

HAROLD CAMPING REFUTED: THE NECESSITY OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH (INSTITUTE) (1)

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I. Introduction

Harold Camping, founder and head of Family Stations Inc. (otherwise known as “Family Radio”), was known for many years as a Calvinistic radio Bible teacher. His fame rose to notoriety, however, when in 1992 he published a book entitled *1994?* in which he predicted that the world would end with the return of Christ in September, 1994. Camping’s prophecy, of course, proved to be false but he defended himself with the claim that he had never actually predicted the date with absolute certainty, but only that he believed on the basis of his calculations that the end was *likely* on that date. That was a subterfuge.¹

False prophets who remain stiff-necked are often given over to greater error, and such has proven to be the case with Mr. Camping. With some clever re-calculation, Camping then began to promote his thesis that 1994 (or perhaps 1988) *is* the correct date, not of the end of the world, but of the beginning of the Great Tribulation, which, according to Camping, is not characterized by a personal Antichrist and physical persecution of the true church, but universal apostasy, the reign of Satan in all the churches of the world, and the end of “the Church Age.”² Since 1994 (or even 1988), therefore, God has abandoned

¹ Camping wrote, “The results of this study teach that the month of September of the year 1994 is to be the time of the end of history ... it seems extremely unlikely that we have overlooked something. However, I modestly and humbly acknowledge that such a possibility exists ... I will be surprised if we reach October 1, 1994 ... when September 6, 1994, arrives, no one else can be saved. The end has come” (*1994?* [New York: Vantage Press Inc., 1992], pp. 532-533).

² According to Rev. Christopher Gordon (United Reformed Church in Lynden, WA, USA), Camping taught that the Holy Spirit began departing from the churches *around May 1988*, a time when Mr. Camping was officially removed from his post as Bible teacher in the Alameda Christian Reformed Church. Writes Rev. Gordon, “Drawing a preliminary conclusion, is it really a coincidence that the period Camping’s teaching controversy broke open in the church coincides with the ‘month and year,’ if not the exact date, that Camping would later declare

the instituted church and salvation is no longer possible in the churches and congregations of the world, because God has removed His Holy Spirit and given the task of world evangelization (which for over 1950 years was entrusted to the church) to ministries like Family Radio. All this he has set forth in a book, *The End of the Church Age ... and After*, published in 2002, ten years after his failed prophecy published in 1992.

With increasing boldness, Camping continues his attack on the instituted churches. In 2003 he published a book, *Wheat and Tares*, in which he claims that all those who remain in the churches and congregations in spite of Camping's "gospel" to depart out of the churches are tares (unbelievers) and that God is gathering the wheat (elect believers) for harvest through the call of Camping's "come-out-of-them" "gospel." In his latest book, *Time Has an End: A Biblical History of the World 11,103 BC - 2011 AD* (published in 2005) he predicts that Christ will return in 2011. In fact, a few weeks ago, Harold Camping was proved to be wrong again. He predicted that Christ would come in judgment on 21 May 2011, a date supposedly exactly 7,000 years after the flood of Noah's day. Many who believe Camping gave up their jobs, sold their property and donated their money to Family Radio (II Thess. 3:10-12)! Should you object that "of that day and hour knoweth no man" (Matt. 24:36), Camping will tell you that in these days God is opening the understanding of "true believers" (he means himself and others who follow him) so that *they can know* what previous generations could not know. On 23 May, Camping told a press conference that Judgment Day had come spiritually (echoes of the

the church age ended? Is it not the least bit suspect that Camping would later declare that the Holy Spirit was removed from the church beginning on May 21, 1988, the very same period Camping himself was removed from teaching 'in' the church? And is it not alarming that Camping now 'outside' of the church would declare, soon after his own departure, that anyone still identified with any church is now under the judgment of God? *In legal terms, I think it's safe to say we have motive.* Pride and bitterness had so overcome Camping that he was able to declare that upon the year of his censure and departure from the church, God was done with the entire church, and from that time forward, God would only work in the 'true believers' who were willing to take the stand with Camping and come out of the church. This is a severe warning of what can happen to those who reject the elders who rule with the authority of Christ. Over forty percent of the Alameda CRC, many of whom were employed by Family Radio, 'went out' from the church and subsequently started their own 'fellowship'" (<http://christopherjgordon.blogspot.com/2011/03/judgment-day-may-21-2011-harold-camping.html>).

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Watchtower!) and remains convinced that 21 October is the final day of the world. No doubt his feverish imagination will find a new explanation for why he is wrong on 21 of October—if God spares the 89 year old Camping. Ironically, in predicting, repeatedly and unsuccessfully, the day of Christ’s return, Camping himself fulfills Scripture, shows himself to be a false prophet, and is himself a sign of Christ’s coming (Matt. 24:23-24)!

