

Last Things

Pretribulation Rapture Premillennialism, which has perched on the throne of fundamental eschatology for the past fifty years, having clambered up there via Darbyism, the Scofield Reference Bible and Premillennial Bible conferences, is being soundly challenged from every quarter now.

Never have so many diverse systems of eschatology (from the Greek *eschatos*, the farthest and the last . . . the study of last things) had so many diverse and enthusiastic promoters. All who are not fervently and zealously expounding a system are urged to choose one and get in the fight. It is not enough simply to believe that Christ is going to return bodily to earth as He said He would and that all men will be resurrected, judged and appointed to everlasting life or everlasting damnation. We are told we must subscribe to some sort of system which answers all the questions relating to the sequence of events. Everyone needs, we are told, a program which leaves out no major event; and we must be able to prove that program to be infallible and be ready to fight for it at the drop of a hat.

If we are to read someone's book, perhaps a favorite preacher or author or Bible teacher, decide to subscribe to his views, then the matter becomes quite simple. All we need to is memorize his key scriptures, his stock arguments, convince ourselves that this man is *The Authority* on the subject, and parrot him. But we are not generally urged to do that (although many secretly hope that is what will be done, and it is most commonly done). We are told to get our Bibles and study prophecy until we have come to unshakable conclusions on the matter.

Now, that is a formidable task.

To become anything remotely resembling a scholar of prophecy one would need to master the four apocalyptic books, Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah and Revelation. To do that he will need a firm and Biblically sound system of interpreting signs and symbols. Most symbols and types have scores of interpretations. He must also have a thorough working knowledge of all the prophetic books to such a degree that he can unflinchingly separate events that are already fulfilled from those currently being fulfilled and those yet to be fulfilled. In order to do that with any degree of accuracy, he must thoroughly acquaint himself with both ancient and modern world history; and he must be a student well versed in Church history. (Please do not say, "All you need is the Holy Ghost to reveal to you what these prophecies mean." Every heretic and false prophet in the history of religion has made that claim.)

All this requires study, research and resources that no layman can afford. It demands a squandering of precious time that few Bible scholars are willing to indulge, and *no* evangelical preacher. For it will not make one whit of difference so far as the gospel is concerned, or amount to a hill of beans to a lost soul what the exact program for the end time events is. The man who takes his call to preach the gospel seriously is irrevocably engaged in his concern for the souls of men and their preparation to meet God. He has no time to stoop to the petty eschatological squabbles of piddling preachers.

Personally, I have no quarrel with the preacher of prophecy. If he has nothing better to do with his time than to attempt to exegete 666, speculate on the white, red, black and pale horses or the 144,000, then I suppose he could do worse with his time. And if those who hear him have nothing better to do with their time than to evaluate his accuracy . . . laud him if they agree, damn him if they do not, then so be it. If their hearts are set on such things, then they will have no heart for relevant gospel preaching anyway.

Nor am I overly concerned about detrimental error in the basic tenets of *most* of the popular systems.

Post-tribulation Rapture (Historic) Premillennialism, Pre-tribulation Rapture premillennialism (at least 57 varieties here), Post Millennialism, A- or Church-Age Millennialism, Split Rapturism, Mid-trib Rapturism, etc. . . . They all have *some* Biblical basis. None, however, I think, have enough sound scriptural basis to support a dogmatic system. Nor do I think God intended we should formulate one, or that it is indeed possible, while using consistent, sound hermeneutical principles. Therefore, I have never subscribed myself to one or worked out my own system.

I am quite content that others satisfy their own personal itch to know the things that are yet hidden, and spend all the time they wish either muttering over the vials and trumpets, or playing the game of "guess who the Anti-Christ is this year" . . . if that is all it amounted to.

Regretfully, it is not. People, mostly "prophetic" preachers, insist you "take a stand." They demand that you choose sides and get in this fracas of foolishness. They question, prod, suggest and goad until you give an answer or make a statement which allows them to polarize you, and then whether you have taken sides or not, they will "-ist," "-ite," or "-ism" you and put you in somebody's camp so they can shoot at you.

