

Does Scripture Teach A Partial Rapture?



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DIVERSE and strange doctrines more and more abound in these days. It seems that Satan in matchless cunning, has taken special pains to link many of these to the truth of the second coming of Christ, either to bring that precious doctrine into disrepute, or to mystify and confuse honest souls, to rob them of the comfort and blessing which God intends we should derive from the "looking for that blessed hope."

One of these strange doctrines is that only a part of the Church will be caught up at the coming of Christ, and the rest left behind to pass through "the great tribulation." It is called the "Partial Rapture."

That this teaching is both unscriptural and pernicious we shall show from Scripture; for the word of God is so clear and concise on the subject that any attentive reader should know just who will be caught up when the assembling shout is heard.

Let us turn to a few scriptures showing beyond doubt for whom Christ is coming. "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14: 3). Has our Lord in view a special class among believers here? Did He say, *Some* of you—those who shall be on the lookout for Me? Those of you who shall be in a suitable condition of soul? Or, those who have attained to a certain degree of knowledge or holiness? No, He includes them all, "you," "ye,"

with no added condition; and what He said to them He says to us all. (See Mark 13: 37.)

Take again that well-known passage, 1 Thess. 4: 13-18: the pronoun "*we*" there is found five times; and four times out of the five it undoubtedly means all the Thessalonian saints, as well as the apostle, with Sylvanus and Timotheus his companions. The one exception is: "This *we* say unto you by the word of the Lord," etc. (ver. 15), which means, of course, Paul and his companions. The others are as follows: "For if *we* believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this *we* say unto you by the word of the Lord, that *we* which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (precede) them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then *we* which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall *we* ever be with the Lord."

So it reads: "If *we* believe"; "*we* which are alive and remain" (twice repeated); "so shall *we* ever be with the Lord." Is "*we*" a special class here—some particularly holy ones among the Thessalonian believers, those reckoned "overcomers" only, the most devoted from among them? Or does it mean all the Thessalonians? All of them, most assuredly—every one is included in the "if we believe," etc., all who believed in the death and resurrection of Christ for their sins and justification.

And have the terms been changed since? Has a divine decree gone forth that faith in Christ is no more the only ground and condition of acceptance—that something more is required for fitness for His presence, or another title to glory than His precious blood, shed upon the cross?

Look at the same epistle, chapter 2, verses 19, 20: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy." "Ye"; to whom does he refer—a class among believers, those of special merit, of peculiar holiness or extraordinary devotedness? or does the apostle mean all to whom the epistle is addressed, "the church of the Thessalonians"? There can be but one answer: he means them all, every one who by God's grace had "turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven."

And were all these Thessalonian saints serving the living and true God with equal or adequate devotedness and zeal? We have but to read the second epistle addressed to the same company, and written but a few weeks after the first, and see that some were "disorderly, working not at all, busybodies" (chap. 3 : 11). Is there any hint or threat (open or veiled) that some of these might be left behind at the rapture? Not the slightest. And surely this would be the place to indicate a segregation of believers if something in them were to prevent a part of them from being "caught up" at the coming of the Lord. But the apostle hints at nothing of the kind, for he knows, as he else-

where taught, that at Christ's coming all His own shall be "caught up together," and that *grace*, the grace that saved, is the ground of it, and the blood that atones for sin is the only and all-sufficient title to share in that glorious event for which he encouraged all believers everywhere to look.

Again, look at 1 Cor. 15: 51, 52, where we have three times the first personal pronoun "we." "We shall not all sleep, but *we shall all* be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." To whom do these "we" refer—to some, or to all of them? To all, unquestionably. And if a Christian's conduct could affect his title to have part in the rapture, this would be the most suitable occasion to teach it; for these Corinthians, as the apostle says elsewhere, were indeed carnal; schismatic; glorying in men; were exalting human wisdom, yet *babes* in Christ; going to law one with another. Yea, "*Ye* do wrong, and defraud," he says, "and that your brethren." Some of them misconducted themselves at the Lord's supper, eating and drinking of the eucharist unworthily, and bringing upon themselves the just chastisement of the Lord. Yet in no wise did the apostle suggest that any really converted person among them might miss being taken at the rapture. No, without any qualification he says, "We (the living) shall be changed."

