

The Future of Christianity, Part I

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"The Future of Christianity" was one of the three themes of Reverend Sun Myung Moon's 21-city tour of the United States beginning in New York in October 1973 and ending in Los Angeles in January 1974. This speech was given in New Orleans, Louisiana on October 28. His interpreter, Mr. Bo Hi Pak writes: "Thank almighty God that I can serve in even a small way in presenting His declaration of truth, which He is revealing through Rev. Sun Myung Moon. This truth has value unparalleled in human history. We now have the means to heal all modern-day human problems, exalt every soul, and bring the kingdom of God within the reach of every man. "

I would like for you and me to spend this time together in open-mindedness so that the spirit of God can speak directly into our hearts. Jesus taught in his Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Matt. 5:3, 5, 6)

Tonight I humbly ask you to be the poor in spirit; I ask you to be the meek, and I ask you to become those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Then we will all see the kingdom of heaven, and we shall all be satisfied. Now let us begin.

Christians, and Christianity itself, have a final hill to cross. Biblical prophecy states that Christians must pass through the end of the world and face the judgment of fire at the great and terrible day of the Lord. The Bible says we are going to see many extraordinary phenomena, in heaven and on earth, as the end comes near.

Tonight we must clarify the meaning of the end of the world as the Bible prophesies it. We should first of all understand that God did not create the world to end. He always intended the world of goodness to last forever. The God who does not create for eternity cannot be an almighty God. The present world must end, however, because the fall of man initiated a history of evil. The end of the world is necessary because we have not achieved God's intended world of goodness. Instead of becoming children of goodness, we have in reality become creatures of evil.

Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden. They were not at that time in a position to have a clear understanding of the will of God. They entered into a state of confusion and made the wrong choice. They were confronted with either obedience to God, which would have brought about the good world, or obedience to Satan, which did in fact bring about their fall. Between two clear choices, Adam and Eve

made the wrong one. They brought evil into the world. God's original intention was to create His ideal world—a good and prosperous world He determined to last for eternity. But man fell, the good world of God ended abruptly, and human history started in the wrong direction. The history of mankind is therefore a history of evil. God sowed good seed, and He intended to harvest a good crop. But Satan stole His crop before it was ripened and reaped a harvest of evil. Human history is a crop of weeds.

The end of evil

Then what does the end of the world mean? Just what is going to end? Evil is going to end. God will put an end to all evil. Out of God's new beginning will come a new opportunity for man. And the goodness God intended in His original ideal can be made real.

In the Garden of Eden man fell into evil instead of developing his goodness. Man was subjugated by Satan and became the child of sin. Therefore the Bible says, "You are of your father the devil." (John 12:31) If the fall of man had not occurred, then the true ruler would be God. But He is not today the King of this universe, because Satan is sitting upon God's throne. God has to remove all results of the fall of man before He can truly reign over the world.

Now I will give you clearly the definition of the end of the world. The end of the world is the moment in history when God ends evil and begins His new age. It is the time of the cross-junction between the old history of evil and the new history of good. In light of this definition, why does the Bible predict extraordinary heavenly phenomena as signs of the end of the world? Will the things predicted really occur? The Bible says:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the power of the heavens will be shaken. (Matt. 24:29)

What does this mean? What are we to expect?

First of all, please rest assured that these things will not happen literally. God will not destroy anything in the universe. God often expresses His truth in symbols and parables, and these Biblical sayings will be accomplished symbolically.

Secondly, God has no reason to destroy the universe. It is not the universe, but man who has committed sin. Only man deviated from the original plan of God's creation. Why should God destroy the animals, or the plants, or anything in creation which fulfilled His purpose as He intended? God would not destroy those innocent things. The Bible therefore says, "Generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever." (Eccl. 1:4) But in Revelation we read: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away." (Rev. 21:1) That new heaven and new earth refers to the coming of the new history of God, a time of new dominion. After you buy a house, won't you move in your family and possessions? Then you will say that you have a new home, and you are the new master of the house. In the same way, when men of God occupy this universe, it will become a new heaven and a new earth.

Gradual change

We know that when winter ends, spring begins. But can we say at precisely what point spring starts? Who can pinpoint the exact instant of transition? You cannot know because the passage into new history. Our step into new history is like a glorious dawn emerging out of the blackest night. The crossing point between good and evil is not obvious. You will not notice it when it happens, but it will definitely take place, just as surely as the sun will rise tomorrow.

Then how can we know when the end is approaching? God will not hide this moment from man; He does not suddenly bring judgment on the world without warning. God will announce the coming of the great and terrible day through his prophets. Amos 3:7 says, "Surely the Lord does nothing, without revealing his secrets to his servants the prophets." God chooses His instrument and through him God announces His plans. This has been the case throughout Bible history.

God needs a man of faith

The person to be chosen as God's prophet must be one of the people living in our evil world. But he must be a man of faith who can demonstrate that he is worthy to be used by God. He must show absolute faith. To do this he must give up all worldly success and completely separate himself from this evil world. He must purify himself by cutting off all evil attachments. He will not be popular in the evil world. God is absolute good and therefore the exact opposite of evil. That is why evil always persecutes a man of God.

