
The Unity of the Spirit

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"In the Bond of Peace"

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Dear Fellow-believers,

It is imperative that we as Christians maintain our spiritual perspective on life at all times. This is a New Testament perspective that is rooted and grounded in all that God has, and will, accomplish for his people in Christ. Whatever may be going on in this present evil age, Christian believers are those “upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (I Cor. 10:11). Spiritually, God’s purposes for his people are already fulfilled “in Christ” and the new age of salvation has already begun (II Cor. 5:17). All that remains is the final consummation of God’s purposes when God will “bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph. 1:10). As R.J. Bauckham states,

In contrast to cyclical conceptions of history, the biblical writings understand history as a linear movement toward a goal. God is driving history towards the ultimate fulfillment of his purposes for his creation. So biblical eschatology is not limited to the destiny of the individual; it concerns the consummation of the whole history of the world, towards which all God’s redemptive acts in history are directed (“Eschatology”, *New Bible Dictionary*, p. 342, Eerdmans).

Biblically, of course, this final resolution of history takes place with the return of Christ, the last judgment, and the final establishment of God’s kingdom in a renewed and glorious earth (I Cor. 15:20-28). However, the unique perspective of the New Testament is that “the last days” or “the end” actually *began* with Christ’s death, resurrection and giving of the Spirit on Pentecost. Therefore, like it or not, we already live in “the last days” and our lives should be conducted in that light.

For Christians this should be cause for joy since with every passing day Christ’s return is closer and so “now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11). In short, every generation of Christian believers, including the first century church, lives in the last days and in the light of Christ’s return. This makes for a simple deduction: to study the first century church, as recorded in the NT, is to study an example of how we – or any generation of Christians – should live in “the last days.” Our responsibilities as Christians are *always the same* and they can be broken down into two broad responsibilities, which *never change*:

(1). Christians in every generation are responsible to live Christ-like lives of love and service to others as encapsulated in Gal. 6:10: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

(2). Christians in every generation are responsible to help in proclaiming the good news of “God’s salvation to the ends of the earth.” This is made crystal clear in Acts 1:6: “So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

As the Book of Acts shows, these responsibilities do not change even in the midst of persecution, economic depression, or tribulations or hardships of any kind. These Christian responsibilities are simply part and parcel of what it means to be ambassadors for Christ in a world that is under the corrupting influence of Satan’s kingdom –

while, at the same time, having our true citizenship, and hope, in heaven.

As with most students of the Bible, my present beliefs about end-times haven't come easily. They are the result of much study and many experiences with many Christian groups and individuals from childhood until today. Along the way I've learned that sensationalism, special "revelatory" insight, or "scoops" on current events are almost always wrong. By far, I've learned the most through my own personal reading and study of the Bible, history, etc. as well as from the works of recognized biblical scholars from a wide variety of denominations throughout the world. Amongst such scholars there is actually a wide consensus of agreement on most matters about eschatology. Disagreements that do occur among such scholars are primarily over details that do not affect the big picture. The following list presents principles for studying and living in the end-times for any generation of Christians. I recommend them and present them for your consideration:

1. The "end-time" began with Christ's first coming. Specifically, the life, death and resurrection of Christ were the most important eschatological events in God's plan of salvation. Through what he achieved, salvation is now available to all who will accept him; and, his resurrection and glorification are the prototype for all who are to follow.
2. Christ will return, raise, gather together and transform all his people, and then reign in life with them forever in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Before that time we must be willing to continue in the faith and to endure the sufferings of this age, because it is only through much tribulation that we will enter into the kingdom of God.
3. Passages such as Acts 1:6-11; 3:18-21; 14:21-23; Rom. 8:16-25; I Cor. 15; Eph. 1:9-10; Phil. 3:20-21; I Thess. 4:13-18; II Thess. 1-2; I John 3:1-3; I Peter 1:3-9; II Peter 3:1-13; Rev. 21:ff.; etc., which are clear and easy to understand, form the basis of my understanding. These truths are confirmed over and over throughout the NT and by every NT writer. No passage of scripture should be allowed to break the truth of their consistent witness.
4. The fulfillment of OT prophecies must be understood in accordance with the interpretation

of the NT writers. Normally, this fulfillment was understood in the light of progressive revelation and in typological terms (rather than either a strictly literal, or else, allegorical way).

