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Of Polished Brass and Sinking Ships

by Murray McLeod-Boyle

1.0 Introduction.

The doctrine of the two ages is something that is not often discussed in Christian circles, which is a pity as the doctrine yields some very helpful insights.

This doctrine is found throughout Scripture, which should be of no real surprise, as it forms the very essence of its message. Often the doctrine of the two ages will be obscured if we look only for the term "age." Thus, a priority, particularly in dealing with the Old Testament, is to realise that the doctrine of the "ages" might well be titled 'the tale of two kingdoms.' When we realise that these terms are synonymous we are better able to grasp the big picture that is painted on Scripture's canvass.

Furthermore, we must, of necessity, define what we mean by the terms "age" and "kingdom." When we speak of the doctrine of the "ages" we are not, in the strictest sense, talking about time boundness. We are not talking about an historical epoch that can be readily identified by events that clearly delineate beginning from end. Rather, we are concerned with a doctrine that speaks about the physical and metaphysical climate of a particular epoch.

Speaking in reference to the Greek word for "age", Vine has this to say:

Aion . . . signifies a period of indefinite duration, or time viewed in relation to what takes place in the period. The force attaching to the word is not so much the actual length of period, but that of a period marked by spiritual or moral characteristics.¹

With this in mind we must understand that the *primary* objective is to de-

fine the different "ages" in terms of their moral and spiritual content. This may seem a somewhat difficult task, but in reality it is one that we do all the time. For instance, in the course of normal conversation we speak of 'the dark ages'; 'the medieval period'; 'the reformation'; 'the renaissance' and of 'modernism.' What delineates one period from the other is not chronology, but the spiritual/cultural milieu of the day.

However, in Scripture, as with most of the abovementioned periods, one can, as a general rule, point to an historical event that helps us to see chronological lines of demarcation.

Hence, we are not far into Scripture when we are confronted by the cataclysmic event of the fall. Whilst we rightly look at the fall in terms of its detrimental effect upon mankind, we often do not give heed to the cosmic battle that stands as the precursor to the fall. The fall was no chance happening, and it certainly did not take place in a vacuum.

Behind the fall stands a Righteous God who is the rightful possessor of all that He has created. There is peace, harmony and joy as this Great King rules over and surveys what is His. However, this peace is shattered when Satan, deluded by his own sense of grandeur, starts a war with God in a 'winner take all' battle. It is at this very point that we encounter the beginning of the conflict between these two kingdoms, and the entrance of two distinct ages.

This is so because the "*spiritual or moral characteristics*" of each kingdom are completely antithetical to each other.

The Kingdom of God stands for life, light, truth, righteousness, harmony, relationship, dominion and worship; all of which take place in the context of (unbroken) fellowship with God Himself.

That kingdom over which Satan is in control holds out death, chaos, darkness, subjugation and unrighteousness as its main tenants, and all of these take place in the context of open rebellion toward God.

So it is that each of these kingdoms are represented by an age — an "age" in which the key elements of each kingdom are demonstrated, as the forces on each side wage war for the sole right to rule this creation.²

2.0 Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, no clearer testimony exists than that of the whole book of Daniel. In this book we are confronted with a national crisis on the part of Judah. The Northern kingdom of Israel had been exiled by the Assyrians. Now Judah is led captive to Babylon by the great king Nebuchadnezzar. The earthly representation of Yahweh's reign was caused to cease by the great pagan king, who left Jerusalem and the temple a waste and a ruin.

Did this mean that Yahweh had been conquered? Did this mean that Yahweh had been dethroned? Had the kingdom of darkness overpowered the kingdom of light? In a temporal manor it did. Some believed that this was exactly what had happened.³ However, these people looked at the situation from the wrong perspective — a perspective that Dan-

1. W.E.Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (ed. O.T., F.F. Bruce; Iowa Falls, Iowa: Word Bible Publishers) 41, emphasis added.

2. This in no way implies that God has lost control of this world and is desperately seeking to hold on. Rather, it is designed to reflect the reality in which we find ourselves. The same reality with which Scripture deals.

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iel's testimony was to openly contradict and conflict with.

Daniel is replete with illustrations of how these two ages collide. An obvious example can be found in those proud and pompous earthly kings, who are representative of "this age." Men who were constantly carried away with delusions of grandeur, like their father the devil. Men who saw nothing but seventy years of life upon this planet and who, as a consequence, lived completely for themselves. Men whose morals were utterly corrupt. Men who perpetuated the spread of evil.³ Men who craved riches, power, worship and an everlasting memory. Consider Nebuchadnezzar who, gazing upon the city of Babylon, declared: "Is this not Babylon the great, which *I myself* have built...by the *might of my power* and for the glory of *my majesty*?" (Daniel 4:30. Emphasis added.). Here we see clearly that this king demonstrates that he belongs to the kingdom of darkness. He counts Yahweh as nothing; He steals Yahweh's glory and exalts himself to the highest heavens. Yet, for this rebellion he was banished, by Yahweh, to a place amongst the wild beasts. A position in which he was kept until he understood *that Yahweh alone was the Great King* (4:34f).

