

A Delusional Doctrine

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Delusional is defined as, “holding idiosyncratic beliefs that are contradicted by reality or rational argument.” This will be the third and final edition of FCGN that is dedicated to addressing the AD 70 doctrine that is taught in some circles among the churches of Christ. There is truth and there is error (1 Jn. 4:1). The child of God has the awesome responsibility of being able to discern one from the other. This article will make “*rational arguments*” based on Scripture that are denied by those who believe that Jesus returned in AD 70 and that He is not coming back again.

First, consider Matthew 24 and 25. This passage, along with Mark 13 and Luke 21, is a favorite of the AD 70 crowd – not because it teaches their doctrine, but because they misuse the text. They fail to acknowledge a reality – Jesus talks about two judgments in that chapter. The AD 70 advocate says it is all about the destruction of Jerusalem. Here is a reality that they cannot deal with – the distinction between a judgment that would be foretold by many indicators (Matt. 24:4-34) and a judgment of which “*no one knows*” (Matt. 24:36). In fact, Mark’s account records about the destruction of Jerusalem, “...*know that it is nigh, even at the doors*” (Mk. 13:29), but of another coming he records, “...*ye know not when the time is*” (Mk. 13:33). One would have to be delusional to think that these are speaking of the same event! Matthew 25 then records some more of Jesus’ teaching on this judgment of which is said, “...*ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh*” (Matt. 25:13). The disciples would know – by many clear and unmistakable signs – when God would judge the city of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:15-21). It was a local judgment from which people could escape (Matt. 24:16; Mk. 13:14; Lk. 21:20-21). Yet, the Bible also speaks of a judgment from which no one can escape (2 Cor. 5:10) and which will include “*all nations*” (Matt. 25:32). It is delusional to believe otherwise!

Second, AD 70 advocates teach that there is no future resurrection of physical bodies from the grave. They tell us that all the resurrection passages, such as First Corinthians 15, are speaking of a spiritual resurrection of the church from under the influence of Judaism. This too is completely delusional! First Corinthians 15 is the “Great Resurrection chapter!” The veracity of the gospel that Paul preached was based on the death, burial, and *resurrection* of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead was verified by a minimum of 513 people (1 Cor.

15:5-9). Based on those facts, Paul wrote that there are many consequences to denying a physical, bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12-21). The remainder of the chapter addresses various truths about, not only the resurrection of Christ from the dead, but also the assurance of a resurrection and change that will take place “*in the twinkling of an eye*” (1 Cor. 15:52). To believe that this chapter is talking about some past, non-physical resurrection is absolutely delusional!

Third, and finally, to deny that Jesus is coming back for a universal judgment in the future is an absolute delusion! As noted earlier from Matthew 25, there is a day in which “*all nations*” will be gathered before the throne of Christ. As also noted above, the events of AD 70 were localized events that were preceded with many signs. People could flee from Judea! They could run to the mountains! Yet, we are told of another judgment by New Testament writers. For example, “*For we must*

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all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he

hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). One question from this verse – What does the phrase “*we must all appear*” mean? In preaching to Cornelius, Peter said of Jesus “...*that it is He which was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead*” (Acts 10:42). Peter, a Jewish man, was speaking to Cornelius, a Gentile. Again, AD 70 was a localized judgment against the city of Jerusalem and the temple was destroyed. The quick (living – NKJ) and the dead were not judged in AD 70. To believe otherwise is truly delusional! In preaching about the one true God to the Athenians Paul said that God, “...*hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness...*” (Acts 17:31). That event has not yet happened. The world has not appeared before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account yet. To believe otherwise is delusional! To believe that will not happen is delusional!

Nearly two-thousand years ago Paul wrote of some who were able to be deceived (2 Thes. 2:10-12). In that text he states the reason that their deception was possible – “...*because they received not the love of the truth...*” and they “...*believed not the truth...*” Remember, being delusional means that a person will hold to some specific belief that is contradicted by reality and rational argument. The Christian has the responsibility to “*discern between good and evil*” (Heb. 5:14). The faithful child of God has the responsibility to know the truth well enough that he can spot error when he sees it and not hold on to a delusion like preterism!

