

Session 2 The Varying Importance of End-Time Beliefs

**For additional study material pertaining to this session, see mikebickle.org*

I. INTRODUCTION

A. This is a working document that we will add to from time to time.

Before we look at the particular events in the book of Revelation, I want to give a grid, a context, for understanding that not all end time beliefs have the same value. Some teachings are far weightier and far more important than other teachings. The reason this is important to know that is because there are 150 chapters in the Bible, 150 of which the primary subject is the end times. When I say that to people and that is the first time they have heard that, it blows their mind. I have said this to many people, leaders who visit. They say, “One hundred and fifty.”

I say, “Yeah.” Actually it is more. There is tremendous amount of detail. Some of the details are of primary importance. Some of them are not that important, but still important, and on and on.

B. We recognize varying degrees of importance regarding biblical, end-time beliefs and themes. We use four categories of ideas related to the end times—those of *primary importance* (essential doctrines), those held as our *core convictions*, those *helpful for clarity*, and *personal opinions*.

We recognize the varying measure of importance to end time beliefs and themes. Not all the themes are official doctrine, but they are clear themes, and they are scenarios. We want to recognize the varying measures. The reason is because some things we can speak about boldly, very strongly. Other things we have to speak as a suggestion or put nuance on it, or say, “Well, maybe perhaps or maybe not.” There is a varying level of weightiness to Biblical beliefs. We reference four categories of ideas as related to the end times. We are talking right now about the end times, although this could be said of other doctrines as well. We recognize five truths are of primary importance. I will give you those five really briefly. We will not spend much time on them. Everybody knows them.

Then we are going to identify—and this is not comprehensive by the way. We will add more to it—those our leadership team holds as core beliefs. You do not have to believe these core beliefs to be a part of our spiritual family, to go to our Bible School or be an intern, but you do have to believe them if you are going to teach in our missions base. Core beliefs are different than doctrines of primary importance.

Then we have themes or ideas that are helpful. They are not essential at all, but they are helpful. What I mean by helpful is if you understand them, then you get the story line, the picture the 150 chapters are trying to paint. It takes all 150 chapters to get the whole picture. Some of these ideas are helpful to grasp the larger story line, but they are not essential, and you do not need to believe them. Again, this is not a comprehensive document. This is just giving you the idea so you can process truth through this grid.

Some teachings or themes we believe are Biblical, but they are opinions. Meaning we draw them as an implication from the Scripture. They are opinions, and we believe they are informed opinions, but they are of a whole lesser level of weightiness. It is really important that you understand this as students, but it is more important that you understand it as teachers, because many of you will be leaders and teachers in the body of Christ in the near future and in the distant future as well. You will be leaders and teachers. I am wanting you to frame out your own communication through this grid.

- C. Jesus spoke of some truths as being weightier than others (Mt. 23:23), and He considered the commandment to love God to be “greater” than other commandments (Mt. 22:37-38).
²³***“You tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.” (Mt. 23:23)***
- D. It is important to present the biblical message of the end times with humility and in a way that promotes unity, yet without compromising important truths. This is captured in the well-known saying “*In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, diversity; and in all things, love.*”

It is important to seek to present end-time truth with humility and restraint. It is not enough just to present it with boldness. Boldness is important, but humility with the boldness, with restraint. What I mean by restraint is that ideas that you are personally excited about and personally convinced of, but are secondary ideas—we need to show restraint in how we share them. We have to qualify them and say, “Perhaps...maybe...it is an idea. Other people do not see this, and maybe I will understand it differently later.” That takes restraint. We do not want to compromise the important truths.

This idea is captured in the well-known saying that you may have heard before, “In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, diversity. In all things, love.” That is a phrase you will hear over the years. Maybe it is new to you, but it is one you hear over and over if you stay with it long enough. In essentials, unity. We want to be unified in the essentials. In the nonessentials we want to give liberty and honor in our diversity. We want to love people who have different views and really enjoy fellowshiping with them. In all things, particularly in our communication with one another, love and honor.

- E. The Lord wants His people to be bold, with strong convictions about what the Bible makes clear, yet with humility and proper nuance. We acknowledge the value of people whose views differ from our own, and we must always posture ourselves to continue to learn and listen to others.

Having said that, the Lord wants His people to be bold with strong convictions, but only what about the Bible makes clear. Crystal clear. Not what the Bible infers or implies. Out of 150 chapters, the Bible implies many things that might be inferred. We are only bold and strong about what the Bible makes very, very clear.

We acknowledge the value of other people who have totally different views. I have friends who have very different views. We have a great friendship. Our different views do not hinder our fellowship at all. We do not fellowship around those views. Sometimes we talk about them. Sometimes we have fun with them, but we honor each other. We always want to posture ourselves to learn and listen. We always want to be learners until the day we meet the Lord, and then after that we are still learners. Actually in the resurrection you will be learners. We want to listen well to people. Even who have completely different views. You might not accept their particular view, but you will find insights about their view that are helpful for you to understand them and to honor them.

- F. In our zeal to be faithful to the Scriptures, we acknowledge that some end-time themes are best stated as opinions and suggestions, instead of as statements that are unnecessarily dogmatic. Scripture allows for interpretative diversity concerning the specific details and timing of events.
- G. Any presentation of a detailed narrative of future events from a biblical perspective must be tempered, knowing that church history is littered with self-confident teachers who proudly overstated their position or were dogmatic where the Scriptures were not. It is best to delineate between primary truths and our personal opinions when presenting details of end-time themes.

