

The purpose of these supplementary notes are first to provide an outline of key points from the PTC Course Notes, and second to provide some extra information that may fill out your understanding of the subject in question.

Introduction

- We live in what is called the ‘overlap of the ages’ – that is, the time between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ.
- In this unit, we will consider what Christians should expect of *this age* in order to better understand God’s present activity and expectation of us.
- In the last unit (next time), we will examine what God has revealed about the eternal future.

The ‘last days’

- In Mark’s gospel, we find out quite a bit about Jesus, before he says a word!
- The reader of Marks Gospel stands in the privileged position to be able to survey these scenes unfold before him/her. If it was possible to be an impartial spectator, then it should not be hard to see that this one was special.

‘The time has come, the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.’ (Mark 1:15).
- What is this ‘time’? What is Jesus announcing? The start or end of something big? The culmination of the long-expected kingdom? The end of all things?
- One of the expectations drawn out of the Old Testament was that in the age to come, God would send his Spirit of strength to overthrow all those (nations) who had opposed God’s people. Joel prophesied:

“And afterward,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.
²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.
³⁰ I will show wonders in the heavens
and on the earth,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
³¹ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.
³² And everyone who calls
on the name of the LORD will be saved;
for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
there will be deliverance,
as the LORD has said,
even among the survivors
whom the LORD calls. (Joel 2:28-32)

- Jesus came, and announced that kingdom.
- Jesus told the Pharisees in Luke 17:21 that *‘the kingdom of God is in your midst’*. In the kingdom parables recorded in Mark 4:26-34, the kingdom of God is likened to a seed planted and seemingly insignificant (yet will grow significantly to the point of fulfillment at harvest).
- Following Jesus’ death, resurrection, he met with his disciples for a period of forty days, During this time Jesus spoke about the ‘kingdom of God’ such that they asked him *‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’*.
- His answer...
- On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the Spirit does in fact arrive in visible and spectacular fashion. The onlookers, understandably amazed and perplexed ask *‘What does this mean?’* (v12) to which the Apostle Peter stands and addresses the crowd using the words of Joel 2:

“In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.
¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
²¹ And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

²² “Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. (Acts 2:17-24)

Exercise:

- Compare Acts 2:17-24 (Peter’s speech) with Joel 2: 28-32 (Joel’s prophecy). What are the differences? Why do you think Peter has made the changes?

- Christians since the day of Pentecost, are located between the first and second coming of Jesus. Living in the present evil age and therefore at the mercy of all that a fallen world may serve up. Yet, even so, living in the age of forgiveness and peace with God in the presence of his given Spirit.
- And Christians live, expectant of a day to come when Jesus will return and bring completion to all that was promised – a fully realised and consummated Kingdom of God.
- The lasts days have arrived, but not the last day.

- What do we know of the age that we live in?
- What are the characteristics of this age?

3. _____ of Jesus

- The Old Testament was largely concerned with the nation of Israel, yet even so, there were others who were blessed through them (in fact that was part of the Abrahamic promise – c.f. Gen 12:1-3).
- With Jesus death, resurrection and ascension, he drew all people to himself (Jn 12:32).
- And the job he commissioned his disciples to do was to go out to all nations (Matt 28:19).
- How? It is by the proclamation of the good news!
- Note one of the 'signs' of the end of the age is that the...

'gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to the nations, and then the end will come' (Matt 24:14)

- It should be a Christian expectation that this side of the return of Jesus the ongoing work of gospel proclamation will continue – be that in season or out of season (c.f. Jn 15:18-20; 2 Tim 4:2).
- At times it will happen through false motives (Phil 1:15-18) at times the good news will be corrupted by false messiahs (Mark 13:6) and those who deny Jesus Christ (1 Jn 2:18-22). That which is false, that which deceives, and those who corrupt the message of the gospel will themselves be revealed – even if only at the end of all things (2 Thess 2:3-12).

Living in 'the last days'

- Misunderstanding these 'last days' will lead to two distinct errors – both to do with our Eschatology.
- *Eschatology* is the theological term to describe the study of the end times.

_____ **Eschatology**

- Not knowing when Jesus returns can lead some Christians to overly emphasis the here and now.
- Focusing on the present experience, with the sufferings and burdens which are part and parcel of life this side of the second coming.
- The danger is that it leaves folk without hope or help as they trudge their way through the Christian life.

_____ **Eschatology**

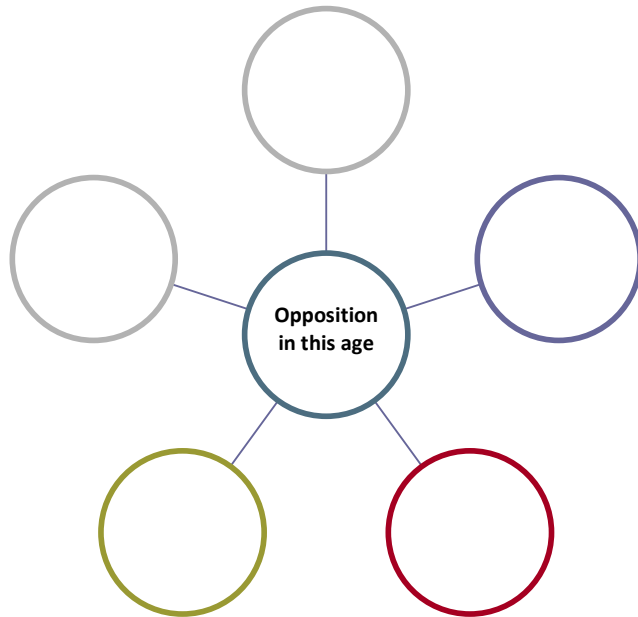
- Not knowing when Jesus returns can equally lead some Christians to draw promised characteristics of the new age, forward into this age.
- The biblical promises for the next age – sinlessness, prosperity, health and drawn forward and offered in the here and now.
- The danger is that it leaves folk questioning their hope in God through the gospel when they experience suffering or burden or sicknesses or opposition.

