

HUMANITY BEFORE AND AFTER ALL THINGS FULFILLED

For those who might not agree with how I'm getting ready to introduce this, I don't want to get into a debate over how I'm introducing this, for it would only veer us totally away from the main point; just allow me some leeway here because this is how I see best to introduce this. OK, so...

When the biblical narrative kicks off, I see mankind pictured as utterly devoid of knowledge concerning The Source of All Life, i.e. God, meaning that humankind was in the darkness of ignorance; however, due to all he had experienced, he had reached a point of acknowledging that there's something or someone out there somewhere beyond his grasp. So, at the/this right time, God introduced Himself by choosing someone and placing him into a circumstance which would activate a previously formulated strategy to gradually make Himself known and even open to fellowship with anyone who desired such, with the added benefit of living on after biological death. God's approach to this matter began with the provision of directives, which would help man to understand not only something about Him, but also about how He saw man in relation to Him at that time, i.e. that man couldn't enjoy fellowship with Him (much less come into possession of His gift of immortality) without first being schooled in how all of this must play out. So...

By the time God's Son was sent to Earth to finalize this plan of God for a relationship between Him and humanity, there were two types of people on the earth: {1} those of the lineage of the man named Adam God chose from out of mankind to get the ball rolling (aka Israelites) and, though the darkness had been gradually dissipating over the centuries due to Adam's posterity and the religion that issued from it, {2} those outside of that ancestry and religion who were largely still in darkness (aka Gentiles, cf. Luke 1:79 & Acts 17:22ff, viz. those who were still "groping for Him"[v. 27]). However, now, i.e. after the consummation of this great undertaking of God, there's a choice: Just as indicated in a prophecy of hope by God to Daniel (12:2), we can now actually choose eternal life over eternal death (John 5:24 & 11:26). If all this had still not yet reached a conclusion, then Proverbs 13:12^a would still hold sway: "Hope drawn out makes the heart sick"; but since it has achieved completion, verse 12^b is, thankfully, our reality: "but when that hope is fulfilled, it's a tree of life." PTL! ☺

So this, in a very brief summary for sure, is how I see things "before" the fulfillment of God's plan by the Second/Last Adam (Jesus the Christ), all of which transpired around the time of the events that concluded all things related to the "schooling" of mankind (tho indirectly via the Israelites and their Law, Gal. 3:25 & 4:1ff); then, after that or since the events of AD 70, all could/should be able to understand that a relationship with The Source of All Life could/can only be enjoyed by means of His grace. So (if indeed we believe in possessing the ability to choose) 2000 years later...

For those of us who've entrusted ourselves into God's hand and are therefore in a relationship with Him, thereby also graciously receiving the added bonus of continuing immortally in that relationship with Him, we find ourselves in possession of the outcome of that hope which had been extended for centuries—having is better than hoping. Right? Right. But, then again...

Just because the hope for a finalized plan devised by God to provide the capability of admittance into such a relationship came to fruition, does that mean there's no such thing as any type of hope whatsoever? Certainly not. For since (from an earthly standpoint) we're temporary beings (i.e. we'll all die in this realm of existence), even children of God cannot cease from hoping in the sense of looking forward to continuing to exist after physical death. (At least we have that anticipation!) The hope of which the Bible generally refers, i.e. the hope of the reality of an actual way to have a relationship with God that didn't exist before Christ, is what has been accomplished for 2000 years, not the anticipations of every single Christian individual. So...

Today we (God's children) are therefore essentially in what some call "paradise restored" or what I like to call "a new heaven and earth" condition, meaning that we're now in a relationship with The Source of All Life as pictured in Genesis between God and Adam before the so-called "fall." We don't live in an age of more prophecies and more promises, but in an age of fulfillment/completeness. After all, seriously, what would be "better" about a New Covenant age which is so dark that it needs light from the Old Covenant age until the dawning new day does finally arrive in still yet another age (cf. 2 Pet. 1:19)? See, if this age, which had so much promise, has actually/merely turned out to be little different than the last one, what should we expect from the supposed next one? For there's no way to make the timing language any plainer than it is in the New Covenant Scriptures! Non-preterists should find it rather strange that God's new Israel is required to gird herself in preparation for yet another "end" (cf. 1 Pet. 1:13), begging the question, "When will it all finally end or come to genuine fruition?"