And another thing: What gives the saint fallen asleep in Jesus title to have part in the first resurrection? Is it his conduct while living on earth, or

was it through *grace*? Through grace alone, most certainly. And is it not just the same with those who shall be changed as with the dead who shall be raised incorruptible? Were not some of them very deficient in their conduct while upon earth? Yet they shall not be left in their graves at the "resurrection of life" any more than the living believer be left behind at the coming of the Lord. The two events, "the resurrection of the just" and the translation of the saints, occur at the same moment, and the title to either rests on the same basis—on "the blood of Jesus Christ which cleanseth us from all sin."

And on what does this teaching base the idea that only a part of the company of the redeemed shall go to glory at the coming of the Lord? On two things, principally: First, on a misapprehension of the gospel—failing to see that the sinner's real title to anything pertaining to heaven, or spiritual favor, rests upon *grace*. Second, in spiritual pride—in the vain conceit that some superior devotion to Christ secures a better claim to the "blessed hope," which less holy or spiritual fellow-Christians fail to attain.

Now as to the first, What is the ground of our entering glory at any time before or since the Cross, at death now, or at the coming of the Lord by and by? The ground is *grace*, redeeming *grace alone*. It is not, it could not be, any merit of our own, for this would cloud the gospel and contradict the written word of God. The Thessalonian converts were instructed to wait for God's Son from heaven, with never a question as to any

superior claim to be among those translated at that happy moment. The youngest convert's reason for expecting Christ to come for him is the same message of God's grace that came to him as a sinner, and told him also of his Saviour's coming again—and for whom? Why, for all who receive that message, "The gospel of our salvation." Has the youngest believer any less claim than "such an one as Paul the aged?" Or any more than the Corinthians or the Thessalonians? All alike are partakers of that "heavenly calling," and shall share alike in the fulfilment of "that blessed hope." If being caught up to meet the Lord in the air depends on the believer's state of soul or conduct, it brings us back to our own merits, instead of the grace of God and the love of Christ.

But what says the Word? "*They that are Christ's* at His coming." Yes; they are Christ's; this is the only reason they have part in the first resurrection; and this is just why you and I, beloved fellow-believer, are going to be caught up at the same glad moment—"because we belong to Christ!" And we are His, not by any thing of ourselves, but by Christ's redemption, and that *alone*. Are you Christ's? Then be assured you will have part in this "blessed hope;" for, as with those who have *died* in Christ, so shall it be with those *alive* in Him—"They that are Christ's at His coming" (1 Cor. 15 : 23).

As for the second reason of this error (some distinctive or superior worthiness in a believer), who or what am I to expect to have any part in the rapture, if it depended upon anything in me or

in my walk? Did not our Lord teach His disciples to confess themselves "unprofitable servants" (Luke 17 : 10)? And does not James tell us that "in many things we all offend" (Jas. 3 : 2)? And did not the great apostle Paul confess himself "less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3 : 8)? In view of this, who could expect anything else than to be of those "left" at Christ's coming, if it is any question of personal fitness or attainment of holiness? And more: who could tell me, or by what means might I know when I had attained to the degree of holiness, devotedness, or growth in grace (whichever it is), to warrant me to expect to have part in the rapture—if it is conditional upon something else than a simple faith in the work and merits of our Lord Jesus Christ? By what measure would the teachers of this strange doctrine mete to me or to themselves a decision in the matter? If their teaching be true as to the translation of select saints alone, we would have to cry out with the aged Samuel Johnson, in reference to justification, "Who can tell me when I have done enough!"