But that is not the worst of it. Systems of eschatology have a way of adopting tenets that spill over into the area of soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. Views of justification and sanctification are then seriously affected by views of the Second Coming of Christ. In this, the tail begins to wag the dog. Justification and sanctification have to be altered to fit into the mold of end-time events.

This is where I get into trouble with the fathers of end-time fables. There are some principles, some sound precepts of the doctrine of salvation and of God, which cannot be compromised; and when the system of prophecy demands that they be, then that is where *I do* get into the fight.

1. To Divide the People of God.

A position which has two or more classes of people in heaven. Any view which has the permanent abode of part of the redeemed on earth and part of the redeemed in heaven. A "wedding supper" which has part of God's children and the

Bride and part as the Guests. Any separation of the inheritance of the Old Testament Saints and the New Testament Church, of the Jews and the Gentiles, of “Jehovah’s Wife” and “Christ’s Bride,” of those in the Kingdom of Heaven and those in the Kingdom of God. The Lord tells us in John 10:16: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be **one fold, and** one shepherd.” The sheep which he had at that time were all Old Testament sheep; the New Testament ones were yet to be brought. Or yet consider Hebrews 11:40 in reference to the Old Testament saints, “God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”

Nor may such a separation of the redeemed be supported on the basis of imperfect sanctification. God has predestined that all the saved be conformed to the image of Christ. We shall all be equally perfected. There will be no second-rate children in heaven.

2. Any Post-Death Adjustments.

It is appointed to man once to die and after this . . . Judgment! (Hebrews 9:27). Any second chance scheme is ruled out by Luke’s account of the rich man in hell. Nor does the judgment in view mete out probationary or temporary sentences. It determines the eternal state of man. God fully punished Christ for all the sins of all of the redeemed and reserved the wicked unto the day of eternal punishment. He completes all the chastisement, purification and sanctification of His children during this present life. Their preparation for heaven is complete when they die or when the Lord comes. The Universalist’s temporary hell is a lie. The Extreme Ultradispensationalists’ final salvation of even the devil is a lie. The Catholic Purgatory is a fraud. And the Protestant Purgatory, more commonly called the “judgment seat of Christ,” where the Christian suffers for all his sins that are “not confessed and put under the Blood,” is an invention to accommodate a two-judgment system. It slanders the perfection of the saints by the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross and cannot stand in a gospel of grace.

3. That Which Debases the Perfect and Finished Work of Christ on the Cross.

“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). God has forever abolished any sacrifice or penance for the removal of sins. The one offering of Christ finished forever all propitiation to God for all time and eternity. Any subsequent penances or offerings are therefore an insult to the Spirit of grace and a trampling underfoot of the Son of God (Hebrews 10:26-29). Whence, then, is this grand conglomeration of end-time events which has the rebuilding of a Judaistic Temple and a return to the sacrifice of bulls and goats? Will they mend the rent veil of the Temple which Christ took away in His body? Will they shut God away in the Holy of Holies so that He cannot be now approached except by extensive penances and sacrifices? Out with it. God forbid! We join Paul in his anathema to such preachers of another gospel.

Under this category must also fall the teaching that the “great tribulation” will be a means of purifying Christians who are not yet holy enough to go to heaven. Whether this is to mean that the entire church will go into the Tribulation to prepare her to be holy enough for God’s presence or only the “unsanctified Christians” (the fully holy ones having been raptured out before the Tribulation began), the teaching is still the same. Tribulation and persecution and trials are not put upon the church in order to make it more holy, but more pure. It is a purging and cleansing exercise. It separates the wheat from the chaff, the true possessors from the false professors. When the outward church and allegiance to Christ become the occasion of hardships and suffering, all who are not solidly in vital union with Him will find it more convenient to disassociate themselves from Christians. Temporal sufferings turn the thoughts and hearts of God’s children from the lying vanities of this life to the true riches of eternal glory, but they make them not one whit more holy or acceptable before God than Christ has already made them in His death and resurrection. God’s election of us in Christ Jesus the Holy Saviour has secured for us a standing before Him that is called “holy and without blame” (Ephesians 1:4). He has *made* us accepted within the beloved (Ephesians 1:6). The idea that we become more holy through physical suffering does not arise from the Bible or from Christian thought, but from pagan asceticism.