As the book of Daniel strains to show us the conflict between the ages it does so by depicting these kings as belonging to an age that is antitheocratic.

Through the visions, dreams and apocalyptic that are the book of Daniel, a clear picture emerges. There are two kingdoms at war. The kingdom represented by "this age" seems to be all powerful. There are mighty kings portrayed; there are mighty kingdoms prophesied, all of which represent, in some shape or form, "this age." Yet constantly woven into the backdrop is the message that Yahweh is in control. You see, the book of Daniel does far more than simply reveal who the combatants are — *it actually declares who the victor of this struggle is to be.*

Take chapter two of Daniel as an example. In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a great statue that was divided into four segments, each being different in its composition. Daniel's interpretation discloses that the differing segments of this statue stand, first of all, for various world empires. Secondly, the composition of each part reflects the kingdom's size, might and durability. Four world empires. Each powerful. All gluttonous warriors in search of more territory to conquer. Each representative of this age. What an awesome display of might and tyranny.

Yet Daniel has not finished. He is yet to tell us of this seemingly insignificant "stone." A "stone" which was "cut out of the mountain without hands," which came forth and crushed this statue so that it "became like chaff." What are we to make of this? Victory, that is the answer. This event portrays for us the day when "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed" because "it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, *but it will itself endure forever.*"

Thus Sinclair B. Ferguson is correct when, speaking in relation to the book of Daniel, he says:

The heart of this book's message is, of course, the good news of the kingdom of God. Nations and empires, thrones and dominions will rise and fall, but the city of God will endure. His kingdom will last forever, and the gates of hell

shall not withstand it. The stone cut without hands will break into pieces the idols of man's creation and ultimately grow into a mountain that will fill the whole earth.⁵

Consequently, it can be seen that the Old Testament divulges to us the fact that their are rival forces in the heavenly realms. Importantly it also discloses that there are representatives of each "kingdom" upon this earth. Therefore, we see that men like Joseph, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, stood in the courts of pagan kings as a living testimony to them that Yahweh is the Supreme King. They stood then, and they stand now, as a witness to the fact that *all powers must yield to Yahweh in humble submission or be crushed by Him.* HSee also Psalm 2, where the kings are warned to consider their way, lest the anger of the Son should flare quickly and they perish.

3.0 New Testament — Tensions escalate:

TURNING FROM OLD TESTAMENT to New, we gain a heightened perspective on the doctrine of the two "ages." We also note that there is a change in terminology. The Old Testament spoke in terms of kingdoms and focused upon geographical locations that were ruled by national kings. Now, with the Gospel breaking out beyond the borders of Israel, there is a change in emphasis. No longer are allegiances dealt with on a national scale. Rather, the individual, regardless of nationality, comes to the fore.⁶ Each individual is now categorised according to the "age" to which he belongs. No more is there Jew and Gentile; there are simply those who are of "this age" and those who are of "the age to come". Individuals must now look beyond the physical rulers of this world to the ultimate eschatological kingdoms and their kings.

Therefore, the New Testament, makes it starting point with the arrival of the eagerly awaited Dividic King. With the coming of Jesus we are confronted by the fact that the Kingdom of God was inaugurated.⁷

3. An example of this type of mentality can be found in 2 Kings 18:31-35.

4. Note how often in the book of Daniel that people are threatened with death by the king. Under Theocratic rule the king could legitimately only dispense death if it had been so decreed by Yahweh. Here is a prime example of how the two kingdoms are represented. As stated earlier, God's Kingdom is one of life and this is clearly demonstrated by the laws He gave Israel to live by. These laws being designed to promote life. In stark contrast to this is the pagan kings who represent death. They treated life as cheap. People could be put to death on the whim and fancy of the king even though they had committed no real crime. An example of this is the chief baker and cup-bearer of Pharaoh who both met differing fates, just as Joseph predicted.

5. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Daniel* (ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie; The Communicator's Commentary, Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1988) p. 24.

6. This in no way implies that God is not interested in society. As God is both society and individual He is interested in both aspects. In the Old Testament God worked with society as the norm pausing briefly to receive individuals. In the New Testament it is the individual that falls under the spotlight. It is a collective of individuals from all tribes that shall make up God's society.

7. See: Matt 3:2; 4:17, 23; 10:7; Mk 10:23-25; Lk 13:18ff.

is here signifying that emotions such as "cares" and "worries" are particular to this age. The implication here is that these emotions are not only peculiar to this age, but are in opposition to the coming age. Hence, Paul exhorts us: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). The exact point being made is that as participants of the coming age we need not be concerned about anything, as our Sovereign God has all things in and under His control. Not so those who are of this age. These are constantly perplexed by life because they have no bright hope for tomorrow. As Matthew 6:31-32 says: "Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' "For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for *your* heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

Paul also underscores the fact that there are two ages when in Romans 12:2 he urges that a transformation is to take place. We are not to be conformed to "this age," but must be transformed by the power of the coming age which is present now.⁸

3.3 *The Age to Come*

The next category of texts are those that place the emphasis upon "the age to come".

