



WHO KILLED CHRISTIAN OPTIMISM?

One of the predominant themes in the Scriptures and especially in the New Covenant era is *hope*. Christians are not without hope for the future, in spite of what the world may look like at the moment, or even what we are like, as those who are imperfect.

Because of the sin of Adam, mankind was plunged into a darkness that was utterly hopeless, save for the grace of God toward us. And in the fulness of time, God sent His Son in order to save His people from their sins; so that we might be reconciled with our Creator, and that which was lost by Adam and Eve might be restored: *Paradise Restored!*

Last week we considered, briefly, the greatness of the Great Commission. And if anything ought to give us hope, it is the fact of these marching orders for the Church, the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven to be seated on His glorious throne, and the fact of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, giving the Church the power to preach the Gospel with world-changing results. Of all people,

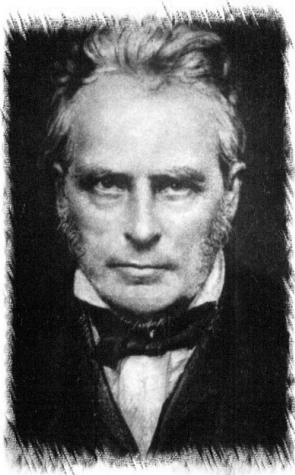
only Christians can rightfully have optimism for the future, and hope that Christ will, indeed, put all His enemies under His feet.

In a nutshell, that is Christian optimism...not faith in ourselves to make the world a better place; not a secular progressivism that thinks that sinful mankind can right all wrongs. No, it is faith in the power of the Holy Spirit and the living Word of God through the Good News of Christ that changes the world. That is the Christian view of the future: the nations will be disciplined, for no one is able to stand against the plans and purposes of Almighty God through His Son and the Church, which He Himself established as His army on the earth.

But today, *Christian Optimism*, is not the predominant view as it once was. So what happened? *Who killed Christian Optimism?*

The rise of ungodly philosophies and theories, such as evolution, have certainly disturbed us; the descent of Western culture into barbarism and sensualism has shocked us; the horrific wars of the recent past have

dismayed us. But these evidences of man's sinful nature are not unusual in the history of the world. The question is why should Christians become pessimistic about the future, and who led the retreat from optimism to pessimism?



A key figure in this turn-around was British minister and Bible student J. N. Darby through his writings in the 1830's. Many credit him as the originator of dispensationalism

and the inventor of the novel doctrine of the pre-tribulational rapture of the Church. In America, the popularizer of this new teaching was C. I. Scofield in the early 1900's.

These dispensationalists developed a drastically different approach to the development of human history, than had been taught before. This is evident, for instance, in their division of history into seven dispensations. According to Scofield, each dispensation "represents 'some change in God's method of dealing with mankind,' involving 'a new test of the natural man.' Mankind

invariably fails these tests, and God ends each dispensation with 'judgment and introduces a wholly new era.'" Thus, rather than viewing human history as a divinely ordained process of development, this theory preferred to speak of changes in history as a series of divine interruptions and judgments.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the dispensationalist and the biblical view of human history is the pessimism of dispensationalism's premillennial eschatology. Rather than viewing history in terms of progress through the leavening work of the Gospel, dispensationalists posited that history, society, and even the Church were in a state of moral and spiritual decline, irreversibly. Further, according to the dispensationalists, things will only continue to grow worse until a final period of tribulation after which Christ will return and establish His literal kingdom in Jerusalem.

The tragic events of the First World War seemed to lend credibility to the pessimistic worldview of dispensational premillennialism. Thus, in a speech delivered in 1914 at the second annual Philadelphia Bible Conference, C. I. Scofield declared,

The whole period [during which earth is put under the governmental authority of the Gentiles] may be regarded as a testing of the capacity of the natural man to govern himself and his fellows. We are witnessing in the present World War the final demonstration of his inability. Every resource available to man for the great task of organizing humanity into the social order and establishing peace with righteousness has been tried... So far from restraining in any effective fashion the bloodthirstiness that is latent in humanity, the Gentile nations have succeeded but in organizing it, in organizing human killing on a prodigious scale.

Mankind is thus incapable of freeing itself from its increasing state of moral and cultural decline. Only by a radical interruption of God in human history can any such “progress” be at all possible.

This brings us to perhaps the most controversial doctrine of modern dispensationalism—the secret pre-tribulational rapture of the church. For Darby, Scofield, and their followers, hope does not come from the possible betterment of society by human or even by divine efforts. Rather, hope is to be found in the secret pre-tribulational rapture of the church, in which Christians will be mysteriously

taken from the world, leaving the multitude of unbelievers behind. Thus, according to Scofield, “the characteristic attitude of the believer, all down the ages, is that of constant expectation of our Lord’s coming in the air for us.” It is always said that this secret coming of Christ is “imminent.”

If the world, according to dispensational theory, is getting worse and worse; and if the only hope for Christians is God providing a miraculous escape from this evil world before His judgment falls, what do you think the attitude will be about the future: pessimistic or optimistic?

Top Ten Errors of the Pre-tribulation Rapture and Dispensational Premillennialism

1. It questions the power and foreknowledge of God when it says that Jesus came to establish His Kingdom, but because the Jews rejected him, had to establish the church instead. *Daniel 2:44, Job 42:2*
2. It makes God a respecter of persons when it assigns a special favor of God to the Jew today. It fails to recognize that all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, are now God's chosen people

and that this has always been His plan. *Galatians 3:28-29, Acts 10:34*

3. It rejects the plain statements of Jesus when it insists that Jesus came to establish a material, earthly kingdom. *John 18:36, Luke 17:21*

4. It denies the present existence of God's kingdom when it insists that the kingdom is yet to be established, and they still look forward to its establishment and a millennial reign. *Colossians 1:13*

5. It denies that Jesus is now ruling as king when it contends that Jesus is still to come and establish a kingdom in the future. *Acts 2:33, Hebrews 1:8-9, 10:12-13*

6. It makes the church of Jesus Christ an afterthought and a temporary substitute when it contends that Jesus failed to establish His kingdom, so established the church instead. *Ephesians 3:11, Romans 1:1-5, 16:25-27*

7. It denies the plain statements of the Old Testament when it contends that God has not yet kept his promises (to the fathers) concerning the land promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. *Joshua 21:43-45, 23:14*

8. It teaches error when it teaches that there are going to be several resurrections instead of only the one resurrection that the Bible teaches. *John 5:28-29*

9. It fails to recognize the true nature of the judgment and Christ's return when it teaches that Jesus will return several times. *Hebrews 9:28*

10. It denies Bible prophecy when it teaches that Jesus will rule the earth from Jerusalem during the millennium. *Jeremiah 22:30, Matthew 1:11*

Who killed Christian optimism? Sadly, many Christians have bought into the

dispensational pessimism of J. N. Darby, C. I. Scofield, and their followers.

The result is that long-term planning and kingdom work

seem hopeless. If there isn't enough time to disciple the nations, then we might as well, eat, meet, and retreat from this wicked world, instead of proclaiming the crown-rights of King Jesus.

