

WHY SHOULD CHRISTIANS GO TO CHURCH? HOW IMPORTANT IS IT?

Some people joke about the “Bedside Baptists” who attend the “Chapel of the Tube” on Sunday mornings. But it’s more than a joke. Many people refuse to get near a church unless their nephew is playing the role of a sheep in the Christmas pageant! They claim they can get more out of a walk in the woods than from the typical sermon.

Can a Christian survive apart from a church? Some Christians have no choice. They are trapped in a hospital bed, or working in an isolated area where no church exists. God is certainly sufficient to care for their needs. You can still get to heaven if you can’t go to church. But, even though it’s technically possible to live the Christian life in isolation, it’s certainly not the norm.

When you become a Christian, you are called into a relationship with God (1 Corinthians 1:9). However, 1 John 1:3 makes it clear that we enter a fellowship that goes two ways: with God and with other Christians.

The New Testament never divides Christians into the church members and the non-church members. All the way through, it assumes that everybody participates in their local assembly. It gives no samples of Christians who belong to the “universal church” but have no link with a local church. One scholar has said that “any idea...of enjoying salvation or being a Christian in isolation is foreign to the New Testament writings” (Alan Stibbs, *God’s Church*, p. 92). Wherever Christians are within range of each other in the New Testament, they meet. Every time the apostle Paul comes to a town in the book of Acts where there are no Christians, he wins a few converts and immediately organizes them into a small group – a little church.

Acts 20:7 reveals the practice of the early church: "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them." For Christians in every location, regular gathering was a part of life.

It's illogical to say that you are merely part of the worldwide, universal church, yet refuse to gather with the segment of that universal church that exists in your geographical area. It would be like claiming you have a car, when the right fender is in Phoenix, the engine is in Tucson, and the wheels are in Paradise Valley! You don't have a car; you have the beginning of the inventory for a junkyard. It just won't function until the pieces are put together.

The church must be together to carry out many of its purposes.

Here are some irreplaceable pieces of the Christian that cannot happen when you live in isolation from the church:

1. THE USE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS – I Corinthians 12 makes it clear that God has given spiritual gifts to every Christian. And verse 7 states unmistakably that these abilities are not provided to make you feel good; they are abilities to minister that should be used for the common good! I Peter 4:10 commands us to use spiritual gifts to help each other.

The same passage makes it clear that we meet with other Christians so they can use their gifts to strengthen us. God's gift of a preacher or teacher is wasted if no one comes to hear them speak.

2. MUTUAL MINISTRY – The church is pictured as a body in I Corinthians 12, and Paul explains that each part of the body exists to meet the needs of other body parts. In the same way, God intends each of us to meet the needs of other believers, using our strengths to help in their areas of weakness. I Corinthians 12:21 expresses it this way: "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you." Neither can a Christian claim to be self-sufficient today.

The New Testament is full of “one another” commands. We are to comfort one another (I Thessalonians 4:18), build up one another (I Thessalonians 5:11), confess our sins to one another (James 5:16), pray for one another (James 5:16), and many more. How can we obey these directives if we stay away from the gathering of believers?

3. ACCOUNTABILITY – God designed the church as a place where spiritual leaders could watch out for our welfare, as a shepherd guards the sheep (I Peter 5:1-4; Hebrews 13:17). A Christian who answers only to himself can easily rationalize sinful attitudes or actions; regular contact with other Christians can keep us sharp.

A single verse should actually be sufficient answer for this question: Hebrews 10:25 warns its readers against “forsaking the assembly of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.”

ESCHATOLOGY 101

Many Christians have told me that the study of prophecy is irrelevant to the here and now. I would counter, by quoting the famed comedian George Burns, “I look to the future, because that is where I’m going to spend the rest of my life”. Several years ago, an Omega Letter member named Ron Maurno delivered to us the ‘Bible Prophecy 101’ letter, which I for one, was tremendously blessed by. He gives a summation of all the major points in the prophetic Scriptures. In a similar manner, what I would like to do now is focus in on one section of that summation, eschatology. While the days darken, and our world seemingly becomes more unhinged each day, we know according to Scripture, that God has a grand plan

for us, and a future beyond compare. I hope this helps you in your journey.

Definition

Bible Prophecy: God's foretelling of what's to come. Since God exists outside of time, He is able to see the end from the beginning, and all therein. (Isaiah 46:9-10) 28% of the Bible is prophetic in nature, beginning with Genesis 3:15 (protoevangelium). There were 'near' and 'far' prophecies. Near being fulfilled in the lifetime of the person delivering the message, and far, would be any of which would come to pass beyond that prophets life.

Eschatology: the word being a compound of two Greek words, Eschatos, meaning last or final things; and ology, meaning the study of, so it is a part of theology concerned primarily with the study of last things or final events.

So while all Eschatology fits into the concept of Bible prophecy, not all Bible prophecy is eschatological in nature. For instance, Bible prophecies concerning Christ's first coming were prophetic when they were given, but are not considered eschatological.

Purpose of

Probably the most maligned, and misunderstood theological doctrine in all of Christianity, is that of Bible prophecy. Granted, every major doctrine within Christendom has been abused and/or perverted to some extent, but none as much as Bible prophecy. So why would God give us something that has the potential to receive so much negative attraction?

Bible Prophecy...

1. Defends the authoritative power, truth, inerrancy, and divine inspiration of the Bible (Isaiah 46:9-10; Jeremiah 30, 31; Ezekiel 36-39, etc.) "Thus saith the

Lord”

2. No other book, religious or otherwise contains the same claims, nor the perfect prophetic track record of the Holy Bible. (Isaiah 55:11) Ex: Christ fulfilled 109 specific prophecies concerning His birth, life, death, and resurrection.
3. Jesus used prophecy to confirm that His message was true, and did so by telling His disciples ahead of time, so when it happened, they knew it was supposed to happen. (John 14:29; 16:4, Luke 24:25-27)
4. Gives hope in dark days (2 Peter 1:19-21, 1 Thess. 4:13-18)
5. We are commanded to watch and understand the times we live in. (Mark 13:35-37; Luke 12:37; 1 Thess. 5:1-8)
6. Gives a practical purpose for everyday life:
7. Prophecy is not meant to tickle the ear, but to turn our feet toward God.
8. Meant to provoke us to holy living. (1 John 3:2-3; 2 Peter 3:11; Titus 2:13)
9. A powerful tool for evangelism. (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9)
10. Serves as warning that time had a starting point, and likewise, has an end.
11. Revives a sense of urgency in our lives concerning the coming of Christ (Matt. 24:42)
12. Is all about Christ (either directly, or indirectly). (Rev. 19:10; Luke 24:25-27)

Hermeneutics

Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpretation concerning the books of the Bible. It is part of the broader field of hermeneutics, which involves the study of principles for the text and includes all forms of communication: verbal and nonverbal. (Source: Wikipedia)

Understanding that Bible prophecy has a ‘value added’ to the Christian walk, we now turn to the differing viewpoints within

eschatology. All of these viewpoints come about, by either one of two methods of biblical interpretation, or hermeneutics.

Literal: means the literal, grammatical, historical, and contextual reading of a passage is taken at face value, unless the surrounding passages convey otherwise.

Non-Literal: means the passage is not taken in the above manner, but either a spiritual metaphor or simile, or allegorical approach is applied to the text at hand.

Now, two common misconceptions are at play here:

Taking a passage literally, does not imply 'wooden literalism', as some would have it. When Jesus says, "I am the door..." (John 10:9), we know that Jesus isn't literally a 'door'. He is using a metaphor to convey a deeper meaning that one must enter through Him, in order to receive salvation.

Also, in Isaiah 55:12, when it states that "all the trees of the field will clap their hands", we understand that to be a personification of a non-human object. It is meant to convey a deeper, poetical meaning to the fact that nature itself will rejoice in God. Having a literal interpretation just means we take the text at face value, unless by doing so, makes the passage nonsensical. From Dr. D.L. Cooper:

"When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word as its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths indicate clearly otherwise."

Secondly, a person who takes the non-literal position is not to say that they take the whole bible in non-literal fashion. Rather, they take the non-prophetic passages literally, but then apply a non-literalism (allegorical, metaphorical, etc.) approach in varying degrees, to prophetic passages. So for the

most part, they would think they have a literal understanding of the Bible (i.e...Creation, Noah's ark, Moses, David and Goliath, and even prophetic passages that pertain to Christ's first coming), usually are taken in a literal manner. Non-literal interpretation is usually only reserved for passages pertaining to events that have yet to take place.

Three main branches of hermeneutical thought within Orthodox Christianity based off the framework in which one develops an eschatological viewpoint, is derived usually, from one of three main views:

1. Dispensationalism
2. Covenant Theology
3. Catholic

Dispensationalism (DISP)

Dispensationalism; comes from the Greek compound word, oikonomia, which simply means 'house rules'. It is used some 20 times in the NT and represents the following words; Steward or stewardship, administration, dispensation, or manager. The definition, according to Dr. Charles Ryrie is as follows:

Dispensationalism views the world as a household run by God. In His household world God is dispensing or administering its affairs according to His own will and in various stages of revelation in the passage of time. These various stages mark off the distinguishably different economies in the outworking of His total purpose, and these different economies constitute the dispensations. The understanding of God's differing economies is essential to a proper interpretation of His revelation within those various economies.

It is based on three simple premises:

1. A plain, normal, literal, grammatical, historical interpretation of all Scriptures.
2. A recognition that Israel is not the Church and the

Church is not Israel.

3. The overarching plan is God's glory.

A Dispensational viewpoint is a natural consequence of a consistent, normal, literal interpretation of scripture. Two points up front to consider: the first is that God never changes. The second is that although the entire Bible is for the Christian, the entire Bible is not to the Christian. Anyone who goes to Church on Sunday with clothes on, doesn't sacrifice small animals, and doesn't consider themselves under the thumb of the Mosaic Law would have to agree.