Imagine being present in the first century as a follower of the Hebrew God, Yahweh. Imagine combing through the Gospel according to Matthew thirty years after the death of the Nazarene and you recall the carpenter's son, and you remember the teachings and the particular way about Him. He was of man, yet there was a sense of transcendence about Him that intrigued you. You recall the persuasion of Cephas and his tenacity to proclaim that the Messiah you and your family had been looking for was, in fact, the one they called Jesus. You remember there were so many at Pentecost who refused the idea and there was only a small percentage to respond favorably to the teachings of Cephas and the eleven. Yet now in your older age you've experienced so much turmoil looking for your elders, scribes, and Pharisees to balance their way of life with that of Rome. Israel was never in a position of authority or the very idea of Israel being a sovereign kingdom was mocked in all the days of your life. As an honest Hebrew, you knew most of your peoples' time had been reigned by another. As a child, you learned that there were times of deliverance in the Torah, in the prophets, and the writings - but only when Israel obeyed Yahweh with a pure heart and pure actions. Now that you have a family of your own and you see the rampant hypocrisy of those in the synagogue, you know that the kingdom that Yahweh promised is not of this world. It couldn't be. This kingdom that belonged to this Christ was as pure and undefiled as a baby. You now know that this is it. The Kingdom is here. The Kingdom is now.

Shall we fast forward to the present age? Here we are over 2,700 years after Isaiah told of the virgin that would bring forth a son and He would be God among us (Isa. 7:14). The first words recorded by Mark of Jesus are at the beginning of His ministry: "***The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand***" (Mk. 1:15). No fluff. No dodging. No side-stepping. Just a King serving as His own orator and the very promises of God fulfilled in Himself (2 Cor. 1:20). These promises include the coming of His Kingship and Kingdom for the reign of all the nations and not just Israel alone. The passage for our consideration is the following: "***For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom***" (Matt. 16:27-28). Gathering from the context of this verse we will deal with two purposed questions: (1) *What is the Kingdom?* (2) *Who would see it?* Let us consider these two questions in frame of their context.

If there ever were a time when the body of Christ were to exult and exalt over the Kingdom and their beloved King, it is now. Our society stands in political turmoil over kings and kingdoms and, more intimate to Americans, the present elections and the transfer of powers concerning the presidency. If one were to have a conversation with his neighbor concerning what is found on the majority of media outlets today, you'll find a range of emotions. Emotions of frustration, nervousness, fright, instability, anger, and the

list continues in the mind of those whose hope is in this kingdom of earth. Neither America, nor any other kingdom of man is the Kingdom for which our Lord died! Father, hasten the day that Americanized Christianity or as some put it "*churchianity*" dies. Where one takes passages meant for the Old Testament church of Israel and apply them to modern America. Or, where as long as one is a proactive member in society that holds to more traditional American values, they are seen as "Christian" as though America and the church of Christ are synonymous. God forbid that. We are faithful citizens to this country because we are Christians and we obey for the Lord's sake (Rom. 13:1-7). Our citizenship is in Heaven, not America (Phil. 3:20). We are not Americans who just happen to be Christians. We are Christians who live in America. We pledge allegiance to the cross of Christ foremost and alone. Any other allegiance we pledge to is on behalf of Christ to further the advancement of His Kingdom. So, what is "that Kingdom"?

Matthew boldly proclaims Christ as King and His Kingdom as the church through the quill and parchment of Good news. Matthew is the only gospel account writer who uses the word "*ekklesia*" and He uses it interchangeably with the word "*kingdom*" (16:18,19). The Kingdom that belongs to Christ is the Church that belongs to Christ. For John himself wrote that he was, "***...also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ***" (Rev. 1:9). The first century church knew the very presence of the Kingdom without hesitation. It was a Kingdom of the faith. Ezekiel prophesied, "***My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.***" (Ezk. 37:27). Paul reminded the church of the Kingdom of Christ and that God's very Spirit was within them as His New Testament church (1 Cor. 3:16-17). A Kingdom made up of those who profess Christ as the Son of God (Matt. 16:16) and who obey Him as King of their life. By this lifelong journey of faithfulness they remain in His Kingdom by remaining in Him (John 15:4).

Considering the second question, "*Who would see it*" in the context of that passage, Jesus would be spiritually referring to his disciples. They would see it, because they would be looking for it by faith (v. 16). These are those who would not be filled with the "***leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees***" (v. 11). What is that "*leaven*"? The leaven of wickedness and spiritual adultery that impairs the eyes and ears of the heart (Matt. 13:13-16). The context may include the skeptics of Jesus' day and one may say that even the Pharisee, Scribe, and Gentile alike would "*see*" the Kingdom come in their present age. Jesus said, "***There be some standing here, which shall not taste death, till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom.***" So it would absolutely arrive within the lifespan of those in the presence of Jesus. But not all would receive it. It is my prayer that you have the eyes to see and ears to hear, that the Kingdom of Heaven is here. Humble yourselves before the Christ, so that He may exalt you. It is the Father's good pleasure to give you this King and His Kingdom (Lk. 12:32).

