



BULLEEN BAPTIST CHURCH

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SERIES : "THE LAST THINGS"

Study 12 : "The Future of the Church" - October 29, 2006

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INTRODUCTION : to the series

The "Last Things" is a Series on God's ultimate purposes for his people & his creation. The Series will pick up on the main themes through the Scriptures; themes which find their ultimate fulfilment when Jesus returns to the world - the whole of creation is renewed, his people are "clothed with immortality," and God reigns supreme.

INTRODUCTION : to Study 12

A common theme in all popular Prophecy books is that the Church will become APOSTATE in the time leading up to the Return of Jesus - in fact this is one of the many "sure" signs of the closeness of his Return.

This theme is usually coupled with the belief that the major part of the Church will so deny the Lord that it will unite with other religions into a world-wide religion and work hand-in-hand with a world-wide dictatorial government to actively persecute the minority of faithful Christians.

After "the Rapture" (when these few faithful Christians have been whisked away to safety by this "secret coming" of Jesus) most of the Churches carry on as usual - baffled by the disappearance of a few of their number, but glad that the "troublemakers" are gone.

Such a scenario is hardly calculated to get a person excited about the Church! It inevitably encourages the further splintering of the Church by individuals / groups that buy into this idea as they attempt to preserve the Church's purity - or at least the purity of their particular group. "Come out from among them and be separate" (2Cor6:17), lifted from its context, becomes their operational principle.

We are going to do three things in this Study. :

1. Look at the Exegetical Evidence for the "Apostasy of the Church" - that is, does this scenario stand the test of Scripture?
2. Understand why "Popular Prophecy" teachers hold to this belief
3. Set out a brief Biblical View of the Church to encourage us.

A. EXEGETICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE CHURCH'S APOSTASY.

EXAMPLE 1

"Most of the passages in the New Testament that discuss the moral and spiritual trends in the last days focus on the spiritual apostasy that will occur in the church." Mark Hitchcock "101 Answers To The Most Often Asked Questions About The End Times." Multnomah Publishers, 2001. p53

Typically, the conclusion is reached before any scripture references are considered. The next paragraph is a near repeat of the above, but it does have a reference :

"The familiar passage in 2Tim3:1-9 that does list the kinds of behaviour that will characterise the last days is primarily describing apostasy or falling away that will take place in the church.

Let's have a look at this "familiar passage" - supposedly about apostasy.

There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. ... Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth ... But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

- a. Wrong GROUP : no mention of "Church" ... just a description of people in general.
- b. Wrong TIME : Note the underlined phrase "Have nothing to do with them." The people mentioned were Timothy's contemporaries. All "last days" references define the time from Jesus' birth to his return - not a short period just prior to his return. (see Ac2:17 & Heb1:2)
- c. Wrong OPPONENTS : Are these people in the Church who "have a form of godliness?" Who are Jannes & Jambres? These are the names that tradition assigns to Pharaoh's magicians who tried to emulate Moses' miracles. (See Ex7:11-12, 8:18, 9:11) (A "google

search" on the names will result in 100's of references to this tradition) As this is a comparison to the people described earlier, this passage is not about apostasy within the Church but to opposition without.

- d. Wrong EFFECT : rather than affecting the Church, this opposition, like that of the magicians to Moses, has limited effect. "They will not get very far..."

EXAMPLE 2

In his book "The Return of the Lord," written in 1955, John Walvood titles his first chapter "Trends Of Our Day Toward Fulfilled Prophecy." And yes, one of those trends (just has to be) the Apostasy of the Church. He writes on page 21 :

"The Scriptures also make plain that another characteristic of the professing church is its growing apostasy, its utter departure from God as it reaches its climax"

His biblical proof for this? He quotes 2Tim3:13

"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."

This verse is the sum total of biblical evidence that Walvood offers to justify his extraordinary (and quite slanderous) claim about the Church.

Where did the concept of the "the professing church" come from in text or context?

This verse is in the context of the passage considered in Example 1 - which identifies these "evil men" as opponents of the Church outside it, not false teachers from within it.

Where does this verse, or its context, mention that the Church becomes apostate? Where is the "minor detail" about apostasy as an increasing trend in the time prior to Jesus Return?

EXAMPLE 3

"Some of you may be thinking that every generation has seen this apostasy in the Church. This is true, but the Bible says, that as the countdown of Christ's Return comes closer, the teachings of the false leaders of the Church will depart further and further from God's Word."

