

REMINDER

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GOD'S CHURCHES IN THE GREAT TRIBULATION

by the late Dr. W. A. Criswell

In Matthew 24:21, and in Revelation 7:14, we find the Tribulation mentioned: *he- thlipsis he-megale-*, “the tribulation, the great.”

“In the world ye shall have tribulation,” says Christ. But the trials and the sorrows that we know in this life are not even comparable, not even the beginning, to be mentioned in the same breath with this era, this period of time that shall precede the ultimate climatic consummation of history.

There is coming, says the Lord God, a time of infinite trial and judgment upon this world. And practically all of the Book of the Revelation is concerned with that final denouement, that great end period of unprecedented sorrow and tribulation.

Now, the question arises, *Shall we go through it?* Will the people of God be in it? Or does God take us away before that time of indescribable judgment and trial is poured out in wrath and fury upon this earth?

I do not believe that God's churches will not go through that awful, awesome, indescribable trial and time of sorrow and judgment. And the reason for my belief is to be found in these four propositions by which I have summarized the best I know how the teaching of the Word of God.

The first one is this: God's people, God's churches will not go through that period of Tribulation *because the structural outline of the Book of the Apocalypse forbids it.*

God gives His own outline of the Revelation in the first chapter and in the nineteenth verse. He commanded John, “*Write the things which thou hast seen.*” And John wrote them down: the vision of the incomparable risen, glorified Lord.

Second, “*and write the things which are.*”

“*The things which are*” are His churches. Just like now, “*the things that are*” are the churches that pertain and belong to Jesus. Here is a church, yonder is one, there is one.

It was just like this in the days of John the seer. There was a church at Ephesus, one at Smyrna. There was one at Pergamos and another at Thyatira. There was one in Sardis and one in Philadelphia. There was one at Laodicea. So he wrote down the things which are. And you find that in the second and the third chapters of the book.

Then God said the third, “*And write the things which shall be meta tauta*” - “*Write the things that shall be after these things,*” - *after* the things of the churches.

So when I come to the fourth chapter of the Apocalypse, I read, “*After this I looked, . . . a door, . . . a voice saying, ‘Come up hither, and I will show thee things which shall be meta tauta’*” —after the things of the churches. John faithfully followed that outline given him by the Lord.

So, when I come to the end of Chapter 3, I come to the end of the churches. There are no more churches. Heretofore, the church of our Lord has been in the center of the stage, and the messages that Christ has delivered have been to His people. But at the end of the churches, the church is never mentioned again. It's never referred to. It's not seen in this earth. And the next time the church appears is in the nineteenth chapter of the Revelation when the Lord comes at the end of the Battle of Armageddon in glory and in triumph and His church, His bride, appears with Him.

How did she get up there? Because at the end of chapter 3 and before the awful day and trial of the Tribulation, God *raptured*—the

(continued inside)



old English word for “took away”—God took away His people from the earth and took her unto Himself. And then the great judgment and wrath of the Almighty fell upon this world.

Now, that structural outline that you find in the Revelation is the structural outline you’ll find in all of the Word of God - for the Scriptures say that His people will not face the judgment. God’s people are delivered from the wrath and the fury of the judgment of God.

The **only** judgment that the churches, that God’s people, shall ever know is the judgment of reward. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, *“For we must all stand at the judgment seat of Christ, that each one of us may receive the things that [are done] in the body whether good or bad.”* But the great judgment and the wrath of God upon blasphemy and sin and iniquity and an unbelieving world, all of that has been assumed and carried for us by our Savior on the cross. And the judgments that should have fallen upon us, fell upon Him. And to those who receive our Lord, the judgment day is past.

