



AFTER JESUS ASCENDED

We have considered the importance of a person’s worldview, the nature and workings of God, and the first coming of Jesus. Before we begin to deal with the specific apologetic issues of concern in our time, I want to focus on what the Bible tells us we should expect during the “Church Age.” By “Church Age” I am referring to the period of time since Jesus ascended back to heaven – the era during which Jesus has “all authority” (Mt. 28:18), is the “ruler of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5), and is sitting upon the Heavenly throne (Revelation 3:21).

First of all, the continuation of evil around us (and even within the Church) tells me that Jesus’ reign is similar to that of YHWH before the Israelite monarchy (Judges 8:22,23; Psalm 29:10) – He holds final authority and can intervene when He chooses, but generally allows human free will to function. Israel had covenant information to guide them, but each person still had to choose their path (Deuteronomy 30:15-20), whether they would follow/pervert/forget revealed information, and each had to deal with the influence of the Tempter and surrounding humanity. Israelites, just like Christians, had to struggle with their own individual natures, their own culture, and the influences of their neighbors. Accordingly, Jesus has warned us of these things.

The Tempter – While I believe that Jesus “bound” (Revelation 20:1-3) Satan in His first coming (Matthew 12:22-29), this binding has to do with limiting Satan’s powerful “fear of death” weapon (Hebrews 2:14,15; 1John 3:8) for inciting human sin – encouraging an “eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die” viewpoint (1Corinthians 15:32-24) - by His death and resurrection. Although “bound” whenever the Gospel is proclaimed and believed, the Tempter still “prowls” (1Peter. 5:8,9) and must be resisted. There is a powerful “evil empire” at work behind the scenes (Ephesians 6:12). Paul said that some of the false teachings to come would originate from demonic sources (1Tim. 4:1-3). Peter identified Satan as the source of an early Christian’s decision to “lie to the Holy Spirit” (Acts 5:3). While the Spirit within us is more powerful (1John 4:4), there *is* another spirit at work in the world (2Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:1-3) and we dare not ignore or under-estimate his existence and influence.

Human Nature – We must still contend with our own human nature. Like Eve, we can ignore Divine revelation and be deceived as we make decisions based solely on our own rational assessment or, like Adam, quietly follow someone else’ rational lead (Genesis 3:6). We also struggle with the desire to be popular and accepted by the larger social group (Exodus 23:2), as well as cater to those with money (James 2:1-7). Because God does not “zap” us and remove our will and individual responsibility, we still must daily choose to follow God’s path and not live according to “the flesh” (Greek “sarx”) – a mindset focused on appeasing the physical appetites and subjective feelings (Romans 8:5,6; Galatians 5:16-26).

The Church – The Church belongs to Jesus and is the fellowship of the saved – where we find divine and human love, encouragement, truth, and fellowship. However, “local congregations” are also human institutions and open to wide variation because of the people involved. Local churches will always have their “faults” because of the various levels of spiritual maturity present. However, there will also be problems because of some specific things that “should *not* be” present and these need to be identified and dealt with.

Perhaps the first problem to surface was that of people hungry for power/control/rank and the resulting rivalry/division amongst those seeking it (Matthew 20:20-28; 2Thessalonians 2:3,4). Christians need to be cautious about understanding “the end,” because wonder-working “false Christs/prophets” would arise (Matthew 24:24; 2Thessalonians 2:1-12). Another problem, sometimes coupled with power-hunger, arises with those who are so captivated with their own ideas that they divide the body so as to build their own followings (Acts 20:28-30; Romans 16:17,18; Titus 3:10,11). There are also people who create problems because they want to teach but simply do not know what they are talking about (1Tim. 1:3-7; Titus 1:10,11). Peter warned of “false teachers” secretly introducing heresies (even denying Christ), encouraging sensuality, and motivated by greed to exploit people (2Peter 2:1-3). Of course, “hypocrites” (mask-wearers) will always be around, with deeds and lifestyles that deny the pious claims they make with their mouths (Titus 1:16). Thus, we should not be surprised that such things exist – Jesus warned us!

The World – When I speak of “the world,” I am referring to the vast array of human cultures, traditions, philosophies/worldviews, and practices that exist outside of the Church. Because of our physical births, all of us have a national heritage with earthly family traditions and these are not all inherently bad. However, most of the world’s cultures and civilizations have arisen and developed with no, partial, or a perverted knowledge of God (call it “ignorance” – Acts 17:30). Sometimes, unrighteous men have “suppressed” this knowledge (Romans 1:18). While God allowed human civilizations to “go their own ways” (with reminders available -Acts 14:16ff; Romans 1:18-20) over the centuries, the other spirit has been actively at work and this helps to explain the nature of sinful human society – fleshly lust, self-indulgence, futile thinking, darkened understanding, ignorance, hard-hearted, callous, sensual, impure, greed, foolish, disobedient, deception, enslaved to pleasures/lusts, malice, envy, hate (Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-19; Titus 3:3). Without something capable of radically changing how people think (a lesson learned the hard way or the Word of God), such is the “course of this world” (Ephesians 2:1,2) and how things work. Don’t expect it to get any better on its own, for it lies in the power of the Evil One (1John 5:19) and has been this way ever since the initial rebellion in Eden. From Cain and Able onward, there have been two groups of humanity – those focused on this world alone and those seeking God. History is a tale of two cities – the earthly and the heavenly.