5. Sections of Scripture such as the Olivet Discourse in Matt. 24-25; Mark 13; and Luke 21 are clear in what they teach in broad terms. However, the details should not be pressed since it is notoriously difficult to be sure of what pertains, for example, to the first century destruction of Jerusalem, etc. and what might pertain to a time immediately preceding Christ's return. By the same token, the Book of Revelation is loaded with symbolism, etc. and it is not always possible to be sure of the precise interpretation of individual passages. In all such cases, believers should focus on that which is clear throughout the rest of the NT. Those who claim "special" or "revelatory" insight about biblical passages, or current events, or date setting in regards to the last days – beyond what the scriptures clearly teach - should be rebuked and shunned.
6. The first century church as recorded in the pages of the New Testament should be our prime example as to how to live in the end-time. The primary Christian responsibilities of living a Christ-like life of love and service towards others and of bearing witness to Christ to the ends of the earth never change no matter what the circumstances may be. They should be the primary focus of action for *every* generation of Christians.

After many years of dealing with this subject I believe that "simpler is better." It is better to focus on the simplicity of what Christ has *already* accomplished, the *certainty* of his future return, and *how to live* in the light of this as a child in God's family. What may or may not happen in-between is of comparatively little significance in the overall scheme of things. A pre-occupation with the details of possible end-time scenarios seems more often than not to cause believers to miss the mark in regards to their Christian responsibilities and often causes hurt and divisions. Let us, instead, keep our eyes on the simplicity of God's salvation in Christ and live Christ-like lives until the final consummation of God's purposes after Christ's glorious return.

Richie Temple

Christian Citizenship:

Romans 13

By Chuck LaMattina
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The Bible teaches us that Christians are not a part of this world, even though we live in it. In his high priestly prayer, in John 17, Jesus Christ prayed for all who would believe in him saying, "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world (vs. 16)." And his prayer request for us was not that we would be taken out of this world but that God would keep us "from the evil one (vs. 15)."

In saying that we are not of this world Jesus meant that we are not bound to this life alone. We are not like the unbeliever, who is a one dimensional earth dweller, whose wisdom is faulty, and whose hopes rest only in what he or she can see, hear, smell, taste or touch, in this lifetime. As Christians we have the very life of God within us in the gift of the Spirit. We have available to us divine wisdom and strength for daily living. And we have a sure and certain hope of eternal life and glory in the coming kingdom of God. Philippians 3:20 says,

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ [All scripture is cited from the NKJV].

When Christ returns he will establish the kingdom of heaven, of which we are citizens, on this earth. There is a New World order coming!

Yet, even though we are not **of** this world, at this moment in time, we still live **in** it. And since we do there is a tension that comes into our lives concerning how to live as citizens of heaven, even while we are now citizens of some earthly government. In fact this was a problem that Christ faced when he ministered in Israel. At that time, most Israeli's chafed under the dominion of Roman rule. Many hoped to overthrow Rome and restore the Davidic kingdom.

In the light of this a delegation of Pharisees and Herodians (the religious and political elite of the day) went to Jesus to try and trap him in a controversial question. The question recorded in Matthew 22:17 was this:

"Tell us, therefore, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

Their question was devilishly clever! If Christ answered, "No," he would have been branded an insurrectionist – a rebel against Rome. If he answered "Yes," he would have been seen by many as an enemy of God's people. Christ's enemies were sure they had him, but he had them instead.

But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius. And he said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (vss. 18-21)

Christ's answer was brilliant and full of divine wisdom. With a single sentence our Lord made clear the power and rights of human governments, while at the same time limiting its power under God. There is a proper domain and function for civil government. But it must be seen in the light of the overall government of God.

Romans 13 explains to us how we as Christians are to relate to the worldly governments in which we find ourselves. The 13th chapter of Romans has been controversial to say the least. It has been used to prop up evil governments, and as a result attempts have been made to make the "governing authorities" that Paul writes of either church authorities or angelic powers. This has led to abuses as well! The truth is that the "governing authorities" dealt with in Romans 13 are the authorities of civil governments. As we study this section of God's Word in a biblically balanced way, we will receive great spiritual profit. Let's begin:

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. (Romans 13:1, 2)

Christians are to be subject to the civil government in which they may find themselves, for there is no right to rule except from God. In other words, government is not just a man-made institution; the idea of human government and authority comes from God. Civil governments are a

means ordained by God for the right regulation of human affairs. Just as parents are to exercise authority in the home, and church leaders in the church, so civil governments are to exercise authority in public, community life.