We see in the Bible that there are three primary groups of people; the Gentiles, the Jews (Hebrews/Israelites), and the Church. Genesis 1-12 deals exclusively with mankind as singular group. Then, in Genesis 12, God separates one man (Abraham) and is set aside to become a new group. From Genesis 12-Malachi, the focus is exclusively on the Jewish people. Gentiles are only mentioned in so much as in how they interact with the Jews.

The New Testament makes mention of a new class of people...the Church; with Matt. 16:16-19 as the first mention. Acts 2 then is what is normally accepted as the birth of the Church, with the giving of the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost. So from Acts 2 through Revelation 3:22, the focus is exclusively on the Church. Jews and Gentiles are only mentioned, as far as how they interact with the Church. (See 1 Cor. 10:32). Also, in 70+ times of mention in the NT, Israel is never recognized as the Church, or vice versa.

The last piece is on God's glory being the overarching plan for God. This glory supersedes even that of salvation. For example, the fallen angels (of which Lucifer is chief) have no manner or mechanism for redemption, yet, their condemnation, judgment, and damnation, serve to fulfill the purpose of God's glory. True, God knew from before the foundation of the world how this would all play out, but God's glory trumps every

other purpose or plan that exists.

A Dispensationalist recognizes that God has interacted in differing ways with mankind through the ages. Not everyone has a forbidden tree to eat from. Not everyone has an ark to build. Not everyone has a burning bush, or a giant to slay. He/she also recognizes that the entire Bible wasn't given to Adam...it was given in varying measures to His chosen spokesmen over a period of 1,600 years. This is known as 'progressive revelation'. Middletown Bible Church gives a good demonstration of this below:

Adam: "I had no Bible at all, but I walked with God in the cool of the garden."

Abraham: "I had no Bible at all, but at different times God would appear to me and speak to me" (see Genesis 17:1; 18:1; etc.)

Moses: "My Bible contained 5 books-Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy"

David: "My Bible contained the same 5 books that Moses had as well as Joshua and Judges and many of the Psalms which I wrote, etc."

Ezra: "My Bible contained most of the Old Testament books but not all of them"

John the Baptist: "My Bible contained all of the Old Testament books but none of the New Testament books"

Paul: "My Bible contained the Old Testament books and most of the New Testament books but not all of them"

John: "My Bible contained all of the Old Testament books and all of the New Testament books. Shortly before I died God used me to write the last New Testament book."

So simply based off the idea that not everyone had a complete

Bible (Old and New Testament), how could Moses know all that would be revealed to Paul? He didn't. He only knew what God had revealed to him at that moment in time, or over the course of his life. To assume anything beyond that is to insert an idea into the text, that simply isn't there.

Two charges often laid at the feet of Dispensationalism, is that it is a new system (Johnny Come-Lately theology), and that it promotes multiple ways of salvation. Neither is true.

1. Dispensationalism is as old as the Bible itself...because it is the normal understanding one comes to, if you take the literal, grammatical, historical interpretative method. Going back to the early church, men like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus understood that God has worked differently, in different ages. Jonathan Edwards (1646-1719), published 2 vol. work- entitled "A Complete History or Survey of All the Dispensations" Isaac Watts (1674-1748) which recognized the dispensations as conditional ages wherein God had certain expectations of men and made conditional promises and prohibitions to them.

It was systematized by John N. Darby in the 1800's, but that is not the same as it being 'invented'. No one accuses Martin Luther of inventing 'sola fide' in the 1500's. He simply rediscovered what the scriptures have said all along. Similarly, men like John N. Darby (and others) were rediscovering the plain, normative, understanding of all Scripture, to include Bible prophecy. Charles Ryrie sums it up like this;

The fact that something was taught in the first century does not make it right (unless taught in the canonical Scriptures), and the fact that something was not taught until the nineteenth century does not make it wrong unless, of course, it is unscriptural.

Infant baptism and Replacement theology began back as

early as the 1st century, and neither are biblical, yet because they've been around as long as they have, does that give them credence to persist as mainstream Christian teaching? Clearly, no. So longevity is not an accurate standard in which we measure our orthodoxy on.

2. Dispensationalism has never promoted multiple ways of salvation. Certain statements by Dispensationalists, when taken in isolation and/or out of context, have been used as fodder to feed this argument. (See a detailed response here). Adherence to the Law never saved anyone, (Gal. 3:24)

Question: Since salvation is by grace through faith, how could the OT saints be 'saved' prior to Christ's coming?

Answer: Salvation is the wrong way to frame the question. Salvation is through Christ alone. (John 10:9, 14:6) One has to come to Christ in order to be baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. (1 Cor. 12:13), sealing the believer into Christ forever. (2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:11-14) Since 4,000 years of human history had transpired prior to Christ's physical manifestation here on earth as the promised Redeemer, salvation was not yet possible. If it were, Christ need not come.

One was not 'saved' before Christ came, in the same sense that we are today (post-Calvary), but they were justified by their faith in God, and when they died, they went to Abraham's bosom, which is in Sheol (or Hades in the Greek), but separated from 'Torments' in a place known as Paradise, awaiting their redemption by the Redeemer. (Luke 16:22-26; 23:43; Eph. 4:8-10; 1 Peter 3:18-20)

In conclusion, on the Dispensational view, it is the most accurate attempt by fallen men, to corroborate what Holy Scriptures tell us about God's outworking in the human race

over the course of our common history. It is not perfect, because we simply don't know certain things, either due to silence in the Word, or because events have not yet played out. We hold that all Progressive Revelation ended with the Apocalypse, as given to John the Beloved on Patmos, in AD95. What we have now, is Progressive Illumination, which continues to open our understanding of the how, in God's plan unfolds according to His time, and His purpose.

<http://www.raptureforums.com/PeteGarcia/eschatology101>

Sighted: 5 Jan 2015

WAITING ON GOD

There are many "voices" we can hear and follow in this modern-day world in which we live. The underlying reason that many people are becoming out of control in our communities today, is no doubt because of the many 'voices' that they listen to every day. If you're a young adult you will probably hear the 'voice of independence' telling you that you should do your own thing! For example, a common 'voice' that young people hear is, "If it feels good DO IT! The end result of course, is that that type of attitude leads to our actions simply creating another person who is out of control! The abuse of drugs, alcohol, partying, addiction to pornography, illicit sex, and so on, are all things that loudly says to others, "Hey, I'm out of control"!

You may ask, what is the deep seated thing that motivates us as a result of hearing and responding to a particular 'voice'? If you're not hearing God's Voice, then all other voices must come from the wrong source? My wife and I were recently discussing the subject of contentment – we had attended a

meeting where the speaker spoke on same – we concluded that by allowing ourselves to listen repeatedly to any one of the many of the worldly ‘voices’ that are clammering for our attention every day, that the major effect that it has on people is to cause them to become discontent with their lot in life! Paul said, “...*godliness with contentment is great gain.*”(1 Tim 6:6)

Discontent comes when we respond to the ‘voice’ that we listen to most. Remember, the whole point of modern-day advertising is to make us discontent with our present life – SPOUSE, HOUSE, JOB, CAR, FOOD, CLOTHING, or whatever!! Discontented people are always seeking change. They invariably make changes without much thought for the future! This only engenders heaps of trouble and leads to more discontent! Maybe a good reason we have so many ‘Church-hoppers’ is the problem of discontent!

The Voice that we, as Christians, should most hear and respond to is the VOICE OF GOD! We know that we can only hear Him in our innermost being as a ‘still small voice” when we spend time quietly with Him! This can only lead to contentment. Yet, we always seem to find it difficult to make the time to sit and “wait on God” – I know I’m often guilty in that regard. We need to do this if we are to find the answers we need to help us in live a contented and controlled life. Oh, life would be so much less difficult if we were to set time aside to learn to listen to HEAR AND KNOW THE VOICE OF GOD!! Psalm 62:5-6 *“My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation.”*

Whatever we see as our spiritual and physical needs regarding the desires of our heart, not only for ourselves, but for our marriage, family, friends and church, the SECRET of our SUCCESS is to WAIT on our Father God! Isn’t that what servants do, wait upon their masters? If we can discipline ourselves and learn to hear from God, then discontent will be no longer our portion! Should we not choose to do that, we are simply people out of His control.

If we long to hear from Him and apply His principles for success, it means that we never make quick and rash decisions that we later regret. Eccl 8:5 says, *“He who obeys a command will meet no harm, and the mind of a wise man will know the time and the way.”* Good advice for all who desire to live in what is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, enables us to live self-controlled lives, if we allow Jesus to take the wheel, so to speak. We can do this by adopting the Christian lifestyle and with His help, live at peace with both men and God.

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THE REALITY OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE IN THE HOME

by Dr. Robert H. Carpenter on December 13, 2007

Numerous born-again Christians have little or no knowledge of the spiritual warfare that takes place all around us.

One of the sad realities within the local church today centres on the fact that numerous born-again Christians have little or no knowledge of the spiritual warfare that takes place all around us. The Bible is crystal clear in proclaiming that there is a battle raging in the heavenlies as the forces of evil continue to wage war against not only the Creator, but also against all who trust in Christ Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

The Bible is crystal clear in proclaiming that there is a battle raging in the heavenlies. In the six thousand years since the Garden of Eden, two of Satan's most strategic assaults have been focused on destroying the sanctity of the

marriage covenant and the unity of our homes. A detailed study of God's Word will show us that the devil is focused on ripping our families apart. Satan will use any tactic he can; he will capitalize on every advantage imaginable to disrupt the harmony in our homes.

As a pastor, I am a firm believer that the modern-day church must be dedicated to preaching and teaching the Scriptures without compromise beginning with its foundation in Genesis 1-11. We must be committed to training all believers in the knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures so they can know how to stand firm against the enemy of God. Ray Stedman addresses the reality of the spiritual battles we face by stating:

We can only truly understand life when we see it as the Bible sees it. That is why the Word of God was given: to introduce us to real reality. When we come to the Bible, we learn the truth. One of the most fundamental truths the Bible presents to us is that, behind the facade of this world, there is an invisible battle raging. This battle takes many casualties, and there are no innocent bystanders, no non-combatants. Every human being on the planet, whether he or she is aware of it or not, is forced to take one side or the other in this great cosmic war. There is no room for any neutrality. So it is critically important that you and I know how to defend ourselves and arm ourselves for battle.

