

Revelation 6: 1; "The 4 major views of the book of Revelation",
(The Introduction) Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 7th,
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in the series - "The Faithful and True Witness".

As we have now come to the prophetic section of the book of Revelation, I thought that it would be appropriate to pause for several Sundays and take a look, in an overview, at the various views held by true Christians, concerning the meaning of the visions of this book. I believe that there are 4 major views of the book of Revelation and 3 of them, in their names, have reference to the Millennium and the last view believes that the visions of the book have already been fulfilled in the days of Nero. I am not going to go into great detail in regard to any of the major views in a systematic way. I simply intend to give an overview. The 4 major views are; the Pre-Millennial, the Post-Millennial, the A-Millennial, and the Preterist view. The descriptive prefixes of the first three refer to Christ's second coming in relation to the Millennium. In Pre-Millennialism Christ returns before the Millennium, In Post-Millennialism Christ returns after the Millennium. And in A-Millennialism Christ is presently reigning and will return at the end of this age. These major views even have various views within them. For example, in the Pre-Millennial view; it may be distinguished into the Historic Pre-Millennial and the Dispensational Pre-Millennial camps. The Post-Millennial view may be distinguished into the Historic Post-Millennial position and the Progressive (My term) Post-Millennial Position. The A-Millennial view may be distinguished into the Optimistic and the Pessimistic camps. The Preterist view may be distinguished into the full and the partial camps. All of these terms have significance and meaning. So what I want to do this afternoon is to begin to define, as simply as possible, what these positions are, in terms of the things that I have read about them. I do not claim to be an authority on all these positions. I simply want you to try to understand them better and to accept the fact that true Christians do differ in their understanding of prophecy and the interpretation of the book of Revelation. I hope that in setting these views forth that each of us would try to make better sense of the prophetic part of this book.

I myself, in my spiritual pilgrimage, was a person who believed in the Pre-Millennial Dispensational view of prophecy when I first became a Christian. When I came to the Doctrines of Grace and the Reformed faith I became A-Millennial for a time when I sat under Pastor Gordon Taylor's teaching at Sycamore Baptist Church in East Moline. And then in 1993, after having read many of the Puritans, and having read widely in both the Reformed and Evangelical literature of the 18th and 19th centuries, I came to embrace the Post-Millennial view of the book of Revelation. I have only recently been exposed to the Preterist view of interpretation, especially the partial Preterist view, which has been opened up by R.C. Sproul in his new book, "The Last Days According to Jesus." I am well aware that most of the pastors of our Reformed Baptist churches hold to an A-Millennial

position in regard to eschatology. I have no idea how many Reformed men have held the Partial Preterist position in the past; there may be some in our movement of churches who are considering it. But I am quite sure that at the present time that the vast majority of Bible-believing Christians hold to the Pre-Millennial Dispensational view. Many churches have placed that view in their confessions of faith. I believe, that to place any one of these views of prophecy into a confession of faith and to require that it be believed, as a requirement for membership in that church, is wrong. The reason that I believe that, is the difficulty of the subject. I am aware that there are some men who believe that eschatology can be made simple. But anyone who seriously considers the meaning of the many symbols of the book of Revelation and has tried to tie them all together with where they may have been previously mentioned in the Old Testament realizes that it is not a simple task. And then deductions and conclusions must be made in terms of those related texts, and a hermeneutic developed from that as well. Some men have not wanted to try to do this in great detail, and therefore have attempted to systemize their study and simply declare that the time period of the Millennium, the latter day glory mentioned in Revelation chapters 19 and 20, and the glorious progress of the church in this present age, which is declared in no uncertain terms in the Old Testament and is yet to take place, is to be relegated to or equated with, the time period of the New Heavens and the New Earth in Revelation 21. That is why they believe that prophetic things are so simple. But when this is done there is a failure to recognize that it is our Lord's plan that the Church triumph and reign on the earth in this present age, and not simply in the age to come. Eschatology is related to the Biblical prophetic history of the Church and not simply the principles of truth related to the fact that Christ is presently sitting and reigning at the right hand of the Father. He will remain there reigning "until all of His enemies are made a footstool for His feet". This means that the Church has much work in the preaching and spread of the gospel yet to do before He returns.