Now, this is not to imply that all forms of government are intrinsically good, or that every government does the will of God in the best sense. But in an ultimate sense, the government's authority to rule comes from God. Psalm 62:11 says, "Power belongs to God" – Amen! All power does. Therefore no one can have any power to rule at all without God's ordaining of it, or permitting of it.

In the Old Testament book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar learned this the hard way. He thought that he ruled his vast empire because of his own greatness, but finally he was driven to his senses and he learned,

*"That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."
(Daniel 4:32)*

We know also from Luke 4 that Satan can give kingdoms and power to those who serve him. Yet, even Satan's authority is subject to God's ruling and overruling. For example, in John 19, Jesus stood before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and Pilate says to Jesus,

*"Do you not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?"
Jesus answered and said,*

*"You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above."
(vss. 10, 11)*

The reason Christ answered Pilate as he did was his strong and accurate belief in God's sovereign rule in the affairs of men. Nothing exists apart from God's will. All things, ultimately trace their being back to God, including the power to govern.

Again, this does not mean that all governments are intrinsically good, or that every official does God's will in the best sense. God is not responsible for the sins of governments or civil officials any more than He is responsible for our sins. But the right of governments to rule and to bring order and stability to public life is the will of God. In the best sense government is ordained of God for the benefit of humanity, for our common good. And since this is true, we as believers in Christ should be model citizens following the laws

of the land and praying for our local, state, provincial, and national leaders. In fact this is stated elsewhere in the New Testament with great clarity.

Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak evil against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men – as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. (1 Peter 2:11-17).

And not only should we submit to the laws of our country, we should be praying for our leaders. In 1 Timothy 2, the apostle Paul writes,

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (vss. 1-4)

Notice that God's Word doesn't say, "Pray for the leaders you like" or even, "Pray for your leaders except those who are incompetent, or bad." No! In fact if we feel that our rulers are ungodly, this should cause us to pray for them even more fervently! This principal of praying for our civil authorities is seen even in the Old Testament. When Israel was held in captivity in Babylon God said,

"Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace." (Jer. 29:7)

Now, let's return to Romans 13 and look at the God-given tasks of good government.

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. (vss. 3, 4)

From these two verses (as well as from 1 Peter 2:14) the most basic role of civil government is to support and promote and praise what is good and right. The government should help promote good civil virtues, they should keep the peace, and promote the common welfare of its citizens. Plus the civil authorities are to punish those who engage in evil acts against the community. The use of force to punish evil doers, or criminals is a God-given right. In a sense, the wrath of the state against evil, is a foretaste of God's ultimate wrath against evil at the final judgment. Government is to be an instrument of justice that promotes what is good, protects the innocent, and punishes criminals.

The whole point here in Romans 13 is that God's ideal for civil government is that it is to bring some form of harmony and peace and order to life. The state however, has no authority from God to terrorize or manipulate its people. It has no right to overturn longstanding moral standards and values. It has no right to change or overturn honorable institutions like marriage and the family. The state has no God-given right to declare what is moral. It only has the right to uphold the moral standards of God that are common to all. The state does not even have the ability, or the God-given right to reform evil doers. It only has the authority to punish them.

Therefore as long as the governing authorities exercises their power in keeping with God's intent, they are God's servants for the common good of society. If however the state runs counter to what is good and right you and I have the right and the moral obligation to disobey. Let me say this as clearly as I can – we as Christians are to submit to all civil law, except where obedience to the state would entail disobedience to the will of God.

For example, when Israel was in slavery in Egypt, the Bible says that the children of Israel were

fruitful and increased abundantly, and they became very mighty (Exodus 1). But a new Pharaoh arrived on the scene who did not know the history of Joseph and Israel. So in an attempt to diminish Israel's numbers and keep control, he afflicted them with heavy labor. But Israel grew and flourished. Finally, Pharaoh ordered the Jewish midwives to kill all the Jewish boys who were born. It was his version of planned population control! But Exodus 1:17 says,

But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive.

