

## Newsletter July 2016

This newsletter is the first in an ongoing series in which we shall discuss biblical Eschatology – a study of prophetic Scriptural doctrines concerning the last days of mortal man upon the earth. In this newsletter we shall provide a broad introductory overview of this study. Eschatology is a subject that is of intense interest in many of our temporal churches today. Unfortunately, many of these churches have placed eschatology above soteriology (the study of salvation) in importance. In doing so they neglect important portions of Scripture relating to the present age of grace, and often neglect the imperative preeminence of the Gospel. Some devious church leaders deliberately embellish prophecy for personal notoriety and gain beyond what Scripture states in an effort to draw curious individuals into their church membership. These individuals are aroused to satiate their natural curiosity regarding the end of the world through an unwarranted sensationalization of prophetic future events erroneously applied to certain present-day happenings. Many of the individuals who fill these churches are the unsaved, and they will likely remain so as the Gospel message is summarily dismissed as unexciting.

Conversely, there are many other churches that ignore biblical Eschatology altogether. That is particularly true of the prophetic text included in Chapters 6 through 18 of the book of Revelation wherein the wrath of God against mortal sin is quite evident as it is unleashed against reprobate earth dwellers in a time of future judgment. God's wrath would appear to conflict with the unconditional love of God that most of today's churches overemphasize; they believe that a loving God would never severely punish anyone for sin, which they view as mere misdemeanors of human nature. Therefore, they ignore large portions of prophetic Scripture that is viewed as far too nebulous and emotionally depressing – lest they offend or frighten away marginal “believers.”

Moreover, many churches allegorize select portions of the Revelation out of original context and use them to support religious doctrines for which they were never intended. This is particularly true of churches within and many of those descended from the Lutheran, Episcopal, and Presbyterian denominations, wherein biblical Eschatology is rarely if ever considered (cf. Newsletter May 2015). This doctrinal neglect came about because early reformers had of necessity focused their efforts on biblically correct soteriology as well as much-needed political reform within the Roman church of their day. It would appear that these reformers viewed the book of Revelation as a spiritual adjunct to Holy Scripture, which was so esoteric that it was beyond human understanding. One of the greatest of all Protestant reformers, John Calvin, wrote detailed commentaries on every book of the Bible with the notable exception of the book of Revelation. Therefore, we discover that Eschatology is one of the major areas in which the *Protestant Reformation Movement* fell short of reaching comprehensive biblical reform. Through unintentional neglect these earlier reformers had taken away from Scriptural prophecy just as surely as today's prophecy hucksters are adding to it. Both extremes are clearly forbidden in Revelation Chapter 22, verses 18 and 19.

The intent of the book of Revelation is not to focus our thoughts on wild beasts and upon massive destruction, but upon the personal glory, authority, and power of the Lord Jesus Christ to rule over and to ultimately judge all mankind. It is important for us to understand at the outset that the Revelation is not a sealed prophecy (cf. Re.22:10). Nothing has been hidden away out of view or encrypted for the exclusive understanding of some spiritual elite. It is an open document that unveils prophetic knowledge through a series of visions to all true believers who will take the time to read and diligently study it. Moreover, the book of Revelation is not a difficult book to follow because of its very orderly construction. Three major divisions of Revelation is to be found recorded in Revelation verse 1:19 wherein John is told to write down the things that he “has seen” regarding the glory of Christ (cf. Re. Chapter 1), things “which are” in the early and present Church age (cf. Re. Chapters 2,3), and the future things “which shall be hereafter” (cf. Re. Chapters 4-22). The entire book is also written in a reasonable chronological order, which is not at all difficult to follow from beginning to end.

Although the language used in the Revelation is largely figurative, we must understand that all of those figures represent real persons and events that we most probably could not properly understand if they were expressed more literally. The metaphors and allegories utilized within the many visions are meant to be a means to aid our spiritual understanding; they are not intended to obscure it. It therefore behooves us to take an exacting approach to all of the text of the book of Revelation by carefully interpreting it in the literal prophetic style in which it was written (cf. Newsletter, May 2013). This leaves us a very narrow line to follow between factual neglect and extra-biblical exaggeration.