In this article, we are not so much interested in Camping’s false date setting, but in his attack upon the church institute. Although no statistics are available, we do know that many have forsaken instituted churches on his “authority.”³ Therefore, we do well to warn the people of God against false prophets like Camping (Deut. 13:1-4; 18:20-22; Matt. 24:4) and to remind ourselves of our positive calling to be living, active members of true instituted churches; to seek out a true church if we are currently members of apostate or departing churches, or if we live in isolation from the true church, no matter what the cost.

II. Camping’s Teachings

A. The Whole Bible Is a Parable

Camping’s problem is his hermeneutical approach. Although his mantra is that everything he teaches is “from the Bible,” he twists the Scriptures to his own destruction (II Peter 3:16). He complains that churches today trust in human doctrines and inveighs against the creeds and confessions of most churches. He has a Bible, a concordance and an overactive imagination. Camping follows the allegorical method. For him, everything in Scripture is a picture of a deeper, spiritual reality. Therefore, he ignores the context and the meaning of words, grammar and syntax as the Spirit has given them.⁴ This has been Camping’s method for many years. In 1986, he published his *First Principles of Bible Study*, in which he sets this forth. “While it [i.e., a

³ *Christianity Today* reported that “ministers are reporting defections as members heed Camping’s call;” one pastor “related a 10-percent decrease in membership” (vol. 46 [21 May, 2002], p. 21).

⁴ For a sample list of the wild allegories which Camping offers his readers, see the Appendix on this web page (www.cprf.co.uk/articles/campingrefuted.htm#appendix).

text] may have only one level of meaning, it may also have as many as three,” he writes.⁵ Camping sees the potential danger of this method but presses on regardless. He admits, “We all have within us the possibility of deception ... at times even the most careful teacher will be in error,”⁶ and adds, “But isn’t it dangerous to attempt to discover deeper spiritual meaning within the Bible? Won’t this lead to all kinds of fanciful interpretations?”⁷ Indeed it will! Undeterred, Camping confidently allegorises with reckless abandon. In the more recent *Wheat and Tares*, Camping exults in his discovery that the early church promoted allegorical exegesis (by the early church, he especially means Origen). This to Camping is a confirmation that he has been right all along and he now laments that the Reformers, while rightly rejecting many of Rome’s errors, threw out the excellent hermeneutical principles of men like Origen:

These very same principles of interpretation have been taught by Family Radio during the past several decades ... even though Family Radio was completely unaware of Origen’s teachings.⁸

The conclusions adopted by the Reformers became the seeds of death for the church. Instead of realizing the Biblical correctness of Origen’s position on Bible interpretation and carefully fine-tuning the Biblical rules to protect it, they threw away everything he taught and developed a Biblical hermeneutic that was completely unbiblical.⁹

Therefore, only men like Camping can really understand the Bible today. They have a special knowledge to which traditional expositors cannot attain. If a believing pastor merely studies the context, the words, the grammar (even with a knowledge of the original languages, which Camping does not have, despite the many references to Greek and Hebrew in his books¹⁰) he will

⁵ Harold Camping, *First Principles of Bible Study* (Oakland, CA: Family Stations, Inc., 1986), p. 2.

⁶ Camping, *First*, pp. 23-24.

⁷ Camping, *First*, p. 53.

⁸ Harold Camping, *Wheat and Tares* (Oakland, CA: Family Stations, Inc., 2003), pp. 51-52.

⁹ Camping, *Wheat*, p. 57.

¹⁰ Stephen Meyers interviewed Camping in June 1994 and he reports, “Harold Camping has had

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never be able to arrive at the true meaning and rightly preach the text in his sermons. All pastors today have been handicapped in their seminary training so that they are unable to expound the Holy Scriptures. Those hampered by the “historical-grammatical literal hermeneutic” have, according to Camping, “effectively locked the door to a correct understanding of many Scripture verses and then [thrown] away the key.”¹¹ They are, therefore,

unable to understand anything the Bible teaches about the end of the church age ... they consistently complain that those who teach that the church age has ended are spiritualizing. They are correct in their allegations because that is the way God wrote the Bible.¹²

Harold Camping behaves like a cult leader. Denying the ability of the church institute to preach the gospel, he tells his readers that this is the time in God’s master plan for believers outside the churches to evangelize the world. Where are we to hear the Word, then? Camping informs his readers that they can hear the gospel from faithful ministries “such as” Family Radio, but we search in vain for the names of any other ministries apart from Family Radio. For example, he writes in *Wheat and Tares*, “As believers study their Bibles and receive help in their Bible studies from a source such as Family Radio, they become acquainted with God’s master plan.”¹³ The words “such as” are a subterfuge. There is no other source. Similarly, in another place, he writes, “While we see the church world falling into decay all over the world, at the same time, we see ministries like Family Radio flourishing as they send the

no formal training in the Bible. He does not know Greek or Hebrew. He uses a concordance to find out the original language. If he does have a question about the Greek or Hebrew he goes to Dr. Ortero, who he says has a Ph.D. in Greek and Hebrew. Dr. Ortero has a Ph.D. in Psychology from Argentina. Camping admits that Dr. Ortero does not agree with him about the world ending in September 1994. Camping thinks that if Dr. Ortero really studied his math in-depth that he would then agree with his book that the world will end in September 1994. In fact, if everyone did their homework, Camping believes everyone would agree with him” (“Other Views: Harold Camping,” *Institute for Biblical and Scientific Studies*; www.bibleandscience.com/otherviews/camping.htm).