Another example is Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in Daniel 3. King Nebuchadnezzar ordered everyone to fall down and worship his golden image, or be thrown in a fiery furnace. The three young men refused to obey the king even in the face of death. The same was true for Daniel. King Darius made a decree that for 30 days no petition or prayer could be made to any god, or man except to the king himself. Daniel disobeyed and kept his prayer time with God, and God delivered him from the lion's den.

In the New Testament, in the book of Acts, chapter 4, Peter and John heal a man who had been crippled since his birth, and begin to preach Christ to the people. As news of this reaches the religious leaders in Jerusalem they have Peter and John arrested, and they threaten then with punishment should they continue to preach in Jesus' name. Here's their response:

But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (vss. 18-20)

It is extremely important to understand that in each case of disobedience given as examples here, the purpose of these heroic refusals to obey the governing authorities, was not to just simply defy the government, but to demonstrate their submission to the higher laws of God! As Christians we have a divine right and a moral obligation to speak out against and oppose what is morally wrong, and to do what is right in order to correct what is wrong. Yet, the point remains that in general, we are to be good citizens and help support the government for the good it can do.

Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.

Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. (Romans 13:5-7)

By obeying the laws of the land we stay out of trouble, keep our conscience clear before God, and keep the doors open for the gospel of Christ. And yes, we should pay our taxes! If you have the right to oppose taxes before they become law, or if you have the right to repeal unfair taxes, then by all means do so. But you have no right to cheat on your taxes. And remember to give honor and respect to those in authority that deserve that respect because of their office. A government that does not have the respect of its people is doomed to impotence and it will ultimately collapse.

Loyalty and honor and respect for those in authority have more than sentimental value. If there is no respect for those who ought to receive respect like parents, teachers, judges, legislators, church leaders and so on, the public welfare stands in jeopardy! Our society today would not be as much of the jungle that it is if proper respect for authority was taught to our children. All of us must learn to respect those who are in authority whether it is in the home, the church, or the government.

It may be difficult to feel respect for officials whose standards or actions we do not support. But it will always be difficult to secure worthy leaders unless the community is at least prepared to regard those in government with the respect to which they are entitled. If we teach our children the truth about honoring those in authority, they will come to understand that they themselves must strive to be worthy should they desire to hold positions of authority in the home and church or in government.

Finally, what Paul wrote in Romans 13 about our duty to the governing authorities of this world is only temporary! In verse 12 he says, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." What day? The day of Christ's return and the establishment of the kingdom of God! That great day draws closer with each new morning. On that day Jesus Christ will be King of kings and Lord of lords, and believers will

be in public office. That's right! We will help administer the justice and peace of the kingdom of God.

In the meantime our primary task as the church is not politics, but preaching the good news concerning Christ and the kingdom of God. To become obsessed with political success or failures, at the expense of bringing people to faith in Christ, is as foolish as a skilled heart surgeon abandoning his profession to become a make up artist, spending time making people look better, rather than saving lives. Only changed people change society. In the realm of civil authorities, its not so much that we need better institutions, as we need better men and women in those institutions. If we show ourselves as the salt and light of the world that we are, we can bring glory to God and good to His people.

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More on Rom. 13

The following comments are by NT scholar F.F. Bruce on Romans 13:1-7 from his commentary, *Romans*, in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* [Eerdmans , pp. 220-226]:

Paul places the whole question [of governing authorities in Rom. 13:1-7] on the highest plane. God is the fount of all authority, and those who exercise authority on earth do so by delegation from him; therefore to disobey them is to disobey God. Human government is a divine ordinance, and the powers of coercion and commendation which it exercises have been entrusted to it by God, for the repression of crime and the encouragement of righteousness. Christians of all people, then, ought to obey the laws, pay their taxes and respect authorities – not because it will be the worse for them if they do not, but because this is one way of serving God.

... But the following verses [Rom. 13:8-14] show that the duty of obedience to secular authorities is a temporary one, lasting only for the present period of "night" (v. 12); in the "day" which "is at hand" a new order of government will be introduced, when "the saints will judge the world" (I Cor. 6:2). The state is to wither away (on this Paul and Karl Marx agree); "the city of God remaineth".

