

"Full Preterism" : Manichean or Perfectionist-Pelagian?

By Gary North

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For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).

Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant (Isa. 56:11-12).

Well, which will it be? Here are two irreconcilable views of history, and more important, two irreconcilable views of the culmination of history and what will follow.

Which one is correct?

A Manichean would deny them both. He would say that the confidence underlying both views of the future is illusory. A Manichean insists that there is an equal ultimacy in history between good and evil. It proclaims faith in the eternity of the struggle between good and evil. In Manicheanism's worldview, neither good nor evil can ever totally overwhelm the forces of its opposition. Ethics is a matter of power, and the struggle for power is eternal.

Manicheanism is an ancient philosophy, but it still flourishes today. Modern scientific evolutionism is Manichean to the core. Denying the origin of the world in the creation out of nothing by God, the evolutionist also denies the scientific validity, and therefore the relevance, of any final judgment of the world by God. The world will end, he insists, if it ends at all, in the heat death of the universe. Absolute zero will be the universe's tomb. [Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2.] Nothing that man or his successor species can do will change this. The end of all life will be cosmically impersonal, just as the origin of all life was cosmically impersonal. There will be no final judgment. On the other hand, if the world does not end, then it must be assumed to continue eternally in a series of cosmic expansions and contractions. [Stanley Jaki,

Science and Creation: from Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, B1974).]

There will be no final judgment.

The evolutionist's denial of final judgment leads to his denial of absolute ethics. In between the Big Bang and the heat death of the universe, mankind survives briefly and precariously. There are no binding laws other than the laws of evolution. That which enables a species to survive genetically in an ever-changing environment is all that matters to that species. Situation ethics -- absolute within any limited environment and time period, but subject to change tomorrow -- is the logical corollary of a world that is not subject to a final judgment by God.

Modern evolutionism is merely the latest in a long line of Manichean religions. In the thirteenth century, Manicheism was brought into Western Europe as a result of renewed East-West contacts during the crusades. One medieval version of this dualist heresy was called the Albigensian heresy because of its geographical concentration in southern France. Variants were known as Catharism and Bogomilism. [Stephen Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, [1947] 1982); Bernard Hamilton, *The Albigensian Crusade* (London: Historical Association, 1974); Milan Loos, *Dualist Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Prague: Academia M. Nijhof, 1974).]

Christianity has always opposed Manicheism. The doctrine of the final judgment militates against any belief in an eternal conflict between good and evil. But, beginning on the fringes of Protestantism in the late nineteenth century, and escalating in the United States since about 1980, the Manichean heresy has experienced a revival. Pastors seem unaware of its existence, even after this heresy has entered their own congregations.

Heresy Is a Reaction Against Orthodoxy

Heresies begin as rival theologies, and then are brought into the church, all dressed up in the garb of orthodoxy. Alien philosophies of God, man, law, historical causation, and time and eternity are reworked to fit Scriptural terminology and concepts. They spread within the church as supposed clarifications of an original true Christianity. To remove these heresies from the church, theologians and pastors must first recognize them as alien imports. This is why J. Gresham Machen wrote *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923): to identify the heresy of theological liberalism as an alien religion, the religion of sovereign, covenant-breaking man. [Gary North, *Crossed Fingers: How the Liberals Captured the Presbyterian Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1996), Part 3.]

In this brief study, I identify the theological origin of the new Manicheism. In order to understand this heretical theology, the reader first needs to know where the heresy comes

into conflict with orthodoxy. In two passages above all others in Scripture, the conflict becomes inescapable: I Corinthians 15 and Revelation 20.

First, Paul challenged all varieties of Manicheanism in his account the Christ's second coming. He spoke of an inheritance that is closed to men in sinful flesh.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (I Cor. 15:50-55).

This section of I Corinthians 15 might be interpreted as referring only to heaven. John undermined this interpretation. Revelation 20 provides additional information regarding (1) the historical events that immediately precede the final judgment, (2) the physical resurrection of the dead, and (3) the post-resurrection state of covenant-breakers.

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:7-15).

Paul's discussion of the final judgment is the consummation of this epistle-long argument regarding judgment in general. He had pointed to the final judgment in chapter 3: "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (vv. 12-15). At the final judgment, every covenant-keeper's work will be judged retroactively by God.

No covenant-keeper will be subject to the second death that John refers to. The lake of fire is no threat to him.

Paul writes: "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (v. 15). But every person's work will be judged and rewarded accordingly.

What is the first death, if the second death is the lake of fire? There is only one possibility: the physical death of each individual. Yet even here, there is a legitimate hope that it will be avoided by a few. Paul teaches elsewhere that at the final judgment, covenant-keepers who are alive at the time of Christ's bodily return will escape the first death.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (I Thes. 4:13-18).

Those who "sleep with Jesus" have passed through the first death that separates history from heaven. They will accompany Jesus when He returns bodily in final judgment.

Some people will be alive at the time when Christ returns with the trumpet and a shout. This will be no secret Rapture. This will be a public event -- the most public event in the history of man. The dead in Christ will rise.

This cannot mean "spiritually dead," for in Christ, no one is spiritually dead. It refers to physical death. Those covenant-keepers who are still alive in their physical bodies will be caught up with the resurrected dead into the clouds.

Corruption and Incorruption

Paul teaches in I Corinthians 15 that those covenant-keepers who have not experienced what John would have called the first death, and who are therefore still burdened by sin and its curse, will join those covenant-keepers who return with Christ. For this to take place, they must be delivered from original sin and its curse, death. This will take place prior to their ascent into the sky. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (v. 52).

This has to take place before the ascent because corruption cannot inherit incorruption. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"

(v. 53). This is Paul's theme of inheritance in this chapter. Eschatology has to do with point five of the biblical covenant model: inheritance. Paul is speaking here of the nature of the covenant-keeper's inheritance on judgment day. He will inherit incorruption. Whether he will subsequently receive rewards of gold, silver, and precious stones depends on God's retroactive judgment of his work, but he will inherit incorruption, which begins with the transformation of his death-cursed physical body and his sin-ravaged soul.

And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (vv. 45-55).