As believers, we may often wonder if there is anything we can do to counter the attacks our spiritual enemy hurls at us. We might even ask, "Can we, as Christian couples and parents, stand in the gap for our marriages, our children, and our homes?" Let me say a resounding, "Yes, we can, and we must stand united in the victory Jesus has secured for us."

We must not delay in teaching our children to understand what the Bible has to say concerning spiritual warfare. Modern-day theologian Wayne Grudem assists us in understanding some of the basic doctrinal truths pertaining to Satan's origin and

fall from heaven when he writes:

Satan and demons were once like the good angels but who sinned and lost their privilege before God. Like angels, they were also created, spiritual beings with moral judgment and high intelligence but without physical bodies. When God created the world, he “saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). This means that even the angelic world that God had created did not have evil angels in it at that time. But by the time of Genesis 3, we find that Satan, in the form of the serpent, was tempting Eve to sin (Genesis 3:1–5). Therefore, sometime between the events of Genesis 1:31 and Genesis 3:1, there must have been a rebellion in the angelic world with many angels turning against God and becoming evil.

As Genesis 3 shows us, Satan’s desire is not only to destroy our lives, but also to weaken and sever the relationships we hold dear. We might all agree that Adam and Eve were both at fault for their disobedience and rebellion against God’s commandments. But a careful reading of Genesis 3:12 shows that Adam blamed his sin not only on his wife, but also on his Creator by saying to the Lord, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate” (emphasis mine).

Without question, Satan is still using the same tactics against our marriages and homes today. He seeks to divide us from our spouses and our children as he plans his strategies to destroy the unity God has designed for us. Just as he was successful in breaking the unity Adam and Eve shared with their Creator, he is still achieving an alarming number of victories in the modern-day Christian home, as the sins of pride and selfishness are often all too prevalent.

I have often talked with numerous people who have had serious questions about the origins of evil and sin in the world. Many may wonder, “How and when, did sin begin?” As the Bible teaches, Lucifer sinned when he exercised his free will to

rebel against his Creator.

Over my years in pastoral ministry, I have seen far too many believers who lack the knowledge about who they are in Christ. I am convinced that unless we acquire a solid biblical understanding of our "in Christ" position, we will be unable to fully counter the attacks of our enemy as he tempts us to exercise our free will and rebel against the commandments of God. As believers, we have a tremendous responsibility to study God's Word so we can be better able to stand firm with the knowledge and power our Lord has provided for us as we face the devil and his forces of evil.

Without a doubt, it is time that we, as the children of God, began living as strong soldiers of the Cross. May our awareness be ever so quickened that we will begin recognizing the attacks of the devil when they come our way. Would you also agree that Satan has been achieving his victories for far too long? Will you join with me as we literally claim the power of God's Holy Spirit against the one who seeks to divide and destroy our marriages, our homes, and our churches? As the people of God, we can praise our Creator for all His abundant promises as we literally stand in the strength He provides.

From: <https://answersingenesis.org/angels-and-demons/> 05 Aug 2014

GOD'S WAY vs SATAN'S WAY?

In the world today there is an increase of pressure on people to take sides on issues that several years ago would never have caused the average citizen to even show the slightest interest. As I typed this some time back, a young man was walking to Sydney, NSW, through Bordertown in South Australia,

in the cause of PEACE. How important is it to stand up for something you believe in, and yet be seen by other people as perhaps a radical? Coming from Sydney to South Australia, one was not continually bombarded on the streets by someone, or some group, seeking to change world circumstances, or public opinion? What his action really has done for some is to give them an appreciation of just how much this troubled world needs someone, to be a Wonderful Counselor, a Prince of Peace! One who can take the numerous problems we have upon His shoulder and bring about an everlasting rule in the world, where peace never ends! But who can be called on to act in such a capacity? The only answer of course is found in Isaiah 9:6 – JESUS CHRIST!!

The statement Paul made as to how men would be in the Last Days, (2nd Timothy 3) is indeed a true description of the times we live in! Yes, some would say that those types he mentions have always been with us, but read Matthew 24! Imagine a man sitting on a fence with a raging bull (representing our sinful world) on one side offering Eternal Death, and the Lord Jesus on the other, offering Eternal Life! The fence sitter is about to fall one way or the other! Which side he lands on determines where he will spend his ETERNITY! It will soon be apparent to those who land on what we shall call, 'the Bull's side – referred to as the Pit' – that their inability to have made an intelligent, wise, and quality decision here and now, as to how they will spend Eternity was perhaps a wrong decision! There are many roads into hell – but there is not a single road or track OUT!

The Word of God says only a fool says in his heart, "There is no God".(Psalm 14:1) Who would believe that mankind, with all his abilities and talents, should only live an average of 70-80 years and then die? Even trees are known to have lived for thousands of years! Large turtles live anywhere from 400-600 years! Trees give shade, drop leaves, seeds and provide lumber. All the turtles do is to eat and reproduce! We

were created for a purpose and one will only know what that purpose for being here on Earth is, only when he asks the Lord Jesus into his life! Is your 'fence rail' of support going to stand the test of time and the storms of life come? If your security is your house, your wealth and your health were all cancelled tomorrow – ON WHICH SIDE OF THE FENCE WOULD YOU BE?
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HOW THEN SHOULD WE LIVE?

In this violent and chaotic world in which we live, there is one thing that has never changed (despite inflation) and that is the wages of sin – which of course is death! How sad is it for someone to be born into this life, grow up, become old and then die, without even knowing why they were here?

It can be so easy for some Christians to sit back in their own comfortable little world and not even trouble themselves about where their lives are really heading? If they have work, they work, they go to church every Sunday, they try to meet their obligations, they try to attend to the needs of their family, but are they ever at all interested in answering God's Call on their lives? If your answer is yes, then remember, that for a Christian, sin is 'missing the mark, or target' which God has set for each one of us to aim for in this life!

So, what then is our target in this life? Is it heaven, or something else? I've said many times that our goal should be life itself – the abundant life of John 10:10. Jesus meant us to live life in the absolute, as God has it! To many people, life in this world is a living hell! Life for those without God is really just a "cut-flower" existence. They look

beautiful on the outside, but they are really dying from the inside out. The Bible pleads with us to become partakers of God's 'divine nature' in 2ndPeter 1:4 What God really wants us to do is demonstrate that there is a better way and lifestyle! Jesus is the way, the truth and the life!

We can't hope to live up to God's standards until we allow His power to begin to change us (2 Cor 3:18). We should never say we are too old, too young or too far gone! Remember, that it is His will that we live the abundant life – it's what the lord desires for us to achieve through his promises by his power (2 Peter 1:4) so that we can all become effective and fruitful in this life and that we will never fall!!! (2 Peter 1: 10) People won't desire a thing unless they can see it. God's will for us is that we know who we are and why we are here, in order to demonstrate the Life which He offers to all – they need to see it to believe it!

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COME SIT AT MY FEET...AND LEARN OF ME!

The expression, "Come sit at my feet and learn of me." is one that Paul the Apostle knew full well the meaning of due to his being sent to Jerusalem as a young man, to sit at the feet of, and be taught by the great Rabbi, Gamaliel. Some years ago, I was very surprised to find, in the course of my research, that there really was some of the great teacher Gamaliel writings that had survived! Many Jews today still quote him as an authority on their faith. Can you imagine how Paul must have been awestruck to be going to sit at his feet!

An indication of the value of the teaching Paul received, can be gleaned from his own writings and his insights into the Hebrew Scriptures! Paul, no doubt was being groomed to be a great leader in his nation. Some have even said that he was being groomed to one day, be the High Priest! Peter even said that, "...in Paul's letters there are some things hard to understand." Even today the Christian World's best theologians have difficulties with his writings. BUT... we don't have to be men with Phd's or the like, to be able to grasp all that our Father wants to enlighten us with from His Word, the Bible. He invites us, in a spiritual sense to "sit at my feet and learn of me."

The Holy Spirit has been given to indwell us as our teacher and given the task of teaches and leads us into all truth! The Holy Spirit, to many is sadly referred to as being an 'It', to others they see Him being likened to a docile dove, the most timid of all the birds. We should see Him as the ultimate and powerful teacher – what better position can we find than to be "SITTING" where we can be taught by Him! We must challenge ourselves to make the time to sit where Father God wants us to sit, at the feet of the One He sent to minister to us, when we read and meditate, by filling our minds with His Word! To lead us when we pray, and just sit quietly and fellowship with Him? Many of the Bible situations in which Jesus taught the people speaks of not only them sitting, but Him sat also.

For example, He sat in the Temple, sat in a boat, sat at a well, sat at meals, and so on. Sometimes, we allow our busy, and often unnecessary, schedules and activities to exclude us from this activity. After all, it's important to God that we do! Why not make a quality decision today, to make the time to sit with the Holy Spirit and learn through Him? With His help we may just make the transition from the 'Milk of the Word' to getting insights into the 'Meat of the Word'? If we think about Ephesians 2:6, "(He) *raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*" we can

see that 'sitting' is a rather important action for us to adopt.

This inability to 'sit' could well be the main reason that we find ourselves 'standing' and 'rushing to-and-fro' all the time, and not really having a Holy Spirit anointed relationship of any substance with the Father through Jesus? We serve a truly great God and Father whom we should never neglect! Note Ephesians 1:3, which says, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."* If we choose not to 'sit at His feet and learn' then how can we know what benefits and blessings are ours to ask for and receive? How is it possible for us to live a life 'in the Spirit? Let's not be like the beneficiary of a will, I heard of years ago, who lived in abject poverty, because he had never bothered to find out what had been left to him in that will – Blessings!

