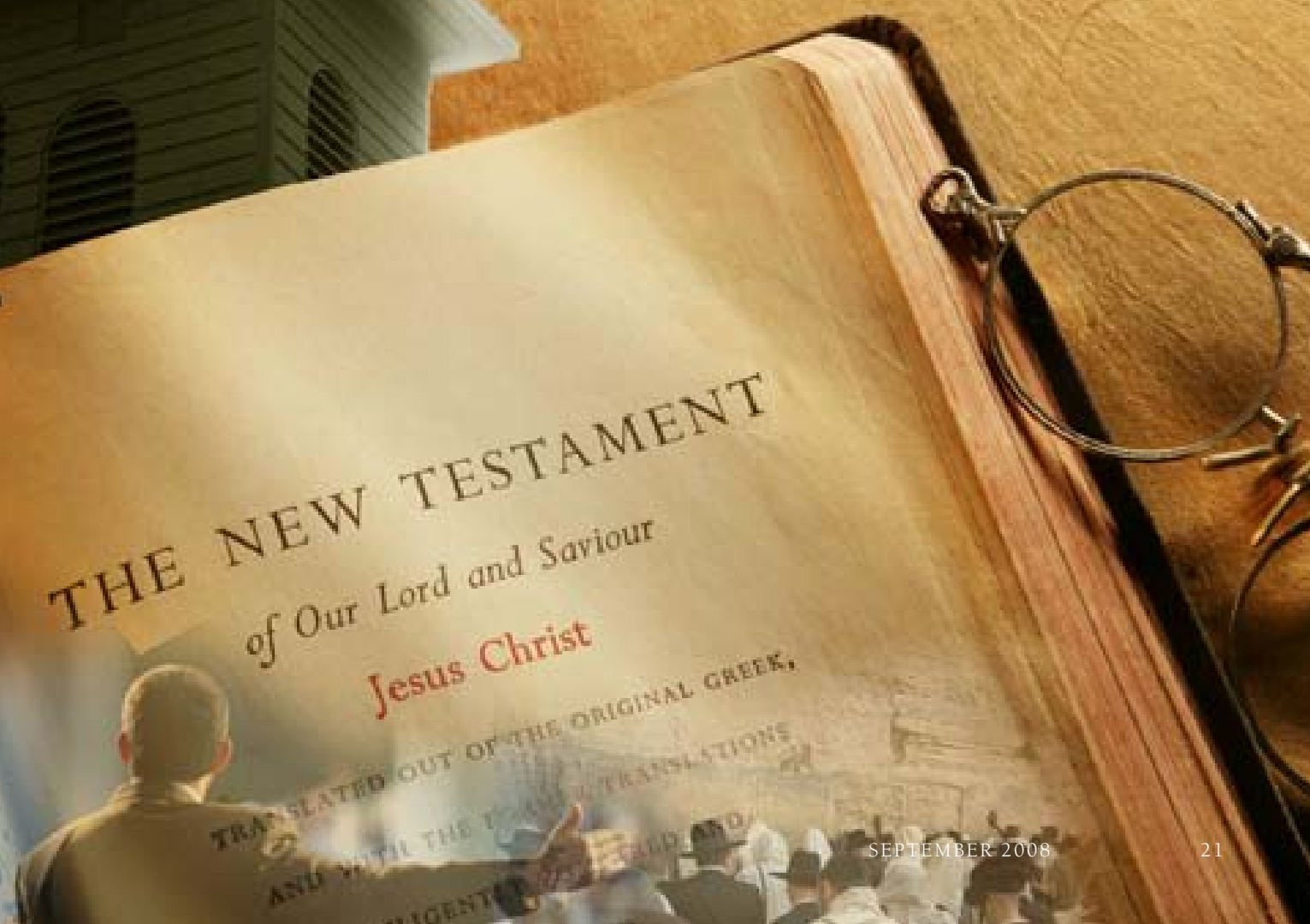


GOD'S PURPOSE FOR THE CHURCH

PART V

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THE NEW TESTAMENT
of Our Lord and Saviour
Jesus Christ

TRANSLATED OUT OF THE ORIGINAL GREEK,
AND WITH THE MOST ACCURATE TRANSLATIONS
AND WITH THE MOST ACCURATE TRANSLATIONS

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21

According to English dictionaries, the meaning of apostasy is to abandon one's religious or other faith. In the Greek New Testament, there are two words for apostasy. The noun *apostasia* is a compound word (*apo*, "from," and *isthmi*, "to stand") meaning religious abandonment, or "to stand from" religious teachings in the sense of not affirming fundamental beliefs.

