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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

The Preview of Christ's Second Coming (1:7–8)

The book of Revelation is the ultimate action thriller. Anyone who loves a great novel will certainly love this book. It contains drama, suspense, mystery, and horror. It tells of rebellion, unprecedented economic collapse, and the ultimate war of human history. Revelation is a book of astounding drama and horror, but also of hope and joy. It culminates with a happy ending, as sin and death are banished forever (Revelation 21:4; 22:3).

In verses 7–8, John provides his readers with a preview of what will come later in the Revelation. In doing so, he reveals the theme of the book as the second coming of Christ. Five truths about His second coming are communicated for our understanding:

1. The Necessity of the Second Coming - *Behold, He is coming (1:7a)*

Verse 7 begins the first great prophetic oracle of Revelation. “Behold” is intended to arouse the mind and heart to consider what follows. This is the first of its twenty-five uses in Revelation—a book filled with startling truths that demand careful attention.

The “Coming One” was a title for Christ. This Greek word (*Erchomai*) is used nine times in Revelation to refer to Jesus Christ; seven times by our Lord in reference to Himself. Thus, the theme of the book of Revelation is the Coming One, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Despite the scoffers who deny the second coming (2 Peter 3:3–4), the Bible repeatedly affirms that Jesus will return. That truth appears in more than five hundred verses throughout the Bible. It has been estimated that one out of every twenty-five verses in the New Testament refers to the second coming. Jesus repeatedly spoke of His return (Matthew 16:27; 24–25; 26:64; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26) and warned believers to be ready for it (Matthew 24:42, 44; 25:13; Luke 12:40; 21:34–36). The return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth is a central theme in Scripture.

The hope that Christ will one day return and take believers to heaven to live forever in His presence provides hope and comfort for those who know Him (John 14:1–3; 1 Thessalonians 4:17–18).

2. The Glory of the Second Coming - *with the clouds, (1:7b)*

Clouds in Scripture frequently symbolize God's presence. A cloud was used as the visible manifestation of God's presence with Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21–22; 16:10; Numbers 10:34). At Mount Sinai, “a thick cloud upon the mountain” symbolized God's presence (Exodus 19:16). When the Lord communicated with Moses at the Tent of Meeting, “*the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the Lord would speak with Moses*” (Exodus 33:9). Both the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34–38) and the temple (1 Kings 8:10–12) were filled with a cloud symbolizing God's glory at their dedications. Jesus ascended to heaven on a cloud (Acts 1:9).



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Believers will ascend with clouds at the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:17), and Christ will return with clouds (cf. Daniel 7:13; Matthew 24:30).

The clouds picture Christ's descent from heaven. More significant, they symbolize the brilliant light that accompanies God's presence. The appearance of the Christ and the brilliance of innumerable angels and the redeemed who accompany Him will be both an indescribable and terrifying event.

3. The Scope of the Second Coming - *and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. (1:7c)*

During the incarnation, Christ's glory was hidden. Only Peter, James, and John caught a glimpse of it at the transfiguration. At His second coming, every eye will see Him. His glory will be obvious to all humanity.

John divides those who will see the second coming into two groups. "Those who pierced Him" does not refer to the Roman soldiers involved in Christ's crucifixion but to the unbelieving Jews who instigated His death. In Zechariah 12:10 God says, "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn." Peter affirmed that the Jewish people were responsible for Christ's execution, boldly declaring:

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. (Acts 2:22–23; cf. 3:14–15)

Israel's mourning, noted in Zechariah 12:10, will be that of genuine repentance. Many Jews will be saved during the tribulation, both the 144,000 and their converts. But for many others, the second coming will be the time of their salvation. It will be "in that day [that] a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity" (Zechariah 13:1).

John describes the second group as "all the tribes of the earth," a reference to the unbelieving Gentile nations. Like the Jewish people, they will also mourn over Christ. Some of that mourning may relate to the repentance of those who are saved at that time (Revelation 7:9–10, 14). But unlike the Jewish nation, the Gentiles' mourning will not generally result from genuine repentance. "Mourn" is from *koptō*, which literally means "to cut." The word became associated with mourning due to the pagans' practice of cutting themselves when in extreme grief or despair. First Kings 18:28 records that the frenzied, panicked prophets of Baal "cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them" in a desperate attempt to get their god's attention. The Israelites were strictly forbidden to engage in such pagan rituals (Leviticus 19:28; Deuteronomy 14:1).

