

# **“ALREADY” & “NOT YET”:** *Significance and Implications*

1.) **The Kingdom and the Blessings of the Kingdom:** The *Kingdom of God* is a future reality we are still waiting and praying for to come in its fullness and completeness, and yet at the same time, through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, it has already been inaugurated: that is, the rule of God over this rebellious creation has already dawned and begun to invade this present evil age. Therefore, all the *blessings* that attend the presence of the Kingdom (such as salvation, redemption, adoption, justification, forgiveness, etc.) are likewise already/not yet, because they always arrive with the Kingdom (that is, wherever Christ reigns and is Lord). Thus, the primary, overarching category of already/not yet is the Kingdom of God, and secondarily as a consequence of the Kingdom’s two-stage arrival, so also the blessings and power and salvation of the Kingdom arrive at two distinct times in history. (see G. Ladd on the secret or mystery of the kingdom of God, and Jesus’ parables of the kingdom)

2.) **The Role of Warnings:** The warnings in Scripture *link/connect* the already & not yet as a means of keeping us running the race and ultimately obtaining the inheritance we have been redeemed for. Why do we remind and warn a marathon runner that if he gives up halfway through the race, he will not receive the prize at the end? To make him look over his shoulder and wonder if he ever really started the race? No—to motivate him to look ahead at the remaining dangers (internal and external) and to resolve anew to run with perseverance until the end, *because he wants the prize*. It is the very reason he has trained for so long. To give up now would be to throw everything away. Thus, when he hears the warning, his focus and energy and motivation is directed towards finishing the race, and thus the warning itself becomes a *means* of helping him to endure to the end. Moreover, warnings never call into question the *authenticity/genuineness* of a past event of salvation or our conversion, but rather they make conditional our *participation* in the future event of redemption which we have not yet reached—conditional upon perseverance, not apostatizing, pursuing holiness, not being ashamed of Christ, not loving the world, the obedience of faith, etc. That is, warnings always deal with the “not yet” of salvation and never the “already” (against the tests of genuineness view).

"Though it be promised that true saints shall be so influenced and assisted, as that they shall persevere; yet this is one MEANS by which God influences them, viz. counsels and warnings against falling away." (Jonathan Edwards, "Persevering Faith")

"For this reason the Epistle to the Hebrews is full of admonition and consolation, because *it is in this way* that the preservation of the Church is accomplished...These admonitions have as their end the preservation of the Church, which precisely in this way is established in that single direction, which is and which must remain irreversible--the direction from death to life!" (G. C. Berkouwer)

"It is therefore quite mistaken to infer from the admonitions of the Scripture the possibility of the total loss of grace. The certainty of the outcome does not make the means superfluous, but in God's order it is unbreakably tied up with them." (Herman Bavinck)

"...their proper primary effect evidently being just to bring out, in the most impressive way, the great principle of the invariableness of the connection which God has established between perseverance, as opposed to apostasy, as a means, and salvation as an end; and thus to operate as a means of effecting the end which God has determined to accomplish--of enabling believers to persevere, or preserving them from apostasy; and to effect this in entire accordance with the principles of their moral constitution, by producing constant humility, watchfulness, and diligence."  
(William Cunningham)

**3.) Looking Both Ways:** Christians need to *look both ways* (to the past with gratitude and joy, and to the future with hope and longing and confident trembling) without denying either (cf. Philippians 3:7-16). I have often heard the question put this way: do Christians obey *from* life or *for* life? When you understand already/not yet, you begin to recognize that this is a profoundly false antithesis. It is not either/or but *both/and*. We run the race because we have been saved, AND we run the race so that we will be saved on the last day. To put it another way: there are *multiple motivations* in the Christian life. We cannot be reductionistic and limit the motivation to faith and obedience to only one, when we are given so many in Scripture! Take forgiveness as an example: we are clearly told to forgive *because* we have been forgiven (already: see Colossians 3:14, Ephesians 4:32, etc.), while *at the same time* we are commanded to forgive *in order that* God might forgive us (not yet: Matthew 6:14-15, 18:35, etc.).

**4.) Unbreakable Link Between Already & Not Yet:** We must not make the mistake of thinking that because there are two moments of receiving salvation, that therefore we can experience one but miss out on the other. For the New Testament writers, to come to share in the past/present salvation event by faith, participating now in Jesus' death and resurrection through the Spirit, is the *guarantee* of obtaining the future inheritance and of future salvation. There is never one without the other (See *Romans 5:9-10, 8:11, 8:28-39, I Corinthians 1:8-9, I Thessalonians 5:23-24, cf. LADD on John* etc.); if you have the first, the second is guaranteed. If you don't have the first, there is no hope for the future and it will be made plain on the last day (Matthew 7, "Depart from Me—I *never* knew you"). It is essential here to see that the Holy Spirit is the *guarantee/firstfruits/down payment/seal* of our future inheritance (see II Corinthians 1:22, 5:5, Ephesians 1:13-14, 4:30, Romans 8:23). Having the Spirit now (salvation "already") is the *guarantee* that we will experience the fullness of our redemption in the future ("not yet"). In the meantime, between the already & not yet, God uses promises and warnings as *means* to encourage and challenge us to continue faithfully until the end, so what he began in us He might certainly finish (Philippians 1:6).

