

The Rapture - Part 32

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My previous articles commenced a series on the rapture of the church. We began with the question, "What is the Rapture?" This question can best be answered by noting ten truths about the rapture from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. We then moved to a second main question, namely, when will the rapture take place relative to the coming seven-year Tribulation period? We offered the contention that believers can develop certainty that they will be raptured before the Tribulation period occurs for at least seven reasons. After dealing with these two questions, we began to explore some of the weaknesses associated with the other competing views that seek to answer the question, "When Will the Rapture Take Place Relative to the Coming Tribulation Period?" At least five differing perspectives exist. We noted at the onset that it is important to understand that all of the non-pretribulation positions have a difficult time handling the seven arguments favoring **pre-tribulationism** previously discussed in this series. We have already noted the problems associated with **mid-tribulationism** and **post-tribulationism**. In this and the next article, we will briefly explain and analyze **partial rapturism**.

Partial Rapturism

Partial rapture theory contends that only the spiritually prepared and alert Christian will be taken in the rapture, while the carnal Christian will be left behind. According to this view, the purpose of the Tribulation period will be to

practically sanctify the backslidden believer. As each is "straightened out" in this manner through the events of the Tribulation period, they will then be individually raptured to heaven at different times depending upon when they are brought into an appropriate state of progressive sanctification.

One recent advocate of this view describes it as follows:

Finally, we should note that the purpose of the tribulation is also to be the testing of lukewarm shallow Laodicean Christians who will be left behind at the coming of Christ. No doubt multitudes who expect to be raptured will be disappointed because like the foolish virgins, they were not watchful. Tribulation is then for the purpose of trying the faith of those who profess to be Christians but who really never repented or are living in this disobedience to the will of God.¹

G.N.H. Peters and J.A. Seiss were also advocates of the partial rapture theory from a prior generation. Peters opines:

It is not simply those who "watch" that shall "escape," but those, Luke 21:36, who "watch and pray always," avoiding the corrupting influences around them. The number of translated ones may not be very large (for the number of

¹ Ray Brubaker, "The Purpose of the Tribulation," *Radar News*, (December 1968): 6.

translated ones given as...types in comparison with the number of those not translated, and with that of the resurrected saints is small), so that Dr. Seiss, with whom many concur, is undoubtedly correct in saying: "I have no idea that a very large portion of mankind, or even of the professing Church, will be thus taken. The first translation, if I may so speak, will embrace only the select few who watch and pray always," etc.²

Those adhering to the partial rapture view typically rely on at least one of the following verses to support their position: Hebrews 9:28 says: "so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.*" Luke 21:34-36 similarly says, "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. *But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.*" First Thessalonians 5:6 says, "So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober." First John 2:28 also teaches, "Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His

coming." Second Timothy 4:8 also says, "In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also *to all who have loved His appearing*" (italics added).

At first glance these verses seem to teach that only those Christians who are eagerly waiting for Christ and who are spiritually sober, watchful and prayerful will be taken in the rapture. Thus, the carnal Christian, or those "backslidden" Christians who do not share these spiritual qualities, will be left behind to experience the Tribulation period. However, there are at least *ten* problems with the partial rapture point of view.

1. *Every blessing that the Christian receives from God is given on the basis of His grace as opposed to human effort.* For example, the Christian receives salvation as a result of God's grace and not his own works (Eph. 2:8-9). The Christian's spiritual giftedness is also entirely the result of God's grace (Rom. 12:6). Likewise, the Christian's participation in the blessing of the rapture will be the result of God's grace and not human effort. The partial rapture view, which teaches that only those Christians who are expectant, sober, watchful, and prayerful will participate in the rapture, denies this basic truth by making it sound as if it is the believer's spiritual progress, rather than God's unmerited favor to him, that merits his participation in the rapture. Rhodes summarizes:

Some claim the partial rapture theory amounts to a Protestant version of purgatory, in which Christians get "purged" into readiness to meet the Lord at the second coming. Such a view

² George N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom*, vol. 1 (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1952), 2:332.

seems to imply that trusting in the atonement of Christ alone (2 Corinthians 5:21) is not sufficient to bring one to heaven (see also Romans 5:1; Colossians 2:13). Scripture reveals that if one is a believer, one is "saved" (John 3:16–17; Acts 16:31). *That alone* qualifies one to participate in the rapture (first Corinthians 15:51–52).³

2. *Symbolic parallels mandate that carnal as well as sanctified Christians will be taken up in the rapture.* As mentioned earlier in this series,⁴ before God rained down fire upon the wicked city of Sodom and Gomorrah, God allowed Lot, a positionally righteous man (2 Pet. 2:7-8), and his family to leave the city (Gen. 19). In fact, Genesis 19:22 records the words of the angel dispatched by God to destroy the city. He told Lot, "Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there." Therefore the name of the town was called Zoar." Notice that the angel did not say that he *would not* bring judgment until Lot was removed. Rather, the angel said that he *could not* bring judgment until Lot was removed. In other words, divine judgment was a virtual divine impossibility as long as Lot remained in the city of Sodom.

