

A New Order of Mankind

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We must not enter the third millennium with blind faith. God wants us to have an informed faith. God sets no premium on ignorance. We must therefore understand our gospel. Let's start by asking ourselves the question, 'Why did God create the universe?' The answer to this long-standing question provides the key to understanding everything - past, present, future, and on to the grand finale. The answer is found in John 3:35 - 'The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.' The universe is essentially the Father's love gift to his Son.

God's grand design throughout history is to bring Christ into possession of his inheritance - an inheritance which was his before it even existed! Christ was God's appointed heir before creation ever took place. The decision to bring everything that Jesus would inherit into existence through him displays the magnificent wonder of God's wisdom (Col.1:). Through the Son, God brought into being all that the Son inherited; and through the Son, God created a people with whom the Son would share all things. God's people are joint heirs in Christ, through Christ. [Ro 8:17]

Satan's hostility toward the church stems from his root hostility toward God's divine purpose in giving his Son Christ the supreme authority over all things; and our coming into Christ making us his joint heirs.. The conflict of the ages is the result of Satan constantly seeking to overthrow Christ and the church as heirs of all things. Remember, however, that Satan is not omniscient - that is an attribute which belongs to God alone. Unable to see into the future, Satan is frustrated when - having initiated what he believes is a superb plan - he discovers he has unwittingly served the purpose of God. Nowhere is this more dramatically portrayed than in the cosmic conspiratorial alliance of Satan, the powers of darkness and wicked men to crucify Christ. Following the resurrection, Peter announced that wicked men - in crucifying Christ - had only done what God had predetermined beforehand should be done. [Acts 2:23] God extends this divine principle: to protect all his children in promising 'to make all things work together for the good' of those who love him. [Ro 8:28]

But why allow Satan to even assault God's people?

The present warfare between the church and the powers of darkness is the means by which God is equipping and preparing his people for their place alongside Christ in the ruling of the universe in the ages to come. In the conflict his people are learning to trust when can't see, to submit and not to strive. Christ has already conquered completely, and the present work of the Spirit is manifesting that victory in the church by her faith in the name of Christ engaging and triumphing in

spiritual warfare. [Eph 6:12-13] It is through the hardships, the challenges and conflicts of life that our true measure as men and women is seen.

When Napoleon sought a seat in the French Chamber of Deputies (the equivalent to Parliament or Congress), men laughed and mocked him because of his youth. His reply to them was apt: 'Men mature quickly on the battlefield, and, gentlemen, it is from the battlefield I have come.' His response settled the issue and won his seat.

Triumphing or Self-Destructing?

Dispensational pessimists depict the present evil age as being in the terminal stages of self-destruction, and hold out to us no other hope than the coming of Christ to rescue his people from their final death throes. According to them, Christ's coming will enact a rescue operation for the church, accomplished by snatching his beleaguered people away from the war zone. But how can we assert ourselves to be a triumphant church if such is to be the conclusion of our time in this age? How can we claim his enemies will 'become his footstool' if this is the grand finale? (Acts 2:35)

How can we say, 'greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world' (1Jo 4:4), if this is the conclusion of the church's testimony?

Conversely, many post-millennialists see the gradual Christianising of the nations until the whole world and its structures have become the kingdom of God. They see apostasy and failure as all in the past. According to them, we are now moving into the ever-increasing light of the age to come.

Neither optimist nor pessimist is right. The Bible reveals that the moral values and lifestyle of the world, the structures of family life amongst unbelievers and their economic security will continue to disintegrate. (2 Tim.3:1-7). The world will remain at enmity with God, and under great pressure, and because of increasing evil many Christians will fall away from the faith. [Mat.24:12] But - as in the time of the early church - progress paralleled persecution, faith will explode in the hearts of ordinary people. The ruthless assault of Satan upon the early church was met by an outpouring of God's Spirit in revival power, with great miracles affirming Christ's resurrection and living presence. And so it will be in our time. (Acts 2:17-21,39) The apostle James prophesied of the end-time world harvest. Writing of the seasonal rains, he reminds us how the early ones enable farmers to plough and sow, while the latter ones come to swell the grain in preparation for the harvest. In these end times we can expect comparable visitations of God. [Ja 5:7-8] Great and widespread will be the refreshing moves of the Spirit on God's people. The final 'grande finale' move of the Spirit will be of such a proportion that multi-thousands, possibly even millions, will be swept into the kingdom of God. It will be a fulfilment of Amos' prophecy of the ploughman being overtaken by the reaper. No sooner is the seed in the ground than by the miraculous influences of the Holy Spirit there is a speedy germination of the seed, the putting forth of its shoot and

roots and its coming quickly to harvest. Seeing people confronted with the claims of the gospel, finding them ready to come into the kingdom, will not be a long drawn out affair but rather a swift move of God. Also the prophet Amos spoke excitedly of the latter day harvest, seeing it as so sudden, rapid, and widespread that there was a continual sowing and reaping as the harvest was abundant (Amos 9:13). Christ is not coming to save a beleaguered church from being overthrown, but for a triumphant church that has overcome all its enemies, advanced his kingdom across the earth and reaped the greatest world-wide harvest of lost souls ever.

“I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you” [Lk 10:19].

It is actually the risen Lord who is striding forth through his body on earth, striking the forces of darkness with the two-edged sword of truth, driving them back and chaining their influence among the nations through the transforming power of the gospel. Paul tells the Roman Christians, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” [Ro 16:20]. In folk religion the posture of the Christian toward fallen angels is defensive; in Scripture the church is on the offensive, and the blows it receives from Satan come from a retreating enemy.[1]

We are not triumphalists - but we intend to triumph, and we live and act accordingly. Tomorrow's age can be more and more our experience today as we increasingly demonstrate God's values and standards in every area of our life and influence. We do not leave everything to be sorted out in the future; we live the future now. Tomorrow telescopes back into today as we live in the light of the consummation of all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

In 1978 Dr. Leighton Ford, then Chairman of the International Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, rightly said, ‘Other people can think about the future, worry about the future, plan for the future, fear the future, discuss the future. But only God's people can live in the future. We Christians live on the borderline of the “already” and the “not yet” of “this age” and “the age to come”. And that is because in Jesus Christ the future has already invaded time and grasped our lives.’[2]

It is the new man - man of the new order, man in Christ - who holds the key to the Restoration of all things spoken by the prophets. What kind of people are these people of the new order? They are just like the man who has already achieved the throne rule - they are like Christ for they are in Christ.

[1] Richard Lovelace, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, IVP, Downers Grove, 1979; p 136

[2] Donald E. Hoke, Ed., *Evangelicals Face the Future*, William Carey Library, South Pasadena, USA, 1978 p 41