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A VIETNAMESE IMMIGRANT

On Saturday, July 24th, 2010 the town of Prescott Valley, Arizona, USA, hosted a Freedom Rally. Quang Nguyen was asked to speak on his experience of coming to America and what it means. He spoke the following in dedication to all Vietnam Veterans. You might enjoy hearing what he had to say:

"Thirty five years ago, if you were to tell me that I am going to stand up here speaking to a couple thousand patriots, in English, I'd laugh at you. Man, every morning I wake up thanking God for putting me and my family in the greatest country on earth.

I just want you all to know that the American dream does exist and I am living the American dream. I was asked to speak to you about my experience as a first generation Vietnamese-American, but I'd rather speak to you as an American.

If you hadn't noticed, I am not white and I feel pretty comfortable with my people. I am a proud US citizen and here is my proof. It took me 8 years to get it, waiting in endless lines, but I got it, and I am very proud of it.

I still remember the images of the Tet Offensive in 1968, I was six years old. (Which the website owner, Fred Grigg took part in). Now you might want to question how a 6-year-old boy could remember anything. Trust me, those images can never be erased. I can't even imagine what it was like for young American soldiers, 10,000 miles away from home, fighting on my behalf.

35 years ago, I left South Vietnam for political asylum. The war had ended. At the age of 13, I left with the understanding that I may or may not ever get to see my siblings or parents again. I was one of the first lucky 100,000 Vietnamese allowed to come to the US. Somehow, my family and I were reunited 5 months later, amazingly, in California. It was a miracle from God.

If you haven't heard lately that this is the greatest country on earth, I am telling you that right now. It was the freedom and the opportunities presented to me that put me here with all of you tonight. I also remember the barriers that I had to overcome every step of the way. My high school counselor told me that I cannot make it to college due to my poor communication skills. I proved him wrong. I finished college. You see, all you have to do is to give this little boy an opportunity and encourage him to take and run with it. Well, I took the opportunity and here I am.

This person standing tonight in front of you could not exist

under a socialist/communist environment. By the way, if you think socialism is the way to go, I am sure many people here will chip in to get you a one-way ticket out of here. And if you didn't know, the only difference between socialism and communism is an AK-47 aimed at your head. That was my experience.

In 1982, I stood with a thousand new immigrants, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and listening to the National Anthem for the first time as an American. To this day, I can't remember anything sweeter and more patriotic than that moment in my life.

Fast forwarding, somehow I finished high school, finished college, and like any other goofball 21 year old kid, I was having a great time with my life. I had a nice job and a nice apartment in Southern California . In some way and somehow, I had forgotten how I got here and why I was here.

One day I was at a gas station, I saw a veteran pumping gas on the other side of the island. I don't know what made me do it, but I walked over and asked if he had served in Vietnam . He smiled and said yes. I shook and held his hand. The grown man began to well up. I walked away as fast as I could and at that very moment, I was emotionally rocked. This was a profound moment in my life. I knew something had to change in my life. It was time for me to learn how to be a good citizen. It was time for me to give back.

You see, America is not just a place on the map, it isn't just a physical location. It is an ideal, a concept. And if you are an American, you must understand the concept, you must accept this concept, and most importantly, you have to fight and defend this concept. This is about Freedom and not free stuff. And that is why I am standing up here.

Brothers and sisters, to be a real American, the very least you must do is to learn English and understand it well. In my

humble opinion, you cannot be a faithful patriotic citizen if you can't speak the language of the country you live in. Take this document of 46 pages – last I looked on the Internet, there wasn't a Vietnamese translation of the US Constitution. It took me a long time to get to the point of being able to converse and until this day, I still struggle to come up with the right words. It's not easy, but if it's too easy, it's not worth doing.

Before I knew this 46-page document, I learned of the 500,000 Americans who fought for this little boy. I learned of the 58,000 names scribed on the black wall at the Vietnam Memorial. You are my heroes. You are my founders.

At this time, I would like to ask all the Vietnam veterans to please stand. I thank you for my life. I thank you for your sacrifices, and I thank you for giving me the freedom and liberty I have today. I now ask all veterans, firefighters, and police officers, to please stand. On behalf of all first generation immigrants, I thank you for your services and may God bless you all.”

Quang Nguyen, Creative Director/Founder, Caddis Advertising, LLC

‘For those who understand, no explanation is needed. For those who do not understand, no explanation is possible’.

The Unpleasantness of Truth

Truth is not always pleasant. Often it can be quite ugly, or hard to deal with. It can be quite confronting. It can be something we just would rather not deal with at times. Of course living in an age of comfort, ease, and self-

satisfaction, any unpleasant truths or news is frowned upon and avoided.

But none of us can afford to go without the truth. Sometimes the most painful truth is the thing we most need. Consider medical truth. If you are afflicted with a deadly cancer, the number one thing you need to hear – regardless of how unpleasant it may be – is the truth about your condition.

No doctor worth his salt would ever withhold valuable information about a possibly fatal condition or illness for fear of upsetting a patient or making him feel bad. He will instead speak the truth about the cancer or whatever, and then offer steps to correct or heal things.

There would be nothing loving about denying medical truth to a patient if that truth can result in a life being saved or real healing taking place. The truth about cancer may never be pleasant, but it is always vital, and must be shared. Not to do so can have disastrous results.

Spiritually speaking this is also the case. We must always speak biblical truth, even when it seems unpalatable and unpleasant to do so. And many spiritual truths are not so nice or so pleasant. The truths about daily dying to self, crucifying our flesh, and carrying our cross are not exactly light and bubbly – but they are fundamental Christian truths nonetheless.

Telling a non-believer he is a sinner headed for future judgment unless he repents and turns from sin and self to Christ will not be seen as very pleasant either – but it is a core biblical truth which all believers are obligated to share. And fellow believers also need to be told the truth, even if it offends or stings.

Paul never shrunk away from telling the truth, even if it was costly to him. He may have lost friendships and alienated others, but truth was always something he never withheld or

weakened or watered down. In fact, he got a lot of flak when he shared biblical truth.

In Galatians 4:16 for example Paul says this: "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?" That always seems to be the case when we stand firm on the Word of God and biblical truth. It will alienate some. It will offend some. It will create enemies with some.

Jesus knew all about this. Wherever he went he stirred things up, caused



controversy, made enemies, and got harsh reactions. Indeed, we are often told that the crowds were divided because of his words. It is the nature of truth to do that: either we come to the truth and embrace it, or we reject the truth and flee from it.

Yet today it seems most Christians would rather run a thousand miles away from the truth, than risk getting some opposition and flak for proclaiming it. We have a church full of invertebrates who think that not rocking the boat and not offending anyone is their highest calling.

They are terrified of getting anyone upset, so they will rather keep silent about the things that matter than boldly proclaim truth, regardless of the negative consequences. Jesus had a few things to say about those who refused to speak out.

It is not just the gospel of Jesus Christ that many believers are afraid to publicly express, but so too any words on the vital issues of the day. Our silence on things like the sanctity of life and God's ideal of marriage and family has been deafening.

Indeed, I am fully convinced that if something like Facebook had been around 70 years ago, there would be plenty of

Christians defriending you if you dared to speak out on what the Nazis were doing, or showed pictures of the Holocaust and the death camps – just as today they will defriend you for talking about abortion, and revealing its ugly face.

I know that many Christians do this all the time – they simply don't like the controversy and big debates. They prefer to live a quiet and peaceful life, and will never deal with these massively important topics. Many will not even share the gospel for fear of offending people or ruffling feathers.

One day we will all stand before our Lord and give an account of our time here on earth. Jesus already warned us about this: "I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8-9).

Of course having said all this, I do not for a moment mean to suggest that there is no need for tact, diplomacy, grace and sensitivity when presenting the truth. It goes without saying that we are to "speak the truth in love" as Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:15.

Sure, we must pray for wisdom and guidance as to if and when we speak out. Being careful and wise in how we share truth is of course important. But my point here is a different one: far too many people who call themselves followers of Christ seldom, if ever, speak forth truth.



And with people heading to a lost eternity, babies being slaughtered in the millions, and God's provision for human sexuality taking a hammering – to name but a few important issues – such silence is morally reprehensible. We will be judged for our silence just as much as for anything we may have said or done.

The church of Jesus Christ needs some Holy Ghost boldness today, and must repent of the sin of men-pleasing and cowardice. Paul prayed for boldness to proclaim the truths of God – we must do so as well.

Written by Bill Muehlenberg of CultureWatch
<http://www.billmuehlenberg.com/2013/05/21/the-unpleasantness-of-truth> Copied 22nd May 2013/



Ducks, Sheep, and People

Some time ago, I was sitting by a pond where some people were feeding ducks. I noticed there was one duck with a broken wing paddling to the side of the pond unable to compete with the others. One person noticed this injured duck was not getting a share of food and walked over to the edge of the pond and tossed pieces of bread so the duck was able to pick the food out of the water without moving. Instantaneously, the rest of the ducks moved over and started pecking at him. I couldn't help but think – ducks are just like people.

In the Bible, the Lord has chosen to use sheep, not ducks, in order to illustrate human behavior. The reason, of course, is that Jesus is the good shepherd. Shepherds herd sheep, not ducks. As well, the sheep-shepherd relationship is an accurate way to illustrate the pastor-flock relationship. Shepherds lead, protect, and watch out for danger from wolves and other predators. Sheep need a good shepherd in order to function properly.

Now, when we discuss the qualities of a good shepherd in

relation to a church flock, we must be aware there are sheep that don't think they need a shepherd. Sometimes sheep think they should be the shepherd. There are even cases when sheep can turn into wolves and attack the shepherd. There are many shepherds who have been hurt by the sheep because of things they have said and done.

As well, there is another thing about human behavior that is quite common in relation to the shepherd-sheep relationship. If the sheep don't agree with their shepherd when he teaches them biblical principles that expose their fallen nature, they just leave the flock. They look around for another shepherd

who will tell them things they want to hear and make them feel good. In the Bible, this is called having one's ears tickled. The Bible states in the last days this is exactly how sheep will behave. They will not want to hear sound doctrine. They will want to feel good, be told that they are good, and continue in their sin.