Nothing waits for us but to appear before our Savior to receive the reward of the good of our life. And that is in keeping with all of the Scriptures. Revelation and Romans 8:1, *“There is therefore now no condemnation, no judgment, to them who are in Christ Jesus.”* In John 5:24, Jesus says, *“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, he that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me shall have everlasting life and shall not come into judgment, shall not come into condemnation”*—Into the wrath and fury and tribulation of God—*“but is passed out of death into life.”*

In the fifth chapter of I Thessalonians, Paul is talking about the great and dreadful Day of the Lord, which includes this Tribulation. And as he speaks to that Day of the Lord, he says to us, *“But we are not appointed unto that wrath and judgment of God, but to attain salvation from it by Jesus Christ our Lord.”* Or as the Lord said in Revelation 3:10, *“Because thou hast kept my word, I also will keep thee from the great hour of trial that shall come upon the whole world.”*

So as we follow the structural outline of the Revelation, we find the church taken away before that awful day of the wrath and visitation and fury of God. And what we find in the Revelation,

we find in all of the structural outlines of the Holy Scriptures. God’s people are delivered from it. The judgment, the wrath, the fury, the tribulation, the awesome vials and trumpets and seals wherein God pours out His judgment upon this world, that’s not for God’s people. They’re taken away **before** it.

Now, the second reason why it seems to me that the churches of Christ, God’s people, will not go through that awesome terrible, indescribable Tribulation is found in the exposition of the apostle Paul concerning it -

The church at Thessalonica, the children of God, the Christians at Thessalonica were in great sorrow. They were in trial and persecution. They thought that they were in that great Day of the Lord—that the Tribulation had come and

they were in it. And they couldn’t understand, for Paul had taught them that the churches, God’s children would not go through the Tribulation. But they were in it, they thought, because of the awful persecution they were enduring. So they asked Paul about it. And in the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians, Paul has an exposition on that great Day of the Lord. In the second verse in my King James Version it’s called *“the day of Christ.”* But these manuscripts that follow the text earlier and exactly say *“the day of the Lord.”* And the Day of the Lord is that great final time of the judgment and wrath of the Almighty that we call the **Great Tribulation**.

Now, Paul says to these Christians who are suffering, “Don’t you be shaken in your mind or be deceived or troubled, as to that day of the Lord, that day of trial is already come and you’re in it.”

“For,” he says, *“that day will not come, except first there be a taking away, and the man of sin be revealed, that son of damnation and perdition, Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only the one that restrains and prevents now restrains and prevents until he be taken out of the way.”*

But when He shall be taken out of the way, the restrainer, the preventer, *“Then shall that Wicked one be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his parousia, with his presence, with his appearing, with his coming. Him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness.”* And on and on he describes that man of sin, that son of perdition called the ultimate and final Antichrist.

Paul says that the mystery of iniquity has been working for these hundreds of years. But he says that great, final, energized kingdom of Satan and that ultimate and final devil incarnate, the Antichrist, the man of sin, that he will not be revealed.

And he is revealed at the beginning of this Great Tribulation, this Day of the Lord. He will not be revealed until the Restraint is taken out of the way. *“The mystery of iniquity doth work now; only he that letteth, he that restraineth, restrains until he be taken out of the way.”*

There's not even an archangel in heaven that stands face to face to rebuke Satan. Michael, the archangel, dared not rebuke Satan, but said, "The Lord rebuke thee." There is no one that can restrain the ultimate power of Satan but deity, the Holy Spirit of God Who is in this world, Who is in this church, Who is in God's people, Who is in the hearts of the believing Christians.

Paul says that there is coming a time when that Restraiter, God's Holy Spirit in God's people, when that Restraiter will be taken out of the way. When that Restraiter, the Holy Spirit of God in God's people, when He is taken out of the way, "***Then shall that wicked one be revealed, that man of sin, that son of perdition or damnation, who exalted himself above all that is called God,***" who deceives the world. God allows it because they believe a lie and had pleasure in it. That is the beginning of the Great Tribulation, when there is revealed on the world scene this ultimate Antichrist, this man of sin, this Satan incarnate.

Now just briefly to sum up the remainder of the Scriptures, they will reveal to us as we shall follow them that this man of sin, this ultimate Antichrist, appears on the world scene as a man of peace, and as a man unifying all of the diversities and divergences that divide our nations and our people. He's going to appear as the great deliverer. He will reign for seven years. At the end of the first half of it, at the end of three-and-a-half years, it is going to appear that he is a deceiver and an imposter.