**5.) One Salvation Event Arriving At Two Distinct Moments:** We are not justified, saved, adopted, redeemed twice, but only one time—though we receive it at two different moments (the firstfruits now, the fullness later). To put it another way: just as there is only one kingdom which is manifested in two different moments, not two kingdoms(!), so all of the blessings of the kingdom are *one* and yet arrive at two distinct moments in history—at Jesus' death and resurrection, and at his future coming. What does this mean? The future moment of salvation doesn't *create* a relationship (like past does) but *reveals/confirms* the relationship that has already been established. Future salvation is the completion and fullness of what we possess

now only as a foretaste and promise. Only past justification/salvation is the once for all move from wrath to grace, from being God's enemy to receiving favor. This is why charge of works righteousness is false. Yet it must be stated as strongly as possible: the new life of the Spirit and the obedience of faith God inevitably brings about in every believer's life is the necessary *evidence* on the last day that will be brought forth at the judgment seat for all those who will be saved. All others who merely say "Lord, Lord" but who do not do what God commands in their lives will hear "Depart from Me, I never knew you." Therefore Paul seeks to be found in Christ on the last day (Philippians 3).

**6.) Practical For Avoiding The Extremes:** If we understand and embrace the "already/not yet" dynamic of the New Testament, we are greatly helped in avoiding the extremes of *naïve triumphalism* (over-realized eschatology; see I Corinthians 4:8-13) and *pessimistic, wretched sinner theology* (see I Corinthians 6:9-11). On the one hand, because God has not yet completed our redemption and we still inhabit the present evil age, we will never be free of sin or struggle or suffering until Christ returns to banish all evil from the new heavens and new earth (II Peter 3:13). On the other hand, because God has already delivered us and freed us from slavery to sin (we have died with Christ to sin and been raised with him for righteousness) and from this evil age and we belong to the kingdom of God and have been given the Spirit, therefore we can and must walk in newness of life and no longer be dominated by sin and evil and idolatry. God has provided everything we need for life and godliness *now* (II Peter 1:3), so that we have no excuse when we disobey. The "already/not yet" dynamic shows us how to be *spiritual realists* (J.I. Packer), understanding how to cope with sin and failure but also expecting gradual transformation and change. See Galatians 5:16-18. This is the mystery of the kingdom: it does not burst forth and immediately take over the world and drive out all that opposes it, but it begins as a small mustard seed that slowly grows to eliminate all evil and to established progressively (not once for all) the reign of God over this world and ourselves.

**7.) The Framework of the New Testament:** The "already/not yet" dynamic does not merely apply to *individual* salvation. It is much bigger than that: indeed, it is the *framework* in which we must read the New Testament. The fact that the *kingdom* (in which God's overall purposes *for all of* creation are tied up) is already & not yet means that our experience of all the *blessings of the kingdom* are also already/not yet. This helps to explain many realities of NT otherwise difficult or in tension (i.e. justification by faith and judgment according to works, joy and suffering, etc.). Therefore, this is the framework in which we must see and identify our own lives as followers of Jesus (i.e. *Exodus and Promised Land* motif: I Corinthians 10:1-22, Hebrews 3:6-4:11, I Peter 1:3-9ff).

**8.) The Cross & Resurrection Are The Beginning Of The End:** Jesus' life, death and resurrection are the *center and climax of history*, being the dividing point between the two ages, where the two ages overlap. Through outpouring of Spirit, God has decisively invaded the present evil age and the cross & resurrection of Jesus marks the point where this happens. *Therefore, the cross and resurrection of Jesus have eschatological, end-times significance.* They are the beginning of the last days, the inauguration of the last stage in redemptive history. The later NT writers clearly understood the events in Jesus' life this way—because of his death and resurrection, the end of the ages has come upon us and we live in the last days. The Gospel

writers themselves grasped this: see at the crucifixion scene the earthquake, resurrection of saints, lightning, temple veil torn, darkness of sun (all events expected to happen at end of the world, day of the Lord). In the judgment Jesus experienced upon the cross, the entire present evil age was judged and sentenced to death; in his resurrection, the new creation dawned and began its invasion of this world. The victory has already been won, but both exist side by side until Jesus returns again. See also the *parallels between the Olivet Discourse and the passion narratives* in Matthew and Mark.

