



The Exception Rather Than The Rule

Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Revelation 19:9-10)

The Apostle John, through the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit of course, authored what is arguably two of the deepest and most important books of the Bible. The Gospel of John is often cited as the number one choice desired by those who theoretically become stranded on a desert island and can only have one book. From an earthly perspective of the Messiah, it is one of the most important books in history. But ironically the Apostle John *also* produced Revelation, which looks at future history from a heavenly perspective. (The repeated return to what is happening in heaven throughout Revelation is the "glue" that binds the themes of Revelation together.) John, as a kind of celestial court reporter, provides a transcription of how heaven sees things. He is unique in being used to author works which provide insight into the Lamb from both of these drastically different perspectives.

Remarkably, the angel at the forefront of conveying the heavenly visions provided to John places both the earthly record of the Gospel of John and this embodiment of heavenly revelations on equal footing. "*For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*" is a statement that these two seemingly different books are actually two sides of the same coin. The writings and teachings of the Apostles about the Lamb who came to take away the sins of the world in the Gospels is the very spirit, life and soul of the prophecies in Revelation describing the concluding work of the one and only Lamb who brings all things to an ultimate fulfillment. The testimony of all the Apostles and Prophets who bore witness to Christ is the flipside of the coin to the spirit of prophecy endowed to the angels relating it back through the Apostle John. I believe this to be foundational to the interpretation of Scripture: there can be no right and sound *eschatology* without right and sound *theology*. Biblical prophecy is not exempted from

"The Exception Rather Than The Rule", Page 1 of 5

any of the rules of interpretation employed to establish the foundational doctrines of the rest of Scripture. In fact, it is impossible without them.

I am not saying that the proper interpretation of biblical prophecy does not bring with it some added responsibilities, but asserting rather that it does not license throwing away the basic principles we are required to bring to all Scripture. When Jacob Prasch provides the illustration that, like the pursuit of higher math, one cannot master calculus without first having mastered trigonometry, trigonometry without the foundation of algebra and geometry, and to begin with the fundamentals of mathematics, it seems there are those who do not fully comprehend the principle that we must bring uncompromised mastery of each previous level in order to successfully engage the next. Accurate execution of calculus is impossible for someone jettisoning the foundational mechanics of basic mathematics and algebra. One does not attain to the advanced formulas by forgoing the fundamentals of addition and subtraction.

In other words, what leads to the proper understanding and handling of biblical “calculus”—prophecy, is the prior establishment of basic biblical “mathematics”—salvation, justification, sanctification, etc., etc. Errors in the staple doctrines of theology render it impossible to arrive at the right eschatology. In fact, I believe we can “reverse engineer”, so to speak, a person’s wrong assertions about something prophetic so as to link them to a flawed doctrinal belief in a basic area of theology. Some eschatological errors are subtle because the underlying doctrinal compromise to which they cling is minor, but the greater and more egregious the End Times error, the greater and more fundamental is the adherent’s deviation from what should be a mainstream doctrinal belief.

As one example, look at those who believe that Jesus will not return until the Church first evangelizes the whole world. If we examine and expose their basic doctrinal errors in the areas of their notion of salvation and the working of the Holy Spirit to begin with (their inability to handle basic math functions), we would not even entertain the inevitably erroneous results of their “calculus”—handling of prophecy. Someone who cannot rightly divide the Gospel cannot provide prophetic enlightenment. Someone who strays from the basic teaching of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is even more lost when they attempt to navigate Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah and Revelation.

Does a good doctor only treat the symptoms or do they cure the disease? I have come to realize that one of the most useless activities I can engage in is trying to correct an egregious eschatological error (the symptom) without first addressing the underlying doctrinal errors from which it springs (the disease). No matter how well I present my arguments for, say, the timing of the Rapture in the scheme of things, it is not going to win over someone who is not on firm doctrinal ground to begin with. When we encounter serious eschatological error we need to be discerning enough to scratch beneath the surface until we find the root cause in order to work on curing the underlying disease. When someone is deceived where an End Times topic is concerned, they are always found to be deceived as to a more important, fundamental teaching of Christ.

In an article published last year for Moriel Ministries titled, "[Three Strikes & You're Out](#)", the Apostle Paul teaches that there are three fundamental things which no Christian should be unaware or uninformed of, three basic doctrines which should naturally be in every Christian's doctrinal toolbox. (The Greek word Paul used in all three cases is "*agnoeo*", which in some translations is rendered even more aggressively as, "*do not be ignorant*".) These three things are spiritual gifts (1 Co. 12:1), the return of Christ (1 Th. 4:13-14, 16-17) and God's plan for Israel. (1 Co. 10:1-2) It is difficult to find a person, organization, or entire movement holding to scriptural error of *any* sort who are not in conflict with one, if not all three, of these areas. Ironically, even though nearly every major End Times error can be traced to problems in one or more of these areas, nearly every conflict of a *general* theological error I am aware of within the Church today intersects to some degree with at least one of these areas.