¹¹ Camping, *Wheat*, p. 63.

¹² Camping, *Wheat*, p. 68.

¹³ Camping, *Wheat*, p. 88.

true Gospel all over the world.”¹⁴ Again, the word “like” is a smokescreen. *No other ministry* is named or endorsed in any of Camping’s books as a suitable source of gospel preaching.

In addition, Camping rejects the perspicuity of Scripture: “Unfortunately, the concept of the perspicuity of Scripture, which is very commonly taught in our day, is completely contrary to the Bible.”¹⁵ Of course, Camping must reject the perspicuity of Scripture, for none of his outlandish teachings concerning the “End of the Church Age” are *clearly taught* in Scripture, nor can they by good and necessary consequence be derived therefrom (cf. *Westminster Confession* 1:6).

To justify his hermeneutical approach Camping appeals to Mark 4:34: “But without a parable spake he not unto them,” and pronounces with characteristic confidence that on the basis of this text,

we can be certain that the whole Bible is presented to us with a great number of absolutely trustworthy historical facts, but until we find the Gospel meaning hidden within these historical facts, we have not begun to receive the rich spiritual blessings that are inherent in every part of the Bible.¹⁶

Mark 4:34 cannot bear the weight Camping wants to put on it. The text does not mean that the entire Bible is a parable. It simply means that Jesus ordinarily taught the people with parables. Camping ignores the context and especially the second half of the verse: “and when they were alone *he expounded all things* to his disciples.” Moreover, in John 16:29, the disciples exclaim, “Lo, now speakest thou plainly and speakest no proverb.”

Allegorical exegesis is a serious error and Camping is a sad example of it run amok. James White points out the folly of Camping’s method:

Allegorical interpretations have no more authority than the one proclaiming them ... There is not the first bit of rational

¹⁴ Harold Camping, *The End of the Church Age ... and After* (Oakland, CA: Family Stations, Inc., 2002), p. 252.

¹⁵ Camping, *Wheat*, p. 59.

¹⁶ Camping, *Wheat*, p. 54; italics mine.

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connection between the passages Camping cites ... Harold Camping cannot demonstrate that his teachings carry the authority of the Bible, for as soon as he says, “this is a picture of this,” he has left the inspired text behind and is now simply giving you the imaginations of his own heart.¹⁷

B. Camping’s Obituary of the Church

Camping’s teaching is this. God’s program of salvation has been divided into three periods in the New Testament: the “early rain,” the “spiritual famine” (or Great Tribulation) and the “latter rain.” God was pleased to use the instituted churches and congregations to proclaim the gospel for most of the New Testament age. In His patience, He endured the sins of the churches and congregations, but just as His patience ended for the people of God in the Old Testament, when He destroyed both Israel and Judah in the captivities of Assyria and Babylon respectively, so the time has now come when God has destroyed (spiritually) the churches and congregations of our day. Since Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb. 13:8), Camping writes, “we can therefore expect a similar complete destruction of the corporate body again.”¹⁸ This destruction is, however, not physical but spiritual. We can see the churches and the congregations in the world, but they are all apostate; they all teach false gospels; they are all synagogues of Satan, where Satan rules by means of human doctrines which are not based completely on Scripture. Duncan and Talbot point out that Camping is guilty of gross generalisation concerning the state of the church today: “however critical we may be about the church ... Camping’s assessment of the current situation is exaggerated and myopic.”¹⁹

C. Camping’s Acrophobia: The Fear of “High Places”

Acrophobia is the fear of heights. Scripture assures us that “height” cannot

¹⁷ James R. White, *Dangerous Airwaves: Harold Camping Refuted and Christ’s Church Defended* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 2002), pp. 56, 82, 137.

¹⁸ Camping, *The End*, p. 12.

¹⁹ J. Ligon Duncan and Mark R. Talbot, *Should We Leave Our Churches?: A Biblical Response to Harold Camping* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), p. 18.

separate the believer from the love of God (Rom. 8:39) but Camping believes that “high places” have caused Christ to cast off His church.