4. That Which Cheapens the Character of Conversion and Christian Fruits.

Men imagine themselves to be more compassionate than God, and attempt to make arrangements or accommodations for people whom they would like to believe saved, but who give no scriptural evidence of inward holiness. We must indeed be charitable to babes in Christ, be patient, forbearing and longsuffering with immature and unstable Christians. But to devise an end time system that delivers all the “sanctified saints” to immediately be with the Lord at the rapture and leaves others who are saved, yet “disobedient, unholy, worldly and unbelieving” to be further sanctified in the “great tribulation” is to give a hope to wicked people that the holy scriptures deny. We might harbor hopes in our hearts that such people may be saved, but the Bible forbids our devising a system which assures disobedient people that they will have a second chance after the coming of the Lord to square the accounts. Repeatedly, the Bible declares blood-bought Christians to be peculiar, different, separate, holy, pure. A marked distinction is drawn between them and the unregenerate, a distinction we must not obscure with compromises. They are said to be mourners, meek, merciful, pure in heart, hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Any attempt to fit a half Christian – half Sinner type of creature into the order of men is going to play havoc with the gospel. This is a compromise we do not need. Preach your split rapture if you feel you must, but please, let us not tamper with the high scriptural standards of regenerate people.

5. One Which Violates the Spiritual Character of Christ’s Kingdom.

The Lord has left us no reason to guess or speculate about the nature of His Kingdom. It is never pictured to be a temporary or an earthly one. It is eternal, heavenly and spiritual. “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be **no end**, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever (Isaiah 9:7). “Thine **is** the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matthew 6:13). “. . . My kingdom is not of this world: . . .” (John 18:36). Jesus said that we should render to Caesar that which was

Caesar's and to God that which was God's. This does not mean that what is Caesar's is not God's also. Nor does it mean that the kingdoms of this world are not also God's kingdoms. They are truly His in every sense of the word. He creates them, raises them up and takes them down according to His Own purpose and for His Own glory. What we are being told is that the reign of Christ is in the hearts of His people and that it is singularly concerned with spiritual realities. The New Testament saints and the early church well understood this. That is why you have not the slightest indication that they ever involved themselves in the matters of civil government.

Therefore, it seems to me that it is grossly inconsistent to interpret from certain prophetic passages a kingdom of Christ that is earthly, political, sensual and temporary. The idea that Christ has to prove that He can govern and rule men and subdue them to Himself seems to be altogether humanistic and materialistic. He **does now** rule and subdue men to Himself; and no man will ever behold His face that will not bow. Let men rid themselves of the idea that He is waiting to get the opportunity to prove that He can rule. He is ruling fully and sovereignly right now!

6. That Which Teaches a Frustration or a Setting Aside of God's Purpose.

Some, in order to reconcile their systems with certain prophecies which seem to indicate something different from the final program they envision, have devised a scheme in which God attempted one thing, and failing, set that program aside temporarily and settled for something else. That idea, on the face of it, should disqualify a system it espouses for two very good reasons:

The integrity and viability rests squarely upon the absolute sovereignty of God and absolute predestination. If any thing in the future is uncertain, then there can be no sure word of prophecy. How shall we be certain that Christ will return? Perhaps He will attempt it and fail. Can God without fail raise the dead? Will the final judgment with its rewards and retribution be set aside? Nonsense!! What Christian would entertain such doubts. Yet if we are to say that these prophecies cannot be frustrated and set aside, what grounds have we to assume that others may be? And if some prophecies fail and others are infallible, by what rule of scripture are we to judge which ones are certain and which are not?

Away with any doctrine, in whatever area of study it may develop, that undermines the immutable, undefeatable God. It is the indescribable joy of the believer to know that his God is able and willing, and having willed, will surely bring it to pass. On this is based the hope in the sinner's cry, the assurance of the believer's acceptance and the security of the saint's perseverance. "Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: . . . yea, I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it" (Isaiah 46:9-11)

- C. M.