God's Salvation to the Ends of the Earth:

The Story of Luke-Acts

By Richie Temple

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One of the chief focuses of this newsletter has always been to emphasize the continuity of God's plan of salvation throughout the Bible. Specifically, we have emphasized that in the Bible there is one God, one people of God, and one hope of salvation for all of God's people. Though the background of this story-line can be seen in the Old Testament Scriptures themselves, the only sure method for correct biblical interpretation of these OT Scriptures is to allow the New Testament writers to be our guides in properly understanding them. For, as has often been stated, the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. It is only by focusing on the New Testament message of salvation - as accomplished through Christ - that we can see the whole Bible in proper perspective.

One of the best ways to do this is to follow the New Testament story of "God's salvation to the ends of the earth" in the two-volume work of Luke: the NT Books of Luke and Acts. These two books provide a continuous account of the NT fulfillment of the OT promise of salvation in Christ and then its proclamation to the ends of the earth. Let's look at Luke's own stated purpose for writing both Luke and Acts:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4).

Luke states clearly that his purpose in writing is to show the certainty of the things that had been taught: i.e., the "word" concerning the fulfillment among them of God's OT promises of

salvation to his people. One of the key OT sections, against which Luke frames his two-volume work, is the "servant of the Lord" passage of Isaiah 40-55. Luke understands these verses to foreshadow the salvation which is fulfilled in Jesus, the ideal Israel and the true "servant of the Lord." His account from beginning to end aims at the fulfillment and proclamation of "God's salvation to the ends of the earth." Isaiah 49:5-6 provides the central background passage for this theme:

*And now the LORD says –
he who formed me in the womb to be his servant
to bring Jacob back to him
and gather Israel to himself,
for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord
and my God is my strength –
He says:
"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring **my salvation to the ends of the earth**"
(Isaiah 49:5-6).*

In short, this OT section of scripture provides the background for Luke's framework of his two-volume work about the announcement, fulfillment and proclamation of "God's salvation to the ends of the earth."

The continuity of this theme can best be seen by comparing the references in Luke and Acts about God's salvation in Christ that tie the two books together as one continuous whole. The Book of Luke begins by several announcements about the meaning and significance of the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. He is the "horn of **salvation**" (1:69) through whom comes "the **forgiveness of sins**" (1:77) and who will "**reign** over the house of Jacob **forever**" since his "**kingdom will never end**" (1:33). In short, this "**Savior ... Christ the Lord**" (2:11) embodies in himself the fulfillment of God's OT promises of salvation for all peoples of the world. As Simeon concluded in Luke chapter 2:

*Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen **your salvation**,
which you have prepared in the sight of all people,*

a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of your people Israel (Luke 2:29-32).

The rest of the Book of Luke goes on to announce and demonstrate “God’s salvation” in the ministry of Jesus the Messiah as well as to show its accomplishment through his life, death and resurrection. This, of course, sets the stage for its proclamation throughout the Book of Acts as can be seen in three sections of Scripture in Acts. First, chapter one begins by tying the two-volume work together.

*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day he was taken up into heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about **the kingdom of God**. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*

*So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore **the kingdom** to Israel?”*

*He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be **my witnesses** in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and **to the ends of the earth**” (Acts 1:1-8).*

It would be hard for Luke to be any clearer as to the purpose of the Book of Acts.

God’s Salvation

There are two sections of scripture that set forth in detail the message of salvation that was preached in the Book of Acts, and indeed, in the entire New Testament from Pentecost onwards. First, Acts 2-4 with Peter and then Acts 13-14 with Paul. The two detailed accounts should be compared with each other but for the sake of space we will focus on the “good news” or “message of salvation”

(Acts 13:26) which Paul preaches in Acts 13-14 on his first missionary journey. First, he speaks to the people of Antioch of Pisidia:

*“We tell you **the good news**: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:*

*“‘You are my Son;
today I have become your
Father.’*

The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words:

*‘I will give you the holy and sure
Blessings promised to
David.’*

So it is stated elsewhere:

*“‘You will not let your Holy One see
decay.’*

“For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

*“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that **through Jesus the forgiveness of sins** is proclaimed to you. **Through him everyone who believes is justified** from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:*

*“‘Look, you scoffers, wonder and
perish, for I am going to do
something in your days that you
would never believe.’”*

As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

*On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear **the word of the Lord**. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.*

Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak **the word of God** to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of **eternal life**, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

*I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
That you may bring **salvation** to the ends of the earth.*

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored **the word of the Lord**; and all who were appointed to **eternal life** believed.