In *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity* Book III, Section 20, we provide a series of Chapters on Eschatology. (The full text of *CRC Book III* is available as a free pdf download on this website). Beginning in Chapter 20.1 of Book III, we describe a period of gathering darkness as mankind's depravity becomes increasingly evident. All mankind is morally depraved from birth as we have repeatedly asserted in this work; yet, parents Christian and non-Christian alike have in the past taught their children to behave responsibly within the family unit to maintain peace and order in the home. When those children became adults, they carried the standards of their earlier upbringing with them. The restraint of human government under-girded by the influence of responsible men and women working together through both religious and political institutions to establish ethical boundaries have mostly held rampant outward moral degeneration of society at bay. The underlying source of this human restraint is the Holy Spirit working within and through redeemed men and women. However, this restraint will one-day cease, as the Holy Spirit will no longer strive with an arrogantly depraved mankind that fiercely rejects the wondrous redemption offered in Jesus Christ. No longer will He seek to convict men of their sin with the consequence that mankind's depraved nature will be unleashed to run wild upon the earth.

Throughout this time of rampant depravity, men and women will still hold to an outward form of religion (cf. 2Ti.3:5). This religiosity will ultimately result in a complete collapse of the temporal church as it denies all Truth in favor of a series of satanic lies being forced upon it by a corrupt society through decadent worldly congregations. This period is generally known as the "Great Apostasy," a "falling away" from the true faith (cf. 2Th.2:3), which will take place in the latter days prior to Christ's return to the earth (cf. Lu.18:8). True Christian believers, who will by that time have become reduced in number, will necessarily flee out of those satanically-inspired temporal churches to worship Christ in seclusion wherever and whenever they can within private homes and hidden locations to avoid intense persecution (cf. *CRC Book III*, page 544).

The relative timing of major eschatological events can be determined by closely examining a prophecy of the prophet Daniel (cf. Da.9:25-27), which was referred to by Jesus Christ (cf. Mt.24:15) in a discussion regarding the last days with his disciples on the Mount of Olives just prior to his crucifixion (cf. *CRC Book III*, page 574). In Chapter 20.3 of Book III, we fully examine Daniel's Prophecy of 70 Weeks, wherein each week refers to a Sabbath year; thus, 70 weeks actually represents 490 years. The first 69 weeks (483 years) of this prophecy predicted the precise date of the birth of the Messiah (the Christ) and his death, which was followed by the later destruction of Herod's Temple. A veiled reference to the church age as a period of indeterminate length is implied between the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel's prophecy inasmuch as the prophecy concerning that last week (7 years) has not yet been fulfilled in history. In future newsletters, we shall closely examine this seventieth week in which most all prophetic end-time events will take place within a short span of seven years (cf. Da. 9:27). In doing so, we shall harmonize Daniels seventieth week, the Olivet Discourse, and the related passages contained in the book of Revelation to provide a coordinated outline of the events of this future period.

In Chapter 20.5 we discuss a book (or scroll) in Heaven having seven seals firmly held in the right hand of God, the Father (cf. Re.5:1), until it was claimed by Jesus Christ – a lamb as it had been slain (cf. Re.5:6-7). This book contains the preordained forecast of major eschatological events, which must take place on earth, and Jesus has been vested with the absolute authority to set those events into motion. A corresponding series of events will begin to take place on earth as Jesus breaks open each seal in turn; this series of events correlates to events that will take place within Daniel's seventieth week. When Jesus breaks open the first seal, the antichrist will come forth on earth to head up a global government as its despotic world ruler. In future newsletters, we shall analyze the coming global antichrist, who is symbolized by the number 666 – an unholy trinity made up of Satan, a despotic political ruler, and a false religious leader (cf. *CRC Book III*, page 603). Upon the breaking of the second seal, a highly destructive global war will break out. In the aftermath of that great war (cf. Re.6:3,4), the third seal, brings forth famine (cf. Re.6:5,6), and the fourth seal brings forth pestilence and death (cf. Re. 6:7,8).