Opposition in this Age

Discussion:

- What are some of the burdens Christians experience in this age that will not be part of the next age?

a. _____ – a feature of this age (like it or not) is that we sin (c.f. Rom 3:9-12). Christians are at the mercy of their flesh (mind and body c.f. Rom 8:6-8; Gal 5:19-21). That is in conflict with life in the Spirit (Gal 5:17).



b. _____ – Sin is not only an individual pursuit – the rest of the world joins in! That is the 'ways of the world' (c.f. Eph 2:2). The world will continue to be a source of temptation for the Christian. James and John tell us not to be seduced by the world (James 4:4; 1 Jn 2:15-17).

c. _____ – Jesus describes Satan in no uncertain terms (Jn 8:44) – he is the one who was responsible for Adam and Eve's fall (Gen 3) and the one who blinds the minds of unbelievers today (2 Cor 4:4). He is the ruler of the air (Eph 2:2) and prowls like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8-9).

d. _____ – is there anyone who has never suffered and anyone who will not suffer? This age is the arena in which suffering is experienced – it is a consequence of the fall (c.f. Gen 3:17) and creation will continue to groan until this age comes to a close (Rom 8:20-22).

Yes, suffering can also be an instrument to strengthen faith (as it was for Job and Paul – Rom 5:1-5 and James - 1:2-18).

e. _____ – the last enemy (1 Cor 15:26), the final earthly consequence for sin, worked out in our very bodies, the beginning of the final judgement (Rom 6:7). Only those who don't have a proper grasp of the gospel have death to fear.

Blessings in this Age

Discussion:

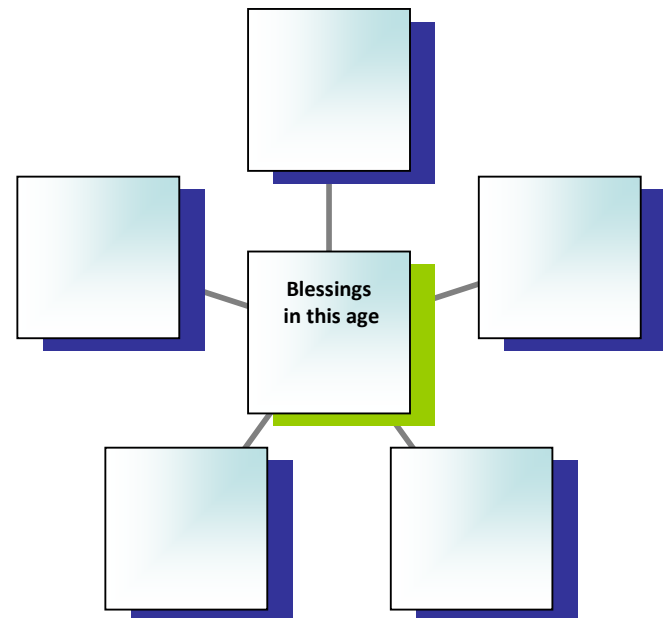
- What are some of the blessings which God gives to help strengthen faith in this age (while we wait for the age to come)?

a. _____ – the gospel changes everything. Without Christ there is no hope (Eph 2:12) and we live under the wrath of God (Eph 2:3). What the gospel brings is forgiveness in this age and the age to come. The gospel deals with sin by destroying its power to hurt us. (Rom 3:21-26)

The flesh, the world, Satan, suffering or death may take much away, but it does not remove the hope of the gospel.

b. _____ – The counselor whom Jesus sent to comfort his disciples and be with them until he returns (Jn 14:16-20). His work is to open the eyes of believers to the truth of the gospel (1 Cor 12:3) and incorporates believers into the family of God (c.f. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15-16). It is the Spirit who intercedes (Rom 8:26-27) and it is through the Spirit which produces in us his 'fruit' – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-33).

c. _____ – Not just a text book about God, but his word useful for transforming our hearts and minds and actions such that those who live obedient to this word know how to live in accord with the gospel of Jesus Christ (c.f. 2 Tim 3:16-4:2).



Note how the Holy Spirit and God's Word are dependent upon one another and show themselves at work in the lives of believers.

d. _____ – The privilege of any believer – that they can call upon their Father and know with confidence that he will consider whatever they ask (1 Jn 5:14-15). There is no greater evidence of faith than for a believer to pray dependently upon God the Father.

Note, if all else failed (eyesight, touch, movement, smell, taste, hearing), the person of faith can still call upon God in prayer.

e. _____ One of wonderful (although at times, challenging) features of the Christian life is the blessing of a church family! God gathers his people, not as isolated

individuals but as people who share a common relationship with God and others build around a common faith in what Jesus has done for them (c.f. Jude 3; Eph 4:1-6).

Reflection:

- How can the Christian person make the most of the blessings God has given to help them live in this present age?

Conclusion

Living in this present age can be a challenge. It is the era of difficulty marked by suffering, sickness, sin, persecution and ultimately death. Yet, God is not indifferent. He has sent his Spirit to uphold, teach and strengthen Christians to help them look to the day when Jesus returns and when all will be put right as every knee in heaven and on earth will bow before him. The last day, before the first day of the eternal and perfect age.

Before next time:

- Read the *Moore Distance* Doctrine 1 - Unit 9 Notes.
- It is time to start revising.