The Great Tribulation is the last one-half of that seven-year period, and you're going to meet it again and again in the Word of God. It is called three-and-one-half years. It is called a time, times, and half a time. It is called time, times, and a dividing of time. It is called the 42 months. It is called the 1,260 days. You're going to meet it again and again.

This is the Antichrist, and when he appears on the world scene and Satan has him all groomed and prepared, God's people will be taken away. But that Antichrist cannot be revealed, will not be revealed, until first the Holy Spirit of God in God's people is taken away. And then shall that Antichrist appear. I think in every generation Satan has his antichrist prepared, and we'll never get beyond one that is candidate for that awesome and awful place. When you get rid of a Kaiser Bill, you got a Hitler. When you get rid of a Hitler, you got a Stalin, and when you get rid of a Stalin, you got a Khrushchev. When you get rid of a Khrushchev, you've got another one coming on the stage of history until finally, the kingdom of darkness driving hard has its ultimate and final world tyrant prepared.

When that final denouement comes, God will take His people out of the world, and the Holy Spirit among God's children will be removed from the earth. After that, then unrestrained you will see the riding of the powers of the kingdom of darkness under Satan in this earth. Then will come to pass those days of trial and trouble and sorrow and tribulation such as the world has never seen. That Antichrist organizes the nations of the world into the great last battle campaign that ends in the war of Armageddon. There, one-third of all of the people of the earth are destroyed—and all of them would be destroyed were it not for the

intervention of Christ Who comes in the midst of the Battle of Armageddon with His victorious saints.

The intervention of Christ in history saved this world. And the only thing that saves it now, that restrains it now, is the presence of God's people in it. The reason the foundations of the world still stand, and the reason this world is not destroyed, is because of the presence in it of God's people. There is coming a time, says the apostle Paul, when this restraining, of the presence of the people of God and the Spirit of God in their souls, will be taken away. And then shall those awful, awesome, indescribably horrible days of judgment and of the fury of God fall upon this earth.

Now, the third reason why I do not think that God's people, God's churches, will go through this terrible Tribulation is because of the types, the illustrations, that are used in the Word of God. And of the many, I choose one our Saviour said in ***Luke 17, "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the appearing of the coming of the Son of Man."***

Also - "***As it was in the days of Lot, even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.***"

Now, when the Lord destroyed this world in the judgment day of the Flood, first Enoch was raptured before it, Noah was saved through it, and the unbelieving wicked people were destroyed in it - which would be as the Lord uses it here, "***As it was***"—the type of it, the figure of it, the simile of it, the picture of it: God's people taken out of the world before the judgment comes, the remnant saved in it. You are going to find out as we study the Revelation, that there are uncounted thousands of people who turn to the Lord in the midst of those awful trials and visitations—Noah, who was saved through it. Then the unbelieving, the blaspheming, the wicked who were destroyed in it. So the type of the picture is that God's people are taken out before it and the remnant are saved through it.

Now, the second illustration the Lord uses, "***As it was in the days of Lot.***" Lot was a compromised, carnal Christian. The Book says that he vexed his soul with the filthy living of the Sodomites. But Lot was a child of God, and when the angel said, "Escape!" Lot demurred. So, the angel took hold of him and snatched him out before the fire and the brimstone fell upon Sodom. "***For,***" said the angel, "***I can do nothing until thou be come hither.***" As long as Lot was in Sodom, the judgment could not fall. The fire could not fall. "***First,***" said the angel, "***I must take thee out. I can do nothing until thou be come hither.***"

So it is with the people of God in this world. That great final judgment will not come, and the fire and the fury and the wrath of the Almighty will not fall upon this world until first God's people be taken out of it.

Now if both of those men, Enoch and Lot, are very typical of God's people in this earth now.

Enoch - a glorious man who walked with God and was not, for God took him—Enoch was raptured, he was taken out before the judgment of the flood came.

