

## End-Time Weirdness & Its Counterpart - Reactionism

(Excerpt from "Is The Church in Denial About End-times? By PJ Hanley)

Recently I read a story about a man who came out of a coma. He had an automobile accident in 1984 and had been in a coma ever since. Now he was awake! Incredible! However, he knew nothing about the nineties or the new millennium. He had slept through it all. He thought Ronald Reagan was still President. Imagine!

Well, I remember Ronald Reagan and the eighties, but without some help, I cannot remember much about the year 1984, except for one thing - George Orwell. I do remember all the talk about his famous predictions throughout the seventies concerning 1984. It seemed so far away then, and now it was here. Amazing!

As a young believer in the late seventies, I heard much about end-times. Hal Lindsey's book called *The Late Great Planet Earth* was huge. Everybody was talking about it! People were reading books on how to prepare, except they weren't talking so much about holiness and godly living. It was more about hideouts, farms, communal living and the like. Of course, since we were in the "cold war" era, the threat of nuclear conflict was very real. Many were building shelters and bunkers and storing food. In one way it was exciting and I admit, a little scary. Yet, there were so few who agreed on anything and I couldn't help but notice the glassy eyes and the reckless lifestyles of many "mark of the beast" interpreters. I remember hearing about the "Illuminati" and the "Council on Foreign Relations" and how they were conspiring to take over the planet and hand it to the Antichrist. It certainly had some truth in it, but it all seemed so "weird." Many of those circulating it were also "weird," if you know what I mean. I thought we had reached the epitome of "weirdness" when the notion was circulated among believers that Ronald Reagan (good old conservative Ronnie) was the Antichrist because his name added up to 666. Then came the book, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture is in 1988*. That caused quite a stir. I could scarcely believe how many sincere believers took that seriously. But they did, much to the chagrin of pastors and leaders the world over, who seem to have decided that unless the rapture actually happens, they will never talk about it again. And just when the dust had settled in 1994, out came Harold Camping's book called *Are You Ready?*, declaring that Jesus was returning in Sept 1994. However, by then no one in the "main stream" seemed to pay much attention, and rightfully so, since it was just another wrong prediction.

Then the Millennium came. Despite the fact that it was a significant date and there was good reason to be on our feet, it was not the return of Jesus that had the church on edge. No indeed, it was something called "y2k." Can we ever forget it? Every other church was preparing for a worldwide computer blackout which was going to bankrupt the economy

and bring everything to a standstill. There was not going to be enough food or fuel or anything. I can't imagine what happened to all the generators that were bought (They are likely sitting in garages with all that worthless exercise equipment). There was, of course, a genuine concern? There was reason to be concerned, to be prudent, but not to overreact. We advised our people to have some supplies, just in case. Many real experts had warned about the problem, but some also said they expected government and business to be ready, which they were. But what amazed me was all the books from all the same prophetic authors who had suddenly become experts on computer programming. They were everywhere! And when January 1st 2000 came, it was such a letdown. Absolutely nothing happened! And, of course, pastors and church leaders the world over, attributed it all to the prophetic "weirdos" who are always trying to predict the end. As a result, they are more disinterested than ever in the subject of the end of the age.

### **Reactionism is Dangerous**

I was taught as a young believer to forget about the horns on the beast and concentrate on character. This, of course, was a reaction to the people who seemed more interested in the number 666 than in keeping a job or providing for their families. Although it was good advice to keep oneself focused on Jesus and His love rather than interpretations of Biblical prophecy, it was an overreaction. As I matured a bit, I realized that I could seek out an understanding of Biblical prophecy as well as love Jesus and do His will. I didn't have to give up one for the other. In fact, it is my love for Jesus that makes Biblical prophecy exciting to me. It's the understanding of His soon return and kingdom. After all, isn't that what it's all about? Yet, so many Christians are told not to think about the future and the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, but only about how to live for Jesus today and reach the lost. But the Bible suggests that anticipation of His imminent return is our blessed hope and the greatest motivation to live for Him now. So why should we let go of our hope? Why should we not find out what the horns mean? After all, it was written for us, was it not? Should we let some "weirdos" steal from us the encouragement and hope of Biblical prophecy? This is nothing more than what I call reactionism.

Reactionism is the practice of forming theological points of view, interpretation of Scripture, and codes of conduct out of a reaction to what someone else has said or done. It almost always results in "throwing out the baby with the bathwater." The bathwater is bad; therefore everything associated with it is bad, including the baby. Some examples are the following:

- ü Psychics predict the future with demonic help; therefore, predicting the future is demonic.

ü My experience with church leadership has been very bad; therefore, I have concluded that God does not want us to have leaders. After all, Jesus said not to call anyone “Leader.”

ü The church that I was a part of was incredibly organized so much so, that everyone was assigned a certain seat. Therefore, the church that I pastor will not have any order. Everything will be done spontaneously. After all, that’s the way it was in the Book of Acts.

Reactionism is one of the greatest problems in the church today. Whole systems of erroneous theology are established by it. Great movements are derailed because of it. By it, truth is imprisoned and knowledge veiled as strongholds of deception are built up in the minds of its subjects. It shuts the door to revelation from God and opens it to fear and deception. Those who succumb to reactionism usually end up embracing something the same or worse than what they sought to reject. They threw out the baby with the bathwater and ended up with no baby and a tub full of different bathwater, just as dirty. How much better it would have been to extract the baby first, no matter how difficult, and then discard the bathwater.