In the Old Testament, Israel and Judah were frequently guilty of erecting high places to worship false gods. High places were places of worship apart from the temple in which the people worshipped idols. King Jeroboam set high places up as rival worship to the temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 13). In Judah, also, the people provoked God to anger with their high places (I Kings 14). The godly kings of Judah failed to remove the high places (Asa, I Kings 15; Jehoshaphat, I Kings 22) with the exception of Hezekiah (II Kings 18) and Josiah (II Kings 23). Despite Josiah’s reforms it was too late, writes Camping, for Judah to be spared. Camping’s thesis is that God destroyed the Old Testament church because of their idolatrous high places and that the New Testament church has been destroyed for the same reason.

This is a startling claim. In order to “prove” it, he jumps to II Corinthians 10 where he reads the words “every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” (v. 5). In Camping’s mind the word “high” in II Corinthians must mean the same as the word “high” in “high places.” Camping then explains that New Testament high places are the confessions of the churches. The churches retain doctrines in their creeds which in Camping’s view are not altogether faithful to the Bible. Therefore the churches stand condemned for erecting high places which are “doctrines solemnly adopted by churches ... high places in that they have come from the exalted minds of men.”²⁰ God has been patient for over 1950 years. He has used the church to bring the gospel to the world despite her high places, but the time has now come for God to destroy the high places. He must do this because He did this in the Old Testament. God’s dealings with His church are not uniform but Camping ignores this fact. He “finds” the prophecy that God will destroy the New Testament high places hidden in II Corinthians 10:6: “and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.” The application is obvious, at least to Harold Camping:

In this very revealing passage God is declaring that punishment will come when the obedience of the churches will have

²⁰ Camping, *The End*, p. 79.

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been fulfilled; that is, when their work of sending the Gospel into the world has been finished.²¹

It means nothing of the kind. James White rightly exposes how ludicrous this interpretation is:

First no effort is made to explain how this passage refers to “high places.” Does the mere repetition of the word “high” somehow indicate identity? ... To read into these words some future prophecy about the end of the church age is simply ridiculous on its face. Camping’s “that is their work of sending the Gospel into the world has been finished” has no basis in the text, and Camping does not even attempt to provide a logical connection for his complete misreading of the words of Scripture.²²

There is *nothing in the context* to indicate that Camping’s exegesis has any merit. The “obedience” referred to here is that of the Corinthians to whom Paul is writing. Paul writes that he does not want to have to be bold when he comes to Corinth (v. 2). In light of the rebellion present in the congregation, he fears that he will have to be bold to deal with the situation there. He warns the Corinthians of the power that he possesses (vv. 4-5) and tells them that he is prepared to use this power (“spiritual and mighty weapons”) against those who are sinning in the congregation at Corinth (“a readiness to revenge all disobedience”) but that he is waiting for the Corinthians themselves to administer discipline (“your obedience”). If the Corinthians’ obedience is fulfilled, Paul will have no need to come to Corinth in boldness wielding his spiritual weapons. When we consider the historical and grammatical context in the light of all Scripture sober exegesis is the result. Would that Camping could see that! Camping’s New Testament “high places” thus fall to the ground!

D. Satan Is Ruling in the Churches

The Scriptures predict a fearful time in the future when Antichrist will rule until he is finally destroyed at the second coming of Christ. The Antichrist will

²¹ Camping, *The End*, p. 80.

²² White, *Dangerous*, pp. 73-74.

be a man. He will set himself up as God to be worshipped as God, and aided and abetted by the false prophet and the false church (Babylon, the Whore of the Beast), he will seduce the whole world, except the true church, whom he will persecute. The saints will be ostracized, unable to buy or sell; they will be imprisoned and executed because of their refusal to worship the Antichrist or to have any part in his false religion.

Camping spiritualises all of this and announces to the world that Antichrist is here now. He is now ruling. He is now persecuting true believers. The reason we cannot see him is because Antichrist *is Satan*, and he is ruling by means of false gospels, through which he has made the churches and congregations spiritually desolate. Believers are being killed today, because “we can understand,” writes Camping, “that to be killed is equivalent to being driven out of the churches.”²³ He appeals to John 16:2 but this passage does not teach that to be driven out of the synagogues *is the same as* being killed. Christ’s disciples are *both* driven out *and* killed. In Camping’s mind “being driven out of the churches” is itself equivalent to being commanded to leave.²⁴ Believers today cannot buy or sell either because, as Camping demonstrates by jumping around Scripture, the inability to buy or sell really means “no one can bring the Gospel there unless they have the mark of the beast.”²⁵ In addition, the mark of the beast “consists of the unsaved within the churches” and worshipping that mark is the sin of revering doctrines invented by men.²⁶ To complete the explanation, Camping reveals to us that when the Beast (that is, Satan) calls down fire out of heaven in the last days (Rev. 13:13) this really means that he causes people to fall down backwards in the “slain the Spirit” phenomenon. The Charismatic movement is cited as proof positive that we are now in the Great Tribulation.