The truth of prophetic things is something that godly men in every generation have differed on. As proof of that let me give you the names of some very famous pastors and commentators who are in these various camps. C.H. Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, and a man who is one of the fathers of the modern movement of Reformed Baptists, held to the Historic Pre-Millennial position. It appears to me that Matthew Henry is an optimistic A-Millennialist, from the writings in his Works and his commentary. John McArthur, who is perhaps one of the most famous Bible teachers and preachers of our time holds to the Dispensational Pre-Millennial view. St. Augustine was one of the first men to teach A-Millennial truth in his writings. B.B. Warfield, R.L. Dabney, J.L. Daag and Robert Haldane are all Post-Millennial in their thinking. I have mentioned R.C. Sproul as holding the partial Preterist view. Ken Gentry Jr., who is a powerful writer on the subject of eschatology also holds this view. It appears to me that some of the men who hold to the partial Preterist view are also Post-Millennial in their view of the gospel eventually conquering greatly among the nations. Let us not disqualify our

brethren from being seen as orthodox Christians because they differ from us on this matter.

A fact that may surprise you, and I hope that you will consider it; it seems to me that of all the views that we are speaking of here, the view which appears to have been held by the majority of the Reformed people in the British Isles, after the Reformation until almost the 20th century, was the Post-Millennial view. This was the view of Baptists Andrew Fuller and William Carey. William Carey is considered as "the father of modern missions" and I believe one of the reasons that he was so active in missions was that he believed these Post-Millennial views. It was the view of John Owen and John Flavel. It was the view of William Bridge and Phillip Henry. It is the view of Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Davies, and David Brainerd. It was the view of W.B. Sprague and Edward Griffin, and Asahel Nettleton. It was the view of many, if not most of the ministers at the time of the first and second great awakenings. It was the view of Samuel Pierce, John Angel James, and Gardiner Spring. It was the view of David Brown, John Howe and Thomas Boston. It was the view of Richard Sibbes, Thomas Goodwin, and Thomas Manton. It was the view of David Dickson, Samuel Rutherford, and James Durham. It was the view of Matthew Poole, John Newton and Richard Cecil. It was the view of Thomas Scott, Issac Watts, and Albert Barnes. It was the view of Archibald Alexander and his sons, and Charles Hodge and his son A.A. Hodge. It was the view of Professor John Murray, John Wesley, and George Whitefield. It was the view of Lorraine Boettner, and in a modified form, it was the view of John Gill. It was also the view of John Bunyan. And I could list many others. Let it not be said that the Post-Millennial view is out of the main stream of orthodox thought or Reformed thought. There are far too many of our Puritan and Reformed brethren who it can be proven were of this view.

The great theologian Louis Berkhof makes this mistake in his systematic theology under the chapter entitled Millennial views. Speaking of the view of many Pre-Millennialists concerning A-Millennialism he says, "Some Premillenarians have spoken of Amillennialism as a new view and as one of the most recent novelties, but this is certainly not in accord with the testimony of history." "The name is new indeed, but the view to which it is applied is as old as Christianity." "It had at least as many advocates as Chiliasm among the Church Fathers of the second and third centuries, which was supposed to be been the heyday of Chiliasm." Chiliasm is the belief in a future thousand year reign of Christ upon the earth. This reign is a literal reign of Christ upon the earth after His second coming, for a thousand years, in minds of Pre-Millennialists. And it is a spiritual reign of the Church before Christ's second coming, for a thousand years or an indefinite period, in the minds of Post-Millennialists. So far Berkhof is right. When he is thinking about Chiliasm he is thinking of the Pre-Millennial view. The Post-Millennial view did not emerge until after the Reformation. But then he goes on to say, "It (Amillennialism) has ever since been the view most widely accepted, is the only view that is either expressed or implied in the great

