

Corinthians Eagerly Await the *Parousia*

With our attention drawn to Paul's corrective teachings about the factions, immorality, lawsuits, and various other problems disturbing the church in Corinth, it has been easy for us to overlook the eager anticipation of Jesus' soon return which they entertained. If we fail to recognize that expectancy which Paul affirms, we miss the full appreciation of some of his messages to the disciples there.

In his introduction of his first letter to them Paul commended, *"Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor. 1:7-8 NIV). Notice that his readers were to survive to "the end" on "the day of our Lord," that being the time of his "*parousia*" or "revealing / presence." This is similar to his benediction to the Thessalonians that each *"whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Thes. 5:23 NIV). One hardly waits eagerly for a promise thousands of years in the future. Paul made no correction of their expectancy for he was the one who had taught them to look for the soon return. He made no attempt to cool their eagerness.

Paul will have much more to say in his letter about spiritual gifts. In this setting, there is inference that those gifts were given for the particular period of time.

The judgmental aspect of Jesus' return is pointed out (3:13 RSV) for *"each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire.."* So the disciples were to be careful about their work on the construction crew of fellow-laborers on the building of God. In various lessons before we have pointed to teachings of Malachi, John the Baptist, Jesus, and other inspired writers who associate judgment with the "*parousia*" so we will not repeat them here.

In this setting, Paul continues, *"Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God"* (4:5). The purpose for their discipline of the immoral man among them was *"that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"* (5:1-5). From these statements of Paul, we may conclude that, if the judgment did not occur on the "day of the Lord" at the end of their age, then neither has salvation come for them.

The realization of the shortness of time before the imminent catastrophe tempered Paul's advice to the unmarried. *"I mean, brethren,"* he cautioned, *"the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away"* (7:29-31). This is not a platitude as is commonly repeated by

preachers about the uncertainty of life; he knew events were soon to transpire that would bring great distress upon disciples throughout the Roman empire. The form of the then-present world of Judaism would soon pass away.

A review of historic transgressions of Israel which brought God's wrath were highlighted by Paul. From them he offered an applicable lesson: "*Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come*" (10:11). The last days in when judgment would come upon Israel were closing on them. If the end of the age has not come, then the "end of the ages" is much longer than the age of Judaism itself.

This point takes us by surprise. In reviewing the beginning of the Communion, Paul writes, "*In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*" (1 Cor. 11:25-26). Was Paul explaining that the Supper would serve its purpose "*until he comes,*" after which it would no longer be practiced? Some students accept that as being true, so they no longer participate in the Lord's Supper.

The question must be asked: If the participation was to proclaim the Lord's death throughout all coming generations, why would "*until he comes*" be added as a limitation?

It is true that the blood of the covenant had already been shed, but "*..the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened as long as the outer tent is still standing*" (Heb. 9:8). This chapter explains that as high priest Christ entered the Holy Place with his own blood securing an eternal redemption. At his return, the "outer tent" "which is (at that present time) symbolic for the (then) present age" would be taken out of the way and the way into the new sanctuary would be opened. The system of Judaism would give way to the new and living way (see Heb. 10:19-21).

Should we discontinue the Lord's Supper, or is it still a binding obligation? It was not a "salvation issue" from the beginning. OK, go ahead a scream! It was not a legalized ritual on a checklist of obligations to be performed each week, or whenever, under penalty of hell. Its purpose was for us to be reminded of the source of our salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus. This would be a continual refreshing of our faith rather than the keeping of a list of laws each and every week.

Now that the covenant has been sealed and forgiveness has been offered through the sacrifice of Jesus, is it not beneficial to be reminded continually of it? The value derived from participation is still effective. It is not a legalized ritual to be performed in specific form to meet God's approval, but it is a refresher of our faith, not until he comes but because he has come.

Now we approach the great "resurrection chapter" of Paul's writing. Having held to the more traditional explanations of Chapter 15, it has been most difficult for me to think that

there might be other interpretations. Of course, there are parts of it that I have never been sure about, but I learned to steer around those points. At this time we will look only at the things that related to the “coming of the Lord,” rather than discussing the nature of the resurrection. You are invited to look back on three previous lessons: “*Last Days Resurrection*,” FR 71; “*With What Body Do They Come?*”, FR 72; and “*Will Flesh or Spirit Be Immortal?*”, FR 73. Now, let us read 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ‘For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘All things are put in subjection under him,’ it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.”

In his letter Paul addressed the matters that the Corinthians had written him about (7:1). Evidently, they had similar concerns that we discussed in FR 87. They expected to live to see the return of the Lord, but some of them had died. That led them to think that they would be excluded from the promises. So Paul explained the sequence of events relating to the “*parousia*” in the text above.

They were assured that the basis of their hope, that is, the resurrection of Christ, was true. Christ was raised as the first fruits that promised a fuller harvest. All would be made alive. Christ was first, then at his coming (the “*parousia*”) those who belonged to him would be made alive. That would include the righteous of Israel who still slept in death. At that end of their dispensation and their earthly kingdom, Christ would raise and deliver them up to the Father. In that coming he would destroy the Jewish system and its leaders who had been his enemies on earth. He would glorify the righteous dead in his spiritual kingdom and deliver them up to the Father, now that the way into heaven had been established. He had already conquered death, but at his return he would raise all the righteous to restored life, thus destroying their enemy, death.

These happenings would be a confirmation of Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 24 of the “end of the world” or “close of the age” (not the end of the universe), and of the judgment scene of Matthew 25 of the separating of the sheep and goats, being judged according to their works under the Law of Moses, all to be accomplished in their generation.

Thereafter, according to the dispensation of grace, it would be different. It is appointed for man once to die and after that the judgment, we are informed, but Jesus took our appointment with death and stood in judgment in our stead (Heb. 9:27-28). At his second

coming he did not have to deal with sin but he received those who had accepted his grace and were eagerly waiting for him.

Hear again these amazing promises of Jesus: *“whoever lives and believes in me shall never die”* (John 11:26). *“Truly, truly, I say to you, if any one keeps my word, he will never see death”* (John 8:51) *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand,”* Jesus promised (John 10:27-28).

Not all the Corinthians would sleep in death. *“Lo, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed”* (15:51-52).

And so it was with them, according to Jesus’ own promise. Likewise, for us he has destroyed death, that is, the power of death to hold us prisoner. In speaking of destroying death, death is personified as an enemy being. Death, like darkness, is a negative which cannot be obliterated. Light, a positive, prevents or dispels darkness. In like manner, life, a positive, prevents or dispels death. Jesus has given us that life. There will be no detaining sleep in death as was endured by those in past ages before he opened the way into heaven. For us, when each of us hears his trumpet call into the heavenly assembly, we will be changed immediately from this mortal, dying body of flesh into an imperishable nature.

In a closing greeting written by his own hand, Paul seems to shout what must have been a watchword among them: *“Maran-atha!”* --- Aramaic meaning *“Our Lord, come!”* Did they *“eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed”* in vain two thousand years too early? Let’s not accuse Paul of sponsoring our misconceptions. Even though we may not delineate with certainty all that transpired at the coming of the Lord in those last days, there are too many indications that they would come upon that generation for us to deny it.

For me, this is more an exploration of the preterist concept than an expression of dogma. You who regularly read my material understand that as we investigate together.. You may see many problems with what I am presenting. That does not disturb me. I know of no explanation that is not debatable. Understanding of these things is certainly not essential.

(Cecil Hook, October 2001) []