Thus, Camping outdoes the Dispensationalists by assuring us that there will be no personal Antichrist in the future for the church, and lulls the church into a false sense of security. The church must know that her calling, especially in the last days, will be to suffer. She must be prepared for that. Camping’s

²³ Camping, *The End*, p. 31.

²⁴ Camping, *The End*, pp. 32-33.

²⁵ Camping, *The End*, p. 101.

²⁶ Camping, *The End*, pp. 97-98.

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heresy is not only ecclesiological, but also eschatological. The Bride of Christ may not listen to him and be found asleep when persecution comes.

Camping appeals to II Thessalonians 2 as “proof” that Satan is seated in the churches and congregations today. We note first of all that verse 3 speaks unequivocally of *a man*. The Antichrist of this chapter is not Satan. He is a man who is energised by Satan (v. 9), but not Satan himself.

Camping also appeals to Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, all of which record Christ’s warning concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. In the Olivet discourse, Christ warns of a day when the disciples will see the “abomination of desolation” in the holy place and that they then must flee from Jerusalem (Matt. 24:15). The most straightforward meaning of this text is this: Daniel the prophet prophesied an abomination which would make the temple in Jerusalem desolate. This occurred during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 BC) but had a secondary fulfillment in AD 70 when the temple was again defiled by idolatry. When, therefore, the disciples see a similar desecration of the temple in the future (this happened in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem) the urgent command is to flee in order to escape the inevitable bloodbath when Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20). All of this, of course, foreshadows the “great and final violation by the antichrist of all that is sacred.”²⁷

Camping, unsurprisingly, does not opt for the straightforward meaning of the text. For Camping, the abomination of desolation is Satan. The holy place is where the gospel is, that is the churches and congregations of the church age. Jerusalem, Judea, the Temple, all are pictures of the church from which the believer must flee:

The holy place is the temple, and the temple includes all of the churches and congregations throughout the world. In this study we have seen that he [i.e., Satan] is now ruling in congregations throughout the world, so the test of Matthew 24:15 is fulfilled without any question. Therefore, Christ has commanded that we must leave the church.²⁸

²⁷ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, repr. 1973), p. 857.

²⁸ Camping, *The End*, p. 211.

How can the temple be the church, and at the same time Judea and Jerusalem be the church? We are not told. Having seen Satan in the temple (that is, in the instituted church) and having left Judea and Jerusalem (that is, again, the instituted church), the disciples of Christ must flee to the mountains which means “flee to Christ or to God” (He is the mountain in Psalm 121:1). Camping may not arbitrarily make the word “mountain” refer to God. The meaning of mountain must be discovered from the context! To give one example, Jeremiah 3:23 teaches that salvation is hoped for in vain from the hills and the multitude of mountains. In the context of Matthew 24, mountain simply means mountain. Camping adds a few more pictures of the church to persuade his readers. In Luke 17:31, Christ commands, “he that shall be upon the housetop ... let him not come down.” Camping assures us that “the housetop is identified with bringing the Gospel” and that the house is the church.²⁹ Therefore this text means “as judgment comes upon the church the true believer is to stay outside the church bringing the Gospel to the world.”³⁰

This spiritual desolation of the churches and congregations is universal. Camping returns to the temple to prove this. Because Christ indicates that in the predicted destruction of the temple “not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down” (Luke 21:5-6), Camping concludes that not one church will remain standing in the Great Tribulation. No believer may say that his church is exempt. No matter how faithful his church seems to be (even if the three marks of the true church are there), God has spoken: there will be no structure left. The church institute is destroyed: “God declares that there will not be left one stone upon another. This means that God’s usage of the churches and congregations has come to an end.”³¹

Christ has cast off His body and abandoned His bride? He has ceased building His church. He has smashed His building to rubble? What blasphemy!

E. God Continues His Work Outside the Churches

Although God in His wrath has destroyed the church institute, the gospel must still be proclaimed. Camping acknowledges that God has been using the

²⁹ Camping, *The End*, p. 229.

³⁰ Camping, *The End*, p. 229.

³¹ Camping, *The End*, p. 217.