The theological issue here is the separate physical condition of what the English-language version of the Apostles' Creed calls the quick and the dead. Covenant-keepers are spiritually alive in history. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). But there is a difference between the celestial body, which covenant-keepers inherit at the time of their physical death, and the earthly body, which they must occupy in history. This difference cannot be bridged by sinful men, not even at the last trump. They must receive their celestial bodies before they can be joined with covenant-keepers who have already received their celestial bodies. The dead in Christ will rise first (I Thes. 4:16). All flesh is not the same flesh, and the two cannot mingle together.

But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man

is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption (vv. 38-50).

There can be and has been mingling in history between men and sin-free angels, but angels are not members of the church. They are not part of the bride of Christ (body of Christ), which the church is. There was also mingling between incorruption and corruption in the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, but He was born of a woman by the Holy Spirit. He was God as well as a perfect man. God can mingle with sinful men.

The only biblical example of mingling in history between sinful humans and a deceased saint is Samuel's appearance to Saul and the witch of Endor. Calling him up from the grave was a major sin on the part of Saul, and he lost his kingdom and his life the next day because of it. Samuel told him: "Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines" (I Sam. 28:19). The judgment on Saul was an extension of his sin. Saul and his sons would soon mingle with the dead. His family's kingly inheritance in Israel would end.

Church Militant and Church Triumphant

The difference between the church in history and the church in heaven has long been acknowledged in the two terms applied to the church's two branches. The church in history is called the church militant. The church in heaven is called the church triumphant.

The distinguishing feature between them is not spiritual warfare with Satan. It is not that the church in heaven has in some way been taken out of the spiritual battle against Satan. We know this because of what John records in Revelation 6:

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled (Rev. 6:9-11).

The saints in heaven remain in the fight against Satan, interceding with God on behalf of the church militant. In this context, "triumphant" refers to the heavenly church's perfect victory over sin and corruption.

Original sin no longer afflicts its members. In contrast, the church in history is still afflicted with sin. It is still in the great ethical war against the kingdom of Satan. In heaven, the church has been transformed. Sin is no longer a problem. Incorruption has

inherited incorruption in heaven. There is more to inherit, of course, for the bodily resurrection of all mankind still lies ahead. The final judgment lies ahead. "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (II Peter 3:7). The post-resurrection transformation of the world after the final judgment has not yet taken place (Rev. 21, 22). But, in heaven, there is a preliminary inheritance of incorruption, beginning with the church's complete victory over sin, which is the inheritance that counts most in the warfare between good and evil. Jesus made this clear in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). The ability to do the will of God perfectly is the greatest inheritance of all.

Because those who occupy corrupt bodies cannot do the will of God perfectly, as those in heaven do it, which is why they are required to pray this prayer, the two realms of the church are separated by a great gulf. So also are heaven and hell, and for the same reason. The sinner in hell remains a sinner. There is no good left in him.

Jesus revealed in his parable of Lazarus the beggar and the rich man that the spiritual gulf that exists after the first death is permanent.

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence (Luke 16:22-26).

The decisive issue here is original sin. Sin's presence and its curse afflict the soul: in history (all mankind) and in eternity (covenant-breakers). God does transform each covenant-keeper's sin-cursed soul, either at the first death, or, in the unique case of those still alive at the time of Christ's second coming at the final judgment, without any transition through the first death.

Those covenant-keepers who will be graced by God by being alive at the time of Christ's Second Coming will be like Elijah: carried up into the sky without having to go into the ground or the sea in burial.

So, the terms "corruption" and "incorruption" refer to original sin and its effects. The word "corruption" refers both to men in history and covenant-breakers in eternity.

In neither case can corruption inherit incorruption. Sin's great gulf separates covenant-keepers from their incorrupt inheritance until after the first death. Everything good which they possess in history is an earnest, or down payment, on their future inheritance.

Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts (II Cor. 1:21-22).

For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord (II Cor. 5:4-8).

The question arises: Will all of the members of God's church ever celebrate together in a joint victory over sin?

Put another way, will there be any time in history when all covenant-keepers will be able to mingle together in a joint operation? The answer is no. A great gulf separates them sin-cursed covenant-keepers from sin-free covenant-keepers.

So, if there is ever to be sin-free fellowship by all members of the church, original sin's presence and its curse must be removed entirely.

Final Judgments in Matthew 25

Matthew 25 contains two parables and a prophecy. The parables are specific. They describe the kingdom of heaven. This means that they describe a single corporate entity which is still in existence. They tell of judgment: a final reckoning or accounting. The third section of the passage, the prophecy of the sheep and the goats, does not mention the kingdom. The expositor's task is to keep these categories straight. There is one common theme: final judgment.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

The first parable presents the story of the bridegroom who comes in judgment.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But

he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh (Matt. 25:1-13).

Christ used a variation of the phrase, "I know you not," in the same eschatological context -- final judgment -- in another passage. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:21-23).

Both of these passages can be applied to God's judgment on Old Covenant Israel, which was final. The question is: Must this be their exclusive application? The kingdom of heaven in Matthew refers to the kingdom of God in history. The Old Covenant order still was part of God's kingdom in Christ's day. There will be final judgment, Jesus taught. The final judgment on Old Covenant Israel, which was still in the future when Christ spoke these words, took place at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The final judgment on the church will be the final judgment at the end of time. Wise virgins keep oil in their lamps.

Unwise virgins do not. The latter will be caught short, Christ taught. This warning applied to Old Covenant Israel. Because the kingdom is still operating in history, it will also apply to self-deceived church members at the end of time. At the final judgment, there will be self-deceived people who have run out of oil.

The parable of the ten virgins pictures a kingdom in which half the participants are on duty, and the other half are not. This applies to the church and Old Covenant Israel. Jesus was warning His listeners, who included representatives of both branches of the kingdom during the era of transition, that they should remain faithful, alert, and on the job. At the fall of Jerusalem, judgment came on members of the half associated with Old Covenant Israel.

The other half survived, because they had paid attention to Christ's words in Matthew 24 (Luke 21). Their survival meant that they possessed exclusive title to the kingdom of God, just as Christ had warned the Jews: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43).

The term "kingdom" applied in Jesus' day to both the New Covenant church and Old Covenant Israel. It no longer does. It now applies only to the church. This means that the parable of the ten virgins now applies exclusively to the church. It indicates that within the church on the final day of judgment that will end Satan's kingdom, there will be unprepared church members who will be caught short.

There will be covenant-breakers within the church at the final judgment. Original sin will still be a problem.