- H. No group has more than part of the full truth of Scripture about the end times. Only as the *whole Body of Christ receives understanding* will we know the full biblical storyline.

No group, no ministry, no church, no small group, no Bible School has more than a small part of the full truth. Nobody has more than a part of the whole truth. Only in context to the whole body of Christ will we know the full story line. Meaning there are groups all over the earth that the Lord has highlighted, with even some of the implications and nuances, but they have captured a part of the story line that you are not going to get if you do not have a learning heart and receive from them. The Lord has ordered the body in just that way where He on purpose gives some to other groups that He does not give to your group so that you need them. You go there because you need them, but what happens, you love them. You say, “Wow, I really like you now that we have had this talk. You are amazing.”

The Lord goes, “Ah, got you again. I knew you would like each other if I got you receiving from each other.”

- I. We are to respect others with differing views on the end times, as long as biblical eschatological essentials are upheld and sound, contextual Bible interpretation is implemented. Teachers must be careful not to imply that their view on the end times is the only correct one.
- J. The purpose of this message is to emphasize that there are varying levels of importance of end-time doctrines and themes, and that our staff, students, interns, and other members of this spiritual family do not need to embrace *all* that we say about the end times. I do not ask anyone to accept my views; rather, I urge you to think for yourself (Acts 17:10-11), to boldly challenge all ideas that you hear, and refuse any teaching that you do not see with your eyes in your Bible.

The purpose of this message is to emphasize to those of you—not just students—who are future teachers that there are varying levels of importance to end-time beliefs. Because if all truths are taught as though they have the same weightiness, you are going to be picking fights with people constantly, fighting for things. The Lord would say, “I do not want you to fight for that. You can hold that opinion with a teachable spirit. You do not need to fight for that.” Do not cause every encounter to be a battle you have to fight.

*I want you to catch this. Our staff, students, interns, every member of our spiritual family **does not** need to embrace what I or the other Bible teachers in our spiritual family here think about all the different levels of the end times. You do not have to embrace it all. You do need to embrace those things of primary importance. If you are going to be a teacher here, you have to embrace the core convictions. After that, you do not need to agree with them, even to be a teacher in our midst.*

*The reason I am saying this is to take pressure off some of your hearts. Some of you think, “Mike says this, Allen says that, Wes says that, and Dave came and said another. It does not make sense to me to be honest. I do not know why they believe what they believe, but I want to be a part. Guess what, I will just believe it.” **That is not a good way to go forward. We do not want you to do that.** “I want to be teachable.” Yes, we want you teachable. We want you humble, but **we want you convinced about what you say, not just echoing what somebody else said or feeling pressure that you better say that.** We want none of that in our midst. Just because humans are humans, that pressure creeps in. We want to expose it and have it out of our midst so there is a very healthy learning environment continually.*

*I cannot say this too much. One of my reasons I want to say this is because I really want you to do it, and I want **you** to say this in the years to come when you are involved in your discipling and teaching ministries, as some of you are already. A teaching ministry does not require a thousand people in a room and a microphone. You can have a teaching ministry with four people in a small group. Beloved, you have a teaching ministry. I want*

you to say these things as well, these things I am saying right here. **I do not ask anyone to accept my views.** That is the sort of thing you should say when you are teaching young people and when you are not young any longer. I know you think that will never happen, but it is coming, sooner than you think. Just having fun. Think for yourself. Boldly challenge.

When we say boldly challenge—I always say this, and even you say this too—**boldly challenge in the right place with the right spirit.** Challenging with an arrogant spirit with the wrong context where it is not appropriate is NOT good. You need to know that as well. There are appropriate and inappropriate times to challenge. Somebody says, “What is an inappropriate time?” When you are the only person who has talked ten times in a row, that is an inappropriate time to keep talking. That is what I mean by inappropriate. I am not even talking about in another context.

If you are dominant, and you have them at the full measure of exercising grace to have you in there, then shhhh, be quiet and listen. You think I am talking about somebody, and I am. I am talking about the guy you are looking at. I was not born at fifty-eight. I was twenty-one, and I dominated. Anyway. Let’s move on. So I am talking about somebody. I know that guy really well. That is why when I see that guy, I think, “You know what, I got your number, but I really like you. I got your number.” I am he. I get it. I get you are trying to win the girl on row eight, and you want her excited to see you at the coffee shop. Anyway, go ahead. The girl I was aiming at was on row ten, just so you know.

II. PRIMARY IMPORTANCE: ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

These are truths that have been upheld historically by the Church as essential doctrines of salvation. They define what is essential orthodoxy as related to end-time themes. The truths below do not include all the important doctrines in our statement of faith, but only those pertaining to the end times. We agree with the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

- A. **Authority of Scripture**: We fully agree with the reformers who used the phrase ***Sola Scriptura***. Our one source for understanding God’s plan for the end times is Scripture alone. We do not base our views on prophetic experiences or “personal revelations.” The only sure commentary on the Word is the Word itself.