Jesus, speaking (see Luke 18:30) of the reward that will be given to those who faithfully follow Him, says that they will not fail to receive a blessing now. Neither will they miss out on eternal life "in the age to come." Likewise, the apostle Paul (Ephesians 2:7), says that we have been raised and seated with Christ in order that "in the ages to come" we might be shown the grace and kindness of God.

3.4 *This Age and The Age to Come*

Lastly, we look at those passages that juxtapose the relevant terms.

In Matthew 12:32, Jesus, speaking of the sin against the Holy Spirit, makes the point that it shall not be forgiven "in this age nor in the one to come."

Luke 20:27ff recounts the story of a Sadducee who questioned Jesus in regard to the resurrection. In the course of His reply Jesus states that the sons "of

this age" marry and are given in marriage. This forms a direct contrast with those worthy to attain to "the age to come" who neither marry or are given in marriage.

Paul, in declaring the magnitude of Christ's name (Ephesians 1:21), tells us that God has given Him a name that is above all names, both "in this age and in the one to come."

From this summary we are able to understand that the New Testament writers believed not only in the doctrine of the two ages, but also in the fact that they overlap, and thereby create a tension.

4.0 The Book Of Hebrews.

IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS this tension is felt as nowhere else in the New Testament. The writer is seeking to encourage a group of Christians who are considering apostasy as a legitimate option.

The way the writer tries to encourage them is by pointing them both backward to the historical fact of Christ and His atoning work, and forward to the eschaton. The purpose of this is to show that they are both inextricably linked.

The author strives to show his wavering flock that atonement and eschaton are two distinct historical events, one past the other future, yet they are at the same time the one event. A rough analogy would be to a movie picture that is screened over two nights or which is split into two segments by an intermission.⁹

This being the case, it is a very striking aspect of Hebrews that it almost totally excludes any explicit references to the "age to come." Most references are made by implication, and come to light in the paranetic and doctrinal sections of the book.

The primary aim of the author of Hebrews is to show that Christ is "better" or "supreme." He establishes this point by revealing that Christ is greater than Moses (3:3ff), Aaron (7:1-10), and Angels (1:1-14). That His priesthood is better because it is Melchizedekian (7:1-28), which, being both eternal and bestowed by God, is better than the Aaronic priesthood which is in need of a progenitor. That Christ offered a better *sacrifice*, with better *blood*, (9:12-14)

Bankruptcies on Increase

Ian Hodge, Ph.D.

Bankruptcies have increased by as much as 46% in Queensland in the past year. Trailing behind New South Wales in the total number of bankruptcies, the increase reflects a growing number of problems in the economy.

Seventy percent of the total bankruptcies were personal, however, according to Anthony Marx in an article in the Brisbane *Courier Mail* of December 28. By this I assume the article means that the incidences were not related to failed business enterprises. The two major reasons given were unemployment and "an excessive use of credit." Reports earlier last year linked a growing problem with housing loans where prospective home buyers had been enticed into taking on mortgages with very low deposit requirements.

The low interest rates available now are an attraction to borrowers, but increased borrowing only leads to expansion of the money supply (inflation). This, in turn, leads to unstable monetary conditions and increases the difficulty people have in making correct financial decisions, especially longer term ones.

A related issue, according to the report, was the changing "social mores". People no longer were embarrassed to become bankrupts.

The report indicates another issue that probably contributes to the rise in bankruptcies. Under normal debt recovery procedures, people could have all their wages seized except for \$200 a week. Bankruptcy, thus, can become a shelter from creditors and a means of avoiding paying legitimate debts.

Debt avoidance, however, contributes to the growing financial problems in the country, since it transfers a financial problem to creditors. Some smart creditors, however, will have factored an overhead cost of bad debts into their prices, and these businesses can be expected to survive a while longer. The others may become a statistic in the number of bankruptcies.

The remaining 30% of bankruptcies were business related. Of these, the two leading factors were money management errors and regional economic

8. Space does not permit a complete survey. See also: 1 Corinthians 1:20; 2:6; 3:18; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Gal 1:4; 1 Timothy 6:17; 2 Timothy 4:10.

9. That this is so can also be established from Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15:20 and 23. Here, during the great discussion on the resurrection, Paul refers to Christ as the "first-fruits." Whilst this term signifies something set apart for God, it is obvious that the first-fruits of any harvest have a direct link to any later produce from that same crop. Hence, the resurrection of Christ is the first-fruits of the resurrection to be experienced by all believers. There are not two resurrections, but one.

and thereby established a better *covenant* — Christ's sacrifice being better because it was "once for all" (10:10, 12), and was in no need of repetition. Last of all the author notes triumphantly that since completing this work He has sat down at the right hand of God (10:12 and 1:3).