historical confessions of the Church, and has always been the prevalent view in Reformed circles." I am not sure how Berkhof can say this. The great historical confessions appear to me to be decidedly Post-Millennial in their view of eschatology. I will point to 3 confessions. The Westminster Confession and the 1689 London Baptist Confession both speak similarly in their chapters on The Church, "The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, in whom, by the appointment of the Father, all power for the calling, institution, order, or government of the church, is invested in a supreme and sovereign manner; neither can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof, but is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God; whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of His coming." This view of the Pope being antichrist, although it cannot be confined exclusively to Post-Millennialism, most certainly is the view of all Historic Post-Millennialists. It is one of the major truths of that system. It has not been embraced by most A-Millennialists or Pre-Millennialists. Therefore I conclude that the historic confessions lean more toward Post-Millennialism than any other of the views.

In the Savoy Confession of 1658, which is the Congregationalist's modification to the Westminster Confession of 1643, you find an additional paragraph under the Church. "As the Lord in care and love towards His Church, hath in His infinite wise providence exercised it with great variety in all ages, for the good of them that love him, and his own glory; so, according to his promise, we expect that in the latter days, Antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the kingdom of his dear Son broken, the churches of Jesus Christ being enlarged and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable, and glorious condition than they have enjoyed." This is Post-Millennialism. This is the view that I believe is the closest to the Bible in regard to the outworking of prophecy, and I will follow it as we go through the book of Revelation. There is a great need for this view to be better understood as I believe that many Christians have misconceptions about it. I will try to clear up these misconceptions in future weeks.

What I want to do in the weeks to come is to take each one of these views and examine it generally so that you will be able to grasp it well enough to think about it and to know for yourself whether you believe it or not. If you find that there are Biblical truths that should be retained from that system because they are plain from the Scriptures, I would exhort you to receive them. For instance; the A-Millennial view of prophecy has done a great service for Christ's kingdom in establishing the truth that Jesus Christ through His death on the cross, has broken down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, and that they are one new entity in the Church. God does not have two programs of history, one for the Church and one for Israel. And even the Old Testament Jews who believed in the promise of the Messiah are not to be placed in a different category from the New Testament church. His Elect in all generations are one. In Hebrews 11: 39 when describing

those in the Old Testament times who did great things by faith, Paul says, "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us." Old Testament Jews and New Testament Gentiles are viewed together, even though under two different administrations of the Covenant of grace. Jesus Christ brings them both together. This truth you should receive. And the truth that Jesus Christ is presently reigning at the right hand of the Father, a primary truth of A-Millennialism, should also be received. All of God's Elect will most certainly be saved and gathered into Christ's Church. Christ has indeed bound the strong man in this regard. The binding of Satan in Revelation 20 does have a relationship to the binding of the strong man in the gospels, but I will examine this truth at a later time.

If the declarations and assertions that any of these systems make, are not plain to you from the Scriptures and seem to be forced conclusions, you are free to reject them. I will not be telling you that you must come to my view of the Book of Revelation or of the Post-Millennial position of Eschatology. And I will not belittle your view of eschatology if it is A-Millennialism or Historic Pre-Millennialism, or partial Preterism. I will attempt to challenge the views of Dispensational Pre-Millennialism and Preterism. I do ask that you would consider the Post-Millennial view as you will hear me preach it when we go through the prophetic section of this book. I would ask that you remember it in relation to all that the Church is going through in our days. I believe that we are on the verge of some very great things taking place in relation to the battle for truth and righteousness and the forward progress of the gospel and Christ's kingdom in the world. But I am also well aware that the false doctrine and false religion of the antichristian forces has not yet been defeated by the forward progress of truth. This is what stands between us and what the book of Revelation calls in chapter 20, the Millennium.