

Watching the Clock

Once again the church has been caught “watching the clock” and emerged with egg on its collective face. A fool followed by a group of fools had announced in no uncertain terms that the world would end at a time that coincided with their calculations. As in the past, the appointed time came and went. Secular society had a field day and the churches’ Christian witness had been tarnished. According to the Barna Group, this type of misguided preoccupation with the end of the world degrades our Christian witness to secular society and causes the Christian church a loss of influence on American culture (Kinnaman and Lyons, 2007).

A multitude of poor assumptions and false conclusions led to this embarrassment.

Christ told us not to concern ourselves with the direct timing of His coming. (*“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. “But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. “Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. “It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. “Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. “What I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’ Mark 13:30-37, New American Standard Bible).* The implication is that we should be careful to be accomplishing the business of God’s Kingdom. Nowhere in the Bible is there a verse which commands the church to watch the clock. There are other verses that lend credence (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6, Ecclesiastes 8:6, and Revelations 3:3).

Christ said that this generation would not pass (*“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” Mark 13:30, New American Standard Bible).* The eschatological view that espouses a strict interpretation of this verse is known as Preterism.

Christ said that His Kingdom is not of this world (*“Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.” John 18:36, New International Version).* Christ, in us, will reign over and through His Kingdom, which on earth is His church (*“Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the Kingdom of God is within you.” Luke 17:21, King James Bible).*

Much of modern premillennialism is based on the discredited concept of dispensationism. Dispensationism has its roots in the teachings of John Nelson Darby in the 1830s (Van Deventer, 2007). Many of Darby’s contemporaries found little Biblical support in Dispensationism. Charles Spurgeon, a Historical Premellennialist (post-tribulational premillennialism), was not a proponent of Darby’s teachings. One of the primary distinctives of Dispensationism is the concept of the “Church Age”, which stipulates that the development of the universal church parallels the letters to the seven churches found in Revelation chapters two through three (Matto, 2002b). Such over interpretations of the Word of God are clearly the false teachings and prophecies which Christ warned us about. If we take a strict Biblical

position there is only one division point in the Bible. Central to that division is God Incarnate, Christ, the division between Law and Grace; the old and new Covenant; and the Old and New Testaments. True Biblical interpretation of prophecy are based on the actions of God not the whims of man.

There has been a long list of individuals who set dates over the years, date setting, however, began in earnest in the mid 1800s (Matto, 2002a). The overwhelming majority of these date setting episodes occurred after the publication of Darby's treatise on dispensationalism. One of the best known, "The Great Disappointment", occurred in 1844, and is historically linked to the followers of William Miller. The frequency of date setting debacles has increased steadily, with each occurrence leaving a trail of spiritual disillusionment.

Historical Premillennialism, Amillennialism, and somewhat more recently, Postmillennialism are the historic "end times" stance of the Christian church (Robinson, 2009). All these eschatologies have elements of Preterism and are defensible both biblically and historically according to many ancient sources, including ancient Jewish history and the fall of Jerusalem documented by Josephus (Winston, 1987; Gentry, 1989).

Perhaps the foremost indictment against dispensationalism and its associated "date setting" is the raw arrogance of disobeying God, and then proclaiming that human calculations, wisdom, and cleverness have somehow acquired a handle on God and come to a full understanding of God's thought processes. We have seen this type of arrogance before. *(As the people migrated to the east, they found a plain in the land of Babylonia and settled there. They began saying to each other, "Let's make bricks and harden them with fire." (In this region bricks were used instead of stone, and tar was used for mortar.) Then they said, "Come, let's build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world." But the Lord came down to look at the city and the tower the people were building. "Look!" he said. "The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them! Come, let's go down and confuse the people with different languages. Then they won't be able to understand each other." In that way, the Lord scattered them all over the world, and they stopped building the city. That is why the city was called Babel, because that is where the Lord confused the people with different languages. Genesis 11:2-9, New Living Translation)* There is little difference in the ancients seeking within themselves power and security, and modern man using human intellect to over-analyze and read between the lines of God's word to render a conclusion that attempts to, in effect, diminish God's glory and contain Him in a human comprehensible box. The "Lord of All" is not subject to man's assumptions or conclusions.

Modern Premillennialists discredit themselves with indefensible date setting and convoluted prophetic interpretation. One cannot proclaim the Bible as being inerrant, and yet interject the doctrines of man by interpreting prophetic verses with double and triple innuendo. All prophecy in the Bible serves to underscore that Christ is Deity and the only means to God is through His Grace.

There is neither the time nor the space in an essay length composition for a complete argument of why analysis of Bible prophecy must use strict Biblical interpretation. Strict interpretation of Bible prophecy still allows much room for debate among proponents of the various eschatologies taught in most

mainstream Christian churches today. My point is this: if the church is to learn anything from this latest bit of theological misinterpretation, it is that Christians need to quit concentrating on the minutia and once again strive to follow Christ's call (Kinnaman and Lyons, 2007). We are to live, love, lead (proclaim and bring others to Christ) and learn (discipleship).

What Jesus would have us do is shockingly simple. First and foremost is that God and others should take precedence in our lives. (*Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."* Mark 12:29-31 New Living Translation). Secondly, we must strive to impart God's truth, not our human interpretation of that truth, to others via Christian discipleship (*Then Jesus came up and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, as you go, disciple people in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. And remember, I am with you each and every day until the end of the age."* Matthew 28:18-20, International Standard Version).

Our world is desperately hungry for the pure simplicity of the Gospel of Christ. We don't need to analyze it. We don't need to complicate it. We don't need to read into it what is not there. We don't need to cloak it in political correctness to make it more palatable. We don't need to ram it down other's throats. There is power in simply presented truth. We are to plainly, individually, communicate who God is to us and, in Christ, love those that we are presenting God's truth to. The basis of the Christian walk requires that we love others and live what is true. Watching the clock and arguing the minutia of competing eschatologies are not among our callings.

References

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