Here, the essential point is that Christ is better precisely because He belongs to that age which is to come. Whilst in no way wishing to sound like a process theologian, we must understand that Christ has realised, in full, the eschatological age of the Kingdom of God and wants us to share that with Him (John 14:2-3). He stands, as it were, in the future and calls us, even now, to be like Him. This is, however, the point at which the tension arises, for both the Hebrews and ourselves.

Therefore, the writer exhorts the Hebrews to persevere in light of the fact that they are participants of the coming age. As he applies his main theme — Christ's superiority — to the situation at hand he continually touches upon the tension of the "already and not yet." However, rather than confusing his flock he is able to use this doctrine to calm their fears.

4.1 The age to Come

Within the book of Hebrews the term "age" is used only three times and there are at most four explicit references to the age/world to come.¹⁰

1. Hebrews 6:5: In this reference there is an explicit mention of the "powers of the age to come." This text is a little ambiguous, yet placed in the broader context it can be clearly understood. Its clear teaching is that the power of the "age to come" is present now.

The Greek word "dunamis" is rendered as "powers" at this point. In order to understand the meaning here we will do well to note its close association with the Holy Spirit in verse 4. Furthermore, by returning to 2:4 we will do well to note that a word from the same root is used and again it is in close association with the Holy Spirit. Here the term "dunamis," is rendered as "miracles". What we are able to ascertain from this is that the signs, wonders and miracles (works of power) of 2:4 are a manifestation of the "powers of the age to come" (6:5). Moreover, it is clear from this text that the Holy Spirit is of the coming age and that

His presence here and now is an indication that the age to come has arrived in power.

2. Hebrews 9:26: It is at once clear that when we read about the "consummation of the ages" that it is figurative. However, this only serves to highlight the overlap of the ages. The writer is here making the point that Jesus entered the real Holy of Holies that was not made with human hands. He entered into the heavenly tabernacle with His own Blood and therefore there was no need for any kind of repetitious sacrifices. Christ had offered Himself once for all. The writer thus concludes that *this sacrifice* was made at the consummation of the ages. This no doubt has reference to the Old Testament dispensation in that Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament types. Yet it is more than apparent that we still share in the same problem as those who lived under the Old Testament dispensation. Hence we must look further. What the writer here establishes is the certainty and sufficiency of the sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice was so definitive that it can be looked upon as the consummation of the ages. It is as though the author is saying that Christ's sacrifice was so decisive that history could have been brought to a close there and then. Therefore, we once again see the overlap of the ages as a feature of the writers argument. Christ has brought the future to the present and thus it shall be until the future dawns in all its glory and this age is no more.

3. Hebrews 2:5: Unlike the preceding references the word "age" does not appear here. Rather, we find the phrase "the world to come," which, in context, must be taken as synonymous with "the age to come." This, then, shows that the age to come is to be ruled by man. More importantly it is to be ruled by The Man, Jesus Christ.¹¹ However, what we are compelled to note is that Christ already rules. Mark Rushdoony has rightly said that, "it is not necessary for Christ to be present to exercise His present lordship".¹² All that matters is that Christ sits at the Right hand of the Majesty on High and there rules over His Kingdom.

4.2 The Day

Another significant factor in the writer to the Hebrew's argument is that of "the day" or "another day".

problems. These factors, however, boil down to one issue: poor management skills.

It is no use blaming "regional economic problems" for failed businesses, since it is the responsibility of those running the business to prepare themselves for these kinds of circumstances and plan accordingly. Nevertheless, planning is what many businesses fail to do.

Many business outcomes are predictable. They are also manageable. While there are no guarantees in business, those businesses that develop a plan that has some reasonableness to it will usually succeed. That plan, if done properly, will include many issues blamed for the bankruptcies, such as a slowdown in the state's population growth.

Planning means taking a longer term approach to business management. A person's view of time, however, is determined by his religious beliefs. The self-centredness of modern society works against long term planning. Debt, the ability to shorten — temporarily — a longer term goal, is a major contributor to the declining longer term vision of the population. Instant gratification is now available at 7.45% per annum, fixed for two years.

On top of all this is the dramatic change in corporate culture. It has been predicted that by early next decade, less than 40% of people will have a job. Larger corporations that are "downsizing" (a euphemism for sacking staff) will retain a core of key management people. A majority of the workers' work will be "out sourced", that is, provided by workers employed as contractors, not as permanent employees.

Economic circumstances are helping this displacement of employees to occur. For example, a company that employs 20 people in its Information Technology (computer) department has the related costs of running that department. If the services are purchased externally, putting pressure on the costs of supplying those services is easier for the buying company.

