

The Rapture - Part 33

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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 the last and this article, we 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.

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. In the last installment we noted the first five of these ten problems:

1. Every blessing that the Christian receives from God is given on the basis of His grace as opposed to human effort.
2. Symbolic parallels mandate that carnal as well as sanctified Christians will be taken up in the rapture.
3. The promise of the rapture is mentioned in Paul's letter to the carnal Corinthian church.
4. A partial rapture would sever Christ's body.
5. The partial rapture view subjects believers to God's wrath. Let's now examine the remaining *five* problems with partial rapturism.

6. *Partial rapturism makes the Bema Seat Judgment unnecessary.* The purpose of the judgment seat of rewards following the rapture is to reward faithful believers as well as not reward those believers who were unfaithful upon the earth following their spiritual birth (1 Cor. 3:10-15). Yet, partial rapturism makes participation in the rapture the reward for faithfulness. If faithful believers have already been rewarded by being included in the rapture, what then would be the purpose for the judgment seat of rewards or Bema seat Judgment? Faithfulness and unfaithfulness will have already been rewarded based upon participation in the

rapture, or lack thereof, making the Bema Seat Judgment of rewards unnecessary.

7. *Partial rapturists never objectively quantify the exact degree of faithfulness or spiritual maturity that is necessary to participate in the rapture.* For example, how long and intense does your prayer life have to be in order to be considered worthy of the rapture? How much of your thought life must be under divine control? What if a person has two unspiritual thoughts per day? Would that amount disqualify him from participation in the rapture? Hitchcock notes, "If the timing of our translation to heaven depends on our own spiritual maturity or readiness, how ready do we have to be? What degree of maturity or readiness is required to make it in the first group? The Bible never says."¹

8. Partial rapturists appear individually biased. Hitchcock observes:

Every person I've ever met who believes in the partial Rapture view believes that he or she will be included in the first group that goes before the Tribulation. They always believe in the pre-Tribulationist view for themselves. It's those other unfortunate believers who will have to go through varying degrees of tribulation before they can be caught up to heaven. But why believe that you are worthy for this special reward while other believers are not? It is inconsistent.²

¹ Mark Hitchcock, *Could the Rapture Happen Today?* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2005), 68.

² Ibid.

9. *Partial rapturists dispensationally misapply Bible passages.* Partial rapturists frequently quote from passages from the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25), such as the Parable of the Wise Slave (Matt. 24:45-51) or the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), where it appears that Christ is only coming back for those who are faithful. However, since the Olivet Discourse exclusively concerns God's future plans for Israel rather than the church (Matt. 24:20), partial rapturists indiscriminately apply these passages to Christ's church when in actuality their context concerns God's future plans for Israel rather than the church. Concerning the partial rapturists appeal to the Parable of the Wise Slave (Matt. 24:45-51), Walvoord explains:

Following the strict rules of exegesis, the context indicates that the subject is the second coming of Christ to the earth not the rapture of the church. Although many expositors have attempted to make this whole discourse apply to the church, or at least from Matthew 24:45 make an application of the general truth of Christ's coming to the rapture of the church, as seen in previous study the evidence is quite insufficient. There is no clear distinction between the illustrations before Matthew 24:45 and those which follow. Neither the church nor the rapture are in view. Inasmuch as the rapture (John 14:1–3) had not yet been revealed, it is questionable whether Christ would have tried to teach His disciples using an illustration of a truth that was not even known to them at this time. Interpretation,

therefore, must relate this passage to the context, namely, the doctrine of the second coming of Christ to establish His earthly kingdom.³

Also, note Ron Rhodes' criticism regarding how partial rapturists misapply Christ's Parable of the Ten Virgins:

This view is based on the parable of the 10 virgins – depicting five virgins being prepared and five unprepared (Matthew 25:1–13). This is interpreted to mean that only faithful, and watchful Christians will be raptured...Pre-tribulationists respond that Matthew 25:1–13 has nothing to do with the rapture. Those virgins who are "unprepared" apparently represent people living during the tribulation period who are unprepared for Christ's second coming (seven years after the rapture).⁴

Garland also observes how partial rapturist Peters dispensationally misapplies numerous passages:

I believe that Peters is mistaken in confounding various thief passages with the coming of the Lord for the church (e.g., Mat. 24:37-44, Luke 17:26-37). Where these passage speak of "one taken . . . another left," Peters falls into

³ John F. Walvoord, "Christ's Olivet Discourse on the End of the Age Part V: The Parable of the Ten Virgins," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129, no. 514 (April 1972): 101.

