

## **A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism**

(Part III)

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### **Apostasy and Persecution**

It is the Reformed doctrine of the last things that the last days are a time of departure from the faith by many and a time of persecution of the true church by a wicked world. Apostasy and persecution characterize the entire age from Christ's ascension to His second coming. They increase and intensify at the very end in connection with the coming of the Antichrist and the establishment of the universal kingdom of the beast.

The Reformed faith repudiates the notion that the last days hold the prospect of the conversion of the majority of the human race so that the true church of Christ is in a position to persecute the ungodly.

### **The Reformed Creeds**

Reformed doctrine is established by the Reformed creeds. These creeds teach the last days as the time of apostasy and persecution. The Second Helvetic Confession (1566), expressing the conviction of all the leading Reformers, stated:

And from heaven the same Christ will return in judgment, when wickedness will then be at its greatest in the world and when the Antichrist, having corrupted true religion, will fill up all things with superstition and impiety and will cruelly lay waste the Church with bloodshed and flames (Dan., ch. 11). But Christ will come again to claim his own, and by his coming to destroy the Antichrist... We further condemn Jewish dreams that there will be a golden age on earth before the Day of Judgment, and that the pious, having subdued all their godless enemies, will possess all the kingdoms of the earth. For evangelical truth in Matt., chs. 24 and 25, and Luke, ch. 18, and apostolic teaching in II Thess., ch. 2, and II Tim., chs. 3 and 4, present something quite different (*Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, ed. Arthur C. Cochrane, Westminster Press, 1966, chap. 11).

The two main sections on eschatology in the “Three Forms of Unity” are Question 52 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* and Article 37 of the *Belgic Confession*. Question 52 of the Catechism locates every believer, and by implication the true church, in circumstances of persecution throughout the present age:

**Q.** What comfort is it to thee that Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead?

**A.** That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered himself for my sake,... to come as judge from heaven: who shall cast all his and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all his chosen ones to himself, into heavenly joys and glory.

Article 37 of the Belgic Confession does the same. It declares that the final judgment is:

most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and elect: because then their full deliverance shall be perfected, and there they shall receive the fruits of their labor and trouble which they have borne. Their innocence shall be known to all, and they shall see the terrible vengeance which God shall execute on the wicked, who most cruelly persecuted, oppressed and tormented them in this world.

The article continues that it is only then, at Christ’s return, that the faithful and elect will be crowned with glory and honor, all tears will be wiped from their eyes, and “their cause which is now condemned by many judges and magistrates, as heretical and impious, will then be known to be the cause of the Son of God.”

Not only is there nothing in these articles about any hope of a “golden age,” but also the articles plainly rule out the notion of an earthly kingdom of Christ in history.

The ungodly always dominate. The world’s rulers always condemn the cause of the true church. The wicked always oppress the saints. The only hope of the church in the world, and their full deliverance, is the second coming of Christ and the final judgment.

This is Reformed doctrine.

Postmillennialism has no basis in the Reformed creeds. Postmillennialism conflicts with the Reformed creeds. Postmillennialism is condemned by the Reformed creeds, explicitly by the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, implicitly by the others.

## **Perpetual War**

As is true of all of the doctrines contained in the Reformed creeds, amillennialism is based on the plain teaching of the Bible.

The original promise of the gospel in Genesis 3:15 put enmity between the church and a wicked world that is spiritually descended from Satan: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed...." Enmity is war. In the war, the ungodly - Satan's spawn - do real, although not fatal, harm to the saints: "... thou shalt bruise his heel." This war with its sufferings for the people of God continues to the very end of time at Christ's return, for Romans 16:20 promises the apostolic church that "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Crushed principally at the cross, Satan is, nevertheless, not crushed finally until the Lord returns to cast him into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). In the meantime, he bruises the heel of Christ's body in the world without any letup.

Psalm 2 teaches that the kings of the earth foolishly set themselves against Jehovah and His Christ until the Christ breaks them with a rod of iron. Revelation 19:11ff. makes clear that the destruction of these raging foes with a rod of iron will occur at Jesus Christ's second coming. That Revelation 19:11ff. refers to the second coming is evident from the opening of heaven (v.11) and from the fact that at that time Antichrist and his false prophet are cast into hell (v.20). Until the personal return of Christ, the nations under the government of the kings of the earth make war against Him as He is present in His church by His Word.