"Christian theology has rarely grappled seriously with the eschatological presuppositions that permeate the New Testament, and although the twentieth century is the century of Albert Schweitzer, contemporary students of the New Testament have yet to explore fully the importance of eschatological language for the early followers of Jesus...In at least some early Christian circles, language that Judaism typically reserved for discourse about eschatological expectations came to be associated with the end of Jesus. Jesus' resurrection was interpreted not as an isolated event but as part of the general resurrection, and his death was understood as though it were a death in the great tribulation of the latter days...The eschatological prophecies of Jesus were believed to have met their initial fulfillment in the Messiah's death and resurrection. Thus has dawned the great Day of the Lord." (Dale Allison, *The End of the Ages*, pp. 169, 171)

**9.) Imminence & Urgency:** The New Testament writers all realize that because all the great, central redemptive events have already taken place in Christ, there is nothing else that must take place before the final consummation arrives. That is, we are in the *last days* (plural) simply awaiting the *last day* (singular) [cf. I Peter 1:5 and 1:20!]. Therefore, the NT's consistent witness that the end is at hand, that the Lord is near—not in the sense of necessarily having to occur within a certain time frame, but in the imminent sense of "anytime." Conclusion: watch, for you know neither the day or hour (see *Matthew 24:36-51, 25:1-13, 26:36-46, Mark 13:32-37, Luke 12:35-48, I Corinthians 16:13, I Thessalonians 5:2-9, Revelation 3:1-6, 16:15*)

"If we realize that the Incarnation-Crucifixion-Resurrection-Ascension, on the one hand, and the Parousia, on the other, belong essentially together and are in a real sense one Event, one divine Act, being held apart only by the mercy of God who desires to give men opportunity for faith and repentance, then we can see that in a very real sense the latter is always imminent now that the former has happened. It was, and still is, true to say that the Parousia is at hand—and indeed this, so far from being an embarrassing mistake on the part either of Jesus or of the early Church, is an essential part of the Church's faith. Ever since the Incarnation men have been living in the last days." (C. E. B. Cranfield, *Mark*, p. 408)

"...the affirmation of the nearness of the end...is not the same thing as an affirmation that it must necessarily occur within at the most a few decades...but is rather the expression of the recognition that history's most significant events have already taken place in the ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, so that all that remains between his ascension and his parousia can only be a sort of epilogue, during the whole of which, whether the actual length of time involved is short or long, the end presses upon the life and concerns of the believer as something urgently relevant to the present...The time has been shortened in the sense that the occurrence of the gospel events has rendered the remainder of history something which is only epilogue, subsequent to the last chapter. Nothing of independent significance lies ahead of mankind now except the Parousia itself

and God's coming order. All intervening events of history have significance only in relation to the ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ in his coming Parousia. This means that the present world's affairs have been relativized (I Cor. 7:29b-31)...What made it natural and necessary to see the intervening time as short, however long it might last, was the recognition of the decisiveness of what God had already wrought in Jesus and of the fact that the end which is still to come belongs together with it so closely that in real sense the gospel events and the Parousia are one divine act. And this insistence on the nearness of the end is still surely an essential element of true Christian faith and life." (Cranfield, "NT Eschatology," pp. 504-06, 510)

**10.) Become What You Are:** *Indicative* (statement of fact/reality) & *Imperative* (command or exhortation) are held in constant tension by the New Testament writers because of the "already/not yet" dynamic present in Christ. Because God has *already* acted to redeem and save us, certain realities are *already* true of us: we are already free, already justified, already holy/sanctified, already dead to sin, already alive to righteousness, already raised and seated with Christ, etc. Yet, because God has not completed His work in us (*not yet*) and much sin still remains, we are *at the same time commanded over and over again to become the very things we already are*. That is: be holy, because you are holy. Become righteous, because you are righteous. Live as children of light, because you are light in the Lord. Live as free, because Christ has freed you. Put to death the sin in your life, because you are dead to sin. Walk by the Spirit and in newness of life, because you are already raised with Christ to newness of life, etc.

---

"No interpretation of the Pauline ethic can be judged successful which does not grapple with the problem of indicative and imperative in Paul's thought." (**Victor Furnish**, quoted in Fung, *Galatians*, p. 278)

**Galatians 5:1**—"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

(*Since you have been freed by Christ* [indicative], *live as free* [indicative])

**Ephesians 5:8**—"...at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light."

(*Because you are light in the Lord* [indicative], *live as children of light* [imperative])

**I Corinthians 5:6-8**—"Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? *Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened*. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

(*Become unleavened* [imperative], *even as you really are unleavened* [indicative])

(indicative) **Galatians 3:27**—“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ *have put on Christ.*”

(imperative) **Romans 13:14**—“But *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

(indicative) **Colossians 3:9-10**—“Do not lie to one another, seeing that *you have put off the old man* with its practices and *have put on the new man*, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”

(imperative) **Ephesians 4:20-24**—“But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to *put off your old self*, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to *put on the new self*, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

(indicative) **Romans 6:1-4**—“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death...”

(imperative) **Romans 6:12**—“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.”

(indicative) **Romans 8:5-9**—“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”

(imperative) **Romans 8:12-14**—“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For (*indicative!*) all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

**Galatians 5:25**—“If we live by the Spirit [*indicative*], let us also walk by the Spirit [*imperative*].”

(indicative) **Galatians 5:24**—“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

(imperative) **Galatians 5:16-21**—“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh... Now the works of the flesh are evident... I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”