

The Rapture

There is no doubt that we are living in the shadow of the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our world today is fiercely racing towards an irreversible darkness. Bible prophecies show us exactly the predicted direction today's events are taking. And for those who make time to study Bible prophecies, you can see that developments in our world today point in only one direction – the Second Coming of our Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, to establish His Kingdom on earth.

The Second Coming is a very important subject to the Lord. It is the grand finale in the fulfilment of a plan that reached its anticlimax during his first coming. You will know how important this matter is to Him by the amount of time he devoted to teaching his disciples about it and making references to it from time to time. See for instance, the kingdom parables in Matthew 13; and Scriptures such as Matthew 23:37-39; 24; 25; Mark 13:5-27; Luke 12:35-48; 13:34-35; 17:20-36; 18:8; 19:11-27; 21:7-17; 25-36; John 14:1-3; 17:24. It remains the subject of our hope which, if it did not exist, would have made our lives on earth a real miserable one (1 Corinthians 15:19).

But, unfortunately, today you rarely hear anything about the Second Coming of Jesus or the rapture of the Church which initiates it. You don't hear about it on radio or secular television. And more surprisingly, you can hardly find Churches devoting time to teach their congregation about these subjects or end time prophecies in general. The rapture is a subject the Bible calls the "blessed hope" of the believer. Yet, instead of generating intense interest among Christians living on the threshold of this occurrence, it has been quietly removed from the scene as we choose to focus our attention on other priorities. It is as though there is a conspiracy to silence Bible prophecies, in particular, prophecies relating to the rapture and the Second Coming.

Why is this so? Who is behind the campaign to keep the subject of the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ out of the picture? What is his purpose in doing this? Why has the Church responded the way she has done instead of contending for the faith on this matter? And what are the consequences of our choice to keep silent on the subject? These are some of the concerns which constitute the rationale behind the call for this conference. In the course of this conference, answers to these questions will become obvious. It will then be up to you to decide what to do with the evidence presented to you.

Different positions on the timing of the rapture

One of the stated reasons why many churches have chosen to keep the subject of the second coming out of their Bible studies and teachings is that there are many differences in opinions regarding the timing of the rapture. Many Christians believe that the rapture event will take place before the Antichrist is revealed and the seven-year Tribulation begins. Some others believe it will happen in the middle of the Tribulation while yet, others believe that it will happen at the end of the Tribulation period. There are still other views on the timing of the rapture.

Depending on the position adopted, many believers have argued fiercely in defence of their positions and the rancour generated has led to the conclusion that the rapture message is a controversial one best not to be discussed. What a shame! The rapture message is a teaching of the Scriptures and you will learn more about it as Professor Malan discusses his paper.

For those who are not familiar with the meaning of the rapture, let me say that the rapture is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the air to take Christians, true believers in Him, out of this planet to His Father's house in heaven before the monumental, global catastrophe in the form of God's judgement is poured out on the earth and its inhabitants.

How have we responded to the 'controversy'?

In response to the heated and emotional outbursts and frequent ill-spirited remarks by some people when the rapture topic is mentioned, the popular response to the subject of the rapture and Second Coming is: "it's a controversial topic". Many Christians say offhandedly that the rapture message is a controversial topic. By this, they mean that different people hold different opinions on the subject and these differences have led to bitter disagreements among Christians when the subject is brought up. In order to avoid these disagreements, quarrels and bickering generated by the attempts to defend the various positions on the rapture by individuals advocating them, the most common response to it has been to keep quiet on the subject. And quiet we have kept indeed.

This a response has yielded disastrous results on the life and witness of today's Christians. Let's take a brief look at some of those results

Some results of maintaining a culture of silence on the rapture and Second Coming

No teaching. One of the major consequences of the choice to keep quiet on the subject of the rapture and Second Coming is that many Churches have opted not to teach anything on it at all. Occasionally, you may hear a pastor mention in passing of our going to heaven when Jesus comes. But the way it is said can easily convince you that the speaker doesn't really believe in what he has just said, or even if he believes it, there is no urgency about it as to constitute the basis of any action. And some others become so apologetic as though to suggest that the mention of anything in relation to the Second Coming could constitute a source of offence to some people.

Ignorance. Another major consequence of our silence and absence of teaching on the rapture and Second Coming is the enormous ignorance of many believers on these subjects. Today, many Christians have not even heard about the rapture. How then could they benefit from the glorious encouragement based on the prospect of their heavenly journey which this message generates? (1 Thessalonians 4:18). And how could they propagate the message or even wait for their Master with such level of ignorance (Luke 12:35).