There are truths of primary importance. We have five of them, not that there will not be six or seven some day. These are truths that are upheld by the church historically. When I list these five truths, this is not our entire doctrinal statement of all of our values or doctrines in the Bible. Our doctrinal statement is far more developed. These are five truths we believe are of primary importance as pertaining to the end times specifically. There are many, many truths that are of primary importance. They are in the Apostle’s Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Westminster Confession, etc. We support and believe wholeheartedly the truths in those historic creeds.

Pertaining to the end times, number one, we hold to the authority of Scripture. Our one source of understanding God’s plan for the end times is Scripture alone. The reason I am saying that, we do not base our views on prophetic experiences. I have had young people say to me with excitement, “Man, you have had five or ten very exciting prophetic experiences in the last thirty years.” I have had some number like that. I do not know the exact number. I have never counted the number. They think, “Man, that is exciting.” I have had people say, “Boy, that is foundational to what we believe.”

I say, “No, it is not. Actually it is not.” I do not count prophetic experiences as a source of truth. I do not derive my doctrine from a prophetic experience. I derive my doctrine from one place and one place only—the Bible. The prophetic experience lets me know God does not want me to quit when I am discouraged in pursuit of that

truth. A prophetic experience is about you not giving up when it gets hard. Prophetic experience is not telling you the truth. It is telling you not to give up when that truth has difficulty related to it.

I have had people say this meaning well, but really wrong, “Boy, our prophetic history, that is foundational to us.”

I say, “No, it is not. It really is not.” It is important in the sense that it motivates us to persevere. If it is not in the Bible really clearly, it is not important to us. That is not a small thing. If an angel appears to you and tells you some truth, and it is not in the Bible, do not take it. If it is in the Bible, quote the Bible. The angelic experience is only so you do not quit because it is a difficult truth to stay with.

- B. **Second coming**: The literal, bodily, second coming of Jesus to reign forever as King of kings
- C. **Resurrection of the saints**: The physical or bodily resurrection of the saints
- D. **Heaven**: Living with Jesus in the New Jerusalem on the new earth for all eternity
- E. **Eternal judgment**: the punishment of the lost. We stand strongly against the heresy of universalism that teaches that there is no hell and that all people will be saved.

We believe in a literal Second Coming of Christ, a literal resurrection of the saints, literal heaven with the New Jerusalem coming down to the earth, and a literal eternal judgment. We believe in that. Those are five things, the authority of Scripture and these other four things that are essential to every believer when it comes to the end times. If you believe in those five things, we can work together, and we can fellowship together in full confidence, even if you have totally different views about the Millennium. I know believers that do not believe this, that, or the other, but they believe these five things. I have total confidence in their spirituality and their discernment in the Lord as a Bible teacher or a person who loves the Bible.

III. CORE CONVICTIONS

- A. Below are core convictions that our leadership holds related to the end times. We do not require our staff, students, interns, or other members of this spiritual family to embrace these truths, yet it is necessary for all who teach at IHOPU to uphold our core convictions. Part of our calling is to be a “messaging ministry,” committed to being faithful witnesses of Jesus, His plan of salvation, His commitment to build the Church and disciple nations, and of His end-time plans.

I am not going to look at all of our core convictions, and we do not have them all here. A few of us got together the other day, and I said, “Let’s give a grid so our people can kind of get a feeling for the different levels of ideas and truths. So they can have a grid so they can interpret them.” Our core beliefs. Below are our core convictions that our leadership team believes, and you have to buy into these to be a teacher here.

The reason that is important is because you do not need to feel pressure to buy in if you do not see them, but neither should you be here for years and find out years later, “Oh, I have not believed those for years. I was thinking I was going to be really plugged in here for years as a Bible teacher. Now I understand that is not going to work.” We do not change our core convictions. We only have a small number of them related to the end times. They are things we are convinced are true and that the Lord does not want us to back down on. Every ministry has a set of core convictions that, if they compromise them, they are compromising all together. Everything they believe is not a core conviction. Many things are a secondary level.

We do not require—that is a very important word—our staff, student, etc. to embrace our core convictions, but we do require that our leaders do. Particularly I am talking about our teachers, so we are not teaching differently on very major points. So we are not creating confusion in the students and interns whom we are teaching. We are a messaging ministry. There are certain truths that are germane to our mandate as a messaging ministry.

- B. Our leadership team has worked through our core convictions for many years, even decades. We have based them on the Scriptures, with the confirmation of many teachers in the Church.*

For those of you who are young, I am saying this so you think, “Oh okay, that makes sense.” You may not have thought this through. Our leadership team has worked through our core convictions for years, some of us—guys my age—for decades. We have searched it out in the Word, and we have received through many Bible teachers throughout history and around the world. It is not like we ourselves get it. We receive the teaching ministry through history and around the body of Christ.

Our leadership team has settled on core convictions that we have concluded from the searching of the Scripture and are confirmed by other Bible teachers through history and across the nations today. If we were the only ones who believe a core conviction, then I would be troubled. Again, I can have an opinion of that level, but that is way down there. There is a big story line with lots of secondary details in the 150 chapters, and I believe a lot of those are not clear right now. In the next decades to come, we—I do not mean “we” as in our group, but I am talking about the people in this hour of history—we need to interact and tease out the dimensions of the larger story line that is found in the 150 chapters focused on the end times.