God's purpose for the church involves a tremendous future. Since the creation of the church at Pentecost (Acts 2), Christians have encountered persecution and apostasy. These experiences will culminate with the rapture of the church to heaven. Following the rapture, the church will experience the judgment seat of Christ. The church will remain in heaven with Christ Jesus until He returns with His saints to rule and reign for a thousand years, in fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies (an event that will capitulate to the new heavens and the new earth).

THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

Hatred and Persecution

The church grows quantitatively and qualitatively through the systematic teaching of God's Word. The Holy Spirit creates and sustains the church by the Word of God (Matt 4:4; John 1:1, 4, 14; Acts 19:20; 20:32; Rom 1:16; 10:17; 1 Thess 2:13; Heb 4:12; James 1:18, 21; 1 Pet 1:23, 25). Jesus prophesied that this growth and progress of the church would be in fulfillment of Matthew 16:18 ("I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it"). The parable of the vine and the branches (John 15:1—16:4) not only illustrated the intimate relationship between Christ and His disciples, but also provided instruction concerning the attitude of the world toward those who "are not of the world." Those who belong to Christ will be hated and persecuted by the world. Nevertheless, Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you

may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (16:33). Indeed, the growth and progress of the church was met with persecution from the unregenerate world (Acts 8:1; 9:15-16; 20:17-24). "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12).

Apostasy

According to English dictionaries, the meaning of apostasy is to abandon one's religious or other faith. In the Greek New Testament, there are two words for apostasy. The noun *apostasia* is a compound word (*apo*, "from," and *isthmi*, "to stand") meaning religious abandonment, or "to stand from" religious teachings in the sense of not affirming fundamental beliefs (cf. Josh 22:22; 2 Chron 29:19; Acts 21:21; 2 Thess 2:3). The verb *piptw* is translated "fall," which means "to fall" from faith in the moral or religious sense (cf. Prov 11:28; Rom 11:11, 22; 1 Cor 10:12; Heb 4:11). The New Testament prophesies a trend toward apostasy within the professing church that culminates at the end of the age.

Not all persecution of the church will come from those directly opposed to Christianity. "Major passages of Scripture deal with this subject and the expositor is embarrassed by the wealth of material which plainly teaches that the end of the age will be characterized by apostasy (Matt 24:4-26; II Thess 2:1-12; I Tim 4:1-3; II Tim 3:1-9; 4:3, 4; II Pet 2:1—3:18; Jude 3-19; Rev 3:14-16; 6:1—19:21)."¹ Some of the characteristics of

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the end of the age include a denial of the following: God (Luke 17:26; 2 Tim 3:4-5); Christ (1 John 2:18; 4:3; 2 Pet 2:6); the second coming (2 Pet 3:3-4); the faith (i.e. cardinal doctrines of Christianity) (1 Tim 4:1-2; Jude 3-4); sound doctrine (2 Tim 4:3-4); morality (2 Tim 3:1-8, 13; Jude 18); Christian liberty (1 Tim 4:3-4); and, authority (2 Tim 3:4).² “There will be



a manifestation of characteristics which belong to unregenerate men, though it is under the profession of ‘a form of godliness’ (cf. 2 Tim 3:1-5). The indication is that, having denied the power of the blood of Christ (cf. 2 Tim 3:5 with Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:23-24; 2 Tim 4:2-4), the leaders in these forms of righteousness will be unregenerate men from whom nothing more spiritual than this could proceed (cf. 1 Cor 2:14).”³

The New Testament prophesies of a progression of heterodoxy (false doctrine) and heteropraxy (false practice)⁴ at the end of the age among the professing church. Therefore, continual warnings are given to the true church to be discerning against doctrinal apostasy from false teachings within the church. These false teachers will seek influence within the church, but they will not actually be regenerate. Walvoord summarized this trend: “An examination of these major passages on apostasy in the New Testament will reveal that a devel-

opment of apostasy will be in three stages: (1) the doctrinal and moral departure in the church prior to the rapture, i.e. during the last days of the true church on earth; (2) the apostasy in the professing church after the true church is raptured, i.e. in the period immediately following the rapture; (3) the final apostasy in which the professing church as such will be

destroyed and the worship of the beast, the world ruler, as the human representative of Satan will be inaugurated (Matt 24:15; 2 Thess 2:3-12; Rev 13:4-8; 17:16-18).”⁵ Until the rapture, the true church will be preserved in holiness by the grace of God (Eph 5:25-27).