When Jesus breaks open the fifth seal of the book, it will usher in a brief period of intense tribulation on earth, which was spoken of by Jesus to his disciples (cf. Mt.24:21). In a future newsletter, we shall discuss this time of tribulation with respect to the timing of the transport of the true Church off the earth to be with Christ in the air (cf. 1Th.4:17) – commonly referred to as the Rapture (cf. *CRC Book III*, page 561). In doing so we shall discuss the deeply-entrenched doctrine of pre-tribulationism in which Christ is expected to call up his Church

just before the seventieth week of Daniel begins, as well as post-tribulationism in which it is assumed that Christ will return after the seventieth week of Daniel ends, and mid-tribulationism in which Christ is expected to return in the middle of that week. In connection with the pre-tribulation Rapture view, an imminence doctrine has also come about. Inasmuch as no specific prophetic events are viewed as preceding the start of Daniel's seventieth week, Jesus Christ could return to call up his Church at any moment in time without preamble or warning—immediately before he breaks open the first seal of the book in Heaven.

With the hope of resolving the current controversy regarding the timing of the Rapture, we introduced a fourth interpretation, which we refer to as post-tribulation – pre-wrath (cf. *CRC Book III*, page 564). This view is better supported by Scripture, as we shall explain in detail in a future newsletter. Briefly stated, there will be a short period – perhaps no longer than a month or so – of extremely intense human affliction just preceding the Rapture of the Church. As opposed to the general affliction and trials that will begin with the coming to power of the antichrist, this is the short specific period of great tribulation that Jesus spoke of rather than one consisting of the entire seven-year length of Daniel's prophecy. In this post-tribulation – pre-wrath interpretation, the true Church will still be on earth as a one-world government is formed and as the ultimate antichrist comes to power. It will also remain on earth through the great world war as well as the global famine and pestilence that will occur during and after the collapse of the antichrist's reign. Those in the true Church who remain on earth must indeed suffer from intense satanic persecution perpetuated through the actions of a depraved mankind during this horrendous period, much as they have often suffered persecution and death throughout the entire history of the Church. This chaotic state of anarchical violence will greatly reduce the number of true believers on earth as many will be taken to be with Christ through death. Remaining believers in Christ will be forced to seek refuge within small hidden enclaves as they expectantly await Jesus' return. However, it must be noted that the true Church will never experience the wrath of God (cf. 1Th.1:10), which punishment is exclusively reserved for the reprobate after the true Church has been safely transported off the earth.

In order that any will survive the chaotic slaughter, the great tribulation will be cut short (cf. Mt.24:22.). This will take place when Jesus breaks open the sixth seal of the book in Heaven. An extremely violent earthquake will shake the entire earth causing mountains and islands to be moved out of place. The sun will go dark, the moon will be turned blood red, and stars will fall from heaven (cf. Re. 6:12-14; Jl. 2:30,31). Then, shall also appear the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven coming with power and glory in the clouds (cf. Mt.24:30). All men on earth will be stunned by this ominous display of celestial power to the extent that all human violence will cease, as each fears for their own physical survival. Many will hide in the rocks of the earth in an attempt to avoid the wrath of the Lamb (Re.6:16).

At that time, 144,000 devout Jews will be sealed to enable them to survive the catastrophic events that are to follow on earth (cf. Re.7:1-8). Immediately after these elect Jews are sealed, the true church will be transported off the earth out of harms way to meet with Jesus Christ in the air where they will forever remain with Him (cf. 1Th.4:16,17; Re,7:9,10). Only then will the earth experience the anger of God's displeasure as Jesus breaks open the seventh seal (cf. *CRC Book III*, page 623). The breaking of the seventh seal is immediately followed by the sounding of a series of seven trumpets by seven angels emerging out of heaven. These trumpets herald seven severe judgments coming out of heaven and onto the earth and its populace. Throughout this period God will be pleading with men to repent. This initial series of judgments will ultimately lead to the pouring out of God's intense personal wrath upon the earth from seven bowls when the seventh trumpet is sounded. Between the sixth and seventh bowl of wrath, Jesus Christ will return to earth as the great battle of Armageddon takes place in which Christ leading Heaven's hosts will emerge victorious. Following this battle, the last bowl of God's intense wrath will be poured out upon the earth fully judging mankind's sinful rebellion.