- C. Our leadership team has been thoroughly exposed to different views held by others in the Body of Christ. We are aware of these differing views and are firmly settled on our core convictions.
- D. We welcome any to challenge our views as they seek to establish their own core convictions. We value this process for them. We are committed to our core convictions, but remain open to change our views related to biblical end-time themes that are of lesser importance (see page 4).

We welcome any challenge to our views. Particularly the young people. The reason I am saying this is because some young people are confused by this. We want them to challenge their views as they seek to establish their own core convictions. In other words, we want them to challenge the thoughts we present. One of the reasons is that we value the process of them challenging it and getting their own core convictions.

The fact that we allow them to challenge does not mean we are changing our core convictions. We want people to challenge those. Our secondary ideas we are open to change. Our core convictions are confirmed, and we are established in them for many, many years. When people challenge them, sometimes they are confused. We say, “No, we are not moving those.” Any ministry that I know of, that values not compromising, has core convictions they will not back away from. You have to. That is part of your assignment in the Lord. The lesser opinions and the doctrines or themes that are helpful, we are open to changing all of those in dialogue over the years as the Lord makes things more clear.

- E. We seek to be clear about our core convictions, so that people do not join us thinking that they might change them. We love and honor believers who disagree with our core convictions and encourage them to find a spiritual family where they can enjoy unity related to their convictions.

- F. Our primary end-time theology is **historic premillennialism with a victorious church**. After many years of searching the Word and studying the writings of other ministries, our leadership team is firmly convinced that this is the end-time position that is most faithful to what we believe the Scriptures teach. Our core convictions express this theological perspective.

Our primary end-time theology is historic premillennialism with a victorious church. That is our primary theology. Some folks ask us—I have been asked this every now and then—“Who else has your view?”

I say, “That is our primary view. There are multitudes of teachers who have that view of historic premillennialism and/or the victorious church.” Some take one, some the other, and some both. We take both of them. I have a beginning list of them on the website. It was new to some folks that multitudes of teachers through church history have had this position, this view. Our convictions express this theological perspective.

- G. **Historic premillennialism and the victorious Church**—this represents our core beliefs related to the end times. Many teachers throughout church history, and today, have held to historic premillennialism and/or a victorious Church.* This theological view includes the following:

1. The victorious Church walking in unity, intimacy, and maturity (purity, power, wisdom). Unity includes the whole Church working together in love and honor (Jn. 17:21-23). Jesus loves the whole Church and is returning for a large, unified, international Church.
¹³...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God [intimacy], to a perfect man [maturity]...to the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13)
2. The theme of a victorious church includes a global harvest and a prayer and worship movement from every nation preceding Jesus’ return (Mt. 24:14; Rev. 5:9; 7:9, 14).

I mention here—and I have a little asterisk indicating there is more information on the website—that there are many teachers currently and throughout history who have held this position. This view includes—I am only going to mention a few of these because some of them are just so obvious—It includes, number one, the victorious church. Some premillennial teachers do not see the victorious church view. They see the church as phasing out to a little remnant that is holding on to the end, and most everybody has fallen away. There is a little bit of hold-on remnant just barely making it.

We do not see that view. Our position, our premillennial position, is with the victorious church. Look at this verse, Ephesians 4:13. There is so much in one verse, “Until we all come to the unity of the faith.” We are talking about a billion believers in the earth. I look at that verse and I ask, “Paul, do you mean that?”

“Until we all come to the knowledge of the Son of God.” That does not mean until everybody is born again. He is talking to born-again believers, the church. That is talking about intimacy with God. Until the whole church is growing in intimacy with God, and there is maturity in the church worldwide.

The Great Tribulation, a whole lot of other things, and the outpouring of the Spirit are going to play into this dynamic. It is going to be a tremendous shift of the landscape through the body of Christ. When it is over, the church will be unified and deep in God. Jesus loves the whole church. He does not just love our group, your group, or that group. He loves the whole church. That does not mean He does not correct the church. Loving the church is not the same thing as agreeing with everything the church is doing. Jesus corrects the church He loves. As a matter of fact, He corrects the church because He loves the church. As a ministry in our end-time perspective, we want to constantly understand He loves the whole church and posture ourselves to love the whole church.

3. The Millennium, a 1,000-year reign of Jesus on the earth with the saints (Rev. 20:1-6). We believe that the Church is to impact society with the kingdom, but we do not embrace the postmillennial view that society will be fully Christianized before Jesus returns.

The Millennium or the 1000-year reign of Jesus is one of our core convictions. Many really good Bible teachers, I mean really godly men and women who love Jesus and are excellent Bible teachers, believe the Millennium is figurative. It does not exist. That point does not matter in our fellowship.

It does matter if we are training forerunners. Because, if you take the Millennium literally, then you take many other passages literally. If the Millennium is interpreted as being spiritual, then what happens is many, many of the other 150 chapters are relegated to symbolism. When they are symbolic, then who knows for sure what they symbolize. You end up with a posture that is so familiar today, so popular, “Well, nobody really knows.” Well, if nobody really knows anything, then why study it? How can we be prepared spiritually if no one even really knows?