Then we can add what amounts to a low level of productivity in Australian industry. While my personal experiences may not be representative, since I have been dealing with businesses with identified problems in them, finding productivity levels within business at around

10. These are: 2:5; 6:5; 9:26 and 11:3. At this point we will not discuss 11:3. While it does use the word "age" the reference is more to our grasping something by faith. Since this topic will be dealt with later this text will be left until then.

11. This is clearly illustrated by the quotation from Psalm 8 that immediately follows. This quotation is introduced to show that man has a high position in creation which, due to the entrance of sin, he has never fully realised. However, there is One who, while made low for a little while, has transcended and has been crowned with honour.

12. Chalcedon Report, *A Reconstructionist View of The Future* No 367, Feb. 1996, p. 29.

In 4:8-9 the Sabbath rest of God's people is introduced. The writer here compares God's rest from creation with the rest given to the people of Israel by Joshua. From this the point is established that long after Joshua settled Canaan, the Psalmist warns the people not to fail to enter God's rest. The conclusion drawn from this is that there still remains an ultimate eschatological rest for the people of God. Therefore, the people should look for "another day." A day that is to come, when God will give his people *final* rest.

In a similar way Hebrews 10:25 speaks of "the day". The writer has just warned his brethren that they should not stop meeting together, but, rather, should be encouraging one another especially as they see "the day" drawing near.

Thomas Hewitt, in commenting on this point says that:

Primarily, *the day approaching* refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, ... Yet *the day*, which is the regular term for the day of the Lord, cannot be limited to the catastrophe of AD 70 but includes the parousia which is ever drawing near.¹³

However, one cannot say for sure that the writer had in mind the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Whilst this may be a real *possibility* we will do well to understand this reference as pointing *primarily to the parousia*. "When spoken of in this absolute manner, "the Day" can only mean the last day, that ultimate eschatological day, which is the day of reckoning and judgment, known as the Day of the Lord".¹⁴

Therefore, the writer points forward to another day which is yet to come. As the Israelites found rest in the land, yet awaited the final rest, so Christians must likewise enjoy the blessings of the land now, yet still wait for the final rest.

4.3 A City

A further underlining of the overlap of the two ages is illustrated by the comparison of the "city" spoken of in Hebrews.

In 11:10 we are told that Abraham was "looking for a city with foundations." This city was designed and built by God. Furthermore, 11:13 tells us that Abraham never saw this city, he only "welcomed it from a distance." The city he looked for was still future. This city is no doubt the one we read about in Revelation 21:2: "And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusa-

lem, coming down out of heaven from God."

This city is to be revealed only at the consummation of the ages. It will not be seen or revealed before then. Yet, in Hebrews 12:22 the writer tells his people that "you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." Once again we are confronted by the overlap of the ages. Whilst the city for which Abraham looked is still to be revealed it is at the same time already present. Those who are partakers in Christ *now* have in fact already arrived at the holy city.

Christ, has come at the consummation of the ages. As He introduced the Kingdom, so He also introduced its capital city. Those who are now members of the Kingdom are likewise residents of that city. Christ Himself stated this clearly when He said, "In my Fathers house are many dwelling places. . . . I go now to prepare a place for you. And if I go. . . . I will come again, and receive you to Myself; *That where I am, there you may be also*" (John 14:2-3).

4.4 Stand Firm

As a consequence of the overlap of the ages there is a need to stand firm. The author of Hebrews is aware of the tension this creates and therefore urges perseverance. Although we are recipients of a Kingdom and of a city, we must nonetheless persevere until "the Day." We must patiently wait until what we know as a spiritual reality becomes a physical reality that we can behold.

As a result, in Hebrews 3:6¹⁵, 3:14 and 6:11, the author calls the people to keep confidence or hope *until the end*. He illustrates the need for this perseverance by pointing to those who missed out on entering the promised land because of a lack of perseverance. These had journeyed through the wilderness yet did not continue the journey *into* the promised land and therefore were condemned; their bodies to fall in the wilderness.

This illustration is powerful in that it warns people about complacency as long as they are in the present age. It is only once man has grasped the reality of the age to come that he can afford to relax, knowing that he is secure.

60% or less is usual. The great tragedy, however, is that the business owners are not aware of the productivity level. They confuse staff's "busy-ness" during the day with productive work. At the end of the day, however, the only really productive labour is that which can be charged to the customer. Mistakes, reworks, delays waiting for parts or equipment, cannot usually be charged to the customer directly. And if these unpaid times are not factored into the costs of running the business, then the business will soon be in trouble.

It should be evident to most business people that the costs of running the business must be recovered in the supply of goods and services. Those who have low productivity levels cannot compete over time with competitors who have higher productivity levels. Market forces thus put limits on prices that can be charged to customers and this, in the end run, determines a business's ability to remain in operation.

In this context, competitive businesses do not compete so much in terms of their products or services as they do in management. Some businesses are managed better than others, they get their prices lower or their quality up, or improve their customer service in ways that attract and keep customers.