This reminds me of a message I saw on Sunday morning TV by one of America's most popular pastors. Nearly 20,000 people were gathered in a stadium. The pastor told them they were all good people. He then told them that their parents were good people – and their grand-parents were also very good. He suggested they all tell God how good they were. He said if they did, God would do good things for them. The stadium full of people erupted with applause.

Yes, ducks and sheep are like people, and people are like ducks and sheep. Now I know why my Dad told me the reason he was a farmer was because he came to the conclusion that dealing with nature was much easier than dealing with human nature.

Thank God, in heaven, things will be better!

Understand the Times <http://www.understandthetimes.org/>

Russell Crowe's New Movie – NOAH

Thirteen “Problem Areas” that discerning Christians should be aware of:

1. In the film, Noah was robbed of his birthright by Tubal-Cain. The serpent's body (i.e., Satan), which was shed in Eden, was their “birthright reminder.” It also doubled with magical power that they would wrap around their arm. So weird!
2. Noah's family only consists of his wife, three sons, and one daughter-in-law, contrary to the Bible.
3. It appears as if every species was crammed in the Ark instead of just the kinds of animals, thus mocking the Ark account the same way secularists do today.
4. “Rocks” (that seem to be fallen angels) build the Ark with Noah!
5. Methuselah (Noah's grandfather) is a type of witch-doctor, whose mental health is question-
6. Tubal-Cain defeats the Rocks who were protecting the finished Ark.
7. A wounded Tubal-Cain axes his way inside the Ark in only about ten minutes and then hides inside. Tubal-Cain then convinces the middle son to lure Noah to the bottom of the Ark in order to murder him (because he was not allowed a wife in the Ark). Tubal-Cain stays alive by eating hibernating lizards.
8. The middle son of Noah has a change of heart and helps kill Tubal-Cain instead.
9. Noah becomes almost crazy as he believes the only purpose to his family's existence was to help build the Ark for the “innocent” animals (this is a worship of

creation).

10. Noah repeatedly tells his family that they were the last generation and were never to procreate. So when his daughter-in-law becomes pregnant, he vows to murder his own grandchild. But he finally has a change of heart.
11. Noah does not have a relationship with God but rather with circumstances and has deadly visions of the Flood.
12. The Ark lands on a cliff next to a beach.
13. After the Flood Noah becomes so distant from his family that he lives in a cave, getting drunk by the beach.

An anonymous comment: "I believe the trailer was put together very carefully and cleverly to attract Christians and Jews—those who might be inclined to pay to see the film and not speak out against it. In fact, many Christians and Christian organisations have already come out publicly to say they can't wait to see this movie.

"False teaching unchallenged is false teaching condoned"

THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE IN HISTORY

Many people sometimes wonder who has taught the pre-trib rapture before J.N. Darby (1800-1881). This question is often stated as an objection. These objections are often very bitter and harsh. Modern pre-tribbers have responded by citing Morgan Edwards (1722-1795), a Baptist pastor who presented a pre-trib rapture in the 18th century. Edwards writes:

"...the dead saints will be raised, and the living changed at Christ's 'appearing in the air' (I Thes. iv. 17); and this will be about three years and a half before the millennium, as

we shall see hereafter: but will he and they abide in the air all that time? No: they will ascend to paradise, or to some one of those many 'mansions in the father's house' (John xiv. 2), and so disappear during the foresaid period of time. The design of this retreat and disappearing will be to judge the risen and changed saints; for 'now the time is come that judgment must begin,' and that will be 'at the house of God' (I Pet. iv. 17)..."

(Quoted in "Morgan Edwards: Another Pre-Darby Rapturist," by Thomas Ice)

Two objections are generally made to this quote. First, it is claimed that Morgan Edwards (as a historicist) was only presenting a hypothetical case for a "term paper." Second, many argue that this obscure writing had no effect or influence on Christians in the mainstream, and that it cannot be seen as setting the stage for Darby's later rapture view. They assert that Darby got his view from someone claiming to give an inspired "revelation" in the early 19th century. After Morgan Edwards, post-tribbers have simply put forth a greater demand. They now call upon pre-tribbers to not only present a pre-trib rapture before Darby, but to also present a "significant" case(s) that would have "influenced" Darby (and modern dispensational eschatology). They now demand that pre-tribbers establish a clear historical progression. Otherwise, they still maintain that Darby was influenced by an Irvingite "utterance."

Wisdom often calls us to stand upon the shoulders of our forefathers. Therefore, it is not unreasonable for post-tribbers to request from us an historical chain of thought in regard to the rapture. It is, however, unreasonable for them to conclude that, simply because certain details may be cloudy, that this must mean the pre-trib view arose from a demonic or Irvingite "revelation." The same claim was made in regard to futurism ("It is from the Jesuits"), and earlier, premillennialism itself ("It is from the Jews"), etc.

Margaret McDonald and the Irvingites

Tregelles (in 1864) made the claim that the pre-trib teaching arose from an utterance in Irving's church:

"But when the theory of a secret coming of Christ was first brought forward (about the year 1832), it was adopted with eagerness...I am not aware that there was any definite teaching that there would be a secret rapture of the church at a secret coming, until this was given forth as an 'utterance' in Mr. Irving's church, from what was there received as being the voice of the Spirit. But whether any one ever asserted such a thing or not, it was from that supposed revelation that the modern doctrine and the modern phraseology respecting it arose." (Tregelles, "The Hope of Christ's Second Coming," 1864)

Tregelles does not document this "utterance." G.H. Lang therefore writes:

"No evidence is available that any of the Powerscourt circle took the idea of a secret rapture from the Irvingite utterances, no evidence beyond Tregelles's assertion, and for this he gives no proofs." ("The Disciple," 1954)

In "The Unbelievable Pre-Trib Origin," (1973), Dave MacPherson does his best to make his own far-fetched idea "believable." He attempts to link the origin of the pre-trib rapture view with a young lady named Margaret McDonald. However, he fails considerably in offering any evidence that this young lady

influenced anyone on ANY Biblical subject (other than perhaps, whether or not Apostolic gifts were reviving). To start with, she was in Scotland (not England, where Irving's church was located). As to M. McDonald's particular "revelation," she appears to teach that the "Spirit-filled" will be "kept" from deception in the MIDST of the Trib (i.e. the post-trib view)! She has the faithful (including herself) on earth when the Antichrist is revealed:

“I saw the people of God in an awfully dangerous situation. Now will the wicked one be revealed with all power...It will be a fiery trial...Nothing but what is of God will stand...I said, Now shall the awful sight of a false Christ be seen on this earth; and nothing but Christ in US can DETECT this awful attempt of the enemy to deceive...This is the trial THROUGH which those are to pass, who will be counted worthy to stand before the Son of Man...The trial of the Church is from Antichrist. It is by being filled with the Spirit that we shall be kept. I frequently said, Oh be filled with the Spirit – have the light of God within you, that you may DETECT satan...” (emphasis mine)

It is obvious that by being “kept,” McDonald means Christians are kept from DECEPTION while the Antichrist is manifested!

McPherson erred by stumbling onto a book written by Robert Norton in 1861 which claimed that Margaret McDonald originated the pre-trib rapture view. The book was titled, “The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Catholic Apostolic Church” (i.e. Irving’s movement). In 1852, Norton wrote “Reasons for Believing the Lord has Restored to the Church Apostles and Prophets.” By 1861, the pre-trib rapture view was a well-established doctrine among premillennialists. Isn’t it reasonable to conclude that Norton (a member of the Catholic Apostolic Church) would greatly desire to argue that something “significant” originated from someone exercising a restored “Apostolic” gift? Notice his words in describing Margaret McDonald’s supposed “revelation” of the pre-trib rapture (i.e. two-stage coming):

“Marvelous light was shed upon Scripture, and especially upon the doctrine of the Second Advent BY THE REVIVED SPIRIT OF PROPHECY. In the following account by Miss M.M...we see first the distinction between the final stage of the Lord’s coming...and His prior appearing...” (emphasis mine; MacPherson, p.47)

Sadly, Norton (1807-1883) was simply a victim of his own wishful thinking. He read into M.M.'s "revelation" in order to argue that "marvelous light" (i.e. the pre-trib rapture teaching which was WIDESPREAD among prophecy students at the time) had come forth from his own restoration movement. Why would he need this type of prop? Because the majority of Christians at the time thought his movement was inspired by the Devil and that Norton himself was "fanatical"! How advantageous it would be to argue that the prized teaching in regard to the two stages of the Lord's Coming was first manifested by someone with a supernatural gift. Yet, he failed in offering anything other than his own assertions to validate his claims. MacPherson repeated the mistake (for different reasons).

But let us pretend that M. McDonald is indeed teaching some type of pre-trib rapture. What would this prove? It would simply show that McDonald was INFLUENCED (in the realm of eschatology) by the scholarly, prophetic teachings around her at the time and was simply coughing them back up as a self-deceived or pretended "inspired" utterance. If not, and something more diabolical was at work, Matthew 8:29 and Acts 16:17 reveal that devils often attempt to oppose truth (especially new or revived truth) by AGREEING with it, thereby attempting to bring confusion in regard to its source.

But we should read the quote by Tregelles a bit closer. Why did he use the phrase "secret rapture" instead of "pre-trib rapture"? It is perhaps because he knew that the pre-trib rapture was certainly taught before anyone in Irving's church ever uttered a word! Whether or not it is "secret" is of no consequence and depends upon what one means by "secret." The debate is over whether or not there is a PRE-trib escape. The Bible itself is

the foundation for the pre-trib teaching (see Lk.21:36, Rev.3:10, Heb.11:5, etc., as well as other Scriptures that have historically been used to teach the view such as

Mt.25:10, Rev.12:5, 14:3, etc.). This teaching is found wherever there is a revival of premillennial thought (literal interpretation). In the 17th century, premillennialism was revived in the mainstream. Therefore, we should be able to find the foundational elements of the pre-trib rapture scheme OPENLY presented in the 17th century.