As a Bible teacher I am very, very unsettled with the view that it is mostly symbolic. I am not unsettled with the men or women that hold it. But if most of those chapters are symbolic, and you cannot know exactly what they mean as related to the events of the coming of the Lord, then you do not have urgency to study them. We are very committed—our whole team is—to this: these passages are meant to be taken at face value. They mean what they say. They say what they mean. They are not relegated to symbolism. They are real. They give us real information. That is a very important belief.

4. The Antichrist is a man who will be the most powerful demonic leader in history.

We believe in a literal Antichrist. A real man. We believe in the spirit of the antichrist as well that has been operating throughout history, but we are talking here about a literal man. When you believe in a literal Antichrist, there are a whole lot of folks who say, “Absolutely,” and a whole bunch of folks who say, “Whatever. That seems a little intense.”

My answer is, “It is really intense.” The Antichrist is a serious problem for the planet, but God is going to use the Antichrist in order to create the environment to bring the church to maturity and to bring the harvest in fullness.

5. A post-tribulation rapture at the end of the Great Tribulation, which lasts 3½ years

We believe in the post-tribulation rapture. That means the rapture at the end of the Tribulation, not at the beginning. I have many dear friends that believe in the rapture in the beginning. I get it. I believed that for several years. I believed it was at the beginning. That is what my leaders taught me.

Again, thousands of Bible teachers believe it is at the end. Thousands believe it is at the beginning. It is one or the other. The reason it matters is because if it is at the end, then you are prepared. The way we are prepared is spiritually, not physically. Some people emphasize preparing physically. They get guns, water, and food on a mountain and get ready to go. I do not even talk about having any opinions about that. If God told some guy to get some water and go to the mountains, I do not even go there. I want to prepare people spiritually so that they do not yield to fear and they do not yield to deception. The reason this really matters is because, if we are going through the most difficult time of human history in the power of God and victory, we want to be prepared in our understanding and our life for it. If God surprises us, and we do not go through it, there is no loss.

If you have the wrong view, and we do go through it, well, there are stories of the church in China. I do not have firsthand encounter with the people who tell the stories, but I have heard the stories of the church in China

many times. They thought they were going to go up in the rapture. When the cultural revolution took place in 1966, and Communist China persecuted the underground church, many believers went into prison and there were multitudes of martyrs, they said, “Many people fell away because they were thinking they were going to be raptured any minute. They had no grid for trouble, and they got offended at God, saying, ‘The Bible must not be real or this would not be happening.’”

Though I love and have confidence in the spiritual life of men and women who teach we are going up any minute, it is a serious error for the generation that experiences the Great Tribulation. The generations before, it is not such a serious error. If you happen to be in that generation, and you are not aware of what is happening, that is an error of a huge consequence.

It is my opinion that we are in the early days of that. I do not have a prophecy or revelation that we are in the early days of that. It is just an opinion. It is not anything I ask anybody to believe or promote. It is just my opinion from looking at the signs of the times. I have had people say, “Did you get a prophecy? Oh, come on. Did Bob Jones tell you something?”

I reply, “No, no. Nothing like that.” I just see the signs of the times from Jesus and the apostles and the prophets. So many are escalating, I think we could be in that season. We might not be. It might be the next generation. It may be the one after that. I do not know. Things are escalating so rapidly.

If we are in that generation, or it is the next one, or the one after that, whatever generation it is, for them to know that there is coming a time of trouble is of huge significance. For the generations that people have taught this over the last 150 years—the pre-tribulation rapture, the any-minute rapture—it has not overly mattered because the Tribulation did not happen. It was like, “Well, you know, okay. It was just a theory.” If you happen to be in the generation of the Tribulation, it is not a theory. I do not know if I will see that in my lifetime.

Some guy says, “Do you hope?”

I say, “I do not have an opinion. I just want to be faithful. I do not hope it is or is not. I just want to be with Jesus forever in a resurrected body and for all the trouble to be over.”

6. A futurist view of most of the prophecies found in the books of Revelation and Daniel.

We have a futurist view of prophecies. We view the prophecies of Revelation and Daniel as having a future fulfillment. People who take these prophecies symbolically see the prophecies as already having been fulfilled in history in a symbolic way. We have a futurist view of the prophecies of Daniel, Revelation, Isaiah, other books as well.

7. Global temporal judgments preceding the return of the Lord

8. The abomination of desolation is the primary sign that Jesus gave for recognizing the beginning of the Great Tribulation. It includes the image and mark of the beast (Rev. 13).

9. A falling away from the faith (Mt. 24:9-13; 2 Thes. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; 4:3-5; 2 Pet. 2:1-3)

We see a literal falling away. A massive falling away. Here is why I say massive. It will be so big that it will be a sign of the times beyond any other time in history. It will stand out as a sign. It will be that graphic. The falling away is not a small point. It is very real and important for the people who fall away, and as a sign it will be such a large number that the body of Christ will see it.

That is why somebody with the view of the church getting more difficult will think it just dwindles down to a small number. The falling away is real, but I believe the great ingathering—the great harvest—is happening at the same time. I believe the church will grow in numbers, while multitudes will fall away. I do not know the number, if it is tens of millions or hundreds of millions. I do not know. It is big enough to where Paul the apostle made it a sign of the end times. That falling away has not happened yet. It will be very distinct and measurable. Measurable meaning we will know it is something that has never happened at that magnitude before in history.

