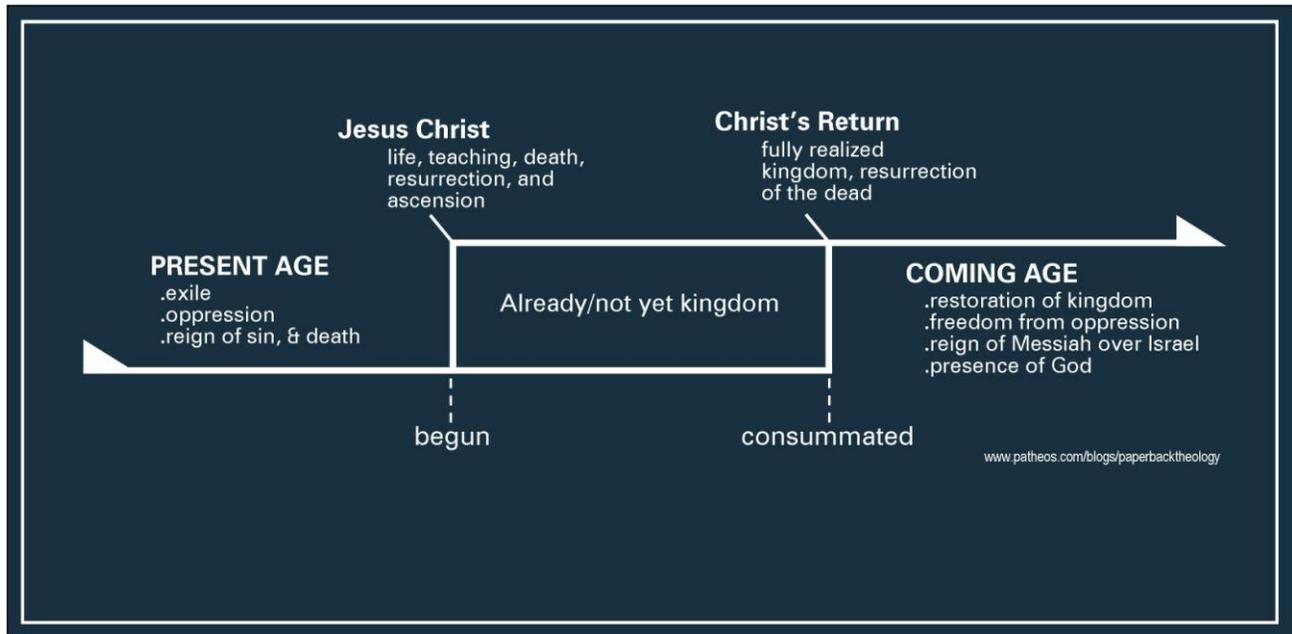


An Appearance that Makes a Difference  
 December 13, 2015  
 Brian R. Wipf

(PIC) Take a look at this diagram. This diagram provides a very simple picture of the spiritual dynamics at work in our world today. Let me break it down for you to begin our time in God's word.



- This bottom line the Bible calls “This present age.” This present age is marked by sin, suffering and death. It’s the world we live in and feel every day. It’s an age, a time on our world, that is bent towards destruction and death. When 1 John 5 says the whole world lies in the power of the Evil One, John, the author, is telling us about the commander general of this present age who is Satan; he uses deceit, temptation and accusation to keep the world under his power. Everything that’s ugly and profane that we see today belongs to the present age.
- This top line the Bible calls “The age to come.” The age to come is the kingdom and reign of Jesus Christ the NT calls the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. Truth, righteousness and freedom from sin are some of the hallmarks of the age to come.
- The Bible says that this coming Kingdom of Jesus, this age to come, has already started. It started at the first appearing of Jesus; the coming of the Lord Jesus and his life, death and resurrection inaugurated, commenced, launched the Kingdom of God in the world that we inhabit. I love how Jesus announces this so simply in Mark 1 (vs. 15), “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” We are not waiting for the age to come; it has arrived in the person of Jesus.
- But notice the overlap of this present age and the age to come. Even though this new Kingdom of God has been inaugurated by Jesus, this present age continues. The Bible describes the ultimate and complete dismantling of this present age at the second appearing

of Jesus, not at his first appearing. At Jesus' first appearing the fatal blow was delivered. That fatal blow was the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus; at that very moment Jesus won the victory. And now we wait for Jesus' second appearing in glory where he finally puts all of his enemies under his feet; where he will finally rid all of his creation of everything that's evil, destructive and deadly. That's why our blessed hope is the coming of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (as it says in our key passage). Then we will fully realize the victory Jesus won on the cross.

