

Fundamentals of Our Faith from the Beginning

Frameworks and the Future

Two Age Eschatology: This Age and the Age to Come

1. Key questions to be answered:

- a. What is the nature of “this age,” and what is the nature of “the age to come”?
- b. Are we currently in this age, the age to come, or in a gradually transitioning age?
- c. Is the age to come inaugurated at Christ’s return or is it implemented gradually?
- d. Is there reason to believe that the evil of this age will give way to prevailing righteousness?
- e. What expectation ought believers have in respect to the development of this age?

2. Proposed answers:

- a. This age was the Jewish Aeon and ended with the destruction of Jerusalem. The age to come was inaugurated by Christ at His first advent and overlapped the “present age” for ~40 years. We are now in the age to come though it will not be fully consummated until Christ returns.
- b. This age is the Church age, is marked by kingdom advance over time, includes suffering and persecution as it develops but which give way to prevailing righteousness and shalom. The age to come is the eternal state/new heavens/new earth and is ushered in at Christ’s return.
- c. This age is the Church age, is marked by gospel advance amid persecution/opposition, and ends at Christ’s return when He consummates all things and ushers in the age to come/eternal state.
- d. This age is the Church age, is marked by gospel advance amid persecution/opposition, and ends at Christ’s return when He establishes His millennial reign. The age to come/the eternal state is ushered in at the end of the millennium.

3. A survey of Scriptures that address the ages:

Key questions to keep in mind:

* Are we in this age or have we transitioned to “the age to come”? * What is this age like? * Will Christ’s second coming rescue us from an evil age or should we expect transformation beforehand?

- a. Scriptures that speak of both this age and the age to come:

Matthew 12:32 “Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.”

Mark 10:30 “...he will receive a hundred times as much now **in the present age**, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with **persecutions**; and in the age to come, eternal life.”

Luke 18:28-30 “Peter said, ‘Behold, we have left our own homes and followed You.’ And He said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much in this time and **in the age to come, eternal life.**’”

Luke 20:34-36 “Jesus said to them, ‘The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age **and** the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.’”

Romans 8:18 “...the **sufferings of this present time** are not worthy to be compared with the **glory that is to be revealed** to us.”

Ephesians 1:20-21 “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 every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”

Titus 2:11-13 “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,”

b. Scriptures that speak of this age:

Mark 4:19 "...but the **worries of the age**, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."

Luke 16:8 "And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for **the sons of this age** are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the **sons of light**."

Galatians 1:3-4 "'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from **this present evil age**...'"

Ephesians 2:1-2 – "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to **the course (age) of this world**, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."

Romans 12:2 "And **do not be conformed to this age** but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

1 Corinthians 1:20 "Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is **the debater of this age**? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"

1 Corinthians 2:6-8 "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a **wisdom**, however, **not of this age** nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;"

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case **the god of this age** has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

1 Timothy 6:17-19 "Instruct those who are rich in this present age not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed."

2 Timothy 4:10 "...for Demas, **having loved this present age**, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica."

c. Scriptures that speak of the end of the age or the age to come:

Matthew 13:37-43 "And He said, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be **at the end of the age**. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**. Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.'"

Matthew 24:3 "As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'"

Matthew 28:20 "...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am **with you** always, even **to the end of the age**."

Hebrews 6:5 "...and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come."

Luke 18:30 "...in the age to come, eternal life."

(cf. Romans 2:5; 1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 4:13, etc.)

4. What do the Scriptures say about suffering, persecution, and future expectation?

Some key questions to keep in mind:

* How does God use suffering/tribulation/persecution in the life of believers? * Is there indication that suffering/tribulation/persecution will give way to earthly shalom?

Matthew 5:10-11 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me."

John 15:18-20 “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this **the world hates you**. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, **they will also persecute you**; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”

Romans 5:3-5 “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

Romans 8:16-18 “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” [2 **Corinthians 4:17** “For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory.”]

2 Corinthians 1:6-7 “But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.”

Ephesians 6:11-13 “Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to **resist in the evil day**, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

Philippians 1:29 “For to you **it has been granted** for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also **to suffer** for His sake.”

Philippians 3:17-21 “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that **they are enemies of the cross of Christ**, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...”

1 Thessalonians 3:3-4 “...so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that **we have been destined for this**. For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.”

2 Thessalonians 1:4-7 “...therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and **to give relief to you** who are afflicted and to us as well **when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven...**”

2 Timothy 2:3 “Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”

2 Timothy 3:1 “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.”

2 Timothy 3:12 “Indeed, **all** who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will be persecuted.**”

2 Timothy 4:3-5 “For the time will come when **they will not endure sound doctrine**; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, **endure hardship**, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

James 1:2-3 “Consider it all joy, my brethren, **when you encounter various trials**, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”

1 Peter 2:20-21 “For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For **you have been called for this purpose**, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.”

1 Peter 3:14-16 “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.”

1 Peter 4:12-13 “Beloved, **do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you**, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.”

5. Some conclusions:

- a. While it is true that “the age to come” has broken into this age for the believer just as the new creation has broken in, the position that “this present age” was the Jewish Aeon and has given way to “the age to come” is an over-realized eschatology and biblically unsupported.
- b. This present age is filled with temptation toward corruption, is marked by shrewdness and foolishness, is unworthy of conformity, is evil, has a false god, and is filled with tribulation.
- c. The end of this age is judgment for the wicked and glory for the believer.
- d. The age to come is marked by eternal life and glory and is ushered in at the end of this age.
- e. Suffering/tribulation/persecution are means the Lord uses for our sanctification and will be part of the Christian experience until the return of Christ.
- f. The position that this present evil age will give way to prevailing global righteousness and shalom is speculative (not derived from NT text), and it must relegate many passages to the 1st century, reinterpret what seem to be lasting instructions for the Church, overlook the pattern of sufferings with Christ, and diminish the nature of sufferings in the golden age.

6. Some additional thoughts:

- a. The “pessimist/optimist” word fight is unhelpful at best, is very often misleading, and at worst borders on blasphemy if it was indeed our Lord who taught us to expect an age filled with persecution and hatred of the gospel until the end.
- b. Although Christians must live as Christians in the world and though this conduct may well have many social benefits, our mission is global evangelization and discipleship and not socio/political Christianization.
- c. Our expectation ought to be that Christ will save *every one* of His elect through the faithful labor of His Church but that this work will require endurance through much opposition.
- d. The hope held out to us in the Scriptures, especially in light of tribulation, is the revelation and vindication of Christ at His return and not global/material “victory”.