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Christ, the Center of God's Plan for the Ages

by David Dunlap

The Scriptures are a record of God's plan for the ages. Even a cursory survey of the Old Testament reveals that Christ is the center of God's plans from the earliest days of biblical history. In every age of biblical history the Lord Jesus Christ is prominent, central, and vital. Christ was central in God's plans for the nation of Israel, as revealed in each of the major covenants. Christ was at the center of the worship of Israel, as seen in the types of the Levitical offerings and in the Tabernacle. Every Old Testament revival resulted in a return to the true worship of the Lord; every Old Testament Messianic prophecy and every-end time prophecy time and again revealed Christ to be the indispensable, sovereign center of God's program. Christ Himself unfolded this truth when He spoke to the disciples as He walked with them on the road to Emmaus. "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

Christ, the Center of the Ages

Biblical history is divided into successive periods of ages. Over and over the Bible mentions these periods or "ages" or "dispensations" (Eph. 1:10). We read phrases such as: "end of the ages" (Heb. 9:26); "ages of ages" (Eph. 3:21); "age to come" (Eph. 2:7); "present evil age..." (Gal. 1:4). Often when New Testament writers want to express the idea of the starting point of creation they use the words "the times of the ages." For example, in 2 Tim. 1:9 we read, "Who hath saved us, and called us...but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the *world began*." The words "the world began" may be best translated literally "the times of the ages." These "ages" are periods of time, varying in duration, in which God is dealing with man in a specific way. Some theologians have called these special dealings of God "dispensations." Dispensations have been defined as God's unique ways of ordering His purposes so to bring man the greatest blessing and to bring to Himself the highest glory. In each of these dispensations the Lord Jesus Christ undertakes a central and decisive place.

German Bible scholar and former president of Wiedenest Bible College, Erich Sauer, beautifully explains the role of Christ as the center of the ages:

God is the eternal, the Creator of the world. This "God of Eternity" has called the Ages into existence (Heb. 1:2). From Him issues, as the mystery of His will, the decree of creation and redemption. He who accomplishes all things according to His own free will, has also determined this design (of ages). Therefore, He is not only Creator of the ages but also "the King of the ages" (1 Tim. 1:17). Each age or epoch is marked by definite special principles of God, and each age brings to view the Son in a new greatness and beauty, for in the Son all ages revolve.¹

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Erich Sauer
(1898-1959)

Christ's Death, the Pinnacle of the Ages

Every dispensation or age is characterized by a unique revelation from God, whether it be *promise* as in the days of Abraham, *law* as in the time of Moses, or *grace* as in the ministry of Jesus Christ. However, the dispensations were also progressive in the revelation of divine truth. God slowly unfolded His purposes to man in each successive dispensation. In the dispensation of innocence we have the entrance of sin and its punishment; in the dispensation of conscience we are introduced to blood sacrifice; in the dispensation of the law we find the approach to a holy God through a penal, substitutionary sacrifice. In the book of Job the question is raised, "How should a man be just with God?" (Job 9:2); Paul answers this cry in Romans, "Being justified freely by His grace..." (Rom. 3:24). Thus, God has progressively revealed His ways and the necessity of His Son as a the remedy to the failure of man in each dispensation. When we come to the closing days of the dispensation of the law, we begin to see the ways of God rising to their highest peak in the death of Christ. This was a moment toward which all biblical history was moving and to which all of creation was in ready anticipation. One verse which sets this forth more clearly than any other is found in the book of Hebrews, "...but now once in the *end* of the *world* hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26). Hidden in this verse is are theological gems waiting to be unearthed and examined. First of all, there are two words in this verse that need explanation, the words "end" and "world". The word "end" is not so much the end of a journey as it is a majestic mountain height. Many translations render this word as "consummation" (NASB, Darby), meaning "completion", "pinnacle", or "climax." So, at the outset, we see that the death of Christ on Calvary's hill was the event of inestimable importance to the divine purpose. Moreover, this verse yields yet another important truth in the word "world" (KJV). First of all, the word is plural, "world(s)"; and secondly, it is the Greek word "aionon" usually translated "ages" (NIV, NASV). Thus, we are justified in saying that the death of Christ was the very pinnacle or climax of all the ages of human history! It is the weightiest article of the faith; it is an awe-inspiring mountain peak of Scriptural truth! The theological importance of this moment of biblical history is of tremendous importance, and yet few have stopped to adequately ponder its dispensational significance. However, consider for a moment the words of Bible teacher William Newell (1865-1956) as he lifts our hearts to heaven:

*Thus He put away sin; this putting away of sin was at the consummation of the ages. All previous ages led up to this; all successive ages are governed by this! It seems necessary, therefore, to believe that each age (aion) had to do with the stupendous thing, Christ's being manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*²

Christ's death was that decisive and climactic moment to which all history was moving and, in which, God was finishing all of His redemptive purposes. All past ages looked forward to this moment in history, and in a future day all creation will look back to it in wonder. All ages meet at Calvary! Bible teacher James Flanigan stirs our hearts to worship as he reflects on the triumph of Calvary:

*Once in the consummation of the ages, He appeared; His coming was a climactic moment of fulfillment. It was the moment toward which all purpose and prophecy had been moving. It was not so much an end as a consummation. The Savior's coming to put away sin was the very climax of human history. Past ages and ages future meet here at the cross. All the ages past looked forward to Calvary. All the future will look back to it. The ages meet at Golgotha. Calvary was the meeting place of two eternities.*³

"Once in the consummation of the ages, He appeared...The Savior's coming to put away sin was the very climax of human history. Past ages and ages future meet here at the cross. All the ages past looked forward to Calvary. All the future will look back to it. The ages meet at Golgotha. Calvary was the meeting place of two eternities."