So we're back where we started: the causes of bankruptcies. Poor management leads to failed businesses or businesses that need to reduce staff. This puts pressure on the unemployed to find a job, but there are no jobs since businesses are reducing staff, not increasing numbers. In desperation, many attempt to "buy" themselves a job. They purchase a business of some kind, failing to realise that they are buying a business, not a job. The actual work they usually know how to do, but they don't know how to run and operate a business. This requires a set of skills that many in larger corporations do not learn. They have not had the need. Nevertheless, the small business operator needs the skills of the managing director, the sales manager, the production manager, and the financial controller as well as the workers in all these departments of his business. They can't meet all these demands so they, in turn fail. Another statistic on the rubbish pile of failed business ventures.

Today's economic conditions of comparatively high unemployment, the

13. T. Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (ed. R.V.G. Tasker, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, London: Tyndale Press, 1960), pp. 164-165.

14. P.E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 416.

15. Even if the variant reading is not accepted the idea of perseverance is still present.

4.5 Faith

In order to keep from growing weary the saint, says the writer to the Hebrews, must exercise faith.

Yet what is faith? G.E. Ladd has this to say:

The primary prerequisite for the Christian life in Hebrews is faith. Faith in Hebrews has a distinctly different emphasis from that in John and Paul. The latter conceive of faith as personal trust and commitment to Jesus that brings union with Christ and therefore salvation. *In Hebrews faith is the faculty to perceive the reality of the unseen world of God and to make it the primary object of one's life*, in contrast to the transitory and often evil character of present human existence.¹⁶

Therefore, given the tension that exists and the need for perseverance (Colossians 1:23), the author urges his people to faith. He declares that it is only by faith that perseverance is possible. Our eyes must be averted from this age to (the implementation of) that age which, with the eyes of faith, we can see and know as a present, (yet unattained), reality.

The author seals this argument with his chapter on the triumphs of faith. In chapter 11 the term "by faith" is used twenty-one times.¹⁷ It is by faith that we believe that God made the world(s)/ages *ex nihilo*. It is by faith that those mentioned were able to suffer, and to leave this world empty handed, knowing that none of God's good promises had failed.

Faith is the key. This is stated no more precisely than in Hebrews 11:6 where we read that "without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

5.0 Where To Now?

HAVING CONCLUSIVELY ESTABLISHED the overlap of the ages, and the tension that the Christians experience as a result, we need to explore the practical side of this doctrine. In other words we must ask ourselves, *how should we then live?*

The decisive point that must be made is that *one must live victoriously*.

What our thesis draws out clearly is that we are not participants of this age — we are in it, not of it. We have been set

free from its power and subjugation. Paul declares:

He (God) delivered us from the domain of darkness, and *transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son*.

We were once God's enemies. Now, by His utter grace (Ephesians 1:7-8), we are His ambassadors. Where once we spurned the Son of God, we now declare His glory and majesty. Our ambassadorial task is to press the Crown rights of Jesus Christ in this world. If we as ambassadors do not do this then we become nothing more than traitors. Can you imagine the Australian ambassador to America, Japan or some other country, ignoring the direction given to him by the Australian government in order to carry out his own scheme? Such a thought is preposterous. Yet many Christians are doing just that. Ephesians 2:10 states that "we are His workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." There can be no compromise! If we claim to be a Christian, saved by the blood of Christ, then we must perform the "good works" which we were appointed to do. We must live the victorious life of the age to come now; we must live the victorious life which Christ Jesus, our head, has called us to and which He Himself is now living. To refuse to storm this world in the name, and under the banner, of Jesus Christ, is to forsake the very task for which we were created and redeemed.

Is such a life possible? Yes, it is! The doctrine of the two ages clearly shows that the Holy Spirit is with us now and that He is the manifestation of the Power of the age to come. The living of a holy and sanctified life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is a real option. If it were not, then God would be less than merciful and compassionate if He required of us that which we could not achieve. True, we could not attain our own salvation. Nor will we live perfect sinless lives now. However, the reality is that the power of the age to come is present now. With Christ's ascension, the Holy Spirit was poured forth to every believer making obedience and conformity to Christ not just a possibility but an 'in principle' reality.

Furthermore, we must comprehend that *Jesus Christ reigns*. That is the bottom line. Not, will reign. Not, might reign. Not, could reign, but *He does reign*. Regardless of the eschatological position held or the interpretative principles applied by any believer, if it results

dislocation of people as they are shunted out of their jobs on to the job market and the growing bankruptcies, are the combined result of decades of monetary mismanagement and currency inflation. They were predicted by those economists who not only knew how the world really works, but also had some understanding of the ethical issues involved.

There are no short term answers to these problems. They must and will continue. For how long? No one can be certain. As an economic pessimist in the short term, it is easy to take the cynic route. But one thing is certain: there are few people offering moral solutions for the dilemma before us. And that, in the long run, is the real problem.