And the teachers of this partial rapture theory, do not *they* expect to be "caught up" when Christ comes? If so, what does this argue? Just this, that they are self-righteous; that they consider themselves superior to other believers. If I know myself at all—my many failures, my treacherous heart, my utter unworthiness—can I claim the right to anything but that of confessing myself *a sinner saved by grace*?

Yes, reader, you may be sure there is a subtle self-conceit underlying this teaching, which makes

a privileged class among the saints, with the secret self-confidence that the teachers and followers of the doctrine are among the worthy ones, the faithful, the overcomers.

Yes; that is the word they catch at, "Overcomer." Overcomers, they say, will be caught up, for to such alone is the promise made of being kept from "the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3 : 10). Granted : but who are the overcomers ? Are they a special class in the Church—saints of a superior order, or "disciples indeed," in a sense in which all believers are not ? Let us see.

We turn to 1 John 5 : 4, 5 : "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God ?" Here we have the divine description of an overcomer: it is the faith in every one that is born of God—faith in Jesus the Son of God—that overcomes the vast hostile system called "the world."

And mark, it is not what some erroneously term "holiness by faith"—the claiming by faith of a "second blessing," "clean heart," "perfect love," "cleansing from inbred sin," etc., but faith in Christ—just such a faith as all true Christians possess. He that overcometh is he "that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." So it is the "overcomer" that will go when Jesus comes, but the term applies to all believers in Christ—not to a select class among them. And so in Rev., chaps.

2 and 3, the overcomer is the *true* believer, as distinguished from the false. Else what could be made of the promises to such? "He shall eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (chap. 2: 7). Is this to be the portion of special saints, or for all true believers? Again, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (chap. 2: 11); will some Christians not be overcomers and be hurt of the second death? Just to ask the question is to answer it—No! And so with all the promises in these addresses to the seven churches; they are not all the same, but are all beautifully suited to the condition and circumstances of each assembly addressed. All true believers shall partake of the promised blessings, for all shall in the end be overcomers, not by any superior degree of holiness or development of the life of Christ in them, but through the overcoming on the cross of Him in whom we are complete (Col. 2: 10), even as it is written, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15: 57); and again, "We are more than conquerors through Him that loveth us" (Rom. 8: 37). Hallelujah to His name!

Now, let us see for a little what more is involved in this error at which we have been looking.

It involves the error of a divided Christ. The expression, "The Christ," includes, in such passages as 1 Cor. 12: 12, not only Christ the Head, but also His body, the Church. If, at His coming, a part only of that body is taken and the other left, what becomes of the unity of this mystical body?

(See 1 Cor. 12 : 25.) And again, the Church, the body, composed of all believers, is Christ's bride. Will He have a bride with members lacking—a body incomplete, in heaven—some members in glory and glorious with Him above, and others on earth suffering in the great tribulation? Is it not written, "Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12 : 26)? How does this comport with the theory of a partial rapture? Will the members caught up at the coming suffer in heaven with their fellow-members left behind on earth?

Again, if the Holy Spirit (who now dwells in the Church as the temple of God) goes with the Church at the coming of Christ, that part of the Church left on earth would be no more God's temple or dwelling-place. But Eph. 4 : 30 declares the members of Christ here on earth are by the Spirit "sealed unto (or till) the day of redemption." Does this agree with the thought of some of these sealed ones being left at His rapture—the day of redemption? The seal is the mark, the sign, put by the owner upon the purchased possession until its removal by him to its settled abiding-place; and the believer, "bought with a price," is marked and set apart for God, "sealed unto the day of redemption." But if he is left at the rapture, the day of the body's redemption, how could this scripture be fulfilled in him?

