

Understanding the End Times

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4. The Two Ages & the Two-Stage Coming of Christ, 3/25/09

Recap

- The Bible present two ages: this age and the age to come.
 - This provides a basic “floor plan” for biblical eschatology.
- The two ages exhaust all time, including future eternity.
 - All time = “this age” + “the age to come”
 - The two ages run consecutively, with no time frame in between.
- The two ages are qualitatively different, but for individuals and in terms of history.
 - “This age” does not evolve or otherwise morph into “the age to come”.
- The two ages are separated by the Day of Judgment, which ends “this age” and inaugurates “the age to come.”
 - The final judgment comes immediately upon the return of Christ.

The Two Ages: Focusing In*

1. Proposition: “This age” is and always will be an evil age.
 - The character of “this age” will always be the evil, anti-God attitude displayed in Psalm 2:

“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed” (v. 1-2).
 - Jesus says that evil men are “sons of this age” (Lk. 16:8)
 - Jesus says that believers must always expect persecution in this age (Mk. 10:30; Jn. 15:19-21).
 - Paul describes it as “this present evil age” (Gal. 1:4).
 - Paul warns us never to be conformed to the pattern of this age

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2).
 - Paul states that Satan is “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4).
 - Paul describes the formerly wicked lives of believers as “walking according to the age of this world” (Eph. 2:2).
 - John says that the desires of this world are contrary to God’s will.
 - “For all that is in the world--the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions-- is not from the Father but is from the world” (1Jn. 2:16).
 - Postmillennialism? Contrary to this proposition.

The Two Ages: Focusing In

2. Proposition: “This Age” has entered its last days

- Numerous New Testament sayings to this effect:

“And the world *is passing away* along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever”(1Jn. 2:17).

“the darkness *is passing away* and the true light is already shining” (1Jo 2:8).

- Everything that belongs to this age is “doomed”:

“Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, *who are doomed to pass away*” (1Co 2:6).

- The event that has brought the last days is the *first* coming of Christ:

“He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26).

“these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come” (1Co 10:11).

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4).

“In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb 1:2).

- Therefore, the NT references to “these last days” refers to *our* times, not some future time immediately prior to Christ’s return:

“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty” (2Ti 3:1).

“In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (Acts 2:17).

The Two Ages: Focusing In

3. Proposition: The great realities of “the age to come” have broken into “this present age” and are operating in those who believe.

- The Age to Come = The Reign of Christ

- “At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But *we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor* because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Heb 2:8-9).

- The Age to Come = The Age of the Resurrection

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1Co 15:20).

- Christ’s Reign and Resurrection Break into This Age because Jesus has ascended and taken up His kingdom

“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:16-23).

1. We need to know the hope to which we are called, the riches of God’s inheritance, and His present power for believers.
2. This power presently operated by means of the same power that raised Jesus from the dead: it is resurrection power.
3. This power is available to us because Christ has been seated above all power and dominion “not only in this age but also in the one to come”. All things have been placed under his feet and Christ is now head over all this for His church.

The Two Ages: Focusing In

3. Proposition, cont: “Age to come”/ “Reign of Christ” has broken into “this present age”

- Basis for spread of gospel.

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mat 28:18-20).

1. “All authority *has been given* to me.”
2. “Go therefore (*in this present age*) and make disciples of all nations...”
3. “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”.

- Through faith in Christ, we who live in this present age pass over into the age to come

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2Cor 5:17). More accurately, this reads, “When anyone is united to Christ, there is a *new world*. The old order has gone and a new order has already begun” (R.B. Gaffin).

“For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15).

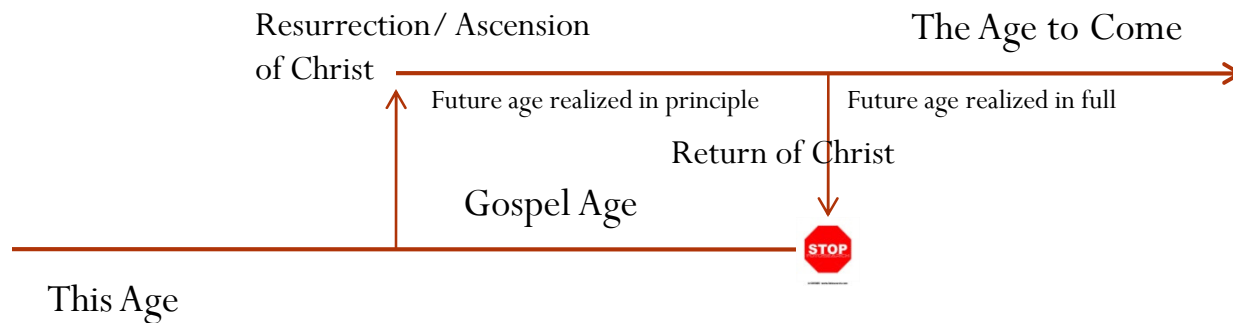
- In both of these verses Paul is not referring directly to the rebirth, but to the new age we enter through faith.

