

“THE END OF ALL THINGS.”

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Belgic Confession, Article 37

Scripture Texts: John 5:25-29; Acts 3:21; 17:31

Introduction

Finally. Article 37 begins with the word finally. After a year and a half and 48 sermons we are finally at the end of the Belgic Confession and ready to deal with the last article that deals with final things, the end of all things. The fancy name for this is Eschatology, which is simply the study of last things.

Finally when it is all said and done, it comes down to this. Everything we have learned about God and Scripture, about the fall and about Christ and our redemption, about the church and the sacraments, all of it is preparation for this final day.

Everything points to the final return of Christ and the final fulfillment of all Scripture and of all history. In the end Jesus will have the last word. The disastrous work of the first Adam will finally be undone by the return of the second Adam.

The last judgment is hard for us to talk about because of its implications for all of us, partly because of some measure of guilt and shame we feel about our sinful words and actions, and partly because hell is a very scary prospect and unpleasant topic.

But there is something else about this article that strikes deeper into our hearts. When you read it, it doesn't just read like academic doctrine. This isn't just spouting truth out of the Bible. As you read you begin to feel there is something personal, something real about this.

This is being written by someone living in the days of suffering and persecution, in the days of martyrdom. This sounds more like what a Christian in Iraq or Afghanistan might write than what a Christian in America would write.

Article 37: “They will then receive the fruits of their labor and of the trouble they have suffered; their innocence will be openly recognized by all; and they will see the terrible vengeance that God will bring on the evil ones who tyrannized, oppressed, and tormented them in this world.”

“...and their cause-- at present condemned as heretical and evil by many judges and civil officers-- will be acknowledged as the ‘cause of the Son of God.’”

This is real. There is conviction here and courage, faith and hope.

Article 37 teaches what Scripture says about this topic under four headings: *when* it will happen, *what* will happen when it happens, *why* it will happen and the *consequences of why* it happens.

Article 37.

When will the end come?

We are now living in the last days. All that remains is the fulfilling of the final prophecy, the second coming of Christ. The article starts with when will the end come?

Jesus Christ will return when the number of the elect is complete and when the sins of the world have filled up.

Genesis 15:16 And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

Daniel 8:23 And at the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their limit, a king of bold face, one who understands riddles, shall arise.

I Thessalonians 2:15-16 who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind 16 by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always *to fill up the measure of their sins*. But wrath has come upon them at last!

There is an end of all things coming. The date is uncertain, but the reality is certain. It will be the end of time as we know it and then the beginning of the rest of eternity.

It is certain because of the revelation and teaching of Scripture, this is not speculation or pie in the sky wish fulfillment.

The creed makes no mention of the conversion of Israel, the preaching of the Gospel to all nations, the great apostasy, the release of the anti-christ or the great upheaval of wars and earthquakes and signs and wonders.

The Bible speaks of such things, the confession keeps it simple. The fulfillment of time will come when the number of the elect is complete and the sins of wicked have filled up. If you wonder why Jesus hasn't come back yet, it's because of these two things.

The time is known only by the Father.

Mark 13:32-33 “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.

What will happen when the end comes?

Jesus Christ shall suddenly, physically and visibly return from heaven just as He ascended, just as He said. Christ is risen just as He said, and Christ is coming again just as He said.

Acts 1:11 “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Revelation 1:7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him.

He will return visibly, publically and physically in His resurrected body for all to see with trumpets blaring and in great glory.

The question of *how* the millennium will take place is not addressed by the article. There are so many views today. I will save a more in depth look at those views for another time. So I will only say this much now.

Part of the reason why I am even saying anything now is that in a couple months a new movie is going to be released called, *Left Behind*, starring Nicholas Cage, based on that popular series of 16 novels that came out in the 90's and 00's by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.

Those books and the movie are based on a particular eschatological viewpoint that has become popular in America in the past hundred and fifty years called dispensational, pretribulational premillennialism. It says Christ secretly comes to earth before the great tribulation and raptures the believers up and the comes again after seven years to set up His 1000 year reign, after which there is then another resurrection of the unbelievers before the great judgment.

They teach two comings with two resurrections and two judgments, but there will only be one return of Jesus and one resurrection of all the dead and one great judgment as John 5:28-29 plainly says.

John 5:28-29 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

The church will not be spared the tribulation. When history is finished and the full number of the elect is complete, Jesus will come and immediately there will be one big resurrection of the good and the bad and then the judgment will begin.

If you read the books or see the movie do so for the entertainment but not for the theology.

Why will Jesus come again?

The purpose or reason of His coming again will be judgment and restoration.

Sin has corrupted everything on earth and totally ruined mankind and all of creation and human history. There will be a great fire on the earth in which everything on earth will be burned up and dissolved away.

II Peter 3:10-13 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Isaiah 65:17 For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

The purpose of the fire will not so much be to destroy but to cleanse and renew the earth. Because of sin the earth is under a curse.