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church to evangelise the world since Pentecost but now He will continue His saving plan *outside of the churches*. There is, of course, not a scrap of biblical evidence for this assertion but Camping assures his followers that this is indeed the case. God has prepared the way for Family Radio:

It was God's good pleasure to continue this method of reaching the world with Christ until God had securely put in place the ability of believers to reach whole continents for hours each day with the true Gospel.³²

Family Radio is the "loud voice" of Revelation 14:7:

Surely, as we are able to send the Gospel by radio and internet and satellite broadcasting so that it can be clearly heard in the homes of people all over the world it is going forth with a loud voice.³³

How convenient! As Duncan and Talbot put it, "The organizational church's demise does not daunt him – we've got radio, he says."³⁴ We are now in the "latter rain" period where God is saving a vast multitude of souls outside of the church institute. Camping finds proof for this in Revelation 8:1: "this half hour of silence *must be understood to be* the first part of the Great Tribulation during which heaven was not saving people by means of the Gospel going forth from the churches."³⁵ Why? Because when sinners are converted the angels rejoice. Silence indicates the absence of rejoicing among the angels and therefore the end of conversions! In addition, Paul in Acts 28 is allegedly a picture of true believers preaching the gospel to the elect during the "latter rain" period: "Christ is no longer using the churches ... He is still using believers, but these believers are no longer part of the corporate church."³⁶

This is absurd. Paul was an apostle, sent by the instituted church at Antioch to be a missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 13:2-3). He is not a picture of anything else except in Camping's fevered imagination.

³² Camping, *The End*, p. 62.

³³ Camping, *The End*, p. 150.

³⁴ Duncan and Talbot, *Should We Leave*, p. 20.

³⁵ Camping, *The End*, pp. 248-249; italics mine.

³⁶ Camping, *The End*, p. 233.

F. *Intra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*

The church has traditionally confessed *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, or “outside the church is no salvation.” Camping has turned that on its head and now proclaims that *inside the church* is no salvation! Those who, in spite of the clear (sic!) command to leave the churches, stubbornly refuse to depart are doomed. This is Camping’s most controversial teaching. In *The End of the Church Age ... and After*, he is more cautious about the spiritual state of those who refuse to obey his (i.e., Camping’s) call. He writes that if a person “persists in disobeying God’s commands to depart out of the local church *it may be evidence* that he has the mark of the beast.”³⁷ In *Wheat and Tares* he is unequivocal. Those who remain in the church *are* tares, and God is using the gospel (of Family Radio) to call the wheat out of the instituted congregations with the result that “the congregation will consist only of those who are servants of Satan.”³⁸ True believers are the “angels” of the parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13, and by Camping’s “gospel” God is “separating the wheat from the tares.”³⁹ Camping speaks of the “super, super, terrible sin” of refusing to leave the church and warns that those who disobey are “still under Satan’s authority.”⁴⁰ This is scare-mongering at its worst.

Even worse is Camping’s emotional blackmail directed towards parents. *You* may be saved, he says, but what about your children? If the Holy Spirit is not in the midst of the congregation (and Camping insists on the basis of a twisting on II Thessalonians 2 that He is not) then the children will not be saved: “That family has a serious problem that can only be remedied by leaving the congregation.”⁴¹ Take your children out of church, remove them from the influence of solid catechetical instruction. This is Camping’s call and in making it he offends Christ’s little ones. Woe to him (Matt. 18:6)! And all of this is based on an allegorical and nonsensical interpretation of Lamentations 2:11-12 and Matthew 24:19!⁴²

³⁷ Camping, *The End*, p. 195; italics mine.

³⁸ Camping, *Wheat*, p. 35.

³⁹ Camping, *Wheat*, p. 42.

⁴⁰ Camping, *Wheat*, pp. 112, 34.

⁴¹ Camping, *The End*, p. 108.

⁴² Camping, *The End*, p. 108.

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A. The Perpetuity of the Church

We have seen what Camping teaches and have noted the foundation of sinking-sand, namely allegory, on which he bases his absurd teachings. We have interacted with some of the more popular exegetical arguments of this untrained, uncalled and unsupervised “teacher,” although it must be pointed out that Camping is, as James White puts it, a “moving target” who is always claiming to find new information in the Bible.⁴³ White complains,

It is impossible to produce a published work that can keep up with the ever changing and developing “insights” of someone who honestly seems to believe that he is “seeing” things in Scripture that no-one has ever seen before.⁴⁴

What Camping refuses to see is that the Bible teaches the perpetuity of the church. Christ has promised that He shall build His church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). God will be glorified “throughout all ages” (including ages after 1994!) by Jesus Christ *in the church* (Eph. 3:21). The church (not Family Radio!) is “the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15). Christ promised that the church would not fall away, but that His Spirit would guide her into all truth (John 16:13). He has been faithful to this promise.

Camping is aware of these verses but he insists that they refer only to the “eternal invisible church.” This is a grievous error. Christ’s promise to preserve His body and bride (the company of the predestinated and gathered) involves the preservation of instituted churches on earth which have the marks of the true church and which manifest themselves as His body and bride in particular locations. Camping declares, “only the eternal invisible church is the bride of Christ. When [Christ] speaks of the church as His body, He can be speaking only of the eternal invisible church.”⁴⁵ That this is erroneous can easily be demonstrated. Paul writes to the Corinthian believers, “Now ye are the body

⁴³ White, *Dangerous*, p. 39.