10. Eternal rewards and reigning on the earth with Jesus (Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4-6; 22:5)

We believe in eternal rewards and reigning on the earth with Jesus. Some people think, “That is kind of neat.” That is not neat. It is germane to the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. It is not just neat. It is neat, but it is core. It is not small. It is not a secondary point that does not really matter.

H. Jesus as Bridegroom, King, and Judge: Jesus is a Bridegroom with desire, a King with power, and a Judge who is zealous to remove all that hinders love.

I. The salvation of Israel, the battle for Jerusalem, and supporting the messianic remnant now; the persecution of Israel and widespread anti-Semitism, even including prison camps

The salvation of Israel and the many important subjects related to that. I am not trying to convey all the importance here in this little sentence, but supporting the Messianic remnant is critical—Jewish believers who are now in the land and those in the nations. It is a very, very important part of God’s end-time purpose that the church would do that. Anti-Semitism or hatred of the Jewish people—that is what that means in essence—is exploding. It is growing rapidly in the earth in just the last few years. It is going to explode biblically speaking. We can see it so clearly.

J. The eternal, conscious torment of the damned in the lake of fire (Rev. 14:10-11)

K. In light of our core convictions, we are committed to raising up forerunners who prepare themselves and others spiritually by understanding the unique dynamics seen in the 150 chapters of the Bible whose primary theme is the end times.* Forerunners proclaim Jesus as Bridegroom, King, and Judge and declare what the Scriptures say about the unique dynamics of His end-time plan. They are to equip people so that they are not *offended* by Jesus’ leadership, *deceived* by the enemy, *seduced* by the culture, or *fearful of* and *confused* by what will occur in the end times.

These are most of our core convictions. There are probably several we missed. I actually did this pretty quickly just to give you a grid. It was not meant to be a comprehensive document. Right now it is to help you feel “Okay, I get what is what now. I get the grid of where the weightiness of the truths are in our spiritual family.” In light of our core convictions, we are committed to raise up forerunners who help prepare others spiritually. We care about the unique dynamics in that generation. Whether we see that generation or not, we want to hand the baton to our children so at least they understand the 150 chapters.

When I was twenty years old, the leaders in the body of Christ in the generation before me handed the baton to me and my generation with very little information on the end times for most of those chapters. I do not want to hand the baton to your generation or to your children or grandchildren without clarity on those 150 chapters. We owe it to our children to hand it well to them. If it is all, “Well, we do not really know what it means anyway. Who cares?” then they are never going to study it.

Some generation has to go deep on those chapters to prepare the next generation. Whether I see it in my time or my grandchildren or their children, I want to hand them the baton with clarity, far differently from what was handed to my generation. In my generation it was, “The rapture is coming any minute, and most of the stuff you cannot understand anyway, so do not worry about it. You will be gone anyway.” That was it and a few more points.

It was like, “Wow, thanks. That’s it for the 150 chapters?” I am just saying that tongue-in-cheek, of course.

There are unique dynamics, very positive and very negative in the same generation. Those unique dynamics will cause people to be offended. Offended at Jesus, “How did You let this happen, Jesus? If You are God, and Your Bible is true, why did this happen?” They will be offended at Jesus if they do not understand it ahead of time. They will be deceived by the enemy. They will be celebrating the harlot Babylon, thinking it is world unity and world peace. Thinking, “Praise God, we have prayed for justice. Finally, it is happening. Let’s be a part of harlot Babylon.” No, no. They will be seduced by the culture. “Well, I mean it is just the grace of God anyway. God is so loving that nothing really matters; there is no sanctity of sex, life, or marriage or anything. Everything is the same anyway.” They can be seduced by the culture.

Many believers are being seduced right now. They do not even know there is a war going on, a cultural war that was prophesied, that the Bible has made clear. We are in the escalation of it. They are not even aware it is in the script. They love Jesus, but they are so ignorant—ignorant meaning unlearned about these passages. They are not even aware of them. They are just completely unaware, and the cultural war has just swept in and taken them unawares.

IV. HELPFUL BUT NOT ESSENTIAL

These themes are helpful for those seeking to understand the broader storyline in the Scripture related to the end times. Understanding these themes helps us to grasp many end-time passages that are commonly neglected based on their being difficult to comprehend outside the context of the broader biblical story line. These are not core convictions that we require our teachers, staff, or students to embrace.

There are themes and doctrines that are helpful. They are not essential, but they are helpful. What I mean by helpful: if you want to understand the whole story line—and no one will understand the whole story line—if you want to understand the bigger story line that is captured in the 150 chapters, some of these themes or doctrines of secondary importance, these are helpful. Because when you see a few of these other dimensions, then it sheds light on some of those obscure chapters that do not make any sense. For example, the very fact of a literal Millennium. People say, “A lion and a lamb and a kid, a little three-year-old is playing by a cobra, petting a lion? Come on. What does it really mean?”

I say, “It means a kid is playing by a cobra, petting a lion.”

“Well, how can that be?”

It does not make sense to them because they do not understand some of the secondary themes that are highlighted in little cameo shots in these 150 chapters where different insights into the diamond of the bigger picture has shed light into it. These helpful themes and doctrines are not critical. You do not need to believe them to be a teacher in our midst. You do not need to understand them or believe them. There are many of those little ones. We need to carry them in humility, and we need to say “it is possible,” or “this is a suggestion and it might be very different than that.” We need to carry and present these beliefs with nuance and qualifiers. We need to keep moving forward. The whole body of Christ. Because God is going to give a little bit of insight to

that group and this group and that group. They are going to have different views of the diamond, of this many-faceted, larger story line.