Joseph Mede and the Rapture

Joseph Mede (1586-1638) was the most popular premillennialist of his age. Edward Bickersteth (1786-1850) called him the "father of modern interpretation." Therefore, his writings were certainly still influential in the 19th century. David Brown called Mede the "prince of Millennarians." Wilbur Smith stated:

"Probably no work on the Apocalypse by an English author from the time of the Reformation down to the beginning of the 19th century, and even later, has exercised as much influence..."

Mede's work on the Book of Revelation became the most popular book (outside the Bible itself) of that day. The main prophetic view of Mede's age (among premillennialists) was the historicist view of the Tribulation period (i.e. the judgments of the Book of Revelation are fulfilled figuratively throughout the whole of Christian history). The literal, futurist view (that which I embrace) did not become widespread until the 19th century when many historicists adopted a "double" view of the 1260 days (e.g. T. Evill, Purdon, E. Bickersteth, etc.) interpreting them literally (i.e. as future days), and at the same time, prophetically (i.e. as years). Burgh, Govett, Darby, and many others would lead the way in abandoning the historicist view altogether. Within his historicist view, Mede suggested the possibility of a RAPTURE before the final "conflagration" (i.e. burning of the earth) in the final days immediately before the 1000-year Kingdom. This would correspond somewhat to the final age of the futurist (i.e. modern dispensational) system. Mede suggested

that this particular burning would only be a purification and not a total annihilation of the earth – which he placed after the Millennium (“Works,” Book III, p.617). In regard to the rapture, Mede writes:

“I will add this more, namely, what may be conceived to be the cause of this RAPTURE of the saints on high to meet the Lord in the clouds, rather than to wait his coming to earth...What if it be, that they may be PRESERVED during the Conflagration of the earth and the works thereof, 2 Pet.3:10, that as Noah and his family were preserved from the Deluge by being lift up above the waters in the Ark; so should the saints at the Conflagration be lift up in the clouds unto their Ark, Christ, to be preserved there from the deluge of fire, wherein the wicked shall be consumed?” (“The Works of Joseph Mede,” 1672, London edition, Book IV, p.776)

Notice the word “rapture,” the use of 1 Thess.4, the analogy of Noah, and the “preservation” in contrast to the wicked, etc. All of these items are the very nuts and bolts of the modern pre-trib system. There was a train of thought (from Mede to Darby) that surely influenced Darby in regard to the rapture. This suggestion of Mede’s had considerable influence on other students of the prophecies. He is later actually quoted by William Cuninghame (which we will discuss shortly) as one of the earliest advocates of the pre-trib rapture view! Therefore, whether or not one agrees that Mede’s quote is foundational in regard to the pre-trib rapture is beside the point. Cuninghame took it as being an early and undeveloped example of his own viewpoint and built upon it. From the point of view of the historian, Mede takes his place in history as being one of the first scholars to revive the pre-trib rapture concept.

Frere, Cuninghame and the Rapture

The next influential prophecy writers to continue laying the foundation for the two-stage coming of Christ (i.e. pre-trib

rapture) were James H. Frere (1779-1866) and William Cuninghame (1775-1849):

“Faber, Cuninghame, and Frere were unquestionably the three most prominent expositors in Britain in the early part of the nineteenth century.” (Fromm, Vol.III, p.279)

Both Frere and Cuninghame later participated in the Albury Park conferences (1826-28). Some historians have noted that Irving was a DISCIPLE of Frere in regard to the prophecies. When Mede’s idea of a “rapture” of believers (to escape the end-time destruction on the wicked) was added to a two-stage second coming of Christ, historicism began to look a lot like futurism at its final “head.” The foundation for this two-stage coming was indeed laid by Frere and Cuninghame over a decade BEFORE the Albury meetings took place. This teaching would be “refined” at the Albury meetings. It is therefore no wonder that after the Albury conferences had ended (1828), articles began appearing in Irving’s “Morning Watch” (June-Sept., 1832) advocating a view that held to both the year-day and literal-day interpretations at the same time. A new breed of “historicist-futurist” scholars would arise that combined Mede’s “rapture” with Frere’s and Cuninghame’s two-stage, end-time scenarios. From that point, this “new breed” (plus many pure historicists and pure futurists) would all begin to issue commentaries and articles advocating a two-stage coming and a pre-trib escape. The popularity of Frere and Cuninghame in the early part of the 19th century has already been demonstrated. And it is obvious that these men (and their peers) had an influence on Edward Irving before (and at) Albury Park. Yet, let us document how these men laid an early foundation for the two-stage coming of Christ: In 1815, Frere writes:

“...the sitting of the Ancient of Days is mentioned in the 9th verse of the seventh chapter of Daniel, and precedes the death and destruction of the ten-horned Beast...The sitting of the Ancient of Days and the judgment of the saints mentioned in Daniel, must therefore CONSIDERABLY PRECEDE the sitting of the

saints in judgment at the commencement of the Millennium...and must be cotemporary with a period in the Revelation of Saint John, prior to that of the battle of Armageddon...("A Combined View of the Prophecies," London: 1815)

Frere looked for the Jews to be restored to the land, followed by a time of trouble to come "such as there never was...", which would cover a period of 45 years. He saw two blessed periods for the saints; one before this trouble, and one after it (i.e. the Millennium). There is no mention of a translation; yet, the foundation for two stages is clearly being set. Many of the futurists would see a Tribulation period about that length (Seiss, Govett, Larkin, etc.) William Cuninghame actually put out his first edition of "A Dissertation on the Seals and Trumpets of the Apocalypse" in 1813. The following quotes are from his 1817 edition:

"In the interpretation of this passage, I am compelled to differ from most expositors of the Apocalypse. Bishop Newton and Mr. Faber both apply the vision of the Lamb with the one-hundred and forty-four thousand, to the state of the true Church during the reign of the Beast...They therefore consider this mystical number of one-hundred and forty-four thousand, as continuing to represent the true Church from the times of Constantine to the dawn of the Millennium...the state of these followers of the Lamb, does not at all agree with the condition of the Church during the reign of the Beast...According to the system of most writers whose works I have had access to, it does not appear what becomes of the Church after she returns from her secret retreat in the wilderness, till she is exhibited to us in the nineteenth chapter, as having made herself ready for the bridal ceremony.....it may be proper, before I close the subject, to take a short view of those great events, which the prophecies both of the Old and New Testament lead us to expect...The first of these is the conversion and restoration of the Jews...their restoration is to happen during a time of trouble, such as

there never was since there was a nation...The number of the elect 144,000, who are sealed, for preservation from the last awful calamities, will have been completed, by means of that final preaching of the Gospel...the elect of God shall be gathered from the four winds of heaven to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and the final judgments shall be let loose against those nations which have named the name of Christ, but have not departed from iniquity...A question will here naturally suggest itself to the mind of the reader. What is to become of the righteous in the awful period described in the foregoing prophecies? Now, the

answer to this inquiry has been given, in considering the seventh chapter of the Apocalypse...This tribulation is manifestly that of the closing period of the earthquake and vials; and we are thus assured, that the righteous are to be preserved during the final display of divine wrath...a call is given to the righteous to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb...These considerations ought surely to awaken the Christian to pray more earnestly for his country, and to quicken his diligence, that he may individually be accounted worthy to ESCAPE the approaching wrath, and to stand before the Son of Man...Our Lord Himself has emphatically assured us, 'behold I come as a thief...' from these words we may certainly conclude, that He will come at a time, when few even of his own people expect it...No human power or wisdom can avert the terrific events which are approaching. But if, through faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we wash our robes, and make them white in the Blood of the Lamb, then we shall individually be numbered with that great multitude, who shall come out of the great tribulation..."

("A Dissertation on the Seals and Trumpets of the Apocalypse," 1817, pp.273-275, 290, 334, 340, 347, 354)

Before reading the next excerpt from Cuninghame, it might be helpful to read over these words in 1813 one more time! All of the elements of the two-stage coming and pre-trib rapture are

beginning to come to fruition in 1813-1817 (years before the Irvingite manifestations or McDonald).

In the following years, Cuninghame built upon his own views and developed a clear two-stage coming of the Lord. Cuninghame would quote Joseph Mede and some early Jewish writings as earlier sources of the Bible's pre-trib rapture teaching. He would also become more clear about what happens to the ready saints during the time of trouble. They would be "translated"!:

"There is a double gathering of his saints unto our Lord, during his abode in the air; first of the 144,000 sealed ones, and secondly, the white-robed palm-bearers (Rev.vii.9-17). The former is at the first moment of the Advent, and the last at a later period...There are two events selected by our Lord himself, as the special types of His Advent, and the state of the world in that day...it is manifest that the Coming of the Lord is to find the world in a state of peace...the ten virgins...are all...found slumbering and sleeping...as soon as the Lord comes and takes to himself the Wise Virgins, the torrent of calamity which is to destroy the prophetic earth shall immediately thereafter break forth...But I remark that there is another class of passages, which no less certainly indicates that his coming shall be in a season of shaking and alarm and fear..." (1836 -perhaps a later edition)

From The Kingdom Alert, #117 (6-9-01) -----

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Is Persecution Right Around The Corner?



Hitler rose to power during 1929-1934

In 1936 Germany was in the midst of economic ruin and social upheaval, facing an uncertain future. A charismatic leader by the name of Adolph Hitler was rising to power and he pointed Germans to a new direction that would bring the nation and its people back to greatness—if they only trusted him.

He consolidated power, bypassing the German legislative houses and started imposing his own laws, ignoring the due process of the German government. One of his first edicts was to control guns within society to “bring about peace”. Then he turned his attention to fundamental religion which he saw as an enemy to the state and aspirations of his Nazi regime. He successfully silenced the churches by convincing them he shared their values—but they would have to cooperate with him and his agenda to return Germany to greatness.

The church rolled over like a dog begging for scraps and within one year every bible and cross was removed from Christian churches and only Third Reich government employees were allowed to preach in church services. The rest, as they

say, is history. Six million Jews were slaughtered and the world was brought into world war as Hitler rose to power in a time of uncertainty and fear.