⁴⁴ White, *Dangerous*, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Camping, *The End*, p. 283.

of Christ and members in particular” (I Cor. 12:27). He does not say, “ye are part of the body of Christ,” but he designates the church at Corinth the body of Christ as that body manifests itself in that city. In another epistle to the same church Paul writes, “I have espoused you to one husband that I might present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (II Cor. 11:2). The church at Corinth is the bride of Christ as she manifests herself in that location.

Is it not the case, though, that Christ removes the candlestick from some churches so that they are no longer manifestations of His body and bride on earth (Rev. 2-3)? This is correct. Some institutes apostatise over time and lose their status as churches in the world. This does not mean, however, that all churches are able to apostatise simultaneously so that there is no true church in the world. White writes,

The destructibility of a single, local congregation, or even a group of them, does not imply the destructibility of the entirety of the local congregations that make up the visible church of Jesus Christ on earth.⁴⁶

Is it possible for individual congregations to fail? Assuredly, writes Turretin but,

... rather the question is whether the catholic church, which is the universality of believers scattered over the whole world, can ever fail. Or whether it could have happened formerly or can take place hereafter, that the church can fail altogether and there be none on earth who rightly worship God. This we deny. For if particular churches fail, it does not follow that the church itself totally fails, for it remains always in its true members dispersed over the world ... Neither can it be admitted absolutely and simply that each and every particular church can fail at the same time on earth, but only successively and in different times.⁴⁷

R. B. Kuiper also attests to the church’s indestructibility:

⁴⁶ White, *Dangerous*, p. 68.

⁴⁷ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 3 (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), pp. 41, 46.

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Christ Jesus, the glorious and omnipotent Head of the church, at the right hand of God, guarantees its continuity ... the church which [the apostles] organized has never passed out of existence and never will. The divine Head of the church has promised that. To be sure, it has experienced many upheavals, but no upheaval has destroyed it.⁴⁸

But, replies Camping, God says that He has given to Satan to make war with the saints and to overcome them (Rev. 13:7). We repudiate this idea. God gives the *beast* (Rev. 13:1), not Satan to make war (that is, to persecute) the saints. Satan can never overcome the church. Turretin explains,

But it can neither be overcome by Satan, because he was overcome and triumphed over by Christ (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14), so that neither by sifting can he cause our faith to fail (Lk. 22:32), nor obtain that all his arts and efforts should prevail against the church.⁴⁹

The Reformed creeds (which the anti-creedal Camping contemptuously calls “high places”) witness to the perpetuity of the church. The *Belgic Confession* calls the church (institute) “a holy congregation of believers” and declares,

This church has been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this that Christ is an eternal King, which without subjects He cannot be. And this holy Church is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world; though it sometimes for a while appears very small (Article 27).

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* is another witness:

Unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, *to the end of the world*: and doth, by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto (25:3).

⁴⁸ R. B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 49, 71.

⁴⁹ Turretin, *Institutes*, vol. 3, p. 45.

Second Helvetic Confession 17 proclaims,

But because God from the beginning would have men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth (I Tim. 2:4), it is altogether necessary that there always should have been, and should be now, and to the end of the world, a church.

Surely if any could have been tempted to believe that the church had perished it was those who had lived through the gloomy days of the Middle Ages. While Rome dominated the ecclesiastical landscape and persecuted those who desired to be faithful to the Scriptures, the Reformed continued to believe that Christ would build His church and the gates of hell would never prevail against her. Even the Waldenses, who were brutally persecuted by Rome, confessed, “this church can not fail, nor be annihilated, but must endure forever” (*Waldenses’ Confession* 26).⁵⁰

We must believe likewise and see to it that we are members of churches which Christ in His mercy has built and preserved in the world.

B. The Indefectibility of the Church

Camping believes that all church institutes on the face of the earth have lost the truth. He is determined to overturn I Timothy 3:15 which states that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. Camping writes, “under no circumstances can the church be the pillar and ground of the truth.”⁵¹ Camping’s position is grammatically untenable. The words translated “pillar” and “ground” stand in apposition to the word translated “church.” This is clear from the Greek cases used in the text. “Church” (not God) and “pillar” are both in the nominative case and therefore stand in apposition to one another. The conclusion is unmistakable. The church, not God, is the pillar and ground of the truth. Furthermore, the church *institute* is the pillar and ground of the truth. This is clear because Paul is giving instructions to Timothy on how he is to *behave himself* in the church. Just as God committed His oracles to the Old Testament church (Rom. 3:2), so He has committed the truth to the New

⁵⁰ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, repr., 1983), p. 765.

⁵¹ Camping, *The End*, p. 268.

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Testament church (I Tim. 3:15). The church's (not Family Radio's) task, indeed her privilege, is to uphold the truth in a world of lies.