I want to know the main points. I think we have a little bit of clarity on most of the main points. I want to know the secondary points too because they are in the Bible. We do not have to preach them like they are primary, but I do want to know them. If they are in the Bible, I want some group somewhere to figure them out and teach them to me. If thousands of groups do that, collectively we will all grow in wisdom.

- A. Seeing the structure of the book of Revelation as *sequential* (instead of recapitulation) and the three numbered-judgments series (the seals, trumpets, and bowls) as *literal* (instead of symbolic)

One thing that is helpful is the structure of the book of Revelation. We see it as sequential. In the structure, one event happens after another. There are other views to the structure. None of that is a core conviction. Our Bible teachers in our midst can have different views of the structure. That does not affect their role in teaching.

- B. The 2-fold definition of the Day of the Lord—the narrow day (24 hours) and the broad day
- C. Identification of the Harlot Babylon
- D. The descent of the New Jerusalem in *proximity* to the earth at the beginning of the Millennium, and *resting on* the earth at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10) with regard to the heavenly and earthly realms being joined together at the time of Jesus' return (Eph. 1:10)

The descent of the New Jerusalem to the earth. The premillennial position, which I received it from others, is that the New Jerusalem descends at the beginning of the Millennium and at the end. The amillennialist who thinks it is mostly symbolic thinks, "That does not make any sense." There are quite a few passages that give insight into this, but no matter what, it is of secondary importance. Those are not the things that you want to get dogmatic about, argue about, or break fellowship over.

- E. Signs of the times: identifying *what* they are and *how* they are fulfilled in today's society
- F. Daniel's 30 days (Rev. 11:2-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5; cf. Dan. 7:25; 12:7, 11)

Daniel's thirty days. You ask, "What is 'Daniel's thirty days?'" The Bible talks a number of times about 1260 days. Forty-two months, 1260 days—that is three-and-a-half years. There are different ways it says this time frame. It is clear in the Bible that there are 1260 days or three-and-a-half years. That is what "three-and-a-half years" is. Then one angel said 1290 days. He added thirty more days. Like, "What? Daniel, where did you get that in the Bible?"

"Well, I got it from the angel and I put it in the Bible." What is that about? The extra thirty days. That is not a really important point, but it is in the Bible, said by an angel to the prophet Daniel. I want to try to understand it. I do not know we will understand it fully, but I want to tease that out a little bit. I want to learn from other people—What does that mean? I have studied all kinds of books on that and different writers on it. My point is it is helpful because you see a different facet of the diamond of the story line if you see it. That is not germane to our core values.

- G. Jesus marching up from Edom to Jerusalem (Isa. 63), and His royal procession being seen by "every eye" in every part of the earth (Mt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7; cf. Zech. 9:14; 12:10; Mt. 26:64)

Jesus marching up from Edom to Jerusalem. Edom is modern day Jordan. In Isaiah 63, Jesus marches into Jerusalem from there. He touches base—we do not know where He touches down when He turns up in the sky—but He lands, and He marches into Jerusalem via the Mount of Olives. It matters because there are a number of verses that to me only make sense if that piece of the puzzle is in place. I have guys that do not believe that at all, but when I ask them about those other verses, they reply, “I do not know. Nobody really knows that those mean.”

I think, “Maybe we could know what they mean.” It seems not so confusing. Again, things like that we learn, and maybe I am wrong on it.

I just had a funny thought. It is about David Pawson who is one of my favorite Bible teachers. We were talking, and he was saying, “You know, I think that “marching into Jerusalem from Edom thing” is a little strange.”

Now, I really take him very seriously as a Bible teacher. Then one of our guys took Pawson’s commentary on Isaiah that he wrote like twenty years ago or something. He turned to Isa. 63 and read, “And He marches from Edom into Jerusalem.”

Pawson says, “Huh, I guess I did believe that.” Anyway. We had a lot of fun. We laughed about it. He added, “Yeah, you know, now that I step back and think about it, I guess it really is in there. Isn’t it?”

V. OPINIONS THAT ARE NOT CENTRAL

Opinions based on implications drawn from Scripture—these are not central to our core convictions.

- A. My personal **opinion** (not prophecy) that we **may** be in the early days of the generation that the Lord returns is not a conviction held by all in our leadership team. I share this opinion because of my sense of urgency as to the importance of people studying the 150 key end-time chapters.*

Next are opinions that are not central, but are based on implications. There are Bible verses that you base them on. You need to be soft on the opinions. You cannot be sure, and you cannot speak them dogmatically. It is important that we identify opinions when we give them. You won’t every time, but I am just saying it is a good discipline to be in.

Opinions are not central to our core convictions. Like, for instance, my personal opinion of the coming of the Lord in this generation. This might be a new point to you. I might not be actually accurate what I am saying, but there is only one time in the Bible that I know of, and I could be missing some verses, where God defined the length of a generation. There are a lot of Bible verses where you can see it is forty years, sixty years, eighty years. Something like that. But one time in Genesis 15, God talked to Abraham about 400 years, and God called it four generations. The one time God audibly defined a generation—at least the only time I know of, I could be missing one. I am kind of doing this off-the-cuff. I would have to do my research to say it boldly—God talked about a generation as 100 years.