Rapture

The rapture is a prophesied event for the church only. Logically, then, the Old Testament does not reveal the rapture, because this is an event for the church. The church (which began at Pentecost) was an unrevealed mystery in the Old Testament. Consequently, the promise of the rapture is only given in the New Testament. Jesus first referred to the rapture, as recorded in John 14:3 (“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also”). Additional details concerning this promise are identified in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, which prophesies of Jesus Christ,

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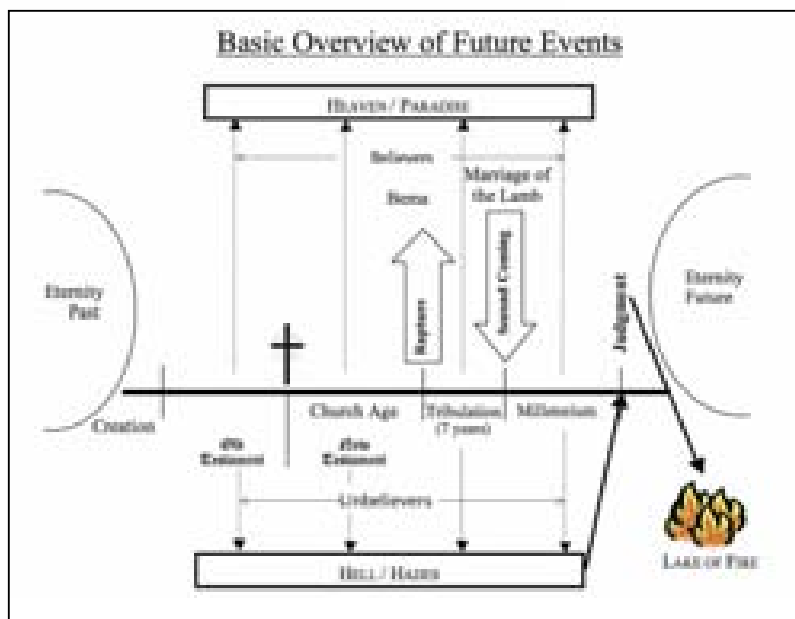
who “will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up [Gk. *Jarpazw*, which means a “catching away”] with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we always be with the Lord.” The biblical source of the word “rapture” is the expression in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 that the church will be “caught up.” Walvoord explained: “The Latin translation of ‘caught up’ is *rapturo*, from which the English word *rapture* is derived. Though often the word *rapture* means to be carried away with joy, here it refers to a bodily ‘snatching up,’ that is, the bodily removal of the living church from the earth and meeting the Lord in the air.”⁶

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rious experience “with Christ” for all eternity. Christ Jesus will return for His church as He promised, and it will be for the purpose of having the church with Him forever. New glorified bodies will be given to those who are resurrected, and those who are living will be suddenly transformed (1 Cor 15:50-58; cf. Gk. *metaschmatizw* which means “to alter the schematics” or changing the present body into something new) and will be taken home to heaven.

The rapture is not a reward for faithfulness to the church, but it is God’s purpose to deliver the church from the coming wrath of the Tribulation. For instance, Paul first described the rapture (1 Thess 4:13-18), then the day of the Lord (5:1-11). The day of the Lord “will come like a thief” upon unbelievers (cf. 2 Pet 3:3-10). In contrast, the day of the Lord does not overtake the church, “for God has not destined us [Christians] for

wrath [the day of the Lord], but for obtaining salvation [deliverance] through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him” (1 Thess 5:2, 9; cf. 1:10). The day of the Lord is even compared to the Genesis Flood in the eschatological synoptic discourses (Matt 24—25; Mark 13; Luke 17:20—37; Luke 21:20—37), indicating God’s judgment upon the unbelieving world. The blessed hope of the rapture is both comfort-



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ing and purifying (1 Thess 4:18; Tit 2:11-14).

The Judgment Seat of Christ

When Christians appear before the judgment seat of Christ (Gk. *bema*) it will be "that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10). The judgment seat is not an event that relates to non-Christians. Furthermore, it is not judgment in the sense of eternal life for the Christian (Isa 43:25; John 17:3; Rom 8:3; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Heb 8:12). It is clearly not a judicial judgment; rather, it is a judgment to determine rewards. Christians will be judged not in terms of eternal salvation; rather, they will receive a reward for those things done in the body on earth.

It is clear that the sins of the Christian will not be recalled to determine eternal life, since God outpoured His wrath for those He came to save upon Christ (2 Cor 5:21). Jesus Christ, the sinner's substitute, took the judgment that depraved humanity deserved (Rom 8:3; Gal 3:13). God has forgotten the sins of the Christian in the sense that He will not lay them to their charge (Ps 103:12; Isa 43:25; Heb 8:12; 10:17). Once justified, the Christian will be always justified, because he has been judged for sin by grace through faith at the cross of Christ (John 5:24; Rom 8:1-2; 10:4).