This parable describes the kingdom of heaven, which still operates in history. Thus, we should conclude that its warning still applies to history. There will be an unexpected day of corporate reckoning. Keep oil in your lamp, Jesus said.

A Long Journey and a Final Accounting

The next parable in Matthew 25 presents the story of a rich man who leaves a great deal of gold behind for his workers to invest. This indicates a long period of stewardship. The Greek text does not mention the kingdom.

The translators inserted the phrase on the assumption -- reasonable -- that this parable also describes the kingdom.

Again, Jesus was telling His disciples to be diligent workers. This warning applies to every Christian throughout history. That it also applied to the Jews in Jesus' day is equally true. Their long time of testing was about to end. They were about to be forced to give an account of their stewardship. The kingdom was about to be taken from them and transferred to the church.

In the parallel version in Luke, this information is added. "But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). The king brings final judgment against them: "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me" (Luke 19:27). In Luke's version, the poor steward is not said to be cast into outer darkness, as the servant in Matthew is (Matt. 25:30). What little he had was taken from him and given to the most profitable servant (Luke 19:24). Jews literally died in A.D. 70. In the future final judgment, covenant-breakers will die the second death. "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14-15).

In both versions of this parable, the profitable servants receive rewards based on their prior performance.

"His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21). "And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities (Luke 19:17). This testifies to an extension of life on earth.

Their venue does not change. What they have achieved in history will lead to greater authority and therefore greater responsibility in a post-judgment world. This testifies to a post-resurrection world that will have continuity with this one, but without the presence of evil-doers: a major discontinuity. With respect to the final judgment on Old Covenant Israel, the church inherited everything associated with the kingdom. In the post-resurrection world, the church will inherit the earth, which will be co-extensive with God's kingdom.

What was final for Old Covenant Israel in A.D. 70 was at the same time the beginning of the church's exclusive monopoly of title for the kingdom of God/heaven. The inheritance of Old Covenant Israel in A.D. 70 was passed exclusively to the church. This kingdom still operates in history. The progressive extension of the kingdom by the church is described in the parable of the rich man: his departure, his long journey, and his return. The next accounting will be final. It will end the long period of history that the Bible defines as the kingdom of God/heaven.

With respect to the church, the time was short before the judgment came on Old Covenant Israel. Yet this parable speaks of a ruler who goes on a long journey. This indicates that Jesus looked ahead and saw two judgments: on Old Covenant Israel, as the culmination of its long period of poor stewardship, and the final judgment, as the culmination of the church's long period of stewardship.

Sheep and Goats Assembled, Yet Separated

Next comes something completely different from the two kingdom parables. The final section of Matthew 25 deals with the final judgment at the end of time: the sheep and the goats. This passage is not limited to the kingdom of God. What it describes is a general judgment.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (vv. 31-34).

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels (v. 41).

The goats here are corporately separated from the sheep. Why? Paul tells us why in I Corinthians 15, which also declares an absolute separation: celestial bodies vs. terrestrial bodies, spiritual bodies vs. natural bodies, incorrupt bodies vs. corrupt bodies. They will never mingle. This prohibition on mingling applies to the sheep.

When God finally judges sin and its effects, he will bring together all of the members of His church, but none of them will be in a terrestrial body. This is why all covenant-keepers who are alive at Christ's second coming will have their bodies changed before they meet the returning saints from heaven. With respect to the goats, there is separation from the sheep because sin and its effects are still with the goats. They will not receive purified bodies and souls at the resurrection, for Christ's perfect humanity was not imputed to them by God in history. Their moral corruption extends into eternity. Therefore, they cannot mingle with the sheep. The wall of separation will be maintained throughout eternity, just as it is maintained between heaven and hell today.

To argue that sin-cursed covenant-keepers and sin-free covenant-keepers can operate jointly, either in heaven or in history, is to deny what Paul and Christ clearly taught regarding this mandatory separation. This is a major argument against any version of popular premillennialism which teaches that heavenly saints will return to rule in history alongside sin-burdened saints. (The professionally trained theologians of the dispensational movement, such as J. Dwight Pentecost, have fully understood this and have taught against any "mixed multitude" of saints during the millennium. Pentecost wrote: "Thus the millennial age will be concerned only with men who have been saved but are living in their natural bodies." [J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Relation between Living and Resurrected Saints in The Millennium," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 117 (Oct. 1960), p. 341.]

But there is a related heresy, as we shall see. To argue in favor of the permanent separation, but then to conclude that the church must be separated throughout eternity into two parts -- celestial and terrestrial -- because the church militant will always coexist with the church triumphant, is to deny the final judgment's bringing together of both branches of the church through the discontinuous transformation of the pre-first death members of Christ's bride: from corruption into incorruption. This eschatology -- really, an anti-eschatology (no last things) -- denies the literal historical fulfillment of Paul's prophecy regarding the future resurrection of the sin-free physical bodies of the saints, who have died the first death in Christ, to be joined with their sin-free souls returning to earth from heaven. It also denies the future transformation from corruption to incorruption of the bodies and souls of living and breathing covenant-keepers at the time of Christ's coming at the final judgment.

There were two final judgments in Christ's teachings: the one that ended the Old Covenant order in A.D. 70, and the other that will end Satan's kingdom in history. The two parables in Matthew 25 were therefore warnings to the Jews, but also still serve as warnings to Christians. The still unfulfilled prophecy of the sheep and the goats refers to covenant-keepers in general and covenant-breakers in general. Old Covenant Israel has nothing to do with it.

Creeds and Confessions on the Final Judgment

The Nicene Creed (325) declares: "On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end." This confession has been the universal testimony of the entire Christian church. It has been a test of orthodoxy, East and West, for almost seventeen centuries.

In what is known as the Apostles' Creed, we read this of Jesus Christ: "The third day he rose again from the dead: He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty: From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." This language can be found in a statement as early as the fourth century: Marcellus of Ancyra (340). It may go back as early as the third century. It, too, has been a familiar public confession by Trinitarian churches for many centuries.

In these formulations, God's final judgment of both the living and the dead is said to take place in the future. It cannot have been an event in the past.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) devotes its final chapter, XXXIII, to a consideration of "The Final Judgment." It says that this judgment will be in the future.

I. God hath appointed a day, wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged; but likewise all persons, that have lived upon earth, shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.

II. The end of God's appointing this day, is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of his justice in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord: but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

III. As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity: so will he have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.