⁴ Ron Rhodes, *The Big Book of Bible Answers: A Guide to Understanding the Most Challenging Questions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2013), 278.

the common mistake of misinterpreting Second Coming judgment passages as Rapture passages...If we consider various passages where people fail to watch or perform, we find that some very serious consequences result: Left as dead for birds of prey (Mat. 24:28, 37-43; Luke 17:37). Being cut in two with the hypocrites, weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mat. 24:51). Being shut out from the wedding feast with the Master proclaiming, I do not know you (Mat. 25:12 cf. Mat. 7:23). Being cast into outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mat. 25:30). Although some teach that "outer darkness" is a place where underperforming believers may suffer during the Millennial Kingdom, this seems most unlikely. Jesus clearly states that those Jews who did not believe in Him—the faithless "sons of the Kingdom"—were bound for outer darkness (Mat. 8:12)...While not focusing specifically on Rapture-related warning passages here, I hope you can see that the way in which a person interprets various readiness warning passages—whether they can have in view believers who are securely saved—will have a lot to do with whether a teacher believes that the body of Christ will be sliced into two companies, either at the Rapture or at the entry to the Millennial Kingdom to follow. Peters, while having much to offer concerning the coming Kingdom and eschatology in general, appears to be comfortable with the idea that it is our performance rather than identity

that determines our destiny in relation to the Rapture. I take the opposite view: that those who are in Christ are joined to Christ in a way which cannot (and will not) be broken.⁵

Pentecost also notes how partial rapturists dispensationally misapply Luke 21:36, which says, "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." He notes:

It will be observed that the primary reference in this chapter is to the nation of Israel, who was already in the tribulation period, and therefore this is not applicable to the church. The things to be escaped are judgments associated with "that day" (vs. 34), that is, the Day of the Lord. Watchfulness is enjoined upon the church (1 Thessalonians 5:6; Titus 2:13) apart from being found worthy to participate in the translation.⁶

Pentecost also explains how partial rapturists similarly misapply Matthew 24:41-42, which says, "Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming." He observes, "Again, this passage is in that discourse in

⁵ Anthony Garland, "Q181 : George Peters and the Partial Rapture View," online: www.spiritandtruth.org, accessed 13 August 2015.

⁶ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1958; reprint, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1964), 161-62.

which the Lord outlined His program for Israel, who was already in the tribulation period. The one taken is taken to judgment and the one left is left for the millennial blessing. Such is not the prospect for the church."⁷ In sum, by not properly distinguishing which verses apply to Israel and which ones apply to the church, partial rapturists end up applying inappropriate passages to the rapture concept.

10. *Partial rapturists misapply passages promising a reward to faithful believers.* While faithfulness is of consequence in order for Christians to experience a reward at the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ (1 Cor. 3:15; 2 John 8; Rev. 3:11), faithfulness is of no consequence in order to participate in the rapture. Partial rapturists confuse the two concepts. Notice Pentecost's critique of the partial rapturists' use of 2 Timothy 4:8, which 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). Pentecost observes:

This is used by the adherents of this position to show that the rapture must be a partial one. However, it is to be noticed that the subject of the translation is not in view in this passage, but rather the question of reward. The Second Advent was intended by God to be a purifying hope (1 John 3:3). Because of such purifying a new life is produced because of the expectancy of the Lord's return. Therefore those that

truly "love his appearing" will experience a new kind of life which will bring a reward.⁸

Thus, the partial rapturist errs by inappropriately applying verses pertaining to rewards for faithfulness to the rapture concept.

In sum, in this series, having previously answered the question, "What is the Rapture?" we noted at least seven reasons that affirm the pre-tribulation rapture view. We then began interacting with the other positions on the timing of the rapture. In prior articles, we have answered mid-tribulationism and post-tribulationism. In the last two articles we have explained the partial rapture theory as well as the various reasons why it is deficient and therefore should be rejected.⁹

(To Be Continued...)



Source: SpiritAndTruth.org

⁷ Ibid., 162.

⁸ Ibid., 163.

⁹ For more information on the partial rapture theory and its various problems, see *ibid.*, 158-63.