* * * *

Kids Say the Funniest Things

Kids say the funniest things. Some school teachers must agree with that because they keep journals of amusing things their students have written in papers. Here are a few examples:

- The future of "I give" is "I take."
- The parts of speech are lungs and air.
- The inhabitants of Moscow are called Mosquitoes.
- A census taker is a man who goes from house to house increasing the population.
- Water is composed of two gins. Oxygen and hydrogin. Oxygen is pure gin. Hydrogin is gin and water.
- (Define H₂O and CO₂.) H₂O is hot water and CO₂ is cold water.
- A virgin forest is a forest where the hand of man has never set foot.
- The general direction of the Alps is straight up.
- A city purifies its water supply by filtering the water then forcing it through an aviator.
- Most of the houses in France are made of plaster of Paris.

16. G.E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Michigan, 1974), p. 584, emphasis added.

17. S. Kistemaker, *Hebrews* (N.T.C., Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 312.

in a doomsday theology then what they have is a theology that is less than Scriptural.

In the years that I lived in the Western Districts of Victoria, "St" Angus of Garvoc spoke to me much about the 'pessimists'¹⁸ who did not believe in "polishing brass on a sinking ship." Experience has taught me that this attitude is far too prevalent among Christian people. Our task is by no means simply one of shuffling the deck chairs on the Titanic and singing our favourite hymn just one more time, as the rising water engulfs us. Nor is it to sit upon the bridge and sing 'woe is me' dirges in the hope that one will be remembered as the heroic(?) captain that went down with the ship. We have a responsibility to be the salt and light of this world. Our responsibility is to man the life rafts; pump out the excess water; and mend the torn hull — even if this be in an imperfect manner. Better still we should be looking at ways in which to make the good ship 'Titanic' less vulnerable to icebergs and sinking.

This world will never be a perfect place. On this point you will receive little argument. Yet we must work hard to make it resemble as much as possible the world that is to come. Now think about this! In the great victory passage of Romans 8, Paul, in verse 29, informs us that whom God foreknew, "*He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.*"

If redeemed man is being conformed to the image of Christ, does it not, therefore, stand to reason that we should also be seeking a society that is appropriately conformed to the image of Christ? ¹⁹To put it in perspective we need to think about and focus upon the age to come (Colossians 3:1-2). What this means in essence, is that any of the principles that can be defined as operative upon the new earth should be put into practice here and now. For example, will man govern the earth in equity? Yes! He will. Then he should be doing so now. Will there be rapists on the new earth? The answer is, no! Therefore, there should not be any now. Likewise, we should ask, will there be any pessimists on the new earth? The answer is, No! There will be none who cry out 'woe is me' and who sit around in a melancholy and stupor in the hope of being blissfully raptured out of all their problems. In fact the conditions will be the exact opposite. So it is, that a victorious life

and attitude is the only way of life for the believer.

This makes the woeful and paradoxical life of the apathetic Christian all the more untenable. Typically, such a person believes that "religion and politics don't mix", 'that my personal walk with Christ is between Him and me' and last, but by no means least, they subscribe to the 'what can I do, I'm just one person,' theory. As a result such Christians sit back and wait for the parousia, blessing the day that will finally see an end to their misery. Yet their very attitude robs them of their true joy and the goal they seek.

Allow me to illustrate with the following extract from a Reformed pessimist. He writes:

While our society followed fundamental Christian Values we were largely immune to the confounding and often soul destroying woes of today ... In recent years, it has become the norm to break down this framework, however little thought seems to be given to a suitable replacement set of standards. Only a growing number of concerned people appreciating how valuable these rules were.

Of all voters, a large percentage (comparatively) of all Christians refrain from voting on religious grounds. As a believer myself, I can identify with this, but *if ever Australia needed more moral people to vote against the increasing evil in this country, it is now.*

Most, if not all Christians who do not vote understand that they should be "in the world" but not "of the world." I also have taken this to mean that we should not get involved in the world's affairs, matters of state, etc. such as politics. I now understand that the apostle John was meaning that we should not do the evil. . . . *For me now, I see that Christians, through non action, are actively supporting evil elements in this country. As William Penn was quoted as saying, many years ago; "evil only multiplies when good men do nothing." Indeed, if Christ were to return, and we Christians were found to be sitting on our hands, waiting, He might refer to the book of Amos; Woe to you who desire the day of the lord! "For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light.*

Finally, *what witness are we to the world, if we, who preach sound moral values, won't raise a finger to stop evil ways?* I urge you therefore to fight the good fight. Show courage and stand up for the most righteous candidate,