Biblical Eschatology: Enhanced Scheme

Basic Scheme of the Two Ages



Enhanced Scheme of the Two Ages*



*Taken from Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, p. 38

Implications of the Two Stage Coming of Christ

1. The Two-Stage Coming of Christ explains the two-stage character of salvation: Salvation is *already – not yet*.

- Justification:

Already: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).

Not Yet: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Mat 25:31-32).

- Adoption:

Already: “You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom 8:15).

Not Yet: “We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23).

- Redemption:

Already: “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Eph. 1:7).

Not Yet: “do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30).

- Eternal Life:

Already: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (Jn 3:36).

Not Yet: “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Mat 25:46).

- Salvation rest:

Already: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mat 11:28).

Not Yet: “So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb 4:9).

Implications of the Two Stage Coming of Christ

2. Explains the ethical tension in the Christian life

- Pursuing the “higher life” (or “second blessing,” “baptism in the Spirit,” “victorious life,” etc.)?

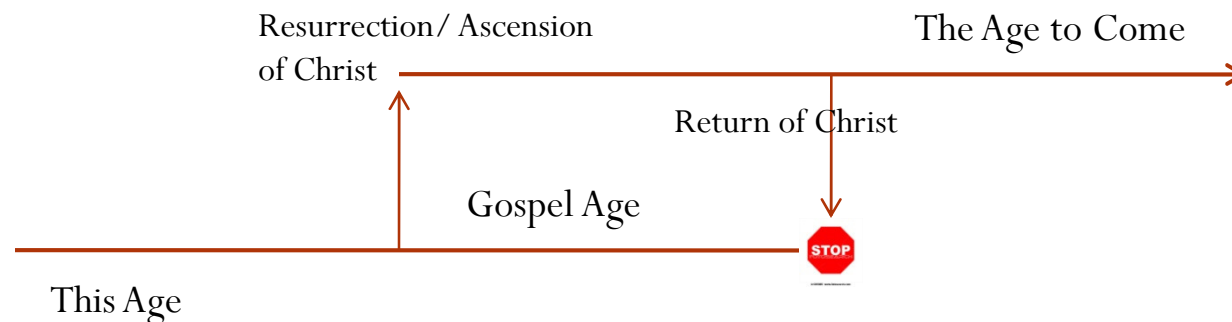
“the life I now live *in the flesh* I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

- We are to live the life of the new age while existing still in the old age.
- We have a new principle and power within us, but we are still our old sinful persons.

“You were taught... to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires... and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:22-24).

- “The only way for a true Christian to escape the battle with sin and the experience of sorrow in this age is to depart this age. He must either die and go to heaven or enter at Christ’s return into the age to come” (Sam Waldron).

Implications of the Two Stage Coming of Christ

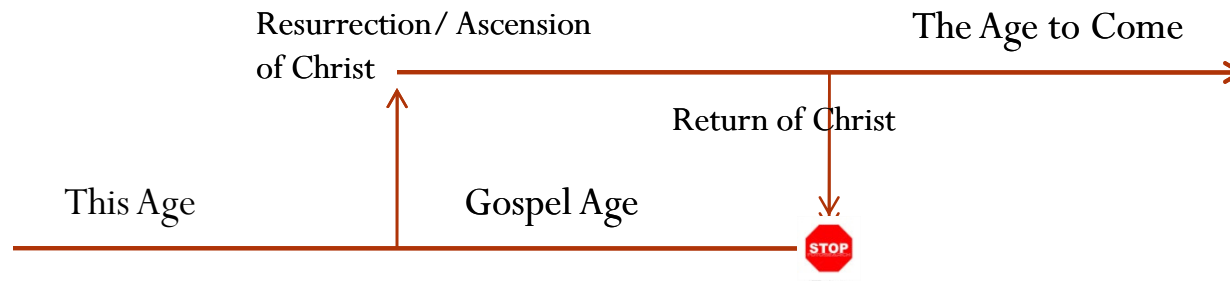


3. Establishes basic expectations for the future of the Church

- Golden age prior to Christ's return? No.
- Attitude towards the future of "this world in its present form?" Pessimistic.
- Attitude towards the gospel and church? Optimistic.
- Does the church apostatize? No.
- Inward-Outward structure: first coming (resurrection) brought inward resurrection; second coming brings outward resurrection.

"Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2Co 4:16-18 ESV)

Our Blessed Hope



- The Return of Christ: “Our blessed hope”

- All that we do aims for the age to come, which is and is yet to come.

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Tit 2:11-14).

“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace... But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (2Pe 3:11-14, 18).