Noah was such a man chosen by God and scorned by the evil world. God instructed Noah to build a ship.

He sent Noah to the heights of a mountain instead of down by the riverside or to the seashore. God's command was so ridiculous in the eyes of the evil world that many people laughed at Noah. He was ridiculed, not because people thought him a particularly funny man, but because he followed God's instructions so faithfully. The eyes of the world could not understand the way of God. In this manner, with such implausible instructions, God could test the faith of the man he had chosen as His champion. This is what happened in Noah's day.

And at the time of Abraham it was no different. God called Abraham, the son of an idol-maker, and commanded him, "Leave your home at once!" God does not allow for any compromise. God takes a position where evil can be totally denied. In no other way can good begin. God has said He will start a new history, in which no element of evil will remain. God demands complete response from man. Those who follow God's direction must begin from absolute denial of the evil world. That is why Jesus Christ taught: "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matt. 10:39) He also said, "A man's foes will be those of his own household." (Matt. 10:36)

God's path is not easy

You may ask, what kind of message is this? This is God's way, to choose His own people and put them in a position where they will be rejected by evil. Otherwise His champion can do no good for God. From the point of view of God's standard, then, modern Christians have been having a very easy time. This is very strange, because there is no easy way indicated in Christian teaching. I wonder how many Christians are really serious about following the path of God? God's demand is absolute. It allows for no middle ground.

Then how can we know clearly the path of God? Let us examine the history of God's providence. Today we are anticipating the end of the world. God has made previous attempts to end the world. For example, the time of Noah: That was a crossroads in history, when God wanted to bring an end to evil and begin the world of goodness. Noah was the central figure chosen in God's dispensation. To better understand Noah's mission and the meaning of the end of the world, we want to know more fully how the evil history began.

In the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam and Eve a commandment. That commandment was the word of God. Then Satan approached and enticed them with a lie. And that lie was the word of evil. Adam and Eve were in a position to choose between the two words. The truth was on one side, and a lie was on the other. They chose the lie. Because this was the process of the fall of man, at the end of the world God will give mankind truth. The words of God will come through His prophet. When man accepts the words of God he will then pass from death to life, because truth brings life. Man has died in a lie, and in truth he will be reborn.

Therefore judgment comes by words

These words of God's judgment will be revealed by His chosen prophets. This is the process of the ending of the world. Those who obey and listen to the new word of truth shall have life. Those who deny the word will continue to live in death.

God chose Noah to declare the word. Noah's announcement was, "The flood is coming. The salvation is the ark." The people could have saved themselves by listening to Noah's words. However, the people treated Noah as if he were a crazy man, and they perished—because they opposed the word of God. According to the Bible, only the eight people of Noah's immediate family became passengers on the ark. Only these eight believed, and only these eight were saved.

God had said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth." (Gen. 6:13) Did this actually happen? We know the evil people perished, but was the physical world demolished in the process? No.

This passage was not literally fulfilled, and God did not destroy the earth. God did eradicate the people and destroy evil sovereignty, leaving only the good people of Noah's family. This was God's way to begin to restore the original world of goodness through Noah.

If God had fully consummated His restoration at that time, then we would have heard no more about the end of the world. Once the perfect world of goodness is realized, another end of the world is not necessary. Nothing could then interfere with the eternal reign of God's perfect kingdom.

But the very fact that we anticipate the end of the world today is proof that God did not succeed at the time of Noah. What happened to Noah after the flood should be fully explained, but I cannot spend too much time on that subject tonight. To make a long story short, once again, sin crept into Noah's family through his son, Ham. God's flood judgment was thereby nullified, and evil human history continued until the time of Jesus Christ.

The end of the world at Jesus' time

With the coming of Christ, God again attempted to end the world. Jesus came to start the new kingdom of heaven on earth. Thus, the first words Jesus spoke were, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Indeed, the time of Jesus Christ's ministry was the end of the world. That great and terrible day was prophesied by Malachi, about 400 years before the birth of Jesus:

For behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evil-doers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. (Mal. 4:1)

Was the judgment of Jesus Christ done by literal fire? Did the day come at the time of Jesus when everything literally turned to ashes? No, we know it did not. Since these things prophesied did not literally happen at that time, some people say that such prophecy must have been meant for the time of the Second Advent. But this cannot be the case.

John the Baptist came to the world as the last prophet; Jesus said: "All the prophets and the law prophesied until John." (Matt. 11:13) The coming of John the Baptist should have put an end to prophecy and the Mosaic Law. This is what Jesus said would happen. The purpose of all prophecy before Jesus was to prepare for his coming, and to indicate what was to be fulfilled up to the time of his coming.

These prophecies are not for the time of the Lord of the Second Advent. God sent His son Jesus into the world, intending full and perfect salvation to be accomplished. The Second Coming was made necessary only by lack of fulfillment at the time of the first coming. Why then was the time of Jesus the end of the world? We already know the answer. It is because Jesus came to end evil sovereignty and bring forth God's sovereignty upon the earth. This was the end of the Old Testament Age and the beginning of the age of the New Testament. Jesus brought the words of new truth.