Some folks talk about “that generation will not pass away when these things happen.” They ask, “How long is a generation?”

Others reply, “It is forty. But some say eighty or 100, or shorter.” Nobody knows. I know when God defined a generation to Abraham, He actually gave the time frame of 100 years. That does not mean every generation is. I have an opinion. I do not know. It is not a prophecy at all.

Some folks are surprised. They ask, “It’s not a prophecy?”

I reply, “No, it is just an opinion. Look at all the signs that are happening.” Because I have studied the signs of the times and they are escalating on a global level. Most believers do not know the signs of the times from the Old Testament prophecies and the apostles. They know a few of Jesus—wars and rumors of wars. They know that one. They know something about earthquakes and a little bit about people not liking each other and stuff. After that they do not really think about it much. There is quite a bit of information in the Bible about signs of the times. Not all of them, but many of them are escalating at the same time on a global level.

- B. The identification and timing of the 144,000 people sealed during the Tribulation
- C. The hastening of the Day of the Lord involves a combination of significant issues, such as the sovereign timing of the Father and the maturity of the Church worldwide (2 Pet. 3:11-14). The end-time global prayer movement is an important part of this, but it is not the only vital issue.

The hastening of the day of the Lord. There is one verse that talks about hastening. Hastening is speeding up the day of the Lord. The hastening the day of the Lord actually involves a number of different truths. Meaning, as I have talked to some, some think that the prayer movement is the number one thing. I would not go there.

I think the number one thing on the hastening of the day of the Lord, to speeding it up, is the sovereignty of the Father. Another thing is the maturity of the church. I could list four to five other issues, of which prayer is one of them. Some people talk about the prayer movement, and they think that alone is the entire doctrine of the hastening.

The hastening of the day of the Lord from where I am at is such a big concept that is out of our league. Meaning most of the inner workings of the Godhead on that concept are beyond what we are grasping. We know if we obey more, and people pray, a billion people do, things are going to get better. There are other dimensions in the hastening. I encourage folks to go really soft on that concept. That is way bigger than our pay grade right now, to understand what all that means.

- D. The Church is not to pray for Jesus’ return until after the abomination of desolation occurs. We pray, “Come, Lord Jesus!”—come *near us* (in intimacy), *to us* (in revival and justice), and *for us* (at the second coming). The *whole Body of Christ* will be involved in “singing back” the King.

The church is not to pray—this was shocking to some of you last week—to pray for Jesus’ return until after the abomination of desolation. Until the last three-and-a-half years, until the Antichrist takes His place in the temple, we still have three-and-a-half years after that. As for praying for Jesus to come, I do not see a Biblical precedent until that time. It is like taking the woman who is three months pregnant and urging her to try to go into labor right now, like, “Just push.”

Like, “What?”

“Push.”

“I am only three months.”

“Just push.”

“Don’t I need to be a little bit farther along?”

“Do not worry about it. Just grit your teeth and go for it.”

Someone would say, “Well, what does that verse mean, ‘Come, Lord Jesus?’”

I think we can pray, “Come, Lord Jesus” in three ways. Come near us. I can pray right now, “Come, Lord Jesus, to me. Touch my heart.” Come near your heart. I believe the primary way we pray it collectively.

“Come to us.” That is revival or the release of justice, Luke 18. “Release the spirit of power, revival, and justice.”

“Come for us in the sky.” Jesus would violate the Word of God if He did that before the abomination of desolation. Jesus with His own mouth said in Matthew 24 that that has to happen first. He cannot come or He would violate His own Bible.

I urge people and say, “If you mean His presence to touch your heart, His presence to touch our city, yeah, but you mean appear in the sky?”

“Yes. Maybe if we pray, He will appear in the sky quicker.”

I think, “Hmmm.” I reply, “Let’s pray for revival. Between the sovereignty of God, the worldwide revival, the harvest, the hardening process of the reprobate, and the Antichrist and the kings of the nations, all those work together.” That is a wholly different story. The reason I am saying that, because some people, in my opinion, get into strange ideas.

I was talking to some of our students and some of our teachers as well, about hastening His return. Kind of a very cool phrase. I like the phrase. I like it. I like it, but I want to change it a little bit. I have heard different ones say, “We are going to sing back the King.” I say, “That is cool. That is biblical.” I say, “Let’s say it differently than ‘we.’ Let’s say ‘the body of Christ is.’” Because some people, when they say “we are going to sing back the King,” they mean their prayer meeting is going to sing back the King, not the whole body of Christ.

I say, “No, it is the whole body of Christ that is going to be involved in the prayer movement. Not one little group that sings back the King themselves.” All of our folks get that, certainly all our leaders do, but I want to encourage us that “singing back the King” is going to have a billion people involved in that from every tribe and tongue in the earth. It may not happen in your generation. You actually might not see it, but some generation will, and it might be you. It is my opinion; I think some of you might see it, or your children or grandchildren will. We will see. We will see when we get there. Amen. I am just giving you that as a gird before we even start breaking the book down. Let’s stand.