- So much of what we read in the NT, my brothers and sisters, is meant to help us live in this reality. How do we live in between ages? How do we live in this present age with all the evil, sin and death still present, but belonging to the age to come and having the indwelling Spirit that guarantees our citizenship in Heaven and in God's kingdom? What do we do since the kingdom already has come, the present age has not yet be dismantled? What should we be doing? What should our focus be? What should our commitments be?

That's our goal this morning; learning from the text about how we live in this present age as we belong to the age to come? One of the reasons why this is such an important question is because the realities of this present age are more apparent to us. We see them more easily; we feel them every day. Hostility. Addiction. Sorrow. Violence. Death. That's what we see and feel, isn't it? All of creation is groaning; all of creation has been subjected to the powers of this present age. And we groan along with it as we eagerly await our adoption as sons and daughters of God. And while we rejoice with great anticipation that Jesus will rid the world from this trouble, this pain, this sin and death that we see, it still tempts us. The effects of this present age tempt us to question the power and grace of Jesus. Is he really here? Does he care? Is faith in God worth it? This is why our passage is so important to study and understand because it helps us live with hope in this present age, committed and empowered to be the hands and feet of Jesus to others even though we are being tempted. Let's read our text to see how this works (READ Titus 2:11-14).

The Christmas connection, as we talked about last week, concerns the appearing of Jesus. Vs. 11 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people." In the coming of Jesus we see the coming of grace personified in the graciousness of the Son. And this grace brings salvation for all people, meaning, all people irrespective of status, ethnicity, gender and any other division. But the grace of God that came at Christmas time does more; and that more is spelled out in vs. 12 (READ).

Some translations say *instructing* or *teaching* instead of *training*, but you can see how Paul is telling us that God's appearing grace does than secure our final destiny. God's grace trains us or teaches us like parents teach and train a child what to do in the present age. Did you notice that at the end of vs. 12? Let's read vs. 12 and pay attention to the end, "training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passion, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly live in the present age." We need this training, this teaching for the reasons I mentioned above. It's not easy to live as new creatures and citizens to a new kingdom in an age that's completely opposite. God's grace teaches us how to do that.

The training power of grace does two things, this passage says, for followers of Jesus. It trains us to renounce and it trains us to live or to practice a certain kind of life. Maybe more simply put, grace trains us to say *no* and it trains us to say *yes*. Let's look more specifically at these things.

First, grace trains us to "renounce ungodliness and worldly passions." The word renounce could be substituted for the word deny; grace trains us to deny ungodliness and worldly passions; to look away from them. You can not live fruitful, productive lives as citizens of the Kingdom of God without renouncing ungodliness and worldly passions. Let me tell you why.

Without turning away from the forces and powers of this present age, you will remain under their control; rather than being filled by the Spirit and accomplishing the work that God prepared for you to do, you will remain selfish; you will prioritize your earthly, fleshly good instead of God's glory and the good of others. You'll remain trapped in addictions that keep you dependent on the things of the earth instead of God. In your despair you will crave the rewards of the earth rather than looking up and waiting for the joy that comes from God. This present age is opposed to God and his ways and if you fail to renounce it, to turn away from it, to deny it's ungodliness you will live in opposition to God's way as well.

In a very helpful, but convicting and challenging passage, we're told (1 John 5:15-16), "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions - is not from the Father but is from the world." When John talks about the world he's talking about the forces of evil at work in the present age. And notice what comes from the world... desire. Ungodly, earthly, natural, fleshly desire. Paul calls them worldly passions in Titus 2 The world, it's desires and passions, are not from God - they belong to the present age. So, you can never live a life pleasing to God by giving into the worldly passions around you; they are not of God. You must renounce them.

While some of you are glad for the mild winter so far, I know others of you are not. You've spent big money buying snowmobiles to have a little winter fun; and that's hard to do without snow. But snowmobiling isn't a lot of fun when every time you make a turn you end up in the woods; you must learn how to counter and resist centrifugal force (I knew my engineering degree would come in handy eventually). If you snowmobile much, you know what I mean, right? When you take a corner a tad too fast, what do you experience? As you make the turn, centrifugal force pulls away from the center of the turn. There's a force that feels like someone is trying throw you off the snowmobile. To stay on when you turn you have to counter that force; you have to oppose or resist the pull.