Whenever we are confronted by extremes either in interpretation of Scripture or in the behavior of believers, it is easy to react defensively and try to distance ourselves from what they are saying or doing. However, though it is important to avoid non-Biblical teaching or practice, it is never good to form conclusions based on our reactions. Reactions are not objective in their analysis. They are often charged with emotional hurt, pain, fear or frustration. They can be the result of ignorance, wrong teaching, or strongholds of thought built up in our own minds. Sometimes something may appear strange or even extreme to us, simply because it is different to what we understand or experience. Therefore, we must be careful to discern and judge things with objectivity and openness, rather than merely reacting. We must listen to the Holy Spirit and search the Scriptures objectively to see what they say about the matter. And we must be willing to have our position challenged, tested and corrected if need be. We must heed the advice of Paul who urged us to “test everything and hold on to the good” (1Thess 5:21).

Interestingly enough, Paul gave this admonition to the Thessalonians in the context of prophecy.

“Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” 1Thess 5:19-22 NIV (Emphasis mine)

Paul’s words are usually interpreted as speaking here about prophecy spoken by some dear soul in the Sunday morning service to encourage the church. Though that is a fair application of the Scripture, it is a very narrow one. The context of the verse is end-time

prophecy. It's about the return of Christ. Thus Paul is referring to prophecy that predicts the future and gives direction to the people of God, hence the admonition, to examine everything carefully. Much of what comes forth in churches today does not need this kind of careful scrutiny. Also, since the warning is to test prophecies, it is implied that part of that process of testing is to evaluate these predictions in light of Biblical prophecy and teaching on the subject. This, of course, also implies that interpretations of Biblical prophecy that come forth today are prophetic in nature and should be judged in the same way. They should not be treated with contempt, but should be examined carefully in the light of Scripture and the good ones held onto.

It is my conviction that many in the church today, particularly pastors and leaders, are doing exactly what Paul said not to do. They are treating prophecy with contempt. They have put all prophecy and predictions with regard to the end of the age in the contempt category. They have either dismissed it entirely, or are carrying in their hearts a subtle contempt for the subject. This response is primarily a reaction to false predictions and "weirdness" over the years but it is also rooted in fear and ignorance. Many, not wanting to be seen by the world as "religious fanatics," have disassociated themselves from those who make any predictions or who even interpret Biblical prophecy at all. As a result, the church at the end of the age is woefully ignorant and unequipped for the days in which we live.

## **Pastors Wake Up**

At this point I had intended to insert a number of statements of prominent pastors with regard to end-times, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy. But I decided it was best not to mention names in this context, since it would probably be interpreted as an attack on other ministries. However, I will let this headline from a national newspaper<sup>2</sup> say it for me:

"Scripture scholars, pastors play down end-times speculation"

This article concerned itself with the 9/11 tragedy and its relationship, if any, to end-times. Certain church leaders and pastors were asked to comment. Similar articles appeared in many newspapers across the nation then and since, as more and more Americans become concerned about the end of the world. But what did the pastors have to say? The majority, as usual, respond with what appears to be embarrassment that the subject has come up. And almost like politicians, they dodge the issue and tell everyone how important it is that we work for Jesus and help the needy, instead of trying to understand end times. Of course, they also have to say, "Nobody really knows except the Father Himself anyway." They almost make it seem like it is impossible to live for Jesus, evangelize the lost, care for the needy, and at the same time, be a student of Biblical prophecy. What a shame! What a

missed opportunity! The world is craving answers, but the church is too embarrassed to respond. Instead, they are going to Nostradamus.

However, they are also turning to the Left Behind Series and some of them are finding Jesus. Thank God for that! Whether they get it all right or not, at least they will know Jesus and that He is coming soon!

Now I know there is no mention of the 9/11 incident in the book of Revelation, despite what some speculate, but please, let's not suggest that it is not related to end-times. Indeed, it is only the beginning. I know that, and so do most pastors and leaders. The Bible is very clear that things will get really bad for the world's inhabitants. But why are we afraid to tell them, even when they ask questions about it? Are we more concerned about being politically correct? Doesn't God want them to know the end is near? Does He not allow it all to happen so that they will turn to Him? Are they not signs of the times? Why not tell them? Why the "wishy-washy" responses, and the "nobody really knows" stuff? The world knows the church has made mistakes with Biblical prophecy, but they aren't holding it against us. On the contrary, they are still asking and still listening. Indeed, pollsters tell us that over 40% of Americans believe the end is near, and sales of prophecy books went up 71% after 9/11. What then is the problem with preachers? Do they not believe the end is near? That's the real question! Most of what I read from well known Christian, Charismatic leaders and writers rarely suggests that we are in the end and usually gives me the impression that the return of Jesus is a long way off. But what if they are wrong? What if we are the last generation of this age? Where does it say we should be ignorant and not know? When we compare what preachers are saying today playing down end-times, with what Jesus said, there is a rather stark contrast.

"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21:34-36 NIV (Emphasis Mine)

Jesus warned the church to be watching and praying. Let me ask, how does one watch? What does one watch for? Could that day be coming unexpectedly for the majority of the church?

As I end this chapter, I recall how it started with the man in the coma. He slept through almost two decades, including 9/11. Is the church in a coma as far as end-times is concerned? Will it wake up any time soon?