Lot - a carnal, compromised Christian vexing his soul with all

of the filthy life of the Sodomites, Lot was taken out also before the great judgment day of God came.

Glorious Enoch translated, taken out in the fullness of his spiritual life. Lot, compromised and worldly in the midst of Sodom, yet also taken out before the judgment of God came. It is thus before the great day of the Tribulation and the visitation finally of the wrath of God. All of God's people—even the worldly ones—those who have placed their trust in Him, they all will be taken out before that awful day comes.

That's why the Bible says, in I Corinthians chapter 3, "***We shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.***"

Second Corinthians 5:10 says, "***To receive the things done in this flesh.***" Those of us who have built with gold and silver and precious stones, when that day of trial shall come, our work shall stand and we shall receive a reward. But those of us who have built this life out of wood and hay and stubble, it all will be burned, yet we ourselves will be saved yet so as by fire, just by the skin of our teeth. That's why we can send our treasures and our inheritance ahead of us - these gold and silver and precious stones.

That's the work. That's the stewardship. That's the godliness of the child of the Lord. We're all going to be saved; some of us just barely, like a man running out of his house naked with nothing. Some of us are going to have a rich and glorious inheritance in the Lord. But all of us are going to be saved, raptured, taken away, before that great and awful visitation of the judgment of God that is called in the Bible *he- thlipsis he- megale-*, the Great Tribulation.

Now, the fourth reason. The first reason was the structural outline of the Apocalypse, how God made it and how it conforms to the structural outline of all of the Scriptures.

The second reason was the exposition of Paul in II Thessalonians that before the man of sin is revealed, first God's people—the Holy Spirit in their hearts—God's people must be taken away. The great Restrainer of this world must be taken away. The third reason is that the types and the figures and the comparisons and the similes and the examples in the Scriptures all portray that same truth that God's people—as Enoch and Lot—must be taken away first before God's judgment falls.

Now, the fourth and the last reason is this: ***What is the hope and the comfort to the Christian as the Bible speaks to its soul?*** What are we to look for and to wait for and to yearn for and to hope for? What are we to look forward to?

Well, there are some who are looking for the man of sin, and the child of damnation, and the great ultimate Antichrist. There are others who are looking for the beasts and the false prophet. There are others who are looking for the great and final Battle of Armageddon. There are others who are looking for the days of trial and tribulation.

But you will never in one instance find that in the Word of God. In the Word of God, in the Holy Scriptures, there is only one thing that you'll find the Christian is asked to wait for and to yearn for and to pray for and to look for. Atypical instance of it is

Paul's writing in Titus 2:13, "***Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.***" ***That*** is what the Christian is looking for.

We're not looking for the Tribulation. We're not looking for the man of damnation. We're not looking for the Battle of Armageddon. We're not waiting for the beast and the false prophet and the Antichrist and all of the fury of the judgments of God. God's people are looking for their Lord!

Now - anybody that interposes anything between the coming of the Lord and the fulfillment of that promise is denying and turning aside from the clear teaching of the Holy Book! He may come any day, any hour, any moment. He may come at noonday. He may come at twilight. It may be at midnight. It may be at the dawn of the morrow.

There is no program, there are no years, there is no Tribulation, there is no battle, there's no anything that a man can think of that could intervene between the coming of our Lord and the fulfilling of His promise any day, any moment, for we are commanded of the Lord to live in the imminency of the return of our Saviour.

The apostles lived in the imminency of the coming of Christ, and we are commanded to live in that same imminency. He will come without a sign for us. His coming will not be announced, as a thief in the night to steal away His jewels, the pearl of price He purchased with His own blood—His people in the earth. He will come suddenly, miraculously, noiselessly, silently, furtively, clandestinely. He will come to take His people away just as He came for Enoch who was translated. Just suddenly, miraculously, silently, and he was gone.