- The people who followed the Lord were called the 12 opossums.
- The spinal column is a long bunch of bones. The head sits on the top and you sit on the bottom.
- We do not raise silk worms in the United States, because we get our silk from rayon. He is a larger worm and gives more silk.
- One of the main causes of dust is janitors.
- A scout obeys all to whom obedience is due and respects all duly constipated authorities.
- One by-product of raising cattle is calves.
- To prevent head colds, use an agoniser to spray into the nose until it drips into the throat.
- The four seasons are salt, pepper, mustard and vinegar.
- The climate is hottest next to the Creator.
- Oliver Cromwell had a large red nose, but under it were deeply religious feelings.
- The word trousers is an uncommon noun because it is singular at the top and plural at the bottom.
- Syntax is all the money collected at the church from sinners.
- The blood circulates through the body by flowing down one leg and up the other.
- In spring, the salmon swim upstream to spoon.
- Iron was discovered because someone smelt it.
- In the middle of the 18th century, all the morons moved to Utah.
- A person should take a bath once in the summer, not so often in the winter. (From New Zealand).

knowing it is our reasonable service to fight evil.²⁰

This disclosure shows exactly how the apathy of many Christians sees them rob themselves of their own hearts desire. As stated above, it is quite pathetic to behold Christians who, by their very failure to understand the point of their redemption, contribute actively to the predicament that they loathe most. That is to

18. By "pessimist" is meant all those who, for whatever reason, have not come to terms with the Biblical fact that they have been redeemed in order to constitute a new Godly society that begins now. This may have its roots in eschatology, poor general theology or just through Biblical illiteracy.

19. That is to say that a compilation of individuals conformed to the image of Christ, is the very essence of a "conformed" society.

20. Edwin Morris, "Why Christians should Vote", *The National Interest*, Issue No 6. 28.04.1996. (Emphasis added. References deleted.)

say, that by their own inaction they assist the moral and spiritual degradation of society which is the very thing that they are seeking release from. Having departed from the Biblical model they have condemned themselves to a life that is without blessing and encouragement because they have concocted a false doctrine for themselves.

The position outlined above is without Biblical warrant. *Nowhere* in Scripture do we read 'Saints of God, lie down in apathy and frustration and your Lord shall return and save you.' No! In fact we find the exact opposite. We find verbs that require a positive action.

We are to:

- Run the race.
- Fight, the good fight.
- Stand firm.
- Imitate (Paul, Christ and God).
- Desire purity.

Any concept that 'pessimism' will bring about the rapture or parousia is completely unscriptural. The Bible tells us that in the face of opposition, adversity, and moral decline we should persevere.

First of all, let us consider the testimony of 2 Timothy 3 where we read:

¹ sin the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; ⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and *avoid such men as these*. ⁶ For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, ⁷

always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth...⁹ But they will not make further progress; *for their folly will be obvious to all*...¹⁰ But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, ¹¹ persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra;¹³ But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad to worse*, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*; ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The picture here painted by the apostle for his young charge, Timothy, is fairly bleak to say the least. Yet, in conjunction with our study, we note that there is no tone of apathy or pessimism. Paul does not say, 'look, if things get too tough go to the country, find a wife, raise children and have a long happy life.' No! He urges Timothy to keep the faith — to persevere. Paul states that all these evil doers shall come to nought and that their folly would be evident to all. As for Timothy he is to continue in the ways that he has learnt from the apostle — the way dictated by Scripture and which he has known from childhood. Why is this Paul's advice? Because as a good dispensationalist (knowing that God's covenantal transactions hold true for all dispensations) he knew that covenant breakers would be dealt with in ways natural and positive.

An even clearer example can be found in 2 Peter 3:11-12a. Here Peter is talking of the parousia and states:

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to *live holy and godly lives... as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming*.²¹

Here is the very crux of the matter. The only action that we can perform in this world that will hasten the day of the Lord is *to be obedient and righteous people*. It is not acceptable to be obedient to what we believe, but *obedient, and therefore submissive, to Scripture*. In this instance Scripture declares that there is but one option — "*We ought to live holy and godly lives*." It is living and walking as God has ordained, that will hasten the day of the Lord — *nothing else!* Kistemaker is therefore right when he observes that "the verb *ought* indicates that a divine obligation rests upon the readers; they are to be holy in all that they do".²²

The Christian lives under divine obligation. To live as though defeated is to give no glory to the victorious King who is risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High.

The point must be clearly made once again: *Any theology that typifies Christianity as defeated and in need of the second coming in order to extricate it from its woes, has been based upon something other than Scripture*.

There are two ages. The coming age has broken into this age. The Power of the age to come has arrived. It is our task to stand up and walk on in holiness and righteousness of life, pressing the crown rights of Christ as we go. It is in seeking to conform both ourselves and this world to the image of Christ that we will find God's blessing of ultimate victory.

It is in doing this, and this alone, that gives us any hope of looking forward to the great and Glorious day of God as a positive element. Furthermore, it is only holiness and righteousness of life that will *speed the coming* of that great and Glorious day.

21. Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Peter and Jude* (Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1987), p. 337, emphasis added.

22. Kistemaker, 338.