We learn the following. First, this event is still in the future. Second, it will lead to the eternal assembling of all the saints: "For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord."

Third, the fear of this future event should "deter all men from sin." The timing of this day is "unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come." There is an ethical aspect of this doctrine, which must be upheld by orthodox Christians.

The Larger Catechism (1647) explicitly refers to the joining together of all the saints, which will occur at the time of the resurrection. Notice the reference to being caught up in the clouds. At that time, the transformed saints will judge the angels.

Question 90: What shall be done to the righteous at the day of judgment?

Answer: At the day of judgment, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on his right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted, shall join with him in the judging of reprobate angels and men, and shall be received into heaven, where they shall be fully and forever freed from all sin and misery; filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company

of innumerable saints and holy angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity.

And this is the perfect and full communion, which the members of the invisible church shall enjoy with Christ in glory, at the resurrection and day of judgment.

This will be the unification of the saints: "perfect and full communion." The church militant will disappear: "they shall be fully and forever freed from all sin and misery." The church triumphant will replace it entirely: "filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity."

We come now to the issue at hand: the revival of Manicheanism within the church.

Heretical Preterism

Preterism is an interpretation of biblical prophecies that argues that many, but not all, of the New Testament's prophecies of judgment were fulfilled in A.D. 70 with the Roman army's destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the defeat of Israel's rebellion. This interpretation has been around for centuries. It is generally associated with postmillennialism, but there is nothing in preterism that cannot be accepted by amillennialists. It is because J. Marcellus Kik's short books, *Revelation 20* and *Matthew 24*, revived interest in preterism a generation ago that postmillennialism is closely associated with this view.

Kik was a postmillennialist, and so was R. J. Rushdoony, who encouraged the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company to publish Kik's two short books in one paperback, *An Eschatology of Victory* (1971). It is quite possible for an amillennialist to hold classic preterism, just as C. Vanderwaal does. [C. Vanderwaal, Hal Lindsey and *Biblical Prophecy* (Neerlander, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, [1978] 1991).]

Classic preterism argues that the key to understanding the prophecies of Matthew 24 is verse 34: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." Everything prior to this verse was fulfilled by the fall of Jerusalem. In contrast, the separation of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 has always been seen by the church as referring to the final judgment. Heretical preterism contends that Matthew 25 is governed by the prophetic time frame of Matthew 24:34.

Indeed, all New Testament prophecy is said to be governed by this verse. As J. Stuart Russell asked rhetorically in 1878, "What can be more comprehensive and conclusive than our Lord's words, 'Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled'?" [J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*, new edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, [no date] 1983), p. 545.] The point is, this passage is not comprehensive. It applies to the events described in Matthew 24, but we may not legitimately assume that it covers every eschatological passage in the New Testament, which is what heretical

preterists assume and then attempt to prove. In this attempt, they wind up in one of two camps:

Manicheanism or perfectionism-Pelagianism, as we shall see.

Heretical preterism is an interpretation of biblical prophecies that argues that all of the New Testament's prophecies of judgment were fulfilled in A.D. 70. To argue that all of the prophecies concerning God's final judgment were fulfilled in A.D. 70 is to take a public stand against Paul's teaching regarding the inheritance of incorruption by corruption. It is also to reject the historic creeds of the church. The heretical preterists deny the creeds of the church on this point, which is why they are heretical ecclesiastically. They deny Paul with regard to the final overcoming of sin in history -- the full inheritance of incorruption by incorruption -- which is why they are heretical theologically. They proclaim "full preterism," which denies the full inheritance of incorruption in the future. Corruption must remain the permanent incomplete inheritance of the church militant.

Because heretical preterists believe that God's final judgment is behind us historically -- A.D. 70 -- some of them also believe that sin is eternal. Sin is with the church today in this, the supposedly post-final-judgment world. They insist that there is no future eschatological event that will transform this world. "What we see now is what we Christians will get in history forever." There is therefore no hope of deliverance from sin in history, and no hope of deliverance from history for the church militant. Because preterism is not necessarily postmillennial, this position can be interpreted as teaching that the church militant will suffer ever-more grievously at the hands of covenant-breakers in history, which will never end. Surely, it means at least this: there must forever be a separation between the church militant and the church triumphant. The Lord's Prayer will never be answered: "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10b). Heaven's perfection is forever denied to history, which is infinite in duration. The church militant must forever struggle with sin and its effects. Satan's work of treachery in the garden will never be finally and completely overcome.

This view of history and eternity stands in opposition to what every branch of the Trinitarian church has taught throughout recorded history. The heretical nature of their position has been downplayed by the system's public defenders. They prefer, for tactical and perhaps personal psychological reasons, to avoid discussing the obvious implications of their position. If they publicly, enthusiastically, and continually declared their view of history as sin-cursed forever, they would eventually be excommunicated. They would have to fund their own churches with their own money. This is as it should be. They should not redefine the meaning of common words in Scripture in order to make their secret, "insiders-only" positions seem more acceptable to naive church members who have not examined the details of their system. They should forcefully say in public that the historic creeds are wrong and therefore not binding on them as church members. They should have the courage to challenge the elders in their congregations to publicly abandon or rewrite both the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed. It is time for heretical preterists to come clean in public and confidently declare their belief in the eternal separation of the church militant and the church triumphant, challenging all of their

theological opponents to refute them, to excommunicate them if they dare. To do less than this is to substitute a strategy of subversion for open theological discussion. It is time for them publicly to answer Paul's rhetorical question, "O death, where is thy sting?" with the only answer that is consistent with their system: "In history and forever."

The Manichean implications of this position are numerous. First, God will never bring history to a close; thus, good and evil will battle for the minds and souls of men eternally. Second, because corruption cannot inherit incorruption, as most heretical preterists acknowledge when pressed, the continuity of corruption in history makes impossible any inheritance of perfection in some post- resurrection New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21, 22). The only New Heaven and New Earth that Christians will ever obtain in their physical bodies is an extension of what Christians experience now. Third, Paul's promise of the eschatological transformation of the creation at the final judgment (I Cor. 15:24-25, 42-50) is seen as applying not to the creation but to the individual's transformation at death. Corruption in history is eternal. Terrestrial bodies will occupy the earth for as long as celestial bodies praise God in heaven. Fourth, covenant-breakers possess equally valid eschatological claims to the earth as covenant-keepers do. The tares will occupy the field of history eternally, right alongside the wheat. Matthew 13 will never come to pass as the end of history: "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (vv. 40-42). Anyone who equates the fulfillment of this prophecy with A.D. 70 is a Manichean. The Manicheism of any such interpretation stands out most clearly in its rejection of the post- resurrection fulfillment of verse 43: "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." Heretical preterists refuse to hear.