But that could never happen in the United States of America – we're the land of the free and the home of the brave [People say, "As goes the united States, so goes Australia!]. And besides the Christian Church in America would never allow this kind of oppression and tyranny to occur! Well, think again...

When you look at the rise of power within our federal government since the 9/11 attacks, we must concede that we might be on the cusp of a government bent on imposing its will and values upon all Americans. Through the Patriot Act every American citizen is spied upon every day and privacy is a thing of the past. Our government has now mandated that employers and health plans financially support abortion; the Supreme Court may soon rule homosexual marriage as a constitutionally protected right; and now many in Washington are hell bent on taking guns away from law abiding citizens who want to protect themselves and their families.

And if you carefully watch events at the U.N., where fundamental religion is considered the greatest threat to the survival of mankind, it doesn't take a lot of imagination to think that Christianity has a target on its chest as the next freedom that will be attacked.

Now Christians can make the argument that we should not worry about things of this world and only concentrate on Jesus Christ and spreading the gospel. But to argue that without thinking of the consequences of non-engagement is foolishness. If we are unwilling to fight the spread of tyranny and government censorship, then we better be prepared to reap the results of our inactions. We best be prepared to eventually be driven under- ground as the price we pay for not standing up and fighting for our religious values and freedoms.

Think it could never happen in America—well you better think again, and more importantly you better start reading your bible. Because it will happen, and it is starting to happen right before our eyes!

In Luke 21 Jesus is discussing the end of the age—the time just before His glorious return. “Nation will rise against nation...but before all this they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name...All men will hate you because of me.”

So stand up and peacefully fight the coming tyranny, or if you choose to, sit back passively. But know what is coming and prepare your hearts for a time when all men will hate us for Jesus' sake. These times will come and they are starting to unfold right before our eyes. Are we preparing our hearts? Or are we one of the virgins sitting idly with no oil in our lamp? The choice is yours.

From:

<http://standupforthetruth.com/2013/01/is-persecution-right-around-the-corner/>

Staying on the Right Track

STAYING ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Since I first began researching, writing and teaching on dangerous religious groups, I have had many inquiries from folk who, after reading my notes, or hearing me teach, have contacted me with requests for further help. There is nothing wrong with that, but, it soon became evident that the major difficulty they were all experiencing came about when they tried to respond during a discussion with a member of a cult, particularly one that claimed to be a 'christian group'. They all felt that there seemed to be an inadequacy on their own part, during the conversation, to respond to the unfamiliar and even peculiar teachings and practices of the cultist, even after reading my work and hearing me lecture.

What most asked for was further information and/or extra materials to assist them to respond to and refute such things as:

- Celebrating Christmas/Easter/birthdays/national holidays
- Blood transfusions, or an infusion of blood product
- Military service, both active and passive (Medical Corps)
- The Holy Spirit – is “it” or “He” a ‘force’ or a ‘personality’?
- Speaking in ‘tongues’
- The authenticity of the Bible – is it just folklore or a corrupt translation?
- Sabbath observance – is it Saturday or Sunday?
- The ‘End Times’ – what is the ‘Mark of the Beast’ and ‘666’?

I could go on and on listing the many and varied requests that they have made. However, in almost every instance, after I had asked the inquirer as to how much time they had devoted, during their conversation with the cultist, asking one simple question, “Who do you believe Jesus Christ is?” I was shocked to hear, in almost every instance, that the most important question of all had not even been asked! What these well-meaning people had done was to allow themselves to be drawn away from the one who said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” [John 14:6]. They had been side-tracked into discussing things that have absolutely nothing to do with Salvation

Friends, just this one question is really the crux of the whole matter of finding the real Lord Jesus Christ! To answer this simple question wrongly means that whatever else you may say is simply just waffle! We should never make the mistake of playing into the hands of the cults by discussing their unique and strange side-issues, like those listed above. Never, and again I repeat, never try to beat, refute or wrangle on what are peripheral issues! In most cases these issues were the

very ones that originally lead the person standing before you into deception in the first place!

It has always been our experience to find that, after the establishing the Deity of Christ (that the Lord Jesus Christ was God manifest in the flesh – see Colossians 1:19 & 2:9), there is very little trouble in tackling the controversial 'side-issues'. We have been able to rejoice at the very easy task of flowing in the will and ministry of the Holy Spirit (after all, it is His ministry to convict a person of his sinful state and to then lead them into all truth). It becomes a simple 'mopping up operation' for the person who has accepted the true Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. Remember always that it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to "...teach you ALL things..."; (John 14:26).

So be mindful of His role when you are speaking to people and seeking to bring them into an understanding of truth. The Lord Jesus said, "Unless you believe that I AM ... you will die in your sins." (John 8:24 RSV). Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ is none-other than the Great I AM – the same I AM that Moses talked with in the "burning bush". Establish this fact for your hearer and then watch the salvation of the Lord! May God richly bless you as you minister THE TRUTH THAT LEADS TO ETERNAL LIFE! © Copyright 1997

The Bible Doom & Gloom Syndrome: A Reputation Undeserved

A frustrated comment that we sometimes hear is this: Why all the doom and gloom in sermons and prophecy? Why the heavy admonitions and scare tactics? Following our recent articles,

we feel we should respond...People appear to be reacting to what they perceive as a heavy weight when reading about worrisome world trends and the Bible's seemingly incessant apocalyptic prophecies.

What's more, people see themselves trapped to these developments. Given that the Bible is true and it indeed prophesies apocalyptic events, then God must have predetermined that these must happen. They ask: What god would condemn the world of his creation in this way?

With such a fatalistic perspective, people will understandably plead that it would be better that they didn't know about the uncertainties of worldwide developments or the specifics of Bible prophecies. They may reason that one cannot worry about something one doesn't know about. This does not necessarily mean people only prefer to hear smooth things (Isaiah 30:10). They may simply be weary of the responsibilities of knowledge, so much so, that they identify with the lament of the author of Ecclesiastes, who wrote: "For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief" (Ecclesiastes 1:18).

We can stop right there in these laments. Why? Because the Bible provides a clear and certain answer to all of them, showing that these expressed concerns are misplaced ... and perhaps even the result of wrong teachings.

The World Is No Blissful Place

Jesus plainly said: "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). So, to begin this topic, we first know that there is no such reliable thing as bliss on earth. We cannot change this by living in denial. The fact of the matter is that Christians must expect that they "will have trouble" in this world. This means that many developments on earth, whether prophesied in the Bible or not, will be far from blissful. But isn't this perspective a pessimistic one?

The Bible Not a Pessimistic Document

We can be thankful that negative reactions to the Bible's messages and prophecies are certainly not for reasons of what the Bible actually says. To start, the Bible is not a

“pessimistic” document. Far from it. Rather, it is a document that testifies to hope.

Scripture consistently proclaims salvation, a glorious hope (Ephesians 1:18) and a blessed hope (Titus 2:13). It stands for Truth, the oppressed, the captives, the poor, for justice and unconditional forgiveness. It is a Book that steadfastly points to an end that will be wonderful. It promises reward and eternal life to those whose names are in the “Book of Life,” not ever blotting them out (Revelation 3:5). Is this emblematic of a pessimistic document?

The above statements of the Bible testify to a God who throughout mankind’s history has repeatedly stepped in with new dispensations due to mankind’s failures ... even regarding that “...it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish” (John 11:50). It is in this context that we must view prophecies and their purpose.

Bible Prophecy and Love

Why then do so many people react negatively, feeling such “doom and gloom” when they hear of Bible prophecy ... of disasters and trends of “Biblical proportions”? There may be a number of reasons.

Firstly, what often is omitted, we think, is the main foundational cornerstone of the Bible—love and mercy. God of the Bible does not want anyone to be lost, much less go through the Tribulation; neither Armageddon nor Hades; nor to be thrown into the eternal “lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).

Scripture is clear on this point. For example: “... he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Christ himself made this clear, saying “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

Nowhere in the Bible does it say that God wants people to perish. Why? “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Scripture and prophecy, when taught and preached in a spirit of love – this including the mission of providing warnings –

encourages repentance. Cheap emotions born of sensationalist scare tactics will not be so effective or lasting. Sadly, one does encounter so-called Bible teachers who exult in the idea that the wicked will perish. They delight in the notion of Armageddon, of the mass slaughter that is coming to the unbelievers. There is no spirit of love in such sensationalism.

A second (and primary) reason why many "turn off" to Bible prophecy, thinking it incessantly pessimistic, is because people (both Christians and non-believers) misinterpret and misuse Bible prophecy. They ignore the warning to "not go beyond what is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6). Doing so, they themselves prophesy in their speculative interpretations of prophetic fulfilments. We noted one publication recently that goes so far as to claim that it is "prophesying" in its interpretations of Bible prophecy. In so doing, they will undoubtedly mislead people and discredit the Bible.

The more there are speculations, the more Bible prophecy is discredited as over-hyped doom and gloom. Such sensationalism can lead to prophecy "burn out" (as happened to this writer early in his adult life).

The very last book of the Bible before John's Apocalypse, Jude, holds this place for a reason, just as Genesis holds the position of the first book of the Bible. And, what is its final message? "Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear-hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh" (Jude 1:22-23).

In no uncertain terms, Jude tells us to snatch people from the fire, to show mercy and to do this to the very last moment that the Church is on earth. This is diametrically opposite to the scare tactics of "doom and gloom" (apart from the warnings of being lost for eternity because of our sins). Sensationalism born out of commercialism and tactics to pull in crowds to the pew is false love.

To conclude these points, the proclaiming of the Gospel, Bible prophecy and its inherent warnings must be done in the spirit

of love ... the goal being to save the lost. People can only be expected to reject what will be perceived as frustrating condemnations.

In all we do, love is to be the overriding motive (this also applying to prophecy teachers). Apostle Paul makes this vital point, saying: "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-2).

Prophecy: Foreknowledge or Predestination?

Next, we turn to the oft-expressed lament that prophecy is destiny ... i.e. that mankind is helplessly condemned to perform all that is prophesied. Since all Bible prophecy will be fulfilled, does this not then mean that mankind is condemned to these events with no choice? This is a serious question to ponder.