Recall what Paul wrote to those suffering first-generation Christians: "It's high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand" (Rom. 13:11-12a). Consider this: Paul was inspired to write those words after only a few of "the last days" had transpired. So, after the passing of nearly 2,000 years, what adjectives/adverbs could we possibly contrive to make things sound any more imminent today if, as many claim, the end is imminent? In other words, how much more awake can we become? Or how much nearer can salvation get? Besides, if "the day" of verse 12 has yet to arrive, wasn't Paul's language to his audience at least somewhat deceptive? Well...

Permit me to use all I've shared so far as a springboard into some vital thoughts regarding our personal/interpersonal lives as post-fulfillment adherents/advocates, with our focus on a couple passages penned by the Apostle Paul.

There were several times in Paul's letters when he employed the terms "light" and "walk," with "walk" of course referring to how one lives out his/her life. Ya know, I know of no other terms better to search for in order to find teachings related to life after "all things fulfilled." I didn't do this, but I'm pretty certain that if you were to check a concordance for the terms "light" and "walk," Romans 13:11-14 would be right there at the top ... and rightfully so, for (to saints a few years before all things fulfilled) Paul, after writing about loving one another, wrote: "Knowing the appointed time, it is already [i.e. past] the hour for you to be awake from sleep. [Why?] Because our salvation is now nearer than when we [first] believed. The night is far spent, and the day has drawn near. We should put off therefore the deeds of the darkness, and we should put on the weapons of the light. As [though living] in the day, we should walk well-behaved: not [involved] in revelries and drunken bouts, not [involved] in acts of licentiousness and lewdness, not [involved] in strife and envy. Rather put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not be making provisions for the lusts of the flesh."

Wow! What a passage! Note the three main contrasts: asleep versus awake, dark versus light, and night versus day, with "the day" being preeminent. And what was "the day" Paul had in mind? The first day of the age of salvation (v. 11b). And what did he mean by "salvation"? Well, the answer seems pretty obvious because he was encouraging them to live "as in the day" or as though they had already attained to that age of salvation. And since he correlated holy living with that age, then this was a salvation of/in/to the genuine/perfect/everlasting righteousness prophesied in Daniel 9:24 and 2 Peter 3:13; and this righteousness was that of Jesus and was bestowed upon His people at His return (cf. Rom. 4:24 & Gal. 5:5) from out of the true most holy place into which He had gone to fulfill His high priestly duties, thereby completing salvation (Heb. 9:28) and thus the purified/consummate kingdom-temple in which the holy God resides.

So with the fulfilled kingdom being a purified place of residence, Paul could (and did) therefore pit that (eternal) "day" or age of the kingdom—in which its people would (and do) walk in the light—against the preceding (temporal) age of the kingdom when people walked in darkness. The implication seems clear: Since we now live in the consummate kingdom age (of which Paul wrote in Romans 13), then it's presumed that we today, who've been stamped with the righteousness of Christ, are walking "in Him" as He Himself walked and would walk "well-behaved: not [involved] in revelries and drunken bouts, not [involved] in acts of licentiousness and lewdness, not [involved] in strife and envy," and so on. Now...

If one were to continue consulting passages with the terms "light" and "walk" in the New Testament in an attempt to find other teachings to aid in seeing what God was and is expecting of those who claim to be His and in His kingdom today, he/she would come upon another passage by the same apostle, namely Ephesians 5:2-14 (found in the midst of the greater section of 4:17—5:21). Just as Paul talked about "love" just prior to the Romans passage just considered (viz. vv. 8-10), so here in Ephesians 5:2-14 he did the same: "Walk in love as Christ has loved us...." Yes, though we don't see the word "light" until verse 8, we see the word "walk" immediately here (as well as six other times in this letter), and it's directly connected to the greatest word of all—"love." In fact, besides "light" and "walk," I firmly believe the term "love" fits right in there with those two as the top three terms to use in a search for teachings related to the topic of what life in the consummate kingdom is all about. God is light, and God is love; so if we're in (fellowship with) Him, then we, citizens of His kingdom, are to be walking in light and love. The principles of Matthew 22:37-40 are the crux of living life after the consummation!