The Deviant Theology of J. Stuart Russell

When a pastor discovers that someone in his congregation believes what the member calls full preterism, it would be wise for the pastor to devote several sermons to refuting the heretical version of preterism, most notably the views of J. Stuart Russell. Russell's book is a common, agreed-upon source for contemporary proponents of heretical preterism. If the member can be made to say to the elders, "But I don't believe what Russell taught," the elders will have left the member theologically defenseless.

To refute Russell is to refute the theological foundation for modern heretical preterism, at least in Presbyterian and Reformed circles.

Russell taught that the parable of the ten virgins refers exclusively to the imminent fall of Jerusalem. He also taught that the separation of sheep and goats described in Matthew 25 refers exclusively to this event. "The parables of the ten virgins, the talents, and the sheep and the goats all belong to this same event, and are fulfilled in the judgment of Israel." [Russell, *Parousia*, p. 140.] Also fulfilled in A.D. 70 was the bodily resurrection of the dead, he said. "The resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the world, and the casting

out of Satan are represented as coincident with the Parousia, and near at hand." [Ibid., pp. 139-40.] Here is his general principle of prophetic interpretation:

We have in these passages another new phrase in connexion with the approaching consummation, which is peculiar to the Fourth Gospel. We never find in the Synoptics the expression 'the last day,' although we do find its equivalents, 'that day,' and 'the day of judgment.' It cannot be doubted that these expressions are synonymous, and refer to the same period. But we have already seen that the judgment is contemporaneous with the 'end of the age' (sonteleia ton aiwnoj), and we infer that 'the last day' is only another form of the expression 'the end of the age or Aeon.' The Parousia also is constantly represented as coincident in point of time with the 'end of the age,' so that all these great events, the Parousia, the resurrection of the dead, the judgment, and the last day, are contemporaneous. Since, then, the end of the age is not, as is generally imagined, the end of the world, or total destruction of the earth, but the close of the Jewish economy; and since our Lord Himself distinctly and frequently places that event within the limits of the existing generation, we conclude that the Parousia the resurrection, the judgment, and the last day, all belong to the period of the destruction of Jerusalem. [Ibid., p. 126.]

Russell's book is an example of Manicheanism by stealth, assuming that he believed in the doctrine of original sin. By relegating to A.D. 70 all of the New Testament's passages that relate to the final judgment, Russell implicitly introduced a variant of Manichean dualism. I can well understand why he refused to put his name on the first edition of his book in 1878. [Ibid., p. 1.] He wanted to "test the waters" before he identified himself in public. Why else would insist that his book be published anonymously, the same way that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* in 1848. Given the fact of original sin, which is permanent in corrupt mankind, Russell's eschatology is Manichean, but he moves his disciples to this position by default. As a result of his theology, they initially decide what they do not believe about eschatology -- the final, comprehensive, worldwide inheritance of incorruption by incorruption -- but they never publicly announce what they, by default, must believe about the future: an eternal conflict between good and evil. Russell was as subtle as a serpent, for he held the formal theology of the serpent: the eternality of the historical kingdom of Satan.

Was He Really a Manichean?

Russell's language at the end of his book indicates that he was a postmillennialist. He was not. He was a Manichean. If he was not a Manichean, then he was a perfectionist and a Pelagian. Some perfectionists teach that a sinner can overcome original sin through self-discipline under God. Others teach that perfection is attained at the time of regeneration -- not merely Christ's perfect moral status imputed to him legally, but His perfect moral status worked out historically. Pelagianism teaches that, in theory, some people need not ever sin at all, from womb to tomb.

Russell began the final section of his book with a crucial admission: the Bible is silent regarding the future of history. For him, the Bible is silent about eschatology -- the last things -- because all New Testament prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70. He writes: "Here

we might pause, for Scripture prophecy guides us no further." [Ibid., p. 549.] He spoke of history as if it were open-ended eschatologically -- the essence of Manicheanism in a world where original sin exists. His next sentence is important in this regard: "But the close of the aeon is not the end of the world, and the fate of Israel teaches us nothing respecting the destiny of the human race." [Ibid., p. 549.]

He was wrong. Christ's final corporate judgment of the Old Covenant order in A.D. 70 teaches Christians to expect a future corporate judgment of the whole world. After a long period, from Abraham's call until A.D. 70, Christ returned to require a final accounting from that nation which had long possessed the kingdom of God. At that time, He transferred His kingdom to the church (Matt. 21:43), which is now an international institution, a new nation. He will come again in judgment to require a final corporate accounting from His people and from all mankind, as John taught in Revelation 20:12-15.

Russell continued: "Whether we will or no, we cannot help speculating about the future. . . ." Here he identified all statements about the church's future as mere speculation. This was because his hermeneutic applies all biblical prophecy to A.D. 70. There is supposedly nothing left over to guide Christians or the church regarding the future. For the brief remainder of the book, he cited not one passage that deals explicitly with prophecy. How could he? He had already squandered exegetically on A.D. 70 the church's eschatological inheritance. So, he speculated.

What he proposed bore a superficial resemblance to postmillennialism's view of the future. But a postmillennialism that is stripped of all Bible passages relating either to prophecy or to eschatology -- last things -- is merely a disguised importation into the church of either the late nineteenth century's pop-Darwinian ideal of moral progress or else perfectionism-Pelagianism.

Russell then invoked the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10b). He commented: "For every God-taught prayer contains a prophecy, and conveys a promise." [Ibid., p. 553.]

Indeed, it does. This particular corporate prayer ("our Father," not "my Father") asks for corporate perfection: that life on earth will someday be as sin-free as life in heaven. It asks for a world in which the church militant will follow the will of God on earth with the same triumphant success as the church triumphant does now. This can be achieved in only one way: by completely removing sin from the world. The church militant must be transformed into the church triumphant. This will be done discontinuously, Paul taught: in the twinkling of an eye (I Cor. 15:52). Perfection for sinful man can never be the culmination of the compound growth of righteousness over sin in history. Man is burdened by original sin. The effects of original sin are in his very being. Moral corruption is a permanent condition in every man in history, Paul taught (Rom. 7). It can be overcome only by the discontinuous intervention of God: either at the individual's death or at the last trump. In history, no person can ever escape this limitation: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). The perfectionist denies this, which is why he is a heretic. [B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Perfectionism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, [1931] 1958).]