This was true despite the fact that Lot was living in a "backslidden" state at the time. Although a positionally righteous man (2 Pet. 2:7-8), he began flirting with the idea of living in the wicked city of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 13:12-13). Eventually, he moved into the

city (Genesis 19:9) and rose to a position of prominence (Genesis 19:1). The fact that he was out of fellowship with God was evidenced by His unspiritual decision to offer his virgin daughters to the mob outside of his door for sexual purposes (Genesis 19:4-9). In fact, because of his backslidden condition, when Lot finally warned his own family and relatives regarding the reality of coming divine judgment upon Sodom, his sons-in-law attached no credibility either to Lot or his words of warning. Rather, they only thought that he was jesting (Gen. 19:14). The whole story of Lot concludes with him in a drunken state and in an incestuous relationship with his two daughters. From these unholy unions came forth the Ammonites and the Moabites, who were perennial enemies of Israel throughout the pages of God's Word (Gen. 19:30-38). In fact, if it were not for Peter's threefold reference to righteous Lot (2 Pet. 2:7-8), there would scarcely be any evidence that this man was even saved. Why does Peter refer to Lot as "righteous"? Lot was righteous positionally but not practically. Therefore, his soul was daily vexed or tormented (2 Pet. 2:8) due to the compromise in his life. Thus, Lot serves as a textbook example of the unfortunate reality and possibility of being a carnal or backslidden believer.⁵

Yet, even Lot in his wayward, backslidden, and carnal state had to be removed from Sodom before the manifestation of divine wrath upon that evil city. Lot ultimately belonged to God and God's people are not appointed unto wrath. The story of Lot deals a serious blow to the partial rapture position that contends that

³ Ron Rhodes, *The Big Book of Bible Answers: A Guide to Understanding the Most Challenging Questions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2013), 279.

⁴ See part 19.

⁵ <http://www.bibleprophecyblog.com/2011/03/what-is-wrong-with-lordship-salvation.html>

only those believers who are earnestly waiting for, seeking, and living for the Lord will be raptured.⁶ The notion that carnal believers are left behind at the rapture, violates the paradigm of the Days of Lot. According to this pattern, even a backslidden believer had to be removed before judgment could come.

3. The promise of the rapture is mentioned in Paul's letter to the carnal Corinthian church.

The church in Corinth was the most carnal church of first-century world of which we have record. In the Corinthian church, there existed believers following men instead of Christ (1 Cor. 1:10-17), worldly wisdom (1 Cor. 1:18-2:16), carnality (1 Cor. 3:1-3), divisions (1 Cor. 3:4), incest (1 Cor. 5), lawsuits among believers (1 Cor. 6:1-11), prostitution (1 Cor. 6:12-20), rampant divorce and remarriage (1 Cor. 7:11-16), the blatant flaunting of freedoms to the detriment of the weaker brother (1 Cor. 8-10), drunkenness and disorderly conduct while participating at the Lord's table (1 Cor. 11:17-34), misuse and abuse of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14), and unrestrained false doctrine even denying the core doctrine of resurrection (1 Cor. 15). Yet, Paul taught this very carnal church about the rapture (1 Cor. 15:50-58). In fact, Paul even went a step further and indicated that all believers (both carnal and sanctified) will be included in the rapture. In 1 Corinthians 15:51, he noted, "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will *all* be changed" (italics added). If carnal Christians were going to be left behind by the rapture, as the partial rapture theorist assumes, then Paul would

have surely warned the Corinthians that their carnality would prevent their participation in the rapture rather than virtually assuring them of their participation in the event. Rhodes summarizes, "First Corinthians 15:51 settles the issue, for it specifically tells us that 'we shall *all* be changed.' 'We' here includes even the carnal believers in the Corinthian church, to whom Paul was writing. None are excluded, for 'all' will be changed."⁷

4. A partial rapture would sever Christ's body.

According to Ephesians 5:22-23, Christ is the head of His body the church. In Scripture, Christ's body is metaphorically analogized to the people of God (1 Cor. 12). First Corinthians 12:12-14 explains, "For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many."

If part of God's people were removed from the earth while the rest of God's people were left behind, as the partial rapture theory teaches, then Christ's body, the church, would be severed and mutilated. It is doubtful that Christ would allow this to happen to His own body. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 12:26, Paul explained, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." Thus, Rhodes concludes, "Moreover, the Spirit's baptism places *all* believers in Christ body (1 Corinthians 12:13) and therefore *all*

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<http://www.bibleprophecyblog.com/2012/02/george-peters-and-partial-rapture-view.html>

⁷ Rhodes, 279.

believers will be raptured (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). The partial rapture theory denies the perfect unity in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12–13)."⁸

In addition, Anthony Garland points out an interesting contradiction between the lack of division of the dead in Christ and the alleged division of those living on the earth at the time of the rapture if partial rapturism is true:

To believe in a partial rapture one must either embrace the notion that salvation is insecure and can be lost or that unity with Christ is not the determining factor in whether we miss the rapture or even the kingdom to follow. But what does Paul say about who is taken in the Rapture (1 Th. 4:15-18)? "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead *in Christ* will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words." Notice that it is the dead, *in Christ* that rise first. If all of the dead *in Christ* are taken at the Rapture, how can it be consistent to conclude that some of the living who are also *in Christ* are left behind? If this

were to be true, we would have the rather strange situation where the living saints would be better off dead prior to the Rapture in order to be sure they were among those taken!⁹

5. *The partial rapture view subjects believers to God's wrath.* Mark Hitchcock notes the consequences of such a belief system: "All believers are promised exemption from God's wrath. The partial rapture view creates a kind of a Protestant purgatory on earth during the Tribulation period. The only difference between this idea and the Catholic view of purgatory is that it would be on earth before death."¹⁰

(To Be Continued...)



Source: SpiritAndTruth.org

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Anthony Garland, "Q181 : George Peters and the Partial Rapture View," online: www.spiritandtruth.org, accessed 13 August 2015.

¹⁰ Mark Hitchcock, *Could the Rapture Happen Today?* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2005), 68.