So it is with the people of the Lord. Any day, any hour, any moment, the Lord may call for His own. And when He does and we're taken away, that is the great signal for the beginning of that awful time of trial that the Book calls the Great Tribulation. So the comfort and the hope of God's people is not for any of these tragic and awesome things. But what God's people are to look for and to yearn for and to hope for and to expect is the appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The door of the Philadelphian age has closed. In the Laodicean age in which we now live, the door is closed and Christ is on the outside [seeking], knocking at the end of "***the things that are.***" But when the door is finally closed in this world, the fourth chapter of the Revelation begins and a door is opened in heaven. When it closes here, it opens there.

John, a representative Christian, in type and in symbol, when the door was opened in heaven John heard the voice as of a trumpet saying, "Come up hither." And John, in symbol and in type as a Christian, through that open door was raptured, was taken up with his Lord. And then follows those awful days of the visitation of the judgments of God.

The Lord says we are ambassadors in this world, strangers and pilgrims in it. Our home is in glory. Before any nation declares war, first they bring their ambassadors home, and it is thus when the judgments of God are visited on this evil unbelieving world, God calls the ambassadors home. ■

COUNT ON ME!

by Robert Simms - writer for the SBC

A woman in a certain church was growing steadily unable to hear. Yet she was unwilling to consider a hearing aid. And in spite of the fact that she had gotten to the point that she couldn't follow much of what was said or sung, she continued to attend church services. One day the pastor visited with her and summoned up the nerve to ask her, very loudly, "I know you can't hear anything that's going on in church. Why do you continue to come?"

The woman's reply was quick: "*I come because I want everybody to know whose side I'm on!*"

Sometimes the core of Christian behavior is just this simple: letting others know whose side you're on. At such times, our actions need to say, "Lord, I'm on your side - you can count on me!"

God knows our hearts, and whether or not we love him truly and are his completely. He knows whether or not he can count on us. But others - like our churches - also need to know. God wants his church to be able to count on its members to stand with it in ministry and witness. Is it enough to attend worship services regularly? Can anyone infer from this that we can be counted on to help move the church forward? Could church leaders plan for challenging outreach ministries based on the assumption they can count on us? Can a church commit itself to support a mission, after reassuring itself that its members will pray, and give, and work? Can your church count on you? Can God?

One of the most important issues for a church is its members' faithfulness to give. Stewardship is certainly about more than giving money; but when it comes right down to converting the resources of individuals into the stuff that runs the nuts-and-bolts operations of Christian ministry, churches need their members to be good givers.

Some people complain about churches which - in their opinion - spend too much time talking about money. Admittedly the subject can be overdone. But look at it this way: churches challenge their members to become generous benefactors of the most important and most rewarding cause in the world, the cause of Jesus Christ, the only Savior. Churches challenge us to take our minds off only what we want to buy, do, or have. They teach us to think of others, to think of spiritual needs, to value more than anything else the advancement of the kingdom of God and the salvation of the world's people. All this is part of what our churches do through the resources their members give Sunday by Sunday.

Can you be counted on to support your church's work? The Bible teaches us that stewardship is the handling responsibly everything God has put at our disposal or entrusted to us. We are charged with the necessity of giving, the grace of giving, the urgency of giving. Look how the scriptures teach us we should be

people who can be counted on.

I. Counted on to Do What We Ought:

One of the basic reasons for our being givers who can be counted on is simply that we are commanded to give - it is a responsibility that has been part of God's law for thousands of years.

The Old Testament contains clear commandments to bring offerings to God, not just the sacrifices that symbolized the price of sin, but the offerings of grain, fruit and other products that came from the living the people made every day. We learn from Numbers 18:21 that the institutions of worship and ministry, and those called to lead them, are to be supported by the tithes of God's people. Other places we read about how the poor are to be fed through the offerings God's people give. There's no debate about what God commanded in the Old Testament.