Nevertheless, God gives gifts to His church in order to fulfill His will (cf. Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12—14; Eph 4:1-16; 1 Pet 4:10-11). Indeed, Christians are "[Christ's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph 2:10), and "special people, zealous for good works" (Tit 2:14). Those that use their gifts as good stewards will receive more. For instance, there will be ruling

authority with the Lord granted, because of one being faithful to Christ (Luke 19:11-27). The quantity of the believer's works, as illustrated in the parable of the pounds, communicates this truth (Luke 19:11-27; Rom 2:6-7).

At the judgment seat, the quality of the believer's works will be judged (1 Cor 3:10-14). Some individuals will experience shame before God for not being good stewards of the gifts that God has given them (1 John 2:28). Just as the stars differ in glory, so will some of the saints (1 Cor 15:41-42). The church should pray continually as David did, to "search me, O God, and know my heart" (Ps 139:23). It should be that every motivation to do something "as unto the Lord" might be judged pure. The motivation of each individual's actions will certainly be examined (1 Cor 4:5). Christians are to use the gifts that God has given to accomplish the work He has set before them and to glorify Him forever. To glorify God and enjoy Him forever is to be the motivation of every believer in the Lord.

Many will receive crowns from the Lord at the judgment seat (1 Cor 9:25; 1 Thess 2:19-20; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 Pet 5:2-4; Rev 2:10). This truth should inspire Christians to labor for the Lord. The motivation is gratitude for all God has done in procuring salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. The receiving of these rewards will allow one to join in the casting of crowns before the throne of the Lord God Almighty in an act of worship (Rev 4:9-11). How sorrowful it will be that some may not have many crowns to cast before the Lord—the only One worthy to be glorified. At that time, it will be made clear that every good and perfect work was for God and through His power, so that He alone should be praised. This will not be a time to draw atten-

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tion to self; rather it will be a time to worship the Savior who alone is worthy “to receive glory and honor and power.”

Christians will also be given robes to wear (Rev 3:14; 19:8). Clearly, the giving of these robes must occur sometime between the rapture and the second coming. It would seem that these robes are given at the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10). When the church as the “the armies in heaven” follow Christ, they are adorned as Christ’s bride, “clothed in fine linen” [i.e. imputed righteousness]. Jude 23 exhorts Christians to hate “even the garment defiled by the flesh.” The emphasis is upon motivation and the excellence of things done in the body. The verse in Jude does not refer to the righteousness of Jesus Christ, with which believers are clothed for salvation (Isa 61:10). The garments mentioned are those of good works (a fruitful life) through the perseverance of the Christian. Just as rewards may be gained, there may also be loss of rewards to the Christian’s shame when Christ returns for His church (1 Cor 3:11-16; 4:1-5; 9:24-27; Tit 3:8; 1 John 2:28; 2 John 1:8).

CONCLUSION

In most biblical passages, the New Testament church is a local congregation of believers. However, in another sense there is one universal church (1 Cor 12:13). Presently, God is accomplishing His decrees through the local congregations of believers. Second Corinthians 11:1-2, Ephesians 5:25-27, and Revelation 21:9 testify of a future event when the glorified church (assembly) is gathered together and presented to Christ as His bride.

Following the judgment seat of Christ will be the marriage of the Lamb. This event will occur in heaven before the second coming of Christ to earth and after the rapture of the



church. This is apparent in Revelation 19:7: “His [Christ’s] wife has made herself ready.” John the Baptist declared, “He who has the bride is the bridegroom” (John 3:29). Revelation 19:7-8 states the bride “has made herself ready” for her soon marriage because of “the fine linen” of good works. The sad truth

is that many Christians are not working for Christ (as fruits of salvation); consequently, they will not be ready to meet the Bridegroom. There will be shame because of a lack of readiness (1 John 2:28).

In the last chapter of Revelation, Jesus said, “Surely I am coming quickly.” The response of the faithful is “Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus!” It is because Christ may return at any moment that those in Christ are to encourage each other to live godly lives so that each may obtain the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 9:24; Phil 3:10-14; Heb 12:1-2). Furthermore, the imminent return of Christ is an impetus to tell the lost of the glorious gospel of grace. Faith in Jesus without the earnest expectation of His return is like a journey leading to nowhere and ending in utter emptiness. (MC)

ENDNOTES

- 1 John F. Walvoord, *The Church in Prophecy*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 32-33.
- 2 J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Finlay, OH: Dunham Publishing; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 155.
- 3 Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947; reprint in 4 vols., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 4:375.
- 4 This is logical since false (unbiblical) doctrine and practice are inseparable.
- 5 Walvoord, *Church in Prophecy*, 33.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 82.