As God foreknows the future choices of mankind, this does not mean that God is condemning mankind to making such decisions. Bible prophecy in large part is God knowing in advance the choices that we humans will make. As He lives outside the bounds of linear time, God recognizes the freewill choices of mankind in advance. Yes, the prophecies of the Holy Spirit will always be fulfilled, but only because mankind chose these outcomes (rather than being predestined to do so). This is an all-important distinction.

For example, living in America, people may feel that God has decreed that the U.S. as a society is irreversibly condemned to greater immorality, godlessness and global decline. Furthermore, that since the end times are here, a decline to greater faithlessness and apostasy must therefore continue uninterrupted. And, since these prophesied trends are all so fatalistic and futile, there is little one can do.

That view is not correct. Why? It denies that both individuals and societies have the choice to change their ways. God is not an author of evil, nor does He condemn anyone to do evil. It

must not necessarily be our current generation that brings about the unwise choices of mankind that will be fulfilled. What if there was a turning back to God? Would it be possible for America to become a more God-fearing nation? Why not? It would be a matter of choice.

In this respect, we were exhilarated to view the courageous speech of Pastor Rabbi Cahn at the 2013 National Prayer Breakfast. President Obama was in the room, as were many other politicians. It would be hard to imagine that their convictions weren't challenged by such a straight-talking, uncompromising, true-to-the-Bible, sermon. This was not the message of a "smiling" nor "want-to-be-everybody's-friend" preacher. Time will tell if such compelling sermons given at such high levels will have an impact.

We return to the main point: At the very least, there is a choice to be made for every person under the aegis of the Holy Spirit. We are not all going to the same place, a view that is maintained by other religions of the world. We are not individually condemned to reject God and to involuntarily suffer the consequences. We can acknowledge that we are sinners; that we must repent; that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who is our Lord.

When the Holy Spirit inspired prophets to utter prophecies concerning the future choices of individuals, whether the leaders of nations or mankind overall, these were all the expressions of the foreknowledge of God. We are still given a choice that we are free to make. We are free to rebel or to comply. We are free to worship God and accept his grace through Jesus Christ or not. Therefore, when the Bible says that faith "will wax cold" (Matthew 24:12), or that the nations of the world will collude against God (Psalm 2:1-3), these are not predictions or immutable predestinations for any individual or specific time. These all occur because of the choices of mankind, whether anguished or by default. This may all seem an enigma to the human mind. Yet, it is consistent with a God who indeed loves the world and "rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

A Call to Watch and Preach Prophecy

Salvation is an undeserved gift from He who has “the power ... that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Roman 1:16). But is this simply an insurance policy that requires nothing more of us? Does salvation provide us the license to slumber ... to turn off and drop out ... to seek the blissful life here on earth? Not according to the words of Jesus Christ.

In the first instance, we note that Jesus castigated the Pharisees and Sadducees because they did not recognize the “season.” He said: “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times” (Matthew 16:2-3).

If this was a criticism of people of that earlier time, it would only follow that Christians of today should similarly have an onus to “interpret the signs of the times.” It would be unlikely that the Church, which has been inserted into the salvation timeline by God for an appointed period, should not be able to recognize the “signs of the times.” This perspective confirms that Bible prophecy is indeed given as “a light shining in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19), and that it is required that we study it and “discern the times” (Matthew 16:3).

Doing so should not instil fear in the saved Christian, but rather provide confirmation that the “blessed hope” is ever nearer, the time ever shorter to “snatch people from the fire.” Jesus implores his people to “watch.” Just what are we to watch? We are to watch for prophesied events and markers. On at least six occasions, Jesus urged his disciples to “watch” the times in the context of being prepared for his return (Matthew 24:42, 25:13; Mark 13:33, 35; Luke 21:36, 38). We cannot deny Jesus’ emphasis of this command.

Yet, the Bible also emphasizes that we cannot know the exact time of Christ’s return (Rapture) – what “hour,” the “day nor hour,” the “time,” whether “at midnight,” or “at the cockcrowing” or “in the morning,” or “the second watch or

third watch," or before "things that shall come to pass." It is clear, therefore, that Christ calls us to watch ... not to predict. And, watching should allow us to assess the trends of our times ... to observe the "season" and "the appearance of the sky," no matter how worrisome.

Points to Ponder

We have responded to the "doom gloom" syndrome by making five main points. Firstly, the Bible commands us to "watch" and to discern the season of the times. It is OK to continue to study prophecy and to watch for the "season." While none of us are absolved from the task to "watch" and to "discern the times," some are specifically called to the task of "watching." Is there proof for this view?

Christ tells us of the parable of the man who goes away on a long trip. This man "gave authority to his servants and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch" (Mark 13:34). Here we see that everyone had their assignments, the porter specifically being called to "watch." The key message of this parable was this: "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning" (verse 35).

Secondly, as Christians, we have been given a great hope, salvation and the promise of eternal life. This is cause for rejoicing, not pessimism, no matter the wickedness of the times. Thirdly, we live in the world only a short time ... a time of trouble and striving. There is no escaping this reality.

For Christians specifically, there are no promises of peace or final rest in this current dispensation. The original apostles had a diametrically opposite view to the popular blissful message of "Live your best life now" that emanates from some pulpits today. Said Paul: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:17). But: "Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses" (2 Corinthians 6:4).

Continuing with our five conclusions, fourthly, we are to continue “snatching people from the fire,” not with condemnations of prophecy but with love. We are to pray for the lost, even those committing evil and supposedly the great conspirators, according to the many conspiracy theorists. Finally, the Bible’s prophecies foreknow our choices and that of mankind. We are not condemned to doom and gloom involuntarily. We must diligently make our own choices. If He be God, serve Him.

Just as the disciples could not stay awake during the night of Christ’s abduction in the Garden of Gethsemane, so Christ’s Church will likely be found asleep at another very crucial time ... that of His Second Return. The very last words of Christ to us in the Book of Mark are these: “What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

“If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping” (Mark 13:36). Let us not let Him find us inactive, but rather snatching people from the fire and looking for the “blessed hope.” By God’s grace and mercy, we will continue doing so. Let us not be “tuned out” nor cause others to “turn off” the gospel message, because of any improper perspectives of Bible prophecy.

For resources on “endtime economics” and to subscribe to the free newsletter, Eternal Value Review, visit Wilfred’s website <http://www.eternalvalue.com>

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Financial Apocalypse Prophesied: Preserving true riches in an age of deception and trouble', looks further into the future.

Cults – Dead Ends of Deception

CULTS – DEAD ENDS OF DECEPTION

I'm told that one explanation of the meaning of the word 'cult' is that the word is derived from the Latin word 'cultus' which means 'any kind of ritual, ceremony or liturgy'. The word 'cult' was also recently defined as being 'a teaching, group or movement which deviates from orthodoxy while claiming to represent the true faith'.

Remember, all cults deviate from what is regarded as being orthodox. Christianity is for everyone – from the intellectual to the uneducated. A good litmus test is to question if what is being put to you is capable of being understood by an uneducated member of a remote tribal community, or not! When confronted by a person who tries to tell you that you are in the wrong place spiritually, you need to be able to apply Biblical standards in order to know if that one comes to you in 'truth' or not. Why? Because there are many similarities between 'true Christianity' and 'false christianity'. Matthew 24:24 says, "If it were possible, they shall deceive even the elect". The 'elect' referred to here of course, are true Christians. Logically, if a true Christian is in danger of being deceived, then how much easier must it be to deceive one who has no understanding of the Bible or sound Christian teachings?

Satan the Devil (yes, he really does exist and he is known as the Father of Lies), tries to frustrate the building of the true Kingdom of God by raising up those who are 'false

prophets' (Matt. 7:13-23), 'false apostles' (2 Cor. 11:12-13), 'false teachers' (2 Peter 2:1-22) and 'false pastors and shepherds' (Acts 20:29-30). In simple terms all of these 'false' ones are going to look and sound just like true Christians!

Satan's foremost strategy is to create confusion of which he is the creator and author! People who may have rejected the false (or the counterfeit) are often placed in real danger, through that bad experience, of rejecting the truth, because the truth is difficult to separate from the false. For deception to win, it has to have a very close resemblance to the truth! It is only because of a lack of knowledge and discernment that people are candidates for deception. The truth and what is false therefore, will have many similarities, such as:

- both will require strong leadership
- both will stress a need for loyalty and commitment to their leaders
- both will believe in a deep commitment to the group and its purpose and goals
- both will share the belief that we are living in what is called 'The End Times'
- both will work to establish a hope for a different and better life-style

A point to remember is that true leadership will always work under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ; false authority will tolerate and encourage the deification (or the exalting like a 'god') of their leader, or leaders. The true always looks to the Bible for instruction and guidance; the false invariably will have other writings which embrace material supposedly superior, or additional to Scripture. For example, the Latter Day Saints have the Book of Mormon and other books; Jehovah's Witnesses have the Watchtower Magazine and a multitude of other books. You will always be able to recognize a dangerous religious group that claims to be 'Christian' by their rejection of:-

- the Authority of the Bible, God's Word

- the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, that He is God manifest in the flesh
- the Cross of Calvary, and
- the Blood Atonement paid by the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary's Cross.

Dangerous religious groups will always promote the idea among their followers that they alone have the truth and that every religion other than theirs is of the Devil. Logically, this leads their members to believe that every other group claiming to be Christian is the enemy!

Cults will always reject, or suspect all authority but their own. To illustrate, the Jehovah's Witnesses will place themselves above the law of the land when it conflicts with their own teachings and belief. They justify it by quoting Acts 5:29 which says, "We must obey God rather than men."

Such teaching leads to a group believing that they are above the law; which can have disastrous results, as it did for the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW's) in Malawi in the 1960's when thousands of their members were killed and many more had to flee for their lives into neighbouring countries! The Malawian Government required people of voting age to register for an ID Voting Card, without which one could not vote! The JW's are not allowed to vote, so they did not register and were considered a threat to society!

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