

# Introduction

## Conflict of Visions

In systematic theology, just like in other disciplines, your own vision of the world sets the agenda for what you believe. We would like to think that \_\_\_\_\_ will simply speak for themselves, but they don't. Instead facts are used to advance or undermine competing theories about everything, including Bible interpretation and theology.

Don't assume that everyone will arrive at the same conclusion if they are given the same facts. Reasonable people may disagree on the meaning of the facts, but that doesn't mean one of them is unreasonable. They just have a different \_\_\_\_\_.

This is why discussions about theology can be so contentious. The subject of eschatology is particularly susceptible to this conflict of visions. For example, the study of eschatology is sometimes a study of last things, and sometimes a study of end things.

Some theologians approach eschatology as a series of last things, or last events, and ask the question, "When will we know that redemptive history has run its course and we are nearing the return of Christ?"

Other theologians say "We will know that true redemption has been accomplished when the world has become a better place for certain people."

The fact is, we all approach the study with a different end in mind, and it helps to know the difference.<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this class, we need to bid farewell to our friends who look at eschatology as a \_\_\_\_\_ . They will not want to join us anyway because our concern is not focused on how the end of redemptive history benefits any one class of people.

Instead our desire is to remain together with our brothers and sisters in the Lord, choosing a biblical path that understands the purpose of the gospel is to provide a way for people from every tribe, tongue, nation, gender, and station in life to know with certainty that in the end, the actual end, we will reign with Christ in glory forever as individuals, chosen and redeemed by his perfect sacrifice.

With that as our charter, we can have a profitable and edifying look at this fascinating subject from the Word of God.

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<sup>1</sup> When we say *last things*, it implies a chronological approach. We begin with Creation, turn over the hourglass, and wait for the *last things* to happen. On the other hand, some envision eschatology as really about the *end times*. It's about making things better *in the end*. For a more detailed discussion see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pages 1155-1171.