond any doubt that this Harlot is first-century Jerusalem." [Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 392] Another name that's involved in this movement is Hank Hanegraff whose show is called *The Bible Answer Man*. He's not just Bible answer man, he's *The Bible Answer Man*. It's not a matter of me mishearing him in his talk; he wrote an entire 400 page book

defending this view. 'What has puzzled me over the years is not the identity of 'the great prostitute,' but how so many could mistake her historical identity. . . . In biblical history only one nation is inextricably linked to the moniker 'harlot.' And that nation is Israel!?' [Hanegraaff, The Apocalypse Code, 118-19]

All of these names, some you recognize, some you don't, are aggressively promoting this belief system. In fact, many of them have written entire books about it. The last part of the sermon: So what! Who cares, I mean, is this just some kind of game, like eggheads like yourself like to be involved in or does this really matter? What you need to understand about theology is it's dominoes in a row; whatever you're doing with one domino will knock over all the others. Theology is a seamless tapestry; if you tamper with one area it's inevitably going to have a negative repercussion or consequence to another area.

Example: health and wealth gospel, you turn on so-called Christian television and you hear preacher after preacher saying God wants you well and God wants you rich. Well, I'm not well and I'm not rich. Well, it's your fault because you don't have enough faith to access God's promises. Do you realize what that does to somebody psychologically, if they're in a wheel chair, or they have some kind of ailment? Does God heal everybody in this age? No, God didn't even heal Paul who requested that God, three times, heal him. He said, no, 'My grace is sufficient for you.' [2 Corinthians 12:8, 'Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. [9] And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness?'.?]

Does God heal? I believe he does. Does He heal everybody? No! But you see, in the kingdom all deformities will disappear and so if you believe in this doctrine, that we're in the kingdom now, then you go through life thinking that you're entitled to worldly riches and health and if you don't have them it's your own fault. And many of them sadly say don't even go to a doctor. Do you realize what you do to somebody when you keep them away from bona fide medical attention? You just destroy them through false doctrine.

Why do these people teach this? You go through their writings and they all believe we're in the kingdom. The Kingdom Now idea is the impetus for the health and wealth gospel. Another way this matters is hope; in this Kingdom Now system what hope is there, because this is as good as it gets. I'm not looking at this world as my hope, in the fact, the more I look at this world the more it seems to me like the whole thing is falling apart. The world's falling apart but I'm not falling apart. Why is that? Because I have hope of something beyond this world, a true kingdom that Jesus will establish. You take that away and you take away a hope for daily living. You know how you can go through trial after trial after trial as a Christian and not be disheartened? Because of hope. And yet this doctrine undermines hope.

Something else that I'm very, very concerned about is the nation of Israel. I love the nation of Israel; the nation of Israel to me is the true 'lone star state.' And I love the second 'lone star state' also. But you know why I love the nation of Israel? Because I believe these promises that God is going to bring forth His kingdom to the earth through Israel. I look at Israel as an unfinished work of God. How can I not love that nation? How can I not love those people? But you see, if you believe that we are Israel and God is through with Israel and God has divorced the Jews, as the Preterists say, then how do you look at the modern state of Israel? With derision, with contempt, they after all are the Christ-rejecters.

Let me read this quote, let's see who said it. 'First, their synagogues should be set on fire.' Secondly, their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed? Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayer books and Talmuds?? Fourthly, their rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach any more?Fifthly, passport and traveling privileges should be absolutely forbidden to the Jews?Sixthly, they ought to be stopped from usury (charging interest on loans?? Seventhly, let the young and strong Jews and Jewesses be given the flail, the ax, the hoe, the spade, the distaff, and spindle, and let them earn their bread by the sweat of their noses?We ought to drive the rascally lazy bones out of our system?? [Martin Luther, Concerning the Jews and Their Lies, cited in Michael Brown's Our Hands Are Stained with Blood, pp. 14-15.] ??Therefore away with them? To sum up, dear princes and nobles who have Jews in your domains, if this advice of mine does not suit you, then find a better one so that you and we may all be free of this insufferable devilish burden?the Jews.? [Martin Luther, Concerning the Jews and Their Lies, cited in Michael Brown's Our Hands Are Stained with Blood, pp. 14-15.]

Who said that? Was that Saddam Hussein? Was that Adolf Hitler? Was that Ahmadinejad? It was none other than Martin Luther. You mean, Martin Luther, the good guy? Yeah, him. You mean the church performer? Yeah, him. Do you know why he said that?

Because he reformed the church in some ways but brought baggage with him into his Reformed church. He brought in the old Augustinian, Alexandrian, 'Kingdom Now,' allegorical interpretation and he became irate with the Jews when they did not respond to his message of the gospel. And in fact, anybody can have a slip of the tongue, I've had my own mangling of syllables from time to time. What I just read to you is an 80 page tract. When you write something down it's different than public speaking because you have time to calmly and coolly compose your thoughts. And in fact, a man named Adolf Hitler wrote this some generations later, also in Germany, saw Luther's writings and said this looks like a pretty good blueprint.

Antisemitism naturally comes when we dismiss God's program for the nation of Israel. Do you know why Jews in Israel love evangelical Christians? Because we are looked as a bulwark or a guard against anti-Semitism that is spreading worldwide. We, as evangelical Christians, who believe correctly have become almost the only friends that Israel has left. And how the devil comes and tries to undermine even that through a resuscitation of Kingdom Now theology.

The fourth way and with this we're finished, is it alters the purpose of the church. Why does the church exist? Why is Sugar Land Bible Church here? Three reasons: number 1, to glorify God, you can look up all these verses on your own. Number 2, to edify the saints, and number 3, to fulfill the great commission. That's it. That's our purpose. But if we become amillennial or postmillennial in our thinking our purpose gets altered. We're not about reaching and teaching any longer; we're not about evangelizing and discipling any longer, we're about kingdom building.

Hal Lindsey warned what could happen to the church in the last days if she began to see herself as the establisher of God's kingdom on the earth. Quote: 'The last days of the church on the earth may be largely wasted seeking to accomplish a task that only the LORD Himself can and will do directly.' [Hal Lindsey, The Road to Holocaust, 269] If we get into the task of kingdom building we are taking on a task that God never gave us. In fact, we're taking on a task which is impossible. And what a strategy of the devil in the last days of the church to neutralize its effectiveness by getting it outside of why God created it.

My simple point is ideas matter. Am I doing whatever it takes to establish God's kingdom on the earth? Absolutely not! What I'm trying to do is to glorify God, edify the saints, and fulfill the great commission. Verse 18, 'men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they have upset the faith of some.' Paul told us this would happen. The last 2,000 years of church history are a testimony to that. May God help us to take to heart Paul's warnings and to stay close to the Lord and His Word in these last days. Shall we pray.

Father, we are grateful for this little clause and what it means to us. Help us to walk these things out this week as we seek to keep Your purpose forefront on our minds. We'll be careful to give you all the praise and the glory. We ask these things in Jesus name, and God's people said...