The Gentiles' mourning will mostly be prompted by terror, not repentance. They will mourn not for the Christ they rejected, but over their doom. (Revelation 9:21).



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4. The Response to the Second Coming - *So it is to be. Amen. (1:7d)*

Experiencing the response of both believers and unbelievers to Christ's second coming, John includes his own response. Using the strongest words of affirmation both in Greek and Hebrew, John pleads for the Lord Jesus Christ to return before noting words from Christ's own voice.

5. The Certainty of the Second Coming - *I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (1:8).*

In this verse the Lord God puts His signature on the prophecy of the second coming recorded in the previous verse. He calls Himself "the Alpha and the Omega," emphasizing His perfect knowledge. Alpha and Omega are the first and final letters in the Greek alphabet. **Second**, as the one "who is and who was and who is to come," God is forever present; He is not confined by time or space. His promise that He will come settles the issue. **Third**, "the Almighty" affirms His perfect power. Nothing can stop Him from carrying out His will.

These terms also imply that He is the creator and consummation of all history. He is the Beginning and the End (cf. Revelation 22:13).

It has been noted that:

- 1. Jesus came the first time in humiliation. He will return in exaltation.*
- 2. He came the first time to serve. He will return to be served.*
- 3. He came the first time as the suffering servant. He will return as the conquering king.*

The challenge the book of Revelation makes to every person is to be ready for His return.

Only those "who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8), who love Him and acknowledge Him as the rightful king, will enjoy the blessings of His kingdom. ~ ***Because the Time is Near - Dr. John MacArthur - An Explanation of the Book of Revelation - The Prologue of Christ's Revelation***

Don't Adjust Your Conscience to Fit the Culture

Most of us are familiar with Martin Luther's heroic statement at the Diet of Worms when he was called upon to recant.

Unless I am convinced by sacred Scripture, or by evident reason, I cannot recant, for my conscience is held captive by the Word of God, and to act against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me.

Today, we rarely hear any reference to the conscience. Yet throughout church history, the best Christian thinkers spoke about the conscience regularly. Thomas Aquinas said the conscience is the God-given inner voice that either accuses or excuses us in terms of what we do.



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John Calvin spoke of the “divine sense” that God puts into every person, and part of that divine sense is the conscience. And when we turn to Scripture, we find that our consciences are an aspect of God’s revelation to us.

When we talk about God’s revelation, we make a distinction between general revelation and special revelation. Special revelation refers to that information given to us in the Word of God. Not everyone in the world possesses this information. Those who have heard it have had the benefit of hearing specific information about God and His plan of redemption.

General revelation refers to the revelation that God gives to every human being on earth. It’s general in the sense that it’s not limited to any specific group of people. It’s global, and it extends to every human being. The audience is general, and the information given is general as well. It doesn’t have the same level of detail that sacred Scripture does.

We must make a further distinction within the context of general revelation between mediate general revelation and immediate general revelation. Mediate general revelation refers to the revelation that God gives through an external medium. The medium is creation, wherein God reveals something about who He is. Paul labors the point particularly in Romans 1 that the general revelation mediated through creation is so clear that every single person knows God exists and, therefore, is without excuse.

Immediate general revelation is revelation that is transmitted to every human being without an external medium. It’s internal, not external. It’s the revelation God plants in the soul of every person. God reveals His law in the mind of every human being by planting a conscience within each of us.

However, we face a problem: the conscience is fluid. It’s not fixed. Almost all people adjust their consciences between childhood and adulthood, and the adjustment is almost always downward. That is, we learn how to turn the volume of our conscience down, and we make the necessary adjustments so that our ethics align with how we want to live and not how God tells us we should live.

This is not to suggest that children are sinless. Even little babies have sinful minds, but the Bible recognizes that the degree of evil found in small children is characteristically different from the degree of evil manifested in adults. Thus, Paul says, “Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature” (1 Corinthians 14:20). He recognized that a baby’s sins are not as heinous as those of people who are mature in age. Somewhere in our development, the gravity of our sins increases. Our consciences are seared as we begin to accept those things that as children we thought were unacceptable.

