

CONSISTENT BIBLICAL FUTURISM
Part VIII
by Thomas Ice

In the New Testament Epistles, church age believers are told to “wait,” not “watch,” since there are no signs preceding the “any moment” or imminent rapture event. The only thing one could watch for in relation to the rapture would be the Lord Himself. The rapture and the second coming are two separate events. If earthquakes, rumors of war, wars, famines, etc. relates to the end of the Church Age in the Olivet Discourse, instead of relating to the tribulation and the subsequent second coming of Christ, then the statements about waiting for Christ in the Epistles would appear to be meaningless.

Dr. Gerald Stanton, speaking of the hope of the early church says, “It consists of the apostolic exhortation to *look, watch, wait, and be ready* for the coming of the Saviour.”¹ I will use his four terms to examine their usage in the New Testament in relation to the rapture and second coming. I will look to see if any of these terms are used exclusively with references to the rapture or the second coming. Perhaps these terms will demonstrate differing postures for believers toward the rapture and the second coming.

LOOKING

The first term mentioned by Stanton is “look” or “looking,” as it appears in most texts. The English translation in the New American Standard (NASB)² yields one verse that appears in the Epistles relating to the rapture (Titus 2:13).³ The passage is Titus 2:13, “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.”

“Looking” is not the normal Greek word for “look,” instead it is the verb *prosdchomai*, which has the core idea of “waiting eagerly, looking forward to.”⁴ In fact, most newer English translations render this Greek participle as “waiting for” (ESV), “while we wait” (NIV), and “while we wait) (NRSV). The older translations that render the Greek term as “looking” presumes the posture of the subject while waiting for our Lord. Thus, the weight of the word has more to do with the posture of waiting than looking. The “looking” emphasis is upon Christ and His return, which indeed will be a blessed event unequalled to anything else. Based upon the original language, Titus 2:13 should be classified as a waiting passage.

WATCHING

Based upon the NASB, there is not a reference relating to the rapture that uses the term “watch” or “watching.” However, in the KJV, “watch” is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:6, “so then lest us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert [watch, KJV] and sober.” The Greek verb *greyoreo*, from where the named Gregory is derived, means “to stay awake, to be in constant readiness, be on the alert.”⁵ What would an alert person, who is fully awake, do in his state of alertness? Such a person would be watchful, a general condition of a believer in this current evil age called the night. Modern translators are split between “alert” (NASB, NIV, NRSV) and “watch” (KJV, NKJV). It appears the core meaning of the verb is on alertness, while the result of an alert person would be watchfulness. Thus, the general condition of a believer throughout the church age (the night in 1 Thess. 5) is to be one of not being asleep, as are unbelievers, but alert. 1 Thessalonians 5:6 speaks of an admonition of a general state of watchfulness for all believers throughout the church age, not a watchfulness for the Lord Himself or for signs.

However, watching (NASB “alert”) is a term that is commonly used within the contexts of second coming passages. The same Greek word is used in these second coming passages as Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 5:6, but the object has changed. “Therefore be on the *alert*, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the *alert* and would not have allowed his house to be broken into” (Matt. 24:42–43). “Be on the *alert* then, for you do not know the day nor the hour” (Matt. 25:13). “Take heed, keep on the *alert*; for you do not know when the appointed time is. It is like a man, away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the *alert*. Therefore, be on the *alert*—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, at cockcrowing, or in the morning” (Mark 13:33–35). “And what I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the *alert*’” (Mark 13:37)! “But keep on the *alert* at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

The context demands that these watching passages relate immediately to events occurring in the tribulation. Thus, these tribulation events are leading up to the second coming of Christ, not the rapture.

WAITING

“Wait” and “waiting” is the major term used in conjunction with the rapture as the posture a church age believer should assume in relation to the Lord’s return at the rapture. The NASB translated the Greek verb *apekdechomai* as “await eagerly.” A sharp observer will notice that *apekdechomai* and *prosdechomai*, used in Titus 2:13 have the same root (*dechomai*) in these compound verbs. The Greek verb *dechomai* means, “to be receptive of someone, receive, welcome.”⁶ However, *apekdechomai* has two prepositional prefixes *apo* and *ek*. While *apo* means “separation from” something and *ek* means “out of” something, the general purpose for a prepositional prefix is to intensify the root word. In this case *apekdechomai* has come to mean “await eagerly” or simply “to wait with expectation.”⁷ “The noun *apokaradokia* appears only in Christian writers, though the verb occasionally appears earlier.”⁸ Thus, both the verb and the noun appear to be special words used almost exclusively in the New Testament in relation to one waiting with eagerness Christ’s return, usually with the rapture in view.

Rapture references using both the verb and the noun include the following: “And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, *waiting* eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). “But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we *wait eagerly* for it” (Rom. 8:25). “So that you are not lacking in any gift, *awaiting eagerly* the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:7). “Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but *wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God” (1 Cor. 4:5). “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we *eagerly wait* for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20). “And to *wait* for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10). “Keep yourselves in the love of God, *waiting anxiously* for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life” (Jude 21).

BE READY

Even Stanton does not cite a reference for the term “be ready” in his book. I did not find any passages where readiness was a command for a believer in relation to the rapture. I did find the following passages relating to the second coming: “For this reason you *be ready* too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will,” (Matt. 24:44). “And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were *ready* went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut” (Matt. 25:10). “You too, *be ready*; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect” (Luke 12:40).

CONCLUSION

Waiting is by far the primary term used to describe the posture of a church age believer who is waiting for her bridegroom to come and take her away for the wedding event without warning. As Peter says, “and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). The true heartbeat of every member of the Body of Christ is a longing to be with the One she loves. We long to be with Him, not because we cannot handle life in the nasty now-and-now, but because as a bride longs to be with her betrothed, so also does the bride of Christ long to be with her Beloved. Therefore, she waits for Him saying as she arises in the morning, “perhaps today will be the moment when He shall come and take us to His Father’s house!” In the evening she says, “Perhaps tonight my Beloved will come!” While she waits, she is busy preparing for that glorious time by preparing fine linen—the righteous acts of the saints. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ (emphasis original) Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept From The Hour: A Systematic Study of the Rapture in Bible Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), p. 127.

² The New American Standard English translation will be used in this article unless mentioned otherwise.

³ Search results from Accordance 9.1.1.

⁴ W. F. Arndt, F. W. Danker, F. W. Gingrich, & Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 877.

⁵ Arndt, Danker, Gingrich & Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 208.

⁶ Arndt, Danker, Gingrich & Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 221.

⁷ Arndt, Danker, Gingrich & Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 100.

⁸ James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans 1-8*, Vol. 38A (Dallas: Word, Incor., 2002), p. 469.