Jesus was rejected

How did the people receive the gospel which he brought? The Jewish faithful accused Jesus and crucified him. They were prisoners to the letter of the Old Testament and could not perceive the presence of the spirit of God in the new truth. It is ironic that Jesus fell victim to the very prophecies that were to testify to him as the Son of God. By the letter of the Mosaic Law he was judged a criminal. Blindly the people nailed him to the cross.

At the time of Jesus many learned people, many leaders of churches, and many people prominent in society who were well-versed in the Law and the prophets, were waiting for a Messiah. How happy they would have been to have their Messiah recite the Old Testament exactly, syllable by syllable and word by word! But Jesus Christ did not come to repeat the Mosaic Law. He came to pronounce a new law of God.

People missed the whole point. And Jesus was accused. The people of Israel said to him, "We stone you for no good work, but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God." (John 10:33) The bible states: "And they reviled him [one of Jesus' disciples], saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.'" (John 9:28-29) This was the way they looked at Jesus. Those people who diligently obeyed the letter of the Mosaic Law disobeyed Jesus Christ. The most devout of the Jewish faithful were the first ones to be judged by Jesus and thrown into unquenchable fire.

Fire judgment

Now at this time I would like to clarify the meaning of "judgment by fire." We read in the New Testament: "The heavens will be kindled and dissolved and the elements will melt with fire!" (II Peter 3:12) How can this fantastic prophecy come true? Will it happen literally? No. The statement has symbolic meaning. God would not destroy His earth, His stars and all creation without realizing His ideal on earth. If He did so, then God would become the God of defeat. And who would be His conqueror? It would be Satan. This can never happen to God.

Even on our human level, once we determine to do something, we see it through to its completion. How much more so will God almighty accomplish His will. When God speaks of judgment by fire in the Bible, He does not mean he will bring judgment by flames. The significant meaning is a symbolic one. Let us now consider another Biblical passage which speaks of fire. Jesus proclaimed, "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49) Did Jesus throw literal, blazing fire about? Of course not.

The fire in the Bible is symbolic. It stands for the word of God. This is why James 3:6 states, "The tongue is a fire." The tongue speaks the word, and the word is from God. Jesus himself said, "He who rejects me and does not receive my saying has a judge. The word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last

day." (John 12:48) In contemporary society, the word of the court executes judgment. The word is the law. In this universe, God is in the position of judge. Jesus came as the attorney with authority to oppose Satan, the prosecutor of man. Satan accuses man with his words, but these are false charges. Jesus champions the cause of believers, and his standard is the word of truth.

God pronounces the sentence: His love is the standard, and love is His word. There is no difference between the earthly court and the heavenly court, in that both conduct their trials by words, not by fire.

God's word is standard of judgment

So the world will not be burned up by fire when it is judged. The Bible states, "The Lord Jesus will slay him [the evil one] with the breath of his mouth." (II Thess. 2:8) The word of God is the breath of his mouth. Jesus came to slay the wicked by the word of God, and "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked." (Is. 11:4) What then is the "rod of his mouth?" We take this symbol to mean his tongue through which he speaks the word of God.

Let's resolve this point completely. Look to where Jesus was instructing the people: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." (John 5:24) Men pass from death to life by words of truth.

God will not send you the Messiah to burn you up. He will not send you the Messiah to set your houses afire or destroy your society. But if we reject the word of God spoken by the Lord, we leave no choice open except to be condemned by judgment. Here is the reason why.

In the beginning God created man and the universe by His word-logos. Man denied the word of God and fell. Spiritual death has reigned ever since. Through His salvation work, God has been recreating man. Man fell by disobedience to God's word, and man shall be recreated by obedience to the same word of God. The word of God is given by the Lord. Accepting the word brings life out of death. Such death is the hell in which we live. Thus the word of God is the judge, and it will bring upon you a far more profound effect than the hottest flames.

God intended to begin the history of goodness in Adam. But Adam fell. God worked to restore history and begin anew in Jesus Christ. But the people of his time lacked faith and did not give him a chance.

Therefore, the promise of the Lord of the Second Advent will be fulfilled. We cannot doubt that Christianity today is in definite crisis. This is a crisis parallel to the time of Jesus, when the established religious institutions failed the Son of God. We recognize this crisis of our time; but we can also see through the haze to the brightly shining day of new hope.

The end of the world is at hand, not only for Christians but for all people throughout the world. The new history of God will begin with the arrival of the Lord. Blessed are those who see him and accept him. It is the hope of Christianity to recognize, receive, and accept the Lord of the Second Advent. The chance has arrived for all of us. The greatest opportunity in any man's lifetime is now knocking at our door. Please be humble; and open yourself to great new hope!

This is the time for unprecedented spiritual awakening. I want you to open your eyes and ears to perceive the truth. This is my hope, that by sharing this message with you, we might unite to prepare for the glorious day of the arrival of the Lord. Let us see the God of history, let us understand the God of Providence, and let us embrace the living God in our own lives.