But many wonder if the New Testament, and specifically Jesus, reaffirmed the importance of giving a tithe, or if He overturned it or brought it to an end. The full answer to that question is not as simple as saying, "We don't have to tithe anymore," or "We do." But starting with the very words of Jesus, we get an idea how He regarded tithing. Read Matthew 23:23, for example:

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

Notice the "oughtness" in this verse. He tells the Pharisees that instead of just following the letter of the law they should obey its spirit. But notice that instead of saying they should *substitute* the spirit for the letter, He says they should keep the letter *after* keeping the spirit, or perhaps *as a result* or keeping the spirit of the law. The words "**not to leave the other undone**" refer to tithing, and constitute Jesus' reaffirmation of God's intention that His people should give the tenth back to Him.

Since Jesus wanted His followers to continue to tithe, He showed us in a number of his parables what kind of spirit we should do it in. We should be the kind of people who are faithful with what God has put in our keeping. We *ought* to faithfully handle even the least of our trusts, and we ought even more to be faithful in the things that lie at the core of life: justice, faith and mercy. All of these we owe God. It is wonderful that the Christian has the word written on his heart, the love of Christ inside him, the righteousness of faith clothing him as a gift of grace: but never let any of us who know Jesus Christ believe that we owe God any less in the matter of giving, just because we're in the age of grace. And we are bound by our duty to the Saviour Who died for us to render unto God the things that are God's, even when we may not feel the inward urgency we *ought* to feel to be stewards.

- More Next Week



NURSERY MINISTRY WORKERS FOR THIS WEEK

10:50 a.m. Service ----- Cradle Roll 1: Caryn Quinnelly
 Cradle Roll 2: Derek Quinnelly
 6:30 p.m. Service ----- Cradle Roll 1: Bertha Sebebratt
 Cradle Roll 2: Janet Bridges
 Wed. Eve. Service ----- Volunteers Needed!!!

AND THE PEOPLE CAME...

Week of July 25, 2010

Sunday School ----- 21
 Sunday Morning Service ----- 36
 Sunday Evening Service ----- 27
 Wed. Eve. Service, 07/28/10 ----- 23

AND THE PEOPLE GAVE...

Week of July 25, 2009

Undesignated Tithes & Offerings ----- \$ 1,275.00
 Insurance Fund ----- \$ 16.00
Total Received for Week of 07/25/10: \$ 1,291.00

Average amount of Undesignated Offerings needed to operate the church EACH WEEK, as a minimum = \$ 1,400.00

INSURANCE FUND REPORT -

Monthly Requirement ----- \$ 273.08
 Amount Received This Month ----- \$ 196.00
Amount Still Needed By The End Of This Month: \$ 77.08

OFF FOR A VACATION



Have you forgotten anything?

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SAVED

1. **Admit that you are a sinner.**
2. **Admit that God says all sins must be paid for.**
3. **Accept the fact that Christ took upon Himself the suffering necessary to pay for all your sins.**
4. **You must change your mind about sin and sinning (God calls this repentance).**
5. **By an act of your will, accept by faith the Lord Jesus Christ, who can save you from the penalty of sin. Then, tell God about this in a simple prayer. Believe that God keeps His promise to save you, and thank Him for His salvation.**

Please Remember To Be Faithful to Give!



As with everything else, the costs of keeping a church going never go down - they always go *up*. Bills wait for no one, and churches are no exception to this. An extra, sacrificial gift today by everyone present would go a long way...

We encourage all of our membership to practice obedience to God by being faithful every payday to give back to Him His tithe (10%). *If every family in our church would practice this one simple discipline, we would never have weeks where we have to put off paying some bills until the following week!*

Everything is expensive, especially for a small church like ours, but ours is a BIG God, and He LOVES to bless His children when they are obedient to Him!

If you are already a tither, we thank you, and encourage you to also give offerings as well. If you're currently not tithing, won't you please start *today* - **OK?** Thank you.

Church Directory

Todd W. White ----- Pastor
 Mickie Shatwell ----- Pianist
 Dickie Eberle ----- Greeter, Custodian
 Larry Mathews, Caryn Quinnelly, Todd W. White ----- S.S. Teachers
 Larry & Mary Byars, Brian & Charity Crawford,
 Dwayne English ----- Outreach
 Flowers ----- Hannah and Shirley White