Russell denied that there will be a last trump. There will be no final corporate transformation of the church militant. The church militant is eternal, as far as the Bible tells us, if we apply every passage dealing with final judgment to A.D. 70. Russell imported an alien imitation of postmillennialism to match his alien concept of time without end. He wrote: "The true implication of New Testament prophecy, instead of leaving us in darkness, encourages hope. It relieves the gloom which hung over a world which was believed to be destined to perish. There is no reason to infer that because Jerusalem was destroyed the world must burn; or, because the apostate nation was condemned, the human race must be consigned to perdition.

All sinister anticipation rests upon an erroneous interpretation of Scripture; and, the fallacies being cleared away, the prospect brightens with a glorious hope." [Russell, *Parousia*, pp. 551-52.] Some hope: the ethical progress of the church militant in history, with no prospect of a discontinuous deliverance from the curse of death, or deliverance from the burden of original sin, or the final victory of God over His covenantal enemies in history. Some hope: the eternity of original sin and its curses in history.

Unless. . . Unless Russell did not believe in original sin. He ended his book on this upbeat note: "This world belongs no more to the devil, but to God. Christ will redeem it, and will recover it, and draw all men unto him." [Ibid., p. 553.] This may mean progressive sanctification without final sanctification, i.e., the permanence of residual sin forever: a heresy (Manicheanism). If it does not mean this, then it must mean absolute perfection in history: a heresy (perfectionism). It would mean that Christians can escape original sin in history: a heresy (Pelagianism).

Russell was not a postmillennialist, despite a superficial resemblance. He was either a happy-face Manichean or else a perfectionist-Pelagian. Whichever he was, he was heretical, and not just a little heretical. He stood in defiance of the church's creeds and confessions on the question of the final judgment, and in doing so, he adopted either an implicit Manicheanism or else multiple explicit heresies that deny the permanence of original sin in history.

This is always the reality of heresy. You cannot limit heresy to just one. To adopt one forces you to adopt others. Russell's official heresy was his denial of the final judgment. He chose not to name his accompanying heresy (Manicheanism) or heresies (perfectionism- Pelagianism), but they are inevitable implications of his system nonetheless.

Russell's modern disciples can successfully refute my accusation that he was a Manichean only by arguing that he was a perfectionist and a Pelagian. This will do them little good if they are brought to trial in churches that adhere to the teachings of John Calvin. (Lutheranism's official amillennialism is sufficient to condemn them in Lutheran churches.) If they are found to be promoting heretical preterism in a Presbyterian church, they will find no theological support for any denial of their Manicheanism by an affirmation of perfectionism- Pelagianism. On the other hand, if they are not perfectionists or Pelagians, then they are Manicheans.

Take your pick.

I pick Manicheanism for them. This is because I see Russell's theology as offering an indefinite extension of time to Satan and Satan's legacy to man: original sin. Russell says that the world belongs to God. So what? God has always owned the world. Original sin is nevertheless a force that can be overcome in men only by God's discontinuous translation of their bodies: terrestrial bodies into celestial. Only if Russell did not believe in original sin -- and on this, he was silent -- was he not a Manichean.

If he was not a Manichean, then the two key theological questions regarding his theology are these. First, on what theological basis can any Christian argue that original sin will be completely removed in history?

Second, how much time has God allotted to history, i.e., the realm in which original sin operates, and the church militant struggles continually to overcome sin progressively? It is clear that Russell denied any future, final, and discontinuous corporate judgment of the world by God. He was therefore unquestionably heretical -- a man who was wise initially to publish his book anonymously. It is clear that he also denied any future, final, and discontinuous corporate deliverance of the church militant from the bondage and curse of original sin. He was therefore unquestionably heretical.

His disciples now have the moral responsibility of deciding which of his possible heresies to accept by remaining his disciples: either Manicheanism or a combined package of perfectionism-Pelagianism. There is no orthodox theological way out for any follower of Russell who affirms the doctrine of original sin. By adopting Russell's theory of world history without a final judgment, but without Russell's perfectionism and Pelagianism, he must affirm an operational Manicheanism: a world without end and also without deliverance from sin. This view grants to Satan what the creeds and confessions deny: influence in history forever.

I recommend the immediate public recantation and personal repentance of Russell's theology. Barring this, I recommend the heretic's excommunication by his church's judicial body. But an excommunicant always retains his liberty of conscience. He has his choice among several possible Russellite heresies. Russell was a very creative theologian. He offered so many ways for his followers to drift into heresy. The elders should allow the accused member to identify the heresy for which he is then excommunicated.

Russell is typical of most one-shot theological heretics. He took his stand against the entire church, wrote one book, and let it go at that. But, in theology as in everything else, you cannot change just one thing. You cannot revise just one doctrine. Trinitarian theology after almost two millennia is a finely honed, carefully balanced enterprise. Orthodox theologians know that when anyone revises a single doctrine, even at the edges, a whole host of fall-out effects will result. An innovating theologian has an obligation to explore these unintended and unforeseen implications and deal with them before he releases his new discovery to the church.

Russell rejected the doctrine of final judgment. He wrote a narrowly focused monograph that promoted the obviously heretical position of "no final judgment and no end of history," and then he abandoned his disciples to take the consequences for defending his

thesis. His thesis immediately raised the issue of Manicheanism vs. Pelagianism, but he provided no indication in his book that he recognized either implication. He did not try to deal with these issues exegetically or philosophically.

He initially published his book anonymously. This indicates that he recognized at least some of the personal risks in proposing such a creed-denying thesis. Most of his followers have not been equally alert to these risks.

They have committed themselves emotionally and intellectually to a ticking time bomb. Russell made subversives out of most of his disciples. As awareness spreads among church officers regarding the dangerously heretical nature of his theology, only a few of his followers will avoid the accusation of being subversives: the frontal-assault kamikazes who are willing to go public in defense of his position. As laymen without any institutional base, they can be dealt with easily enough. The subversives in the churches are the main threat.