Hal Lindsay. "The Late, Great Planet Earth." p128

After this statement he refers to 2 Peter 2:1

"But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves."

- Wrong IDENTIFICATION : "false teachers among you" but not "*false leaders of the church.*"
- NO mention of Jesus' Return nor of any "*countdown*" to it. NO progressively departing "*further and further from God's Word.*" The verse simply states that false teachers exist and what they taught in fairly non-specific terms.
- Wrong EFFECT : Peter indicates that those who peddle "destructive heresies" bring "swift destruction on themselves" - not on the church. This is confirmed at the beginning of the letter, where Peter writes, "... you ... are firmly established in the truth you now have." (1Ptr1:12) It doesn't seem that these false teachers had much of an impact. So much for this Church becoming apostate!

What then does 2Ptr2:1 in its context teach. Disturbingly, exactly what Lindsey states he is trying to counter; the idea "*that every generation has seen this apostasy in the Church.*"

To get the context we'll join the previous verse (2Ptr1:21) to 2Ptr2:1

"For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. / But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you"

From Peter's point in history, false teachers were a part of the fabric in the time of the Old Testament prophets, and they continue to plague the Church in his own day. 1Ptr2:1 is not even a prophecy. It's a WARNING to the readers of his day about a constant reality true in our day also.

History tells us that apostasy in the Church is both a NORM and a VARIABLE. A norm - in that it is present in every generation. A variable - in that its intensity changes both with time (sometimes more, sometimes less) and with geography (worse there, not as bad here.)

Does the Exegetical evidence presented by "Pop Prophecy People" stand the biblical test. Not even close ... but in the attempt they manage to trash both the Church and the Scriptures!

B. WHY IS THIS IDEA SO STRONGLY HELD?

Because the Theological System being used DEMANDS that the Church end in failure.

The Scriptures divide time (by which is meant the entire period from the creation of Adam to the "new heaven and a new earth" of Rev. 21: 1) into seven unequal periods, usually called dispensations (Eph. 3:2), although these periods are also called ages (Eph. 2:7) and days, as in "day of the Lord."

These periods are marked off in Scripture by some change in God's method of dealing with mankind, or a portion of mankind, in respect of the two questions: of sin, and of man's responsibility. Each of the dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgment, marking his utter failure in every dispensation. Five of these dispensations, or periods of time, have been fulfilled; we are living in the sixth, probably toward its close, and have before us the seventh, and last: the millennium.

The above quote comes from Cyrus Scofield's "Rightly Dividing The Word Of Truth" (1896) from the start of the 2nd Chapter. This booklet (found at <http://www.biblebelievers.com/scofield/index.html>) clearly expresses how the "system" works. Reproduced below, are the above underlined phrases as a summary

The scriptures divide time ... into seven unequal periods ... usually called dispensations ... and each ends in judgement, marking his (man's) utter failure in every dispensation.

According to Scofield, we are in the "sixth dispensation" - that of "Grace" or "The Church Age". He continues

The predicted result of this testing of man under grace is judgment upon an unbelieving world and an apostate church.

Since the system "predicts" that the Church be apostate, the Bible must teach it! only it doesn't.

C. (BRIEF) BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE CHURCH

1. HIGH CALLING

TERMINOLOGY : "Church" is an English word from the Greek "Kuriakos" which means "Belong to the Lord." (used in 1Cor11:10 & Rev1:10) Translators used "Church" to translate the Greek "ekklesia" which means "called out" (implying an assembly of people - the "called out" ones.) "Ekklesia" is used in a Greek Translation of the Old Testament, approx 180 years before Jesus' birth, for Hebrew terms that refer to the "called out assembly of Israel." (See Study 3 for more detail)

Whilst the words in the Old Testament and the New are different (because different languages are employed), the meaning is the same :

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. Dt7:6 also Ex19:3-6

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness 1Ptr2:9 also Titus2:14

The Church is summoned into existence by the GRACIOUS call of God, to be his PEOPLE

2. BASIS

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed ... but with the precious blood of Christ ... He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. 1Ptr1:18-21

No hastily improvised "plan B" - before we were created God DETERMINED to make us his own and LAVISH upon us his redeeming and purifying love.

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her ... to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. Eph5:1, 25-27

3. PURPOSE

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. Eph2:6, 3:10

To DEMONSTRATE the wisdom of God - who by grace created a forgiven and forgiving people who "declare the praises of him who called (us) out of darkness into his marvellous light. (1Ptr2:9)