And yet further: will there be different classes of the people of God on earth in the tribulation—one, an *earthly* and Jewish remnant; the other, a portion of the Church on earth with a *heavenly*

calling? And where is this left portion of the Church referred to in Revelation, or in any portion of the Scriptures treating of the tribulation? What is their testimony, their place, their destiny, and will they ever again be joined to the Church, "which is His body?" The earthly saints, both Jew and Gentile, we can clearly see and trace, but this detached portion of the body, this *left* section of the Church, we nowhere find. Why? Because they are not there; they are all in glory: the bride, the Lamb's wife, is presented there to Himself "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. 5: 27)—nor any subtraction, nor any member missing, we might add.

Two scriptures are frequently referred to as supporting the belief in a partial rapture. One is the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25). Let us look at it. The whole company of the ten virgins represent the professing Church. The wise are the true believers; by the Holy Scriptures they have been made "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3: 15). They have not only the lamp of profession, but they have oil in their vessels with their lamps. Oil, in Scripture, is the standing type of the Holy Spirit. And it is written, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His" (Rom. 8: 9). And being Christ's, the wise are ready, and when the Bridegroom comes, they go in with Him to the marriage. The foolish virgins have the profession, but not the Spirit—they are not Christ's, not true children of God; mere professors they are, uncon-

verted ones, having lamps but no oil, no Holy Spirit. So when the Bridegroom comes, they are unprepared and shut out—left without hope. "I know you not," the Bridegroom says. Could this be said of any saint, however unsatisfactory his state? No; for it is written again, "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 2: 19).

The other stock text is Heb. 9: 28: "Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Now, it is not our purpose here to go into the full meaning of this passage. A most cursory examination of the context would show that the inspired penman has before him the Old Testament figure of the Jewish high priest going into the holiest of the tabernacle, as he did once a year, to make atonement for Israel, while the expectant people waited without for his reappearance. So Christ, our great High Priest, has entered heaven itself, there "to appear in the presence of God for us." And in due time, like the earthly priest of old, He shall appear again to them "that look for Him," and they "that look for Him" are all the people of God. It does not say, nor does it mean, that He will appear only to them that intelligently wait for His coming, or to those who watchfully listen for His shout. No; for this would make the translation of a saint dependent, not upon his faith in Christ, or even on his devotedness to Him, but upon his knowledge—an idea which would deny the plain import of Scripture as a whole, and special passages in particular, as "knowledge puffeth up."

The fact is, every truly converted soul is looking

for Christ—not all in the same way, nor yet with equal degree of intelligence or longing. Some, through ignorance, look for Him at death; others expect to see Him coming at the end of the world; while others, again, have no fixed belief as to the occasion and time ; they only know that they love Him because He first loved them, and their heart would be made glad at the sight of His glorious face.

I remember, many years ago, hearing a devoted soul, a real “mother in Israel,” tell of a dream she had concerning “the end of the world,” as it had been taught her. The mighty thunders were crashing, the earth rending, stars falling, the heavens rolled back as a scroll, the fire was descending, and the graves opening, and the judgment about to sit ; and she awoke in her bed exclaiming in ecstasy, “Oh, I shall see Jesus!” Was she not “looking for Him?” Yet how mixed up she was in it all. Like thousands of others of God’s saints, she knew nothing at all of what is called “dispensational truth;” but like them and all who know and love the Saviour, she was looking for Him; and to them He shall appear as well as to us who by grace possess a little more knowledge of the order in which God’s word has placed these different events. How mistaken, then, are they who would limit and narrow a passage of Scripture like this, and make it apply only to a small portion of the beloved and blood-bought saints of God!

We close our argument; not that we have said the last word on the subject; no, not by any means; for very much more might be said in refutation of

this wide-spread error of a partial rapture. But enough has been said, we believe, to convince and satisfy any one willing to bow to Scripture, and it is for these that we write; for our aim has been more to help the perplexed, and guard those already instructed, than to convince the gainsayers.

It only remains for us, in closing, to exhort the Christian reader to be found of Him in peace, watching and waiting, with lamp trimmed and burning; with loins girded, "like unto men that wait for their Lord," that both reader and writer may be "presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." "Let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5 : 6).