The Structural Necessity of Subversion

Because heretical preterists oppose the historic creeds and confessions of the church, they have an institutional problem. Their spokesmen have only rarely been ordained as church officers. There is no good reason for a heretical preterist to seek ordination in any denomination that is governed by the historic creeds or by a Reformation-era confession. As soon as he announced from the pulpit or in print his views on the final judgment, he would be subject to formal de-frocking. Few men will spend the time and money necessary for ordination in a hierarchical, creed-bound church in order to be publicly de-frocked soon after he articulates his most precious distinguishing truths. What would be the point?

This makes the heretical preterist movement of necessity a permanent movement of laymen. These laymen recognize early that they will spend their lives in the wilderness, ecclesiastically speaking. They have come to grips with this emotionally; they remain in orthodox churches. They see themselves as ecclesiastical spoilers of other men's legacies, not as long-term builders of their own. The means of their spoilation is clandestine evangelism among the faithful. They seek to recruit other laymen to a "new, improved" theology that breaks with almost two millennia of credal tradition on the doctrine of the final judgment.

Their theological position is not taught in any seminary. It is not found in any systematic theology. It is not the product of decades or centuries of formal debate and refinement. It is encapsulated in no formal confession of faith. This theology remains undeveloped. Nevertheless, its proponents continue to evangelize.

Heretical preterists want all of the benefits of church membership: Christian fellowship, the sacraments, and help in times of need. But they are unwilling to start their own congregations, ordain their own ministers, pay for their own buildings, start their own seminaries or, above all, come to any formal, judicially enforceable agreement with one

another regarding the details of what it is that they believe about a universe without a final historical judgment.

They seek to create a fellowship of private confessional believers within a larger fellowship of public confessional believers. The larger fellowship is covenantal. It is based on a public creed or confession of faith that formally rejects the eschatological position of heretical preterism. Heretical preterists today cannot win by a frontal assault on these creeds and confessions. They do not have the votes. So, they seek to create their own insiders' group. They seek to create a mentality of "them vs. us" in their targeted victims, where "them" represents the covenantal hierarchy of the church, and "us" refers to members of a clandestine sub-group who have formally placed themselves under the judicial authority of elders whose task it is to police the congregation by means of a doctrinal statement. Then they clandestinely deny the truth of the binding doctrinal statement. A few of their spokesmen are public; most of them are not. If these laymen do not call attention to themselves by making public pronouncements, they can continue to recruit.

They can operate in this way far more successfully in a denomination that does not require laymen formally to affirm their commitment to the denomination's confession of faith as a condition of gaining voting membership. This is one reason why heretical preterism is spreading inside Presbyterian churches. Presbyterianism's by-laws do not require either voting or communing members to affirm allegiance to the Westminster standards or any previous church creed. This fact makes far easier the recruiting activities of heretical preterists. They can quietly go about their evangelism, and, whenever discovered by church authorities, they can evade or at least postpone the threat of church sanctions. How? Because they have never affirmed the Westminster standards. The church's authorities must actively seek to force them to admit that they are in rebellion. This is not easy. It usually takes a formal hearing. It may take a trial. Only rarely will heretical preterists make an admission of guilt voluntarily. Why should they? Not for conscience's sake.

They are not emotionally burdened by guilt for subverting confessional standards that they have never formally affirmed. By keeping quiet in public and recruiting in the shadows, they can undermine the orthodoxy of other laymen before church authorities recognize what is going on.

Presbyterian laymen can promote heresy without violating Presbyterian law until such time as they are ordered by a local church court to cease and desist. They have not previously been asked by the elders to affirm their commitment to the Westminster standards. As long as they do not seek ordination, which requires formal affirmation of the Westminster standards, they feel free to evangelize for their position on a guilt-free basis because, technically, they are not violating any formal rules. They adhere to the letter of Presbyterian law while defying its spirit.

"But I Don't Believe That!"

Heretical preterism is strictly a laymen's movement.

Heretical preterists hold no church councils, hammer out no statements of faith, sign no affirmations, and submit themselves to no ecclesiastical authority that can enforce the provisions of their defining theology. They refuse to subordinate themselves formally to anyone in their movement who could then hold them accountable for what they say or do. Instead, they officially subordinate themselves to historic churches, but they mentally cross their fingers regarding the clear statements of the historic creeds and confessions regarding the final judgment as being in the future. When it comes to these historic creeds, they mentally say to themselves, "But I don't believe that."

This phrase -- "But I don't believe that!" -- is a way of psychological preservation for them. It is their way of being in the historic church but not being confessionally of it. This phrase is also a major component of their strategy of subversion. When confronted by church authorities regarding the obvious implications of their faith, they respond, "But I don't believe that." They can get away with this because their intellectual spokesmen refuse to put into print the obviously heretical implications of their faith: either Manicheanism or perfectionism-Pelagianism. Their critics cannot go to a public document that they have passed around privately that openly declares the Manichean or perfectionist implications of their position. When they are confronted by church officials with these inescapable theological implications, they seek to evade responsibility for them by saying, "But I don't believe that." This gains them additional time to undermine the orthodox faith of laymen around them whom they continue clandestinely to seek to recruit.

They do not choose to make a public announcement of their faith in its Manichean implications or its alternative perfectionist-Pelagian implications. Some of them may not even be aware of these implications. This is not an era in which laymen are encouraged or trained to think theologically. Those few who do have an interest in theology can be sidetracked by other laymen who hand them a thick, seemingly thought-out book like *The Parousia*. This is why the subversives gain converts.

Orthodox Christians, especially church officers, should recognize this heresy for what it is: either an affirmation of the eternal power of Satan through mankind's original sin, or else a denial of the permanence of original sin in history. I think heretical preterism today is mainly Manichean rather than perfectionist, because its adherents are generally believers in original sin. Given the doctrine of the permanence of original sin, heretical preterism represents one more attempt to import Manicheanism into the church: the doctrine of an eternally unresolved struggle between good and evil.

Church officers who learn of any member's commitment to the doctrine of "full preterism" have an obligation to help this member clarify his or her thinking, and either become fully consistent with the full-preterist position or else fully abandon it. The member should be brought before the church's session or other disciplinary body and asked the following six questions in writing:

1. Is God's final judgment (Matt. 25:31- 46; Rev. 20:12-15) behind us historically?

2. Is the physical resurrection of the dead (I Cor. 15; I Thes. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:12-13) behind us historically?
3. Will the church militant struggle against sin in history forever, paralleling the church triumphant's eternally sin-free existence in heaven?
4. Will sin and its curse, including physical death, continue throughout history, paralleling sin-free eternity in heaven?
5. Is original sin a temporary condition of mankind in history?
6. Are the Nicene Creed and Apostles' Creed incorrect when they identify Christ's final judgment of the living and the dead as being in the future?

