

Already but Not Yet
January 31st, 2010

Acts 2:14-18

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. 15 For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

**17'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.
18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophesy.**

So what was Peter saying when he made that declaration? He was saying that the long awaited age to come had begun. What was the evidence? God had poured out His personal presence, the Holy Spirit in and among His people. However, what also became clear was that the End had only just begun.

Acts 2:19-21

**19 I will show wonders in heaven above
And signs in the earth beneath:
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.
20 The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.
21 And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the LORD
Shall be saved.'
NKJV**

The age to come had begun but it had not yet been consummated. They still had to wait on the consummating event which would be the second coming of Christ.

Will the consummation be characterized as well by resurrection and by God's personal presence? Yes. There will be a general resurrection of the dead in the consummation at Christ's return.

Rev 20:11-14

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

NKJV

And in the consummation not only will God the Holy Spirit be present with His people, but God the Father and God the Son will be as well.

Rev 21:3

3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

NKJV

That's at the consummation. So the early church came to understand that they lived "between the times." Already the future had begun, but not yet had it been completely fulfilled. This already/not yet perspective is the framework for understanding the New Testament message and the life and witness of the early church. They really got that they were a people of the future living in the present. That framework determined everything about them – how they lived, how they thought, how they understood their place, and their mission in the present world, which was, in fact, on its way out.

Not surprisingly, then, this already/not yet perspective absolutely characterized Paul's outlook, his message, his ministry, and his letters. You can see that perspective in both his words and writings concerning Christ, salvation, the church, ethics, the present, the future, and in everything. This framework is the proper mindset from which we must read the New Testament if we are going to really get the gospel of the kingdom, be witnesses to the new covenant, and duplicate the world-changing impact of the early church.

Let's look at some examples of this framework as seen in the letters of Paul.

The age to come is presently upon us.

1 Cor 10:11

11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have (already) come.

NKJV

Christ's death and resurrection passed sentence on the present evil age and as a result that age is presently passing away.

1 Cor 7:31

For the form of this world is passing away.

NKJV

With the resurrection of Christ and the personal presence of the Holy Spirit, new creation has already begun for those who are in Him.

2 Cor 5:16-17

16 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

NKJV

For us it's no longer appropriate to view life or people from the perspective of the flesh - from the perspective of the "old order" of things. That old order view includes the fallen evil world and the old covenant. Both have to be flushed from our new covenant perspective.

The death and resurrection of Christ and coming of the Holy Spirit mean for us both death to the old and a radical new life in the present.

Even salvation is to be seen from this radical new perspective. God's final salvation has already been accomplished in Christ. Where did that happen? On the cross! In sort of a divine time warp, the wrath of God, the future condemnation that we all deserve, has been transferred from the future into the past, having been borne by Christ.

Rom 8:1-3

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned (past tense) sin in the flesh,

NKJV

Because of that, Paul can say that we (past tense) "have been" saved.

Eph 2:8-9

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

NKJV

But since our salvation has not yet been fully realized, not yet consummated, already/not yet, Paul can also speak of salvation as something presently in process.

1 Cor 1:18

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being (present tense) **saved it is the power of God.**

NKJV

And yet, though it has been accomplished and is in process, our salvation is also yet to be accomplished.

Rom 5:9

9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be (future tense) **saved from wrath through Him.**

NKJV

So even with a concept as basic to who we are as salvation, we can see an “already but not yet” component. That’s true about us and our experience precisely *because* we are the people living between the times.

This perspective doesn’t apply to just salvation.

We can see similar “already but not yet” language in regard to redemption.

Eph 1:7

7 In Him we have (already) **redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace...**

NKJV

In the same letter -

Eph 4:30

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (not yet).

NKJV

We see “already but not yet” language in regard to our adoption.

Rom 8:15

15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." We already have it by the Holy Spirit. Again in the same letter, this time just a few verses later.

Rom 8:23

23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. We are still waiting for the consummation of our adoption at our own bodily resurrection.

We see “already but not yet” language in regard to our justification.

Rom 5:1

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ
NKJV

Gal 5:5

5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.
NKJV

Justification is the gift of righteousness. Even though we have it already, still we wait for it eagerly by faith. It’s already ours, but not yet fully consummated.

This “already but not yet” framework likewise causes Paul to see the church as an end-time community. Do we really think of the church that way? That’s life as the Bible presents it to us. We live in the present yet we are stamped with eternity. That’s why we live as strangers on earth.

Phil 3:20

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ
NKJV

So for us, ethical living does not consist of a set of rules to follow. Rather, we now, empowered by the Holy Spirit, live the life of the future, the life of heaven, in the present age. That life has the characteristics of God Himself since we now live by His life in us.

That’s why Paul appeals to end time realities when encouraging the believers to live differently than the rest of the world.

1 Cor 6:1-3

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest

matters? 3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

NKJV

Our heavenly citizenship trivializes earthly grievances. We should never be put in the position where we are looking for a ruling among ourselves from the very people who we will ultimately judge.

Here's the point. We, those who are in Christ, are partakers of the life to come. We have tasted of the powers of the age to come. Our future in God is so certain and so manifest in God the Holy Spirit's presence in us that we truly are called to be heaven's radical people on the earth as we live in this "already but not yet" existence.

That's possible because Christ has ushered in the age to come. It's experienced because the Holy Spirit is God's empowering presence in and among us. The greatest tragedy in the experience of Christian life today is that so many live as if we are waiting on the promises of the future to come - living as a *not yet* people instead of as an *already* people. We're both. The early church knew this truth and lived it out by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's precisely why they had such an impact on their cultures.

For next week:

For next week (Jan 31), consider these scriptures which declare that the Holy Spirit is both the evidence that the age to come has arrived and the guarantee that it will be consummated:

2 Cor 1:21-22

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, 22 who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge. (NASU)

2 Cor 5:5

Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. (NASU)

Eph 1:13-14

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. (NASU)

Rom 8:23

Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

2 Cor 1:21-22

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, 22 who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

Eph 1:13

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,

Eph 4:30

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.