I suppose what I am really ranting about is that we do not have an "information" problem, but an "education" problem. The greater issue of error where End Times issues are concerned is only a *symptom* of the underlying *disease* in the Church today: a lack of discipleship.

The biblical examples of discipleship employ a mentor-protégé relationship that goes far beyond the student-teacher framework Western societies most often deploy. Throughout Scripture the examples are of those who go through life side-by-side living and working together, not just merely coming together regularly each week to a classroom, but in a very close, daily relationship. Biblical discipleship cannot be

separated from establishing personal relationships and achieving something akin to a master-apprentice model where the learning comes hand-in-hand with the doing.

In my own experience, the most effective I have been at correcting errors where End Times issues are concerned has been in small groups or with individuals. This is because instead of simply replacing “bad” information with “good” information, I have the opportunity to drill down to the root cause of the disease. It most often morphs from a discussion about an End Times topic into the more pressing need to be disciplined in one of the requisite basics. When that underlying error is corrected, not surprisingly everything else takes care of itself. The more radical and outrageous someone’s End Times beliefs, the louder the cry for help in some basic aspect of the Gospel. I actually see most End Times “problems” as actually being a discipleship issue. (Conversely, too many times I have entered a dialog to address someone’s End Times assertion only to find out far too deep in the conversation that they hold other views bordering on, if not entering, the realm of heresy. Had I known up front, I would not have wasted their time on the End Times question. It really is a variation of “pearls before swine”.)

How do we come to terms with basic biblical teachings such as God’s salvific plan for mankind? Is it based on just a single verse? No, we consult the *whole* counsel of God on the matter. We examine *everything* from Genesis to Revelation and, by straightforward induction, provide the plain meaning from Scripture. The handling of prophecy is actually no different—the meaning is derived by illumination of the Holy Spirit to believers in the course of seeking Scripture to answer Scripture. But if we have not settled what the whole counsel of God’s Word teaches for the basics, we will not arrive at the right prophetic destinations either. Calculus is not difficult for those who have mastered the major disciplines leading up to it, but quite impossible for those who still have not mastered basic math. Cracks in one’s eschatology are merely surface indicators of a fundamentally unsound foundation beneath.

In fact, here is a useful exercise teaching about the true ministry of a biblical prophet. Take a prophet’s book (such as Isaiah or Daniel) and divide the verses between what is a prediction of a future event and what is not. Place all the predictions on one side of the (very long) page and all the non-predictive information on the other. The first thing that will become in-your-face obvious is that the list of predicted events is just a *fraction* of the prophet’s overall message. What are they blabbering on about instead of establishing dates and times of specific things to come? Biblical prophets spend the

[“The Exception Rather Than The Rule”, Page 4 of 5](#)

majority of their time pleading with God's people to come back to the basics! Prophets are, if you will, "evangelists" to the backslidden. More often than not, the events they *do* predict are provided in the context, "This is what is going to happen if you don't repent and get back to the fundamentals". They are less inclined toward providing something "new" as much as they are toward reeling us back to what we already should know.

Prophecy is not a loophole exempting someone from the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel but a plea to return to them. If we truly acted upon prophecy within its proper, given context we would be much more motivated toward engaging in discipleship and evangelism than drawing the latest chart depicting how the seals, trumpets and bowls "*really*" fit together. As with all things scriptural, it is not so much an issue of knowledge as it is of faith.

I do not know how every as yet unfulfilled Bible prophecy will come to fulfillment. What I *do* know is that since every single one of the more than three hundred prophecies Jesus fulfilled during His First Coming *literally* came true, every single one of those remaining will *also* literally come true. (Meditate on *that* for a moment.) I know that every doctrine taught in God's Word is literal. I know that just as I came to an understanding of the cross through examination of *all* that God's Word teaches on salvation through *all* of its sixty-six books, therein lies the answers to the more complex equations in the realm of the prophetic. If I am faithful to work on my "math" and "algebra", the "trig" and "calculus" will come.

You and I as rank and file members of the Church are actually in the best position to correct the major errors of eschatology by discipling it out of the flock one sheep at a time. If we were to disciple our brothers and sisters in the fundamentals, especially in the areas of spiritual gifts, the return of Christ and God's plan for Israel as highlighted by no less than the Apostle Paul, it would not merely resolve differences of opinion about the meaning of prophecy, but actually repair the greater damage currently taking place within the Church today. Sound theology produces sound eschatology. Correcting deficiencies in one's math and algebra go the furthest toward amending subsequent outrageous errors in one's trig and calculus.

In Him,

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"The Exception Rather Than The Rule", Page 5 of 5