If he answers yes to question four, he has adopted Manicheanism. If he answers yes to question five, he has adopted either perfectionism or Pelagianism. If he answers yes to both four and five, he is confused.

It is quite possible that the member has not thought through the implications of his position. He may not be willing to affirm any of these conclusions. In fact, his refusal to affirm any of this is quite likely. The elders must be prepared for the standard answer of heretical preterists who are "caught in the act": "But I don't believe that!" In order to pressure the member to begin to think carefully about whatever it is that he really does believe, it is imperative that the disciplinary body obtain a signed statement from the member that he does not affirm any of these six views, and also that he holds the opposite views. The signed and dated statement should look something like this:

I believe the following:

God's final judgment is still in the future. The judgment that He brought on Israel and the Old Covenant in A.D. 70 was not the final judgment described in Matthew 25:31-46; I Corinthians 15:24-56, and Revelation 20:12-15.

God's final judgment will involve the simultaneous resurrection of all of the dead, at which time God will publicly identify covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers (Matt. 25:31-46).

Members of each group will be consigned to their eternal places of abode: either the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev. 21, 22) or the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).

Sin will no longer operate in history after this final judgment of Satan and all those joined by covenant to him.

This will be the fulfillment of the Lord's prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

If the congregation is Presbyterian, the member must also be asked to sign an affirmation of Chapter XXXIII of the Westminster Confession of Faith and answer 90 of the Larger Catechism.

This signed statement constitutes a formal rejection of the "full preterist" position. The member must be told in advance that this signed statement can be shown to others at the discretion of the session. If the member refuses to sign such a statement under these conditions, the elders should continue the disciplinary process.

There are only three lawful ways out of a local congregation: by death, by letter of transfer, and by excommunication. Presbyterian laymen who have been brought before the church's session because they are suspected of holding heretical preterism, and who persist in their commitment to heretical preterism by refusing to sign a statement that is consistent with the Westminster standards, must be removed from membership in the local congregation by excommunication.

Dealing Institutionally With Heretical Preterism

Ecclesiastical judgment is necessary (I Cor. 6). It is a prelude to final judgment. More than this: it is an affirmation of final judgment. This is what Paul told the church at Corinth. He told them that they had an obligation to deal with public sin in their midst (I Cor. 5). Modern churches are no less obligated.

Those who hold heretical preterism are not inclined to keep their opinions to themselves. A pastor should assume that any church member who has been influenced by Russell's book or by Russell's contemporary disciples has discussed Russell's ideas with other members in the congregation, though not its Manichean or its perfectionist implications.

As with Russell himself, who initially published his book anonymously, his disciples are sometimes clandestine in their promotion of these opinions. A pastor should automatically assume that a strategy of subversion is in operation whenever he discovers even one Russellite in his congregation. He must take steps to undermine it early.

Heretical preterism is a matter for church discipline, not academic debate in a joint forum. These two approaches for dealing with theological error must be distinguished.

In 1880, the faculty of Princeton Seminary made a catastrophic error. They decided to enter into a joint publishing venture with liberal Union Seminary. This was the idea of Union's Charles A. Briggs, who was de-frocked for heresy in 1893, mainly because of his harsh rhetoric in an 1891 lecture. [North, *Crossed Fingers*, chaps. 4, 5.]

Briggs understood in 1880 that if he could lure the Princeton faculty into a jointly sponsored debate over the higher criticism of the Bible, he could move this issue from a matter of church discipline to a topic of formal academic debate -- just one opinion among many. The jointly published journal, *Presbyterian Review*, opened the floodgates to higher criticism within the Presbyterian Church, 1881-83. [Ibid., ch. 3.] These gates were never again closed.

No critic of Russell's version of preterism should participate in any joint venture with those who hold any variation of Russell's position unless he publicly identifies the position as heretical and a matter of church discipline. If a third party invites representatives of heretical preterism to present their case, orthodox Christians involved

in the conference or forum should begin their presentations with a clear statement that heretical preterism is in fact heretical and should be a matter of church discipline. Academics tend to forget that public debates are representative forums. These forums grant equal status to all participants. A Russellite should never be acknowledged as possessing equal status by someone who affirms the historic creeds of the church. He should be treated as if he were a Jehovah's Witness. The Apostle's Creed is more clearly anti-Russellite than it is anti-Arian. Jehovah's Witnesses are Arians. Both forms of Russellism are equally heretical: J. Stuart's and Charles Taze's. They should be dealt with inside the church in the same way.

Conclusion

God's final judgment of the world is coming. It did not take place in A.D. 70, which was God's final judgment on Old Covenant Israel. The bodily resurrection of all mankind is in the future. The dumping of the contents of hell into the lake of fire also lies ahead. If a person is to be an orthodox Christian, he should take his stand publicly with Paul, John, and the historic creeds and confessions of the church. They all agree with respect to the final judgment: it lies ahead. For as long as original sin remains the condition of humanity, God's final judgment of the world remains in the future.

Heretical preterism offers no eschatology, if we define eschatology as "the doctrine of last things." For heretical preterism, there are no last things for the church militant. There is only eternity: the permanently sin-cursed world of the church militant and the incorrupt world of the church triumphant. In place of eschatology, heretical preterism offers either Manicheanism or perfectionism-Pelagianism. In our day, it offers mainly Manicheanism: the equal ultimacy of good and evil forever, world without end, amen. It offers a vision of a church that forever will receive a grim answer to its prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." That answer is simple: "Not a chance."

It is Satan who gives this answer, not God.

J. Stuart Russell introduced his book with this statement: "The work is almost wholly exegetical; and there is no attempt to invent or establish a theory, but only, by honest and faithful interpretation of the New Testament Scriptures, to allow them to speak for themselves." [Russell, Parousia, p. 1.]

I conclude with this warning: whenever anyone tells you that he is merely letting the facts speak for themselves, and that he has no hidden agenda or underlying theory, I strongly advise you to keep your hand upon your wallet and your back against the wall.