

## Rapture and Resurrection

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The significance of hope for a person, the function of vision for his life-style, the critical need for accurate calculation and wise planning, and the ethical ramifications of one's historical expectations have been repeatedly stressed and illustrated in futurology (the study of the future) which has become firmly entrenched in modern thought, from psychology and morality to economic and sociology. The spirit of our age has taken an eschatological turn. Secular counterparts to apocalypticism and various millenarian perspectives can be uncovered, and theological counterparts to humanistic utopianism and political engineering are likewise to be found. Your view of the future, whether stemming from revelation or extrapolation, is not a matter indifferent or irrelevant; your attitude toward history is not simply idle speculation. Ideas have consequences.

In a previous ("Future and Folly") I discussed what certain radical theologians have said about the future, how they have divinized and politicized it. With them eschatology has become a humanistic hope – a hope possible only by denying God's transcendence over time and by washing away the content of His word with alien and antagonistic assumptions. An affirmative view of history for them grows out of a negative view of Scripture.

On the other hand, there are theologians to be found who take a negative view of history and allege that it grows out of a positive view of Scripture. According to this outlook the Christian's hope resides not in the positive gains to be developed in history, but rather in his escape from the climax of a steadily degenerating trend in history. That is, as things are getting worse and worse in terms of world conditions and response to the gospel, the believer can look ahead to his "secret rapture" from the world prior to the great tribulation toward which history is moving. It is supposed that all genuine believers, along with the dead in Christ, will be caught up from the earth to be with the Savior during the closing few years of the present historical epoch. The tribulation period on earth will end with Christ's return; following His second coming there will be a long period of time (the millennium) that will terminate with the resurrection of the wicked and their final judgment.

Obviously, any Christian who loves the Lord will not despise His revealed word as do the radical theologians. The believer desires to view history (including the future) through the spectacles of Scriptural truth. What should his perspective then be? He cannot be indifferent to the future, so what shall he think and do with respect to it? Is the choice between a *secularized* hope in human politics and a *retreatist* hope in the rapture? Repudiating radical theology, is the Christian forced by God's word to anticipate the secret rapture sometime prior to the end of this age? I think not, and for the simple reason that Scripture does not teach that the rapture of believers will be either secret or separated by a noteworthy period of time from the termination of the current epoch.

When shall the saints be raptured from earth to meet their Lord? When shall believers be “caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,” ever to be with Him (I Thess. 4:17)? The passage just cited makes it clear that the rapture coincides with (1) the resurrection of the saints (vv. 13-16, and “together with them” in v. 17), and (2) the coming of the Lord from heaven (v. 16). Scripture elsewhere clarifies when these two events shall occur.

First, the resurrection of the saints will occur at the coming of Christ, which itself brings *the end* (I Cor. 15:23-24). Christ declares that he will raise us again on *the last day* (John 6:39-40, 44, 54). Moreover, the saints and the wicked shall exist together on earth until the “harvest” day of God’s judgment on the “tares” (Matt. 13:24-30); the redeemed and the wicked will not be separated from each other until the *end of the age* (Matt. 13:47-50). Therefore, the resurrection of the saints must coincide with the resurrection of the wicked (one following closely upon the other); when the believers come forth unto the resurrection of life, at that time all in the tombs will as well come forth, including the wicked who are raised to judgment (John 5:26-29). We see, then, that there is no significant gap between the rapture of the saints, the resurrection of the dead in Christ, the resurrection and judgment of the wicked, and the end of the age.

Secondly, the coming of the Lord mentioned in I Thess. 4:16 is also called the “day of our Lord Jesus Christ” when the saints shall be found unrepugnant; this day coincides with *the end* (I Cor. 1:7-8). Moreover, the coming of the Lord mentioned in I Thess. 4:16 will bring the glorification of the saints (cf. Rom. 8:17, 23; I Cor. 15:43; Phil. 3:21; I John 3:2). Paul brings together the return of Christ and the glorification of the saints in 2 Thes. 1:7-10; he there makes it quite clear that these two events will be accompanied by the judgment of the wicked. This confirms what we read elsewhere, to wit, that when Christ establishes his bar of eternal judgment, *all* mankind including both the sheep and the goats (i.e., the redeemed and the reprobate) will be judged (Matt. 25:31-34, 41, 46). We see, then, that there is no significant gap between the rapture of the saints, the coming of the Lord, the glorification of the saints, the general judgment of mankind (including the wicked), and the end of the age.

We must conclude from God’s word that the rapture will not eventuate prior to the very last day of history, that it will not leave behind the world of the wicked, and that it will not be separated from the resurrection and judgment of the wicked. The pre-tribulational rapture seven (or three and a half) years before the Lord’s return is contrary to the teaching of the bible. Furthermore, it must be noted that the rapture of the saints will be *anything but* a secret event; it will be accompanied with the shout of Christ, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God (I Thess. 4:16-17). Nobody will miss it.

Consequently, the Christian is *not* forced to choose between a humanistic affirmation of history and a biblical retreat from history. His perspective on history and his hope for it are found in neither divinized politics nor the rapture. A positive view of Scripture and a positive view of history go hand in hand. Prior to the resurrection of the saints (i.e., the defeat of the last enemy, death) Christ must reign till he has put every other enemy under his feet (I Cor. 15:25-26). Radical and dispensational theologians alike fail to see that in history prior to the parousia, the kingdoms of the world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15). This vision and hope indeed has consequences!