Disparaging of the blessed hope of the rapture by Christians. The only one who mocks the truth and belittles Scripture to make it lose its power and value is Satan, the Enemy. When our differences on this Scriptural teaching encourages us to disparage the Scriptures, whose ambassadors are we then? Are our differences sufficient grounds to belittle any portion of

Scripture in our effort to justify our positions? It is an error of judgement to disparage “the blessed hope” of the rapture with misinformation about how irrelevant it is to whether you go to heaven or not.

A comparison with first century disciples

This situation reminds us of Paul’s encounter with some believers at Ephesus. In Acts 19:1-2, we read, “And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? So they said to him, We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” This is the attitude of many Christians today. They have not so much as heard anything about the rapture. And the Second Coming? Well, maybe. Is this right?

If you read down the passage, in verse 3, Paul asked them further, “Into what then were you baptised?” Today, we can also ask the question, “By what hope then do you live?” And of course, as those believers had an answer, “into John’s baptism”, so also do today’s believers also have some kind of explanation.

But as those early believers were, until that time, robbed of the wonderful power of witness by their lack of knowledge, so have today’s believers been robbed of the power and excitement to witness for the coming King and his Kingdom.

Our major concern today is not how to win souls. It is how to pay our bonds. “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things shall be added to you” (Luke 12:31; Matthew 6:33) has been reversed to read, “Seek ye first prosperity, pleasure and leisure and the Kingdom of God will be your added bonus.” What a shame. No wonder our character as Christians no longer reflects the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We are neither expecting the Lord nor living like He will soon return. Do we honestly think that by not talking or thinking about it, or living in the consciousness of its imminence, that that will in any way put off the Lord’s coming?

Is the Lord the author of confusion?

Some people have said to me that the Bible has something to say about each of the different positions upheld by different Christians. Is that true? Do the Scriptures really uphold such differences? If our answer is “yes,” is the Lord, then, the author of confusion? Of course not.

I’m sure we can all accept that the failure to agree on the Scriptural position on the timing of the rapture and the Second Coming does not suggest that our God is the author of confusion. If we examine it carefully, I’m sure we can all also agree that our differences do not constitute sufficient grounds to adopt a culture of silence on these important subjects. Our failure to agree on a specific timing is not sufficient reason to accept the label of ‘controversy’ which some believers have adopted as their reason for not studying, teaching or promoting or even entertaining any discussion on the subject.

If the Lord is not the one promoting the differences of opinion on the rapture and His Second Coming, then, it should be clear that someone else is responsible for promoting the

differences. The fact that the Lord has no pleasure in our divisions should be sufficient motivation for us to respond differently to these subjects than we have currently been doing.

Throughout the Church age, only one person has worked tirelessly to sow the seeds of discord among the saints. He is the Devil, Satan, the archenemy of the body of Christ. The early Christians recognised his method of operation as the promotion of schisms among believers.

Certainly, whenever the Church has stood for the truth or contended for the faith, she has been sorely oppressed by divisions driven by a behind-the-scenes operator who preys on our selfishness, and often our worldliness, to introduce deceit, confusion and heresies. These heresies, in turn, gain momentum as they are accepted by popular and influential people who were once seen, or continue to be seen, as God's servants. The body of Christ has not been more distressed than it is today by concealing, distorting and even denying the message of the rapture and the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Since we all agree that the Lord is not the one promoting heresies and schisms among His people, isn't it time for us to pause and asked ourselves some questions? Questions such as:

1. What then is behind the disagreement on the timing of these events?
2. Why has our disagreement on timing successfully convinced us to exclude everything God has to say about these matters from our major focus?
3. Isn't it abnormal that the generation that will see these events come to pass has chosen to keep silent on them?

Breaking the wall of silence

Our generation is the generation that will see the Church age come to a close (Luke 21:32). This is the generation that will see the world go through the worst pains in history under the leadership of the world's last superman – the Antichrist. And this is the generation that will see the Lord Jesus Christ return to this planet to establish his one thousand year reign on earth. Yet, this is the generation too scared to talk about these events. What a shame!

We do not want to live with this shame any longer. We want Christians all over this continent and all over the world, to engage not only in discussing these issues among ourselves, but also to champion the course of soul winning as a direct response to this truth. This is why The Rapture Force called this conference. The aim of this :

- To start the process of breaking the wall of silence surrounding the rapture message and the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- To present to you some things about the future that our God has called us to share.