Across the years the familiar verse, “*This world is not my home, I am just a-passing through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue*” has rung through our church buildings as Christians praise God in expectation of the eternal home awaiting us in heaven. Jesus said He will return for the church, promising, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also” (Jn. 14:3). When He comes, Christians will meet Him in the air, where we will be with Him always (1 The. 4:17). Yet there are some who feel the eternal home of God’s people is not in heaven, but on earth. Some erring Christians have joined ranks with groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and myriad denominational millennialist sects to teach that the earth will be the permanent residence of the faithful. Advocates of the doctrine known variously as the “A.D. 70 Doctrine,” “Realized Eschatology,” etc., teach that all prophecies contained in the Bible were fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and, therefore, any reference to the destruction of the earth refer to the system of Judaism, not to the physical earth. Additionally, proponents of the “renovated earth” theory believe the “new heavens and new earth” passages (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 14:3; 21:1) mean the true eternal home of God’s people will be right here where we currently stand.

Some of these groups point to passages such as Ecclesiastes 1:4 as evidence to support their doctrine. In this passage, Solomon writes, “*One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever.*” Taken by itself with no surrounding context, one might be led to believe the earth will never be destroyed. Is that what this passage teaches? Should this passage be taken as evidence to bolster their doctrine? Or are there sound biblical reasons to understand this passage differently? Taking Ecclesiastes 1:4 as proof that the earth will last forever as the eternal abode of the saved violates at least three basics of biblical interpretation, and therefore should be rejected.

First, it violates the immediate context. The book of Ecclesiastes teaches that there is a stark separation between the temporary physical creation and the eternal spiritual realm. Solomon begins by laying out the vanity of man’s labor upon the earth. He makes clear that men seem to pass out of existence in this world quickly as compared to the earth. Thus, “*One generation passes away, and another generation comes*” (Ecc. 1:4a). This was written in contrast to the seemingly unchanging nature of the earth (1:4b), sun (1:5), wind (1:6), water cycles (1:7), and the continual efforts of man upon the earth that seem to be repeated by different generations, but never remembered (1:8-11). After all of these labors,

Solomon declares that man’s spirit doesn’t linger eternally in the physical world. He says God has put “eternity” in the hearts of men (3:11). Both men and animals die and their physical bodies return to the earth (3:20), but the spirit of man goes “upward” while the spirit of the animal goes “down to the earth” (3:21). Solomon says that God is in heaven and man on earth (5:2), and when man dies he goes to his eternal home (12:5b), his spirit returning to God (12:7), and therefore to heaven! Solomon also proclaimed the dead will never more have a share in anything done under the sun (9:6), so how could earth be his eternal home?

Second, it violates the remote context. Claiming Ecclesiastes 1:4 teaches the earth will never end contradicts too many passages in the scriptures to be accepted. Christ teaches that the earth will be destroyed. He says, “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away*” (Matt. 24:35). The Psalmist proclaims, “*Of old You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment;*” (Ps. 102:25-26a). Ultimately, the scriptures teach that the earth will be destroyed by fire. The apostle Peter teaches the day of the Lord’s return will be sudden, and both the heavens (sky, space) and the earth will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10-12). He literally says the earth will be “dissolved” and even the “elements” will melt with

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away”

(Matthew 24:35)

fervent heat.

Third, and finally, it violates the principle that one should always use clearly literal passages to help understand figurative passages. One of the most important rules of biblical interpretation is to never interpret literal passages by figurative ones. And yet, folks who demand that Ecclesiastes 1:4 should overrule Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:35 and Peter’s writings in 2 Peter 3:10-12 are doing just that. Ecclesiastes is clearly written in a poetic format, as are other books of the Bible such as Psalms, Proverbs, and Song of Solomon. In contains inspired truth, but in poetic works one must be very careful to ascertain the main point the passage is teaching. In Ecclesiastes 1:4, Solomon is not discussing whether or not God’s people will live eternally on a physical earth, but rather the brevity of man’s life. Therefore, we should allow literal passages that do address the fate of the earth be the final word. Solomon’s words as recorded in Ecclesiastes 1:4 do not teach that the earth will never be destroyed. Christians can continue to take comfort as we sing the words, “*This world is not my home!*” Our hope is not in a physical world to come, but when this earthly body dies, we have a “house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” awaiting (2 Cor. 5:1)!

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The Churches of Christ

- Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3)
- Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Married to Christ (Rom. 7:4)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Jesus the Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23)
- Added to the church by God (Acts 2:41, 47)

Salvation

- Saved by grace, though faith (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Not by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26)
- Not by grace alone (Matt. 7:21)
- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
- Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
- Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
- Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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