In this letter as well Paul spoke of completed salvation being in their near future, most notably in 1:13-14: "Having believed in Him, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." In 2:22 and 4:15-16 (all in the present tense for them at that time) he wrote of their being built up into the Lord's residence, for (as he wrote in 5:23ff) they were in the process of being purified for (to be) God's dwelling which would occur only after they as His temple (2:21) were anointed as His most holy place (cf. Dan. 9:24). So, after writing to them about being and acting like children who walk in love toward one another (5:2-7), he wrote to them as well about being and acting like children of the light instead of the darkness and being awake instead of asleep (5:8-14). This means he did the same thing here in relation to "the time" in which they were living as he did in Romans 13; i.e., instead of living a life of indulgence, Paul encouraged them to live so as to redeem the short time they had left by understanding what the Lord's will was in that respect (5:15-18; cf. 1 Cor. 7:29 & Rom. 9:28 in reference to the shortness of "the time"). So...

With reference to the words "light" and "walk" (as well as "love") in Romans 13 & Ephesians 5, I've focused mainly upon the personal part of the life of a fulfilled-prophecy believer. So let's move on to discuss a few thoughts relative to the interpersonal part of the life of a fulfilledist, if I may coin a term. As fulfilledists (or preterists, if you'd rather) we possess the greatest tool (viz. the preterist paradigm itself) for dealing not only with disseminators of humanly-devised models of unfulfilled biblical prophecy, but also with the detractors of Christianity in general (Muslims, Jews, atheists, et al.), most of whom latch onto those humanly-devised models (e.g. amillennialism and premillennialism) and use them against Christians and Christianity in an attempt to prove that Jesus and His disciples were false prophets, because, according to those commonly held models, their claims of imminency did not reach fruition. So ... are we ready (per the prodding of Jude 3) to contend for and defend the true Gospel—the real, *bona fide*, actual good news? Do we have love for the truth and our fellowman to be God's instruments in kindly sharing with the people in our individual worlds (cf. Rev. 22:2), who speak of "the future return of Christ" in one breath and "the finished work of Christ" in another breath, that they're sending conflicting messages and thus essentially aiding in the creation of atheists? Besides that...

In the realm of politics, no one has the upper hand that the preterist has when it comes to making our world—especially our own country—better! Just our biblical understanding of old (physical) Israel and new (spiritual) Israel has the potential to have a major affect on foreign policies concerning the modern-day State of Israel. This would go a long way in avoiding wars (and thus the loss of tens of thousands of lives), in saving billions of dollars, and perhaps even in provoking others to reconsider their biblical and consequently political positions. I've contemplated this to the point that it seems to me an almost Garden of Eden of political peace on our planet would be within reach if we could only get the world to see that we have this colossal mess today in large part due to our having been fed false religious information concerning Israel for several generations now! So...

How does (or should) our preterist view affect our daily lives? It should afford us a previously unexperienced confidence, one that provides us with an assurance of our personal religion and which in turn would attract people to us so that we can share our way of life in Jesus with them based upon our conviction in the actual "finished work of Christ" (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15), thereby providing them something better than they've ever expected! Due to the fulfillment nearly 2000 years ago now of the hope of an actual means by which we can finally not just know something about The Source of All Life—God, but even have a relationship with Him that includes the actual possibility of life after death, we should feel beyond blessed! Yes, futurists claim they can say this very same thing, but the problem (as the very existence of Muslims, Jews, atheists, agnostics, and skeptics demonstrate) is that they—especially when they speak of life now as still being within the now-but-not-yet stage—keep numerous people from the kingdom (cf. Mat. 23:13) by their inconsistent teachings, meaning that we are the ones with the true good news; and our desire to live out the second commandment of loving our fellowman motivates us to share that fulfilled hope with them. So...

No, we're not taking away people's hope; we're only saying that the biblical hope of God finally finishing the creation of a way to Him has been accomplished, so that now, at last, we (as opposed to most who lived before Christ's finished work) can know we have eternal life—just read that very thing in First John 5:13). 😊

[Tony E. Denton; ASiteForTheLord.com; Oct. 2018]