If you do not learn how to resist worldly passions, to renounce them, you will get pulled, drawn into all that's in the world that's opposed to the Father's will. Your intentions may be to obey God just like a snowmobilers intentions are to make the turn, but you have to resist the pull. Therefore, to rise above the world, you must be trained to renounce worldly passions and ungodliness. (vs. 17) The world [this present age] is passing away along with its desire, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

But you have to learn how to do more than say “No!” You also need to be trained to say “Yes!” And God’s grace does that, too. Vs. 12 says grace is “training us... to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.” Get a picture of a life that says “Yes!” to a self-controlled, upright and godly life in this present age. When everybody in the world, it seems - even Christians - just give into their emotional impulses and desire, watch an authentic follower of Jesus being self-controlled. He rules his impulses; his impulses do not rule him. Oh, I pray for more self-control in every area of my life. I have a penchant for sweets. In fact, for weeks I’ve been craving these caramel rolls my mother used to make when I was a boy (Note to self, make caramel rolls). It’s strong. Just like lust is strong, greed is strong, wanting the praise of man is strong. Grace teaches us to beat and bruise our bodies into submission where we rule our impulses by God’s Spirit, rather than being ruled by our desires.

Grace trains us to be upright. This is the word for righteousness. Righteousness means behavior that conforms to that which is right in the eyes of God. When your co-workers are cheating on their spouses, you delight in the wife of your youth. When everybody has found a new way to cheat on tests, you get your school work done honorably. You pay every cent of tax you believe you owe rather than looking to cut corners. You use your words to build other people up rather than cursing all the time and tearing people down. Grace trains us to live upright.

Grace trains us to renounce ungodliness and to practice godliness. You can see how these are antithetical; polar opposites. So, while this present age promotes every ungodly thought, word and deed, the grace that Jesus ushered in when he made a way for the age to come makes thoughts, words and deeds that honor God possible.

Now, I want to give you some encouragement now, my brothers and sisters, that this kind of life in this present age is possible. I know for me as I live in this broken-down world and tired trying to resist ungodliness and worldly passions and trying to bear fruit for God with a life of righteousness, godliness and self control I’m tempted to give up; I’m tempted to think, “Maybe living a defeated life is normal.” It’s not normal to a Christian; don’t give into the lie that says grace doesn’t make a difference today. Let me show you; read with me vs. 13-14 with vs. 14 being the focus (READ).

Can you see how Jesus’ work for us coincides perfectly with the work of grace? Jesus gave himself to redeem us, to rescue us from all lawlessness. We can find victory as we renounce worldly passions and ungodliness because Jesus died to redeem us from the lawlessness of this present age. And he also gave himself to purify us, to take us as his very own so we can be zealous for good works. And that’s what self-controlled, godly, upright people do with their time, energy and resources.

Friends, we can be confident that grace will rightly and adequately train us because Jesus was sent into this world and gave himself for us to supply the grace that saves and trains. He’s done it; he’s performed the decisive work. Be encouraged; it’s within your grasp because of grace of God.

You may ask, "But what do I do? How do I experience this grace that trains?" Well, let me remind you of what we've learned from Col. 2:6, "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him." How did you receive him? By faith. By self-denying, Jesus-embracing faith. You didn't receive him by knowing the right information in your head about Jesus, you received him by turning away from your former life and turning to Jesus in faith. You didn't do any work to make that happen, you just turned, you confessed, you called and said, "Jesus, please come!" So, set your mind on the things above where Christ is. Turn away from yourself, my dear brothers and sisters, and look to Christ. I know it's incredibly hard for a number of reasons, but it's simply humbly ourselves and saying, "Ok, Jesus what you said I will do because I believe." Experience this gracious training from the Lord and make the most of this Christmas season by being zealous for good works in Jesus' name.

#### Questions for the week

- Did the opening diagram help you understand the spiritual dynamics at work in the world? How so?
- In what ways does this present age tempt and discourage you? Share that with a friend and ask for prayer.
- Why might we resist the training grace provides?