The climax of this war against the seed of the woman by the seed of the Serpent will be the persecution of the church by the Antichrist.

This is future with regard to the church at the end of the 20th century. In Revelation 13, John prophesied the world-kingdom of the beast that would make war with the saints. In Revelation 19, the apostle tells us that this beast, with his false prophet, appears in history immediately before the second coming of Christ. At His coming, Christ casts the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire (v.20).

This is the clear, irrefutable teaching of II Thessalonians 2. That individual who is "that man of sin," "the son of perdition," and "that Wicked" will be on the scene when the Lord Jesus comes again, for the Lord will "consume (him) with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy (him) with the brightness of his coming" (v.8). Inasmuch as he will oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, and will claim to be God himself, he is Antichrist (v.4). He will oppose Christ (who is the revelation of God), and he will present himself as Christ's vicar, or substitute. Opposing Christ, he will necessarily oppose Christ's church. This will be great tribulation for the church.

Reformed Christians may differ as to the identity of the Antichrist, whether he will be a certain pope of the Roman Catholic Church or a political figure who will have the backing of the false church headed by Rome. There may be no disagreement among us, that the Antichrist and his assault upon the church are future.

This view of the future is in harmony with the testimony of the Scriptures everywhere that persecution will be the lot of the believers always. "Blessed are ye," said Christ, "when men shall revile you, and persecute you ... for my sake" (Matt. 5:11). "In the world

ye shall have tribulation," He said to the church at His leaving (John 16:33). In every age, God's elect confess, "For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Rom. 8:36). In II Timothy 3, the apostle expressly describes the "last days," that is, the present age between Christ's ascension and His return, as the time in which "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (v.12).

Scripture contradicts postmillennialism's dream of the earthly victory of the church in the future.

### **The True Church Becomes Smaller**

Leading up to the final, furious fight of Satan's minions under Satan's man against Christ's church is the great apostasy. This is a wholesale falling away from the truth by many who once confessed the faith. Either they truly confessed the faith in their forebears, or they insincerely confessed it personally.

The future is not bright with the prospect of mass conversions, much less the conversion to Christ of a majority of mankind, as is the dream of postmillennialism. On the contrary, the future is dark with the certainty of departure from Christ on the part of many who once professed Him. This is the clear, conclusive doctrine of the apostle in II Thessalonians 2:3: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed." The day of Christ, that is, the day of His personal, visible coming, is preceded by the sign of Antichrist. Antichrist is preceded and produced by apostasy. An outstanding sign of the end in the day of Christ is departure from the truth of the gospel. What this apostasy consists of and how it occurs are suggested in verses 9-12.

The falling away began already in the apostles' time as their struggle with legalism, gnosticism, and antinomism shows. It picked up intensity in the development of Roman Catholicism. Almost at once after the Reformation, Protestantism began to fall away in Arminianism, liberalism, and the mysticism represented today in the charismatic movement.

To those who have eyes to see the biblical signs, the present condition of the churches manifests plainly the truth of Reformed amillennialism.

The tactic by which postmillennialism tries to escape the force of the biblical passages that forecast apostasy and persecution in the last days is both desperate and deadly dangerous. It consists of referring all of these passages to an event in the past. This event is the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. Whatever in the New Testament, and in the Old as well, predicts tribulation for the people of God has already been completely fulfilled. Nothing of this applies to the church any longer. Thus, huge chunks of Holy Scripture are made irrelevant to the church, including most of the book of Revelation.

Gary DeMar, who has boasted of postmillennialism's powerful exegesis, interprets II Thessalonians 2 in such a way that nothing in the chapter is future. The man of sin was a "contemporary" of the apostle Paul. The day of the Lord was the day of the destruction of Jerusalem. The apostasy was the falling away of the Jews after the ascension of Christ. The coming of Christ was Jesus' coming in judgment upon Jerusalem (see DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, American Vision, 1994, pp. 311-350).

Fundamental to this twisting of the Word of God in the interests of the carnal kingdom is the postmillennial understanding of Matthew 24, Jesus' great eschatological discourse.

We look at this passage next time, God willing.

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