Then **the word of the Lord** spread through the whole region (Acts 13:32-49; cp. Acts 2 with Peter).

Shortly after this speech, Paul preached the word of the Lord to other parts of that same region including Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. After this he returned to each of the churches he established in those cities in order to strengthen them and to appoint elders to oversee them. Acts 14:21b-23 summarizes the message he taught them:

*Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to **remain to true to the faith**. We must go through many hardships to **enter the kingdom of God**” (Acts 14:21b-23).*

No better summary of the “good news” which Paul and the other apostles preached can be found in the entire NT. The teachings in the NT Letters to the churches should constantly be compared with these historical accounts in Luke-Acts so as to put them in their proper historical and conceptual context. In short, Paul’s message was “good news” about the fulfillment of the OT theme of salvation. It focused on Jesus the Savior, whom God had vindicated as Lord and Christ by raising him from the dead. Those who accept him in faith have the assurance of forgiveness of sins, or justification, and eternal life¹ in the kingdom of God to come.

As can be seen from these verses, Luke-Acts

¹ It should always be remembered that the term “eternal life” literally means “life of the coming age.” As F.F. Bruce states, “ ‘eternal life’ (*zoe aionios*) reflects Heb. *Hayye ha olam habba*, ‘the life of the age to come’” (*The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Book of Acts*, p. 266, Eerdmans).

gives us a complete picture of the biblical concept of salvation: *what* salvation is, *how* it is to be attained and *whom* it is for. “Salvation,” “eternal life” and “entering the kingdom of God” are all eschatological terms which speak of the same reality in regards to the biblical concept of salvation, but each are from a somewhat different perspective and with a different emphasis. In sum, we could summarize the whole message about “God’s salvation” in Luke-Acts with the following chart:

**Whoever:
Jew or Gentile,
repents/believes/accepts
the good news/word of God/message of salvation
that:
Jesus is the (risen) Lord/Christ/Son of God,
will be saved:
that is,
be justified/receive eternal life/enter the kingdom
of God**

In Luke-Acts the *basic* “good news” of salvation is always the same: those who accept Jesus as God’s Messiah will be saved. But from Pentecost onwards the message of salvation takes on a new perspective of *fulfillment*. The salvation that had been foretold in the OT has now been fulfilled in Jesus, for God has vindicated him as the Lord Christ by raising him from the dead. Everyone who accepts him as the (now risen) Lord, Christ, Son of God will be saved (cp. Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:9-17).

To the Ends of the Earth

In the Book of Acts, the believers’ mission is to take the good news of *this* salvation “to the ends of the earth.” Note carefully that this is the *same* salvation that was first foreshadowed in the Old Testament; then preached to Israel; and finally, is preached to the ends of the earth. Simply put, there is *one* salvation in scripture that God accomplishes through our Lord Jesus Christ for all people; not different salvations for different peoples.

All of these truths are confirmed and established in the concluding chapter of the Book of Acts. Luke sets forth Paul as an example for all who would follow him in the mission of proclaiming the “good news”. Upon arriving in Rome – the center of the Roman empire – Paul met together with the Jews who were living there in order to explain the message of salvation that he had been proclaiming

wherever he went:

*Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar – not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is for **the hope of Israel** that I am bound with this chain."*

They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect."

*They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning until evening he explained and declared to them **the kingdom of God** and tried to convince them about **Jesus** from the Law of Moses and the Prophets. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement, "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet:*

*"Go to this people and say,
You will be ever hearing but never
Understanding;
You will be ever seeing but never
perceiving."
For this people's heart has become
calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their
Eyes,
Hear with their ears
Understand with their hearts
And turn, and I would heal them.'*

*"Therefore I want you to know that **God's salvation** has been sent to the Gentiles and they will listen!*

*For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached **the kingdom of God** and taught about **the Lord Jesus Christ** (Acts 28:17-31).*

In Paul's final address in Acts he summarizes the "good news" that he proclaimed wherever he went. It is a message about the fulfillment of "God's salvation". This was foreshadowed in the OT Scriptures and has now been fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in him that God's ultimate plans for his people and creation are now proclaimed "to the ends of the earth."

