



"A Christian never falls asleep in the fire, or in deep waters; but he is likely to grow drowsy in the sunshine."

—W.G. Burns

11-Aug-06

Where Is Your Trust?

Almost as riveting as watching the war unfurl in the Middle East is observing the different reactions to it. Evangelicals, for example, take a literal approach when interpreting the prophecies of the last days, and thus any tussle involving the little nation of Israel has many of them creeping forward to the edge of their seats, or perhaps even standing on their tip-toes, anxiously anticipating their trumped up rapture. Others see this war as a call to redouble their efforts to convert the Jews—much to the chagrin of the Jews—so that "the chosen people" can accept their Messiah (through human effort, apparently). The evangelicals are self-assured they will be raptured away before things get too unpleasant, and now feel free to endlessly and gleefully debate how the end will come about for those "left behind."

It is easy to see the shortcomings of this perspective. However, being able to see when this same general approach is used—but with a different scenario—can be more difficult. For example, we may not put our hope in a secret rapture, but could we be guilty of the same assumed-infallibility with regard to the place of safety? Is our hope in a telephone call announcing that it is

time to flee? Is our trust in being on good terms with *the* physical organization that is "guaranteed" to be whisked away and protected from every inconvenience?

We are not called to be "Rapture-Ready," nor even "Place-of-Safety-Ready." We are called to be children of [God](#), changed into spirit beings when [Jesus Christ](#) returns—and there will be nothing secret about that event. This momentous purpose should shape our focus and consideration, not just with respect to current events and prophecy, but especially in the common conduct of our lives. The [Kingdom of God](#) is what we should be seeking—not a self-satisfied avoidance of suffering.

It is possible the current war in Lebanon could become a regional conflict, and it is not unthinkable that it might lead to global war. Perhaps this is the beginning of the end. In any event, the events in the Middle East *should* make us stop and consider. However, we should not just ponder our understanding of end-time prophecy, but we should also readily examine where our relationship with God is, for it is that relationship that determines our ultimate end as well as what our life will consist of in the meantime.

In times of trouble, where is our trust? God neither promotes nor supports salvation-by-association, except in the sense of our association with Him. Ministers are *servants*, not guarantors of safety or salvation. As Paul says, "Not that we [ministers] have dominion over your [faith](#), but are fellow workers [*helpers*, KJV] for your [joy](#); *for by faith you* [the individual Christian] *stand*." ([II Corinthians 1:24](#)) Any man who makes or implies promises of deliverance is assuming a prerogative that is not his.

Putting our hope in a place of safety is likewise misleading, for who can know what God has in mind for each one of us? More specifically, which one of us knows how much more individual spiritual growth is needed for us to be ready to inherit the Kingdom of God? If the fire of the Tribulation—as horrific as it is described—is what will completely purify us, is that not a small price to pay for an eternal place in the Kingdom? On the other hand, does it require greater faith "to be accounted worthy to escape," or to go *through* the Tribulation, glorifying God with a stunning witness of

[faithfulness](#) in the midst of a world breaking apart? The issue of who goes through the Tribulation and why is not as clear cut as we might suppose, *unless* we change our perspective to see it in terms of God's will.

Consider two of the letters in Revelation 2 and 3. The better known is the [letter to Philadelphia](#) ([Revelation 3:7-13](#)). In it, Jesus Christ promises, "Because you have kept My command to persevere, *I also will [keep you from the hour of trial](#)* which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." (verse 10). It is no wonder that being a Philadelphian is so greatly desired! But also notice His statement that seems to be a slight detraction: "...for you have a *little* strength..." (verse 8). This church with a *little* strength—but a great deal of perseverance—is the one that will be kept from the hour of trial. No mention is made of the church's visibility, effectiveness, or influence. God judges according to *faithfulness*, not according to the results—for He determines the results anyway.

Contrast this with the letter to the church in Smyrna ([Revelation 2:8-11](#)), in which there is nothing negative. There is not even a hint of detraction with Smyrna. What does God's providence hold for this church to which He gives no written correction?

Do not fear any of *those things which you are about to suffer*.
Indeed, the devil is about to *throw some of you into prison*, that you may be tested, and *you will have tribulation* ten days. *Be faithful until death* , and I will give you the crown of life. ([Revelation 2:10](#))

Why does God allow these apparently model saints to suffer? Why does God not deliver this singular group from the ignominy of prison and tribulation? The letter does not give us the answer, but it is reasonable to conclude that it is because God is working out far more than physical protection. He is preparing a people who are worthy of the crown of life that can only come from Him.

Our human preference, though, is for the shielded life of a Philadelphian rather than the tested, tempered, uncomfortable, perhaps brutal, life of a seemingly flawless Smyrnian. By itself this is not a wrong desire, but if this desire is not kept in check we could be tempted to compromise, or swayed by men giving assurances of safety and guarantees about our standing with

God. But if our trust is in God, we can echo our Elder Brother's words when He was contemplating his own trial and persecution:

...O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, *Your will be done.* ([Matthew 26:42](#))

- David C. Grabbe

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

Providence is the protective care of God, yet the providence of God also touches on the pains and sufferings of persecution. To the elect whom God foreknew, all things- pleasant or unpleasant- happen for ultimate good (Romans 8:28). Tragic things, calamities, trials, anxiety, evil, and curses happen to Christians too, as well as blessings, in order to become fashioned and molded into the glory of God's image. As Christ learned from the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8), we must also develop patience, refrain from murmuring, and realize that "time and chance" no longer apply to those whom God has called. Whatever it takes to bring God's purpose to pass, we need to develop the humility, obedience, and faith to accept.

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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