This seventh bowl will be followed by a short period of Israel's mourning and reparation (cf. Ze.12:10) as well as a time of preparation and renovation (cf. Da.12:12). This period will be followed in turn by a Millennial (thousand-year) age in which Jesus Christ will take his rightful place upon the throne of David in Jerusalem to govern the nations remaining on earth in a perfect society of peace and tranquility. In Chapter 20.2 of *CRC Book III*, we discuss three opposing teachings of the temporal church regarding the Millennium. The amillennialist denies that there will be a millennial age; that is, Jesus will one day return to earth to separate his saints from the reprobate; the saints will immediately go into Heaven and the reprobate will go into Hell. This simplistic view

generally characterizes the teaching of Episcopal, Lutheran and Reformed denominations as they initially came out of the *Protestant Reformation Movement* and for the most part they remain so to this very day. The post-millennialist takes an extremely high view of the temporal church believing that it will bring in a perfect utopian age on earth such that Christ will merely return to earth to claim it. This is the Roman Catholic view as well as the view of various other high-minded Protestant churches. Both of these positions lack the support of comprehensive prophetic Scripture.

Lastly, the pre-millennialist believes that Christ will return to establish a literal thousand-year kingdom here on earth upon the ashes of mankind's failure. This is a sound biblical view that takes into consideration the full text of the book of Revelation and all other prophetic Scriptures. Satan will be incarcerated for that entire thousand-year period so that he cannot induce men to commit sin (cf. Re.20:2,3). During this era, the earth will have been physically renovated – not only repairing the intense damage that resulted from the antichrist's failed rule, but transforming it into a place of great beauty such that it will become a literal paradise on earth. At the end of this thousand years, Satan will be turned loose (cf. Re. 20:7,8) upon a populace that have received the benefits of a thousand years of perfect conditions – a people that have been ruled by the perfect government, the perfect man, and have abundantly received of his benevolence and of his grace. We read in Revelation 20, verses 8 and 9 that the fallen nature of mankind is such that even then Satan is able to deceive a large number of the Gentile nations to go against Jerusalem. In so doing, they will go against the very throne and rule of Jesus Christ Himself. Because of this failed rebellion, Satan will be cast into the "lake of fire and brimstone" along with the antichrist and the false prophet who had already preceded him (cf. Re.20:10). Then, the reprobate dead shall be raised to stand before a great white throne for final judgment. None will be found listed in the Lamb's book of life. There Christ will judge them based upon their works to determine the degree of their punishment in Hell (cf. *CRC Book III*, page 656).

In *CRC Book III*, Chapter 20.8, we briefly discuss immortal life of redeemed mankind in the eternity that follows the Millennial Age on earth. Time will come to an end, and the old creation will be dissolved in a fiery catechism immediately followed by the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (cf. 2Pe.3:7,12). A new capital city of Jerusalem will descend out of Heaven, to become the permanent residence of the Church. The redeemed will live with Christ in the eternal city in abodes He has specifically prepared for his elect (cf. Jn.14:2). Death will become a thing of the past, as a great river of life flowing out of the throne of God will be made available for all Heaven's residents to drink. The curse of Adam that had once extended to all of mankind will be no more, and there shall be no more sorrow, crying, or tears – for these will have passed away with the former things upon the old earth (cf. Re.21:4).

Although we must not dwell upon future things to the exclusion of the Gospel mandate and other important theological doctrines, we must be aware of what Scripture has to tell us about things to come. Scripture regarding the last days was primarily written that the Church would not be ignorant of future events that are to come to pass upon the earth and be prepared for them when the time comes. They were also written to awaken those who have not accepted Christ in this age of grace and could through their neglect of the Gospel find themselves within the midst of these future times of wrath in a lost state and without hope. It is therefore both a warning and an invitation to accept Christ while there is still time to do so. (cf. 2Co.6:2).

In Revelation Chapter 1 verse 3, we read: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." That means that we are to carefully read, study, and teach all that has been written about the future within Holy Scripture and not ignore any of it as being irrelevant. In doing so, we receive a blessing from God as He shares with us his intent and purpose for events of the end of the age – which are certain to come to pass at their appointed time. Considering the worsening of social, religious, and political world affairs that we are now experiencing, we could very well be living on the threshold of those colossal events that characterize the Last Days. In succeeding newsletters we plan to go into greater detail regarding each of these prophetic topics discussed at length in *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity*, Book III, which were only cursorily mentioned here in this brief introductory overview.