Although individual churches can lose the truth by apostasy there can never be lacking a church which confesses the truth on earth. Kuiper writes,

In one sense the church of Christ is not infallible. Most assuredly it can err. It has erred grievously in the past. It errs exceedingly grievously today. But in another sense it is infallible. It will never lose the truth. The truth will never perish from the church. As there always has been a body of believers upholding the truth of God, so there always will be. The church of the past was, the church of the present is, the church of the future will be – the pillar and ground of the truth. In that respect, too, the Christian church is indeed glorious.⁵²

C. The Perpetuity of the Sacraments

According to Camping, all churches must disband and become unorganised fellowships without office-bearers, discipline or sacraments. Believers ought to gather together and fellowship together by listening to Family Radio. The obvious objection to this radical position has been made. Camping has heard it. Did Christ not command believers to observe the Lord's Supper *until He comes* (I Cor. 11:26)? Camping thinks he has an answer to this. He finds the solution in the Old Testament. Although God commanded that the ordinances in the temple be observed continually, there came a time when "God Himself interrupted the temple service by totally destroying Jerusalem."⁵³ Camping sees a parallel. God has brought judgment upon the churches so they can no longer observe the New Testament "ceremonial laws" of baptism and the Lord's Supper. He calls them "ceremonial laws" because he claims that the churches made high places out of these ordinances by calling them sacraments.⁵⁴

Camping has no basis for calling the sacraments "ceremonial laws." Nor has he any ground for his parallel. Baptism was instituted by Christ and He

⁵² Kuiper, *The Glorious Body*, pp. 77-78.

⁵³ Camping, *The End*, p. 236.

⁵⁴ Camping, *The End*, pp. 236-237.

has commanded that it be administered until the end of the world (Matt. 28:19-20). Camping overlooks an important point in Matthew 28. Preaching *and baptism* will both continue to the end. Camping wants to keep preaching (although he is not ordained to preach and Family Radio has no authority to preach) but abolish baptism. This cannot be.

The conclusion is obvious. The true church institute will be preaching and administering the two sacraments until the end of the world. That activity did not end in 1994.

D. The Perpetuity of Office-Bearers

Christ exercises authority in His church through office-bearers: pastors, elders and deacons, men lawfully called and qualified to serve in the institute.

Nevertheless, Camping tells his readers to withdraw their church membership. If the church threatens to exercise the keys of church discipline, Camping tells them not to worry: “the church no longer has any divine authority.”⁵⁵ But the church which Christ is building and against which the gates of hell will not prevail is the church to which the keys have been given (Matt. 16:18-19). These are the keys of preaching and discipline as the *Heidelberg Catechism* teaches in Lord’s Day 31.

If a whole congregation wants to follow Camping, his advice to them is to disband. Become a fellowship of believers: “The elders will no longer be elders. The deacons will no longer be deacons. The pastor will no longer be pastor. In other words, no individuals will have spiritual rule over the congregation.”⁵⁶ Thus Camping encourages mutiny or “blatantly seeks to remove the sheep from the sheepfold under the nose of the shepherds.”⁵⁷

God’s will for His church is that it be governed by office-bearers. This was the apostolic practice. They “ordained elders in every city” (Acts 14:23). Titus receives the command to “set in order the things which are wanting and ordain elders in every city” (Titus 1:5). This situation is to continue in the church: “the

⁵⁵ Camping, *The End*, p. 260.

⁵⁶ Camping, *The End*, p. 260.

⁵⁷ White, *Dangerous*, p. 92.

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things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach also” (II Tim. 2:2).

Ultimately, office-bearers are gifts of the Ascended Lord Jesus Christ. Paul teaches this in Ephesians 4. The sign that Christ has ascended is His bestowing gifts on the church, for he ascended “and gave gifts to men” (v. 8). What he gave is specified in verse 11: office-bearers. Pastors and teachers (the other extraordinary offices of apostle, prophets and evangelists were temporary) have been given to the church “for the edifying of the body of Christ” (v. 12) “till we all come to in the unity of the faith” (v. 13). Therefore this gift of office-bearers is permanent. The church will need, and Christ will graciously provide, godly pastors and teachers (and, indeed, elders and deacons) until the end. He did not withdraw that gift in 1994 or 1988.

The Bible has nothing to say to those who leave true instituted churches to form unorganised fellowships except this: set in order the things which are wanting and ordain elders (Titus 1:5)! Repent and join the church! Followers of Harold Camping are, in the words of van Bruggen, “a small herd of disobedient sheep” who have been deceived by a wolf in sheep’s clothing.⁵⁸

to be concluded (DV)

⁵⁸ J. van Bruggen, *The Church Says Amen: An Exposition of the Belgic Confession* (Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada: Inheritance Publications, 2003), p. 151.