James Flanigan

Christ's death was that moment in biblical history which all the ages were anticipating, indeed, "the meeting place of two eternities." Nevertheless, His death was not an end but rather the glorious beginning of Christ's preeminence in world history. In Christ's first coming, His mission and purpose was to lay down His life as "an offering and a sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). However, in this second coming, the will and purpose of God is for the Lord Jesus Christ to rule and reign victoriously in the place of His suffering and rejection.

Christ, the Glory of the "Age of Ages"

Since the Lord Jesus Christ suffered and was rejected on earth, He, therefore, will demonstrate His ultimate victory over sin through His kingdom rule on earth. This time of vindication or victory is called the "age of ages" or the millennium. This time period will not be merely another age, much like many others that have gone before it. This age will be marked by the glorious and victorious reign of Jesus Christ on the throne of David in Jerusalem (Ps. 132). Where man previously failed morally in prior dispensations, Jesus Christ will gloriously prevail. The terms of the Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic, and New Covenants will at last find their consummation with Christ in the millennium. This age will be unlike all others, for it will be the "Age of Ages." This period of time is mentioned in Ephesians chapter three: "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph 3:21). This passage highlights Christ's unique authority and His divine stamp which will mark this future age. Most serious Bible students agree that this verse contains one of the most intriguing phrases concerning the kingdom reign of Christ. In original manuscripts this verse reads: "Unto Him be glory in the church in Christ Jesus unto *all the generation of an eternity of ages, Amen.*" At once this striking phrase "*generation of an eternity of ages*", or "*age of ages*", stirs our spiritual imagination. Careful students of the Word of God have long labored to grasp the breadth of this remarkable phrase. Theologian Charles Hodge expresses something of the greatness of this age, when he writes:

'To all the generation of an eternity of ages.' In finding no ordinary forms of expression suited to his demands, the apostle heaps together terms of the largest import to give some vent to thoughts and aspirations which he felt to be unutterable...⁴

Joining him is Greek scholar W. Robertson Nicoll, who adds:

*The phrase age of ages may have the force of a superlative, the 'age par excellence', the age besides which there is none other to be named.*⁵

Moreover, we may be safe in saying that in this biblical time period, the church will be privileged to serve the King in the display of His glories. This service will begin at the millennial reign of Christ and continue on into eternity. In this age, the church of God will be linked with the reigning Christ as co-regents. The grace of God, in associating the church of God with the King of glory, is a truth none should take lightly.

Today, man's intellectual ability and his scientific advances have placed him in prominence on the world stage. The Bible, however, describes a very different scene for the future. The center stage in the age to come is reserved exclusively for the glory of God, in the person of Christ, seen in all of His manifold and shining regal excellencies. We do not know when this age will finally break upon the world stage, but when it does, it will be the decisive age within human history.

"Thus He put away sin; this putting away of sin was at the consummation of the ages. All previous ages led up to this; all successive ages are governed by this! It seems necessary, therefore, to believe that each age (aion) had to do with the stupendous thing, Christ's being manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

William R. Newell
(1868-1956)

Author and theologian

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• INFORMATION •

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Conclusion

Fully aware of this world's yearning and aspirations for a hopeful future, believers remain cautious, for our hearts pound with eager expectation of the soon coming of our Lord from heaven. Our hope lies not in what man has in store for himself, but rather, in what our Lord Jesus Christ has marked out for His bride. The Christian races not in lock step with the world, running in the same direction with the same purpose, desire, and longing. We look up to heaven, awaiting our Lord, firstly in His coming for the church, but also eagerly anticipating the day when the King in all His glory shall stand upon that Jerusalem mount. Upon His thigh a name will be written, "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19:16). Near to His side will be the holy armies of heaven following Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean (Revelation 19:14). Then, that innumerable host of blood-bought saints of the Lord will be gathered with Him to reign as kings and priests forever (Revelation 5:10). There in the midst stands the Lamb, slain from before the foundation of the world, yet crowned in brightest glory, and "everyone in the temple speaks of His glory" (Ps. 29:9). Expectantly, we look for the inauguration of the age of ages, with the saints of all ages who love Him. Where "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in the earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father"(Phil. 2:10-11).

Endnotes

1. Erich Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption*, (London, GB: Paternoster Press, 1964), p. 192-193
2. William Newell, *Hebrews*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1947), p. 323
3. James Flanigan, *Hebrews*, (Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie Ltd, 1994), p. 192
4. Charles Hodge, *Ephesians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), p.195
5. W. R. Nicholl, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament, vol. 3*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 319