Almost fifty years ago, a bestselling book with a strange title was published—*The Happy Hooker*, written by Xaviera Hollander, a prostitute. Hollander sought to silence the people who believe that no prostitute in America could find joy in what she was doing. In her book, Hollander celebrates the joy that she experienced in her profession, saying that she never felt guilty about what she was doing. To be sure, Hollander said, the first time she involved herself in prostitution, she felt pangs of guilt. But over time, she got to the point where she felt guilty only when she heard the ringing of church bells. Suddenly, her conscience was disturbed because she was reminded that what she was doing was under the condemnation of Almighty God. Even this hardened professional prostitute could not totally destroy the conscience God had placed within her.



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Here is the supreme irony and tragedy of sin: the more we repeat our sins, the greater the guilt we incur, but the less sensitive we become to the pangs of guilt in our consciences. Paul says that people store up wrath for themselves on the day of wrath (Romans 2:5). That's objective guilt—they are guilty because they have broken God's law. But some people have so destroyed their consciences that they believe it really doesn't matter what they do as long as it is consensual and causes no harm. Their subjective guilt—the sense of guilt that accompanies wrongdoing—diminishes.

We find new ways to view sinful behavior as acceptable, both as individuals and as a culture. We have now killed sixty million babies, tearing them limb from limb. People use social media to boast of this reality, saying how proud they are that they have maintained the freedom of a woman to abort her child. We now boast about marriage between a man and a man, and a woman and a woman, without shame. There is not much of a collective conscience left in this country.

Paul tells us in Romans 1 that people know the righteous judgment of God, and this knowledge of judgment comes through immediate general revelation. What is the nadir of the list of sins in Romans 1? Paul says, "Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" (Romans 1:32). The worst part of Paul's indictment is not that people practice such things despite knowing the righteous judgment of God, but that they approve of those who practice them as well. When people destroy their own consciences, they do everything in their power to destroy the consciences of their neighbors. To quiet their consciences, people will seek allies and will make proclamations such as, "We're only crusading for liberty here, for the freedom of choice." What a strategy. "I'm not pro-murder; I'm pro-choice." That's what the Godfather would say. "I'm pro-choice. I choose to murder my enemies."

However, our purpose in discussing these things is not to lament how bad the world is, but rather how bad we are in that we Christians do the same thing. We, too, adjust our consciences to fit the culture. We try everything in our power to excuse our sin. That's why developing a conscience sensitive to the Word of God is so important. At the Diet of Worms, Luther did not say, "My conscience is held captive by my contemporary culture, by the latest Gallup poll, and by the latest survey that describes what everybody else is doing." He did not say, "My conscience is influenced by the Word of God." In essence, he said, "I am in captivity to the Word of God. That is why I cannot recant." Had his conscience not been captive to God's Word, he would have recanted immediately. So, he said, "To act against conscience is neither right nor safe."

We don't want to hear the judgment of conscience; we want to destroy the judgment of conscience. That's our nature. The only antidote is knowing the mind of Christ. We need men and women whose consciences have been captured by the Word of God. Thank God for His Word. It exposes the lies we tell ourselves to make us feel better. We aren't going to be judged on the last day on whether we feel guilty, but on whether we are guilty. Still, if you feel guilty, thank God for that. The feeling of guilt is the signal that there's probably something wrong. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, and with that conviction comes a certain tender mercy that leads us to repentance and forgiveness so that we might walk in His presence. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.*



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If you have an August birthday or anniversary that is not posted here or is listed in error or you do not want to be published in this newsletter, please e-mail Walt at gwlcf10415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner August 2022

Birthdays

Ben S. (8)

Carrie P. (24)

Ezra P. (26)

Marlin H. (27)

Anniversaries

Mike and Cheryl P. (9)

“When we understand the character of God, when we grasp something of His holiness, then we begin to understand the radical character of our sin and hopelessness. Helpless sinners can survive only by grace. Our strength is futile in itself; we are spiritually impotent without the assistance of a merciful God. We may dislike giving our attention to God's wrath and justice, but until we incline ourselves to these aspects of God's nature, we will never appreciate what has been wrought for us by grace. Even Edwards's sermon on sinners in God's hands was not designed to stress the flames of hell. The resounding accent falls not on the fiery pit but on the hands of the God who holds us and rescues us from it. The hands of God are gracious hands. They alone have the power to rescue us from certain destruction.”
~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, The Holiness of God*



*West Suffolk Baptist Church
Leadership*

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