



GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

CHURCH LEADERSHIP / THE DOCTRINE OF JESUS CHRIST

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

When we proclaim Jesus Christ and His work, it is vital that we talk not only of His death and resurrection but also of His coming again. The following article focuses on the important message of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.



The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

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“He [Jesus Christ] will return to earth personally, visibly and bodily to judge all men and establish His kingdom.” -GCC Statement of Faith

Why is it important to teach on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ?

1. The emphasis placed on the Second Coming in the New Testament

The Second Coming is referred to 318 times in the New Testament. That is approximately once for every 30 verses. Should we not as teachers of the Word give the Second Coming a similar emphasis in our messages?

2. For building an eternal value system (Colossians 3:1-4)

3. To keep believers focused on our ultimate hope (1 Peter 1:13)

4. To build love for the brethren (Colossians 1:3-5)

5. The emphasis placed upon this teaching by healthy and growing church movements:

The Christian Missionary Alliance was birthed through an emphasis on the teaching of the Second Coming. So, too, with the Great Commission Church movement in the 1970s.

6. To build purity and holiness in believers (1 John 3:2-3)

7. To give a right perspective amidst life’s trials (1 Corinthians 15: 19)

What are the various views in Christianity?

1. What are the views of the Millennium?

Key passage: *“I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years” (Revelations 20:4-6).*

“The little time that remains between this moment and our death, should quicken our diligence to inherit the endless and unchangeable eternity of God.”

- Stephen Charnock

a. Premillennial

This view holds to the existence of a literal 1000-year period when Christ will reign in righteousness over the whole world. Before the millennium, Christ will return and rapture His Church. This view is held by the vast majority of the evangelical world.

b. Amillennial

This view denies a literal millennium, but instead sees the promises of Revelation 20:4-6 being fulfilled today in a spiritual way, either in Heaven or in the Church, as the Church submits to Christ day by day. This view sees good and evil growing together until the Second Coming of Christ, at which time there will be the resurrection (rapture), the final judgment, and the end of all things. This view is held by Catholics.

c. Postmillennial

This view holds that Revelation 20:4-6 is being fulfilled today through the preaching of the gospel and the ever-increasing expansion of the Kingdom of God. According to this view, the world will eventually be christianized and that Christ will return after a long period of righteousness and peace. This view is commonly found among Presbyterians and those from a Reformed theological tradition.

2. *When is the “Rapture” in relation to the “Tribulation?”*

The “Rapture” refers to the translation of believers to meet Christ in the sky at His return.

Key passage: *“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).*

The “Tribulation” refers to a seven-year period of sorrow and distress that will come upon the world around the time of Christ’s Second Coming.

Key passage: *“For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again” (Matthew 24:21).*

There are various views on the timing of the Rapture and the Tribulation:

a. Pre-tribulation rapture

This view holds that the Church will be raptured before the Tribulation period begins. This view is held by a large percentage (if not a majority) of evangelicals today.

***“I see earth receding;
heaven is opening,
God is calling!”***

***- Last words of
D. L. Moody***

b. Post-tribulation rapture

This view holds that the Church will be raptured at the end of the Tribulation period. This is a commonly held view by many pre-millennialists.

c. Mid-tribulation rapture

This view holds that the Church will be raptured midway through the Tribulation period. This is not a widely popular view, but it is held by some premillennialists.

d. The pre-wrath rapture

This view holds that the Church will go through the Tribulation, but will escape the wrath of God's judgment upon the world at the close of the Tribulation period. This view is a recent view that is growing in popularity.

e. The past-tribulation rapture

This view sees the Tribulation period in Matthew 24 as already past, referring to the Temple's destruction 70 AD. This is not a widely held view (except that almost all evangelicals do believe Matthew 24 refers—at least in part—to the 70 AD events).

f. Pan-tribulation

This view holds that it will “all pan out in the end!”

3. *What is the view of the Great Commission Churches?*

a. As to the millennium issue, there is no requirement to believe in one view over the other to be a GCC pastor or church. However, GCC pastors and churches are almost exclusively pre-millennial in their beliefs.

b. As to the Rapture/Tribulation issue, GCC was strongly pre-tribulation in its roots. Today within GCC, there is a wide range of views on this issue.

In this regard, consider the words of Wayne Grudem in his introduction to his chapter on the “end times” in his *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1994):

“Before examining the arguments for these...positions, it is important to realize that the interpretation of the details of prophetic passages regarding future events is often a complex and difficult task involving many variable factors. Therefore the degree of certainty that attaches to our conclusions in this area will be less than with many other doctrines.... I also think it important for evangelicals to recognize that this area of study is complex and to extend a measure of grace to others who hold different views regarding the millennium and the tribulation period” (p. 1114).

“Christ was content with a stable when he was born so that we could have a mansion when we die.”