Romans 8:20-22 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

The curse will be lifted by a purification through fire. This will be a redemption by purging and purifying. A new heavens and a new earth will replace the old heaven and earth and creation will be delivered from bondage.

What was once made very good, and then became very bad will once again be made very good.

Notice heavens is plural in the Isaiah passage. In Genesis 1:1 it says God created the heavens and the earth. Heavens here refers to the first heaven and the second heaven, not the dwelling place of God. There will be a complete renewal of the created order, of the entire physical universe.

The resurrection of dead and the living for the great judgment.

Acts 17:31 he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness.

II Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

We will all be called before the judgment seat by a cry of command; the voice of the archangel; and the trumpet call of God (I Thessalonians 4:16).

The books will be opened meaning the consciences of all people and every thought, word and deed exposed.

All will be judged with regard to what they have done, said or thought.

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

The Consequences of the Judgment.

There will be a great separation. This is the only real separation of people the Scripture allows. No separation of races, no separation of men and women, or rich and poor, or powerful and weak, or political parties. The only separation is between believers and unbelievers.

In Scripture there are only those who are in Christ and those who are not, those who have the Holy Spirit and those who don't. The wicked and ungodly on the one hand and the faithful and elect on the other hand.

The punishment of the wicked.

The purpose of this for the wicked is so that when God judges them it will be seen as a just judgment. Their own consciences will convict them and they will be guilty as charged and they will receive their just reward, eternal torment in an everlasting hell.

Why is a person's finite sin punished to such a great extent? Why is seventy years of sinning met with an eternity of punishment? Does the punishment really fit the crime?

Our sin is not great or small based on how long we have been sinning. Our sin is great based on the one we have sinned against. Our sin merits an infinite punishment because we have sinned against the infinite holiness and infinite excellency and infinite honorableness of God.

We have violated an infinite obligation and our crime is infinitely terrible and wicked.

And we have only to read the headlines and look at the horrific natural disasters on our planet to get a picture, a glimpse of just how horrible sin is. Creation groans under the effects.

Those who lived without God in this world will live without God or hope in the world to come.

The reward of the righteous.

Why does the article say the judgment is pleasant and a great comfort to the righteous?

For believers the purpose of this opening of books is different, it will be for their reward.

II Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

We will not be judged or condemned by our sin and we will not lose our salvation because of our sins, but we will be judged and rewarded based on what we have done.

Our sin is not imputed to us, it's imputed to Christ. His righteousness is imputed to us. We are holy before a holy God. The judgment will be a comfort because we have been freed from fear, terror and dread.

Jesus will confess our names before the Father and the angels personally and publically.

He will wipe away every tear.

He will give us stunning glory, glory that cannot be imagined by any human mind. Not only will we see Jesus' glory but we will share in His glory.

"I know not what joys await us there, what radiancy of glory, what bliss beyond compare!"
(Jerusalem the Golden).

Philippians 3:20-21 Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Application and Conclusion.

Look forward to the day. Long for the coming of Christ. Welcome every thought of that day and what it will be like. Allow yourself from time to time to contemplate what a glorious day it will be. Think about it, prepare for it, plan for it.

Speak of these things to those who do not share your hope. Give a reason for the hope that is in you. With fear and trembling plead with the souls of the lost. Speak to them, pray for them.

"Encourage one another with these words" (I Thessalonians 4:18) Paul says. Encourage each other with this future and this hope. Bless each other by speaking of these true and eternal things.

Revelation 19:1-2 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, 2 for his judgments are true and just;

I Corinthians 2:9 But, as it is written,

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."

Announcements:

Coleson B.; Bertha M. fell, at St. Joe; Toni T. at home.

Next Sunday evening is our annual outdoor communion service and ice social, with children's songs and children's sermon.

Since the topic of the last article of the Belgic Confession deals with the end of time and the coming of Christ and the saints being taken into glory all our hymns and readings are on the same theme.

Call to Worship:

See bulletin

Opening Prayer:

Father, as it the custom of your people now for nearly 2000 years, we have gather on the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection to worship you and give you the praise and thanks that is due your name. We especially thank you tonight for the indescribable doctrine of the resurrection from the dead. What a glorious reality. Grant us believing hearts as we sing and pray and hear your Word proclaimed. Make us hungry to know you and understand your ways and walk in your will and long for you coming. In Jesus name, Amen.

Profession of Our Faith:

See bulletin

Evening Prayer:

Tough situations in northern Iraq, Gaza, W. Arica, Nigeria, Ukraine and many other places.

Also, pray for rain in W. Africa.

Israel/Palestine

Bertha M.; Coleson B.; Willie Feller; Klyn grandson Shamus surgery at Childrens

Craig Gelynse Aug 18; Tony H. on Aug. 20

Nicki Laird; Cancer; depression; bi-polar; age and declining health; spouses caring for spouses

Lance Bosman;

Molly and Mindy China

Trevor (Marilyn's grandson) in Guatemala.

Benediction:

I Thess. 5:23-24 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **24** He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.