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Books in Review

New Testament

Theologies

There are certain biblical scholars whose works on the Bible I have made it a point to collect. Each of these scholars have written many books and articles about the New Testament and I am indebted to each of them for many insights into understanding the Bible as the meaning of the scriptures were unfolded to me in their writings. In addition, each of these authors are not only scholars, but Christian gentlemen as well. Their work has always been with a view to illuminating the truth of the Bible as well as building up the body of Christ. I list below the major works that they have written which best summarize their life-time of NT Studies:

1. **F.F. Bruce**: *The Message of the New Testament* and his many commentaries.
2. **G.E. Ladd**: *A Theology of the New Testament* and works on eschatology.
3. **J.D.G. Dunn**: *A Theology of Paul the Apostle* and other NT studies.
4. **G.B. Caird**: *New Testament Theology*.
5. **Gordon Fee**: *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*.
6. **E.E. Ellis**: *Pauline Theology* (out of print)
7. **J.A. Fitzmyer**: *The Commentaries on Luke and Romans in the Anchor Bible Series*.

[Available from CBD: www.christianbooks.com]

Notes & Quotes

On the Bible

Your Kingdom Come, Your will be done, On Earth, as it is in Heaven

Anytime there are major catastrophic events in the world Christians naturally turn their thoughts to the second coming of Christ and the events that will surround it. The following books are helpful in understanding these topics. The first two were written by the highly respected NT scholar G.E. Ladd - late Professor of NT at Fuller Theological Seminary.

The Gospel of the Kingdom (only \$5.95 from CBD) is particularly helpful in showing how God is working to bring to pass the ultimate victory of his kingdom - "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10) for *all* of his people. It is a collection of lectures that were originally given in oral form and then adapted for his book. In particular, I highly recommend the chapters: "The Kingdom is Tomorrow;" "The Life of the Kingdom" and "The Kingdom, Israel and the Church." I quote short excerpts from the book:

"The Bible conceives of the entire sweep of human history as resting in the hand of God, but it looks for the final realization of God's kingdom in a realm "beyond history," i.e., in a new and different order of existence ... The entire sweep of man's existence is set forth in terms of this age and the age to come ... This Age had its beginning with creation, but the Age to Come will go on endlessly, for ever. This Age is dominated by evil, wickedness and rebellion ... while the Age to Come is the age of the Kingdom of God. In I Cor. 15:50 Paul says that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Our bodies must undergo a transformation so that they no longer consist of flesh and blood but are incorruptible, glorious, powerful, "spiritual" bodies. Only in these transformed bodies will we enter the Kingdom of God" [from chapter 2 "The Kingdom is Tomorrow" pp. 24-34].

The Blessed Hope is an informative book about the second coming of Christ. It gives a short history of differing views about Christ's *parousia* or second coming; then it deals specifically with "pre-tribulation" rapture thought; and finally, spends most of the book dealing with the terminology and biblical passages about Christ's second coming.

Both of Ladd's books consist of thorough scholarship coupled with an irenic tone.

The next book, *Jesus, Paul and the End of the World*, by Ben Witherington III is published by Inter-Varsity Press and also available through CBD. It is a very detailed analysis and comparison of the teachings of Jesus and Paul about the subjects of the kingdom of God, the second coming of Christ and the relationship between Israel and the Church. It is a thoroughly researched book and contains a tremendous amount of useful information - both in the text itself as well as in the footnotes. It is also enjoyable reading - but, it is written in a *very* scholarly format. I quote excerpts:

"What is most striking in the teaching of Jesus and Paul is how they envision the ultimate future as happening in this world, not in heaven ... We have found absolutely no justification in the teaching of either Paul or Jesus for the notion that there will be two Second Comings of Christ - one invisible and one visible. The language about the rapture in I Thess. 4:17 does indeed speak of a meeting of Christ in the air, but the *parousia* imagery in the context strongly suggests that thereafter both Christ and believers return to earth. ... The fact that Paul envisions "the End" happening not in heaven but on earth when Christ returns, strongly suggests that for Paul the kingdom will be an earthly one, albeit with heavenly qualities.

This comports with Romans 8:19-25, where Paul envisions the transformation of the earth when believers experience the redemption of their bodies. The kingdom will be inherited on earth and that requires not only transformed persons but also a transformed earth" [pp. 230, 202].

This ultimate biblical hope is pictorially summarized in a beautiful section from Rev. 21:1-4:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away ... I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God ... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

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