- Unknown

What pitfalls should be avoided in teaching on the Second Coming?

Pitfall #1: De-emphasizing the Second Coming in our teachings

Example: Because of the various views on the timing of the Tribulation and the millennium, many pastors in Christianity have mistakenly responded by not teaching on the Second Coming at all.

Pitfall #2: Date setting and pre-occupation with speculation

Example: Pastors in evangelical churches who explicitly or implicitly stated that Jesus would return within 40 years of the return of Israel in 1948.

Pitfall #3: Imbalance in interpreting (“everything is literal” or “everything is figurative”)

Example: Some have mistakenly seen all of Revelation as symbolic. On the other extreme, some others have made wild predictions from Revelation without recognizing its allegorical nature.

Pitfall #4: Misunderstanding as to historical and future fulfillment in prophecies

Example: The recent “full preterist” position does not recognize in Matthew 24 the difference between a possible historical fulfillment in 70 AD and the future fulfillment at the Second Coming. Therefore, they take the unorthodox position that the Second Coming of Christ and the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) has already occurred and that there will be no resurrection of the body, as has been taught by the Christian Church for 2000 years (Romans 8:11; Philippians 3:21).

Pitfall #5: Misapplying verses on the “Second Coming” views to negatively affect our practical lives

Examples: Some have allowed their view of the Second Coming to promote the unrealistic belief that “we won’t suffer in this life.” Others have been so fearful of the Antichrist that they do not have faith that the gospel will triumph and multiply. Still, others have allowed their view on end times to negatively affect long-term career and job decisions.

Pitfall #6: Overemphasis on temporal versus eternal victories

Example: The effect in the 1980s by those influenced by the post-millennial “dominion theology” advocating a focus on changing the government more than advancing the gospel, which changes peoples’ hearts.

Pitfall #7: Disrespect for believers with different views

Example: Sadly, many churches have allowed these issues to cause strife and division.

Pitfall #8: Being distracted from the mission

Example: Some Christians have been consumed with the speculative aspects of prophecies to the point that they are not actively advancing the gospel message.

In the government approved churches in China, pastors are permitted to teach many truths from the Bible. But they are not permitted to teach the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Overall, on matters related to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, GCC emphasizes the instruction given to the disciples in Acts 1: 6-14:

“So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

1. Avoid speculation about these matters (v. 7).
2. Focus on the fulfilling of the Great Commission (v. 8).
3. Keep your hope on the Lord’s return (v. 11).
4. Pursue unity with believers for the fulfillment of the mission (v. 14).

***“Keep the
main thing the
main thing.”***

- Unknown



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Addendum

1. Pre-tribulation view. Advocates of this view point to:

- a. Imminency verses. That is, verses that indicate that we are to hope for Christ's coming at any moment (Matthew 24:42; 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 5:1-8).
- b. The fact that the Church is not mentioned in the Book of Revelation after chapter four when there is the description of the Tribulation period.
- c. Revelation 3:10 which says that the Church will be kept from the hour of testing (i.e., the Tribulation period).

"Come Lord Jesus!"

*The last recorded
prayer in the Bible*

2. Post-tribulation view. Advocates of this view point to:

- a. The passages such as Matthew 24:9-11 which indicates that the Church will go through the Tribulation.
- b. The fact that the Bible makes no reference to two separate resurrections of believers, but describe it as one event (1 Corinthians 15:23-24).

3. Mid-tribulation view. Advocates of this view point to:

- a. The passages in Matthew 24 which indicate that believers will go through the Tribulation.
- b. Passages (such as Matthew 24:42) that indicate an uncertainty as to when the Lord will return.

4. Pre-wrath view. Advocates of this view point to:

- a. A distinction between "Tribulation" which believers will experience and "wrath" which believers will not experience (1 Thessalonians 5:9). Also, they distinguish the "Rapture" and "Day of the Lord," the latter being the Day of Judgment or wrath upon the world which all believers will escape.
- b. 2 Thessalonians 2 which indicates that there will not be a coming of Christ until the Antichrist is revealed first.
- c. Passages in Revelation that indicate that believers are in Heaven after going through the Tribulation, but before God's wrath comes (chapters 7, 14, 19).

5. Past-tribulation view. Advocates of this view point to:

- a. The questions asked of Jesus before the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21) that refer to the destruction of the Temple, which was still standing.
- b. Matthew 24:34, which they argue indicates that the Tribulation was going to happen within the lifetime of the 1st Century disciples.



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Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. In your church, how well do you think that the Second Coming of Christ is emphasized and taught? Please explain.

3. What are your personal opinions on the various views of the Tribulation and the Rapture?



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Exercise

4. If you and a co-elder in your church had a different view on the timing of the Rapture, how would you deal with this difference in leading the church?

5. What practical steps can you take as a church to insure that the people in the church have their hope on the Second Coming of Christ?
