

## The Inaugurated Eschatological Indicative and Imperative in Relation to Christian Living and Preaching



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G. K. BEALE  
*Professor of New Testament  
Westminster Theological Seminary  
Philadelphia, PA*

### INTRODUCTION

The lectures today and tomorrow represent a rehash and minor revision of parts from a couple of chapters in a forthcoming book to appear next fall through Baker Book House. The book is titled, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* and subtitled, *Transformation of the Old Testament in the New*. The thrust of the book is to show that eschatology was not a mere doctrine of futurology for Jesus and his followers but was a present reality, which shaped their thinking about every facet of the Christian faith. Many understand “eschatology” to refer only to the “end time events” directly preceding the church’s rapture, the coming Great Tribulation and subsequent millennium.

Such a *popular* understanding that the latter-days refers only to the yet future end of the world needs radical adjustment. On a scholarly level, New Testament scholarship over the past few decades has made great strides in increasing our understanding that the beginning of Christian history was perceived by the first Christians as the beginning of the end-times. There is, however, still much study that must be done in

synthesizing this work, developing a New Testament theology in the light of such work, and refining the focus of eschatology in its relation to New Testament Theology. This is what I will attempt to do in my forthcoming book on New Testament Biblical Theology.

This lecture will start by briefly summarizing the basic thesis of the book and then focusing on one particular aspect of theology and seeing how “inaugurated eschatology” sheds rich light on this doctrine. The particular theological idea is the relation of the indicative to the imperative in the New Testament. Put simply, how does “inaugurated eschatology” help us understand the relationship of the commands to the reality of who people are in Christ.

So, let’s begin.

## I. THE CONCEPT OF THE LATTER DAYS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Before one can begin to understand eschatology in the New Testament, the eschatology of the Old Testament must first be apprehended. In the Old Testament the wording “latter days” and synonyms are prophetic and refer to a future time when a number of things will happen. The phrase “latter days” and its synonyms in the Old Testament refer to the following: (1) there will be a tribulation for Israel consisting of oppression (Ezek 38:14–17ff.), persecution (Dan 10:14ff.; 11:27–12:10), false teaching, deception and apostasy (Dan 8:17, 19; Dan 10:14ff.; 11:27–35, 40); (2) after the tribulation Israel will seek the Lord (Hos 3:4–5), they will be delivered (Ezek 38:14–16ff.; Dan 10:14ff.; 12:1–13) and their enemies will be judged (Ezek 38:14–16ff.; Dan. 10:14ff.; 11:40–45; 12:2); (3) this deliverance and judgment will occur because a leader (Messiah) from Israel will finally conquer all of its Gentile enemies (Gen 49:1,8–12; Num 24:14–19; Isa 2:2–4; Mic 4:1–3; Dan 2:28–45; 10:14–12:10); (4) God will establish a kingdom on the earth and rule over it (Isa 2:2–4; Mic 4:1–3; Dan 2:28–45) together with a Davidic king (Hos 3:4–5); (5) after the time of tribulation and persecution, Dan 11–12 says there will be a resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous (so Dan 11:30–12:3ff.).<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the Old Testament expresses eschatological hopes without using the technical vocabulary of “latter days,” “end-times,” etc. For example, Joel 2:28ff. refers to the “pouring out of God’s Spirit” in the coming period of restoration, and this hope can be found elsewhere in the

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<sup>1</sup> In my forthcoming book, *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, I discuss most of the passages in more depth.

Old Testament as well. Likewise, Isa 65:17–18 and 66:22 refer to the coming new creation of the cosmos without utilizing formal eschatological terminology.

## **II. THE CONCEPT OF THE LATTER DAYS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The New Testament repeatedly uses precisely the same phrase “latter days” as found in the Old Testament prophecies. The meaning of the phrase is identical, except for one difference: in the New Testament the end-days predicted by the Old Testament are seen as beginning fulfillment with Christ’s first coming. All that the Old Testament foresaw would occur in the end-times has begun already in the first century and continues on into our present day. This means that the Old Testament prophecies of the great tribulation, God’s deliverance of Israel from oppressors, God’s rule over the Gentiles, and the establishment of his kingdom have been set in motion by Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and formation of the Christian church. The resurrection marked the beginning of Jesus’ messianic reign, and the Spirit at Pentecost signaled the inauguration of His rule through the church (see Acts 1:6–8; 2:1–43). On the other hand, persecution of Jesus and the church indicated the beginning of the final tribulation. What the Old Testament did not foresee so clearly was the ironic reality that the kingdom and the tribulation could co-exist at the same time: e.g., John says in Rev 1:9, “I, John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus.” Therefore, the latter days do not take place only at some point in the future but occur throughout the whole church age, which means we in the twentieth century are still experiencing the latter days, as strange as that may sound to some people.

The first time the wording “last days” appears in the New Testament is Acts 2:17. Here Peter understands that the tongues being spoken at Pentecost are a beginning fulfillment of Joel’s end-time prophecy that a day would come when God’s Spirit would gift not merely prophets, priests, and kings, but all of God’s people. Peter says,

For these men are not drunk as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: “And it shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind . . .” (Acts 2:15–17a; cf. Joel 2:28).

In 1 Cor 10:11 Paul says that the Old Testament was written to instruct the Corinthian Christians about how to live in the end-times, since upon them “the ends of the ages have come.” And in Gal 4:4 he refers to Jesus’ birth as occurring “when the fullness of the time came” in fulfillment of the messianic prophecies. Likewise, in Eph 1:7–10 and 1:20–23 “the fullness of the times” alludes to when believers were redeemed and Christ began to rule over the earth as a result of his resurrection. The expression “the last times” and “end days” in 1 Tim 4:1ff. and 2 Tim 3:1ff. refer to the presence of tribulation in the form of false, deceptive teaching. That the latter days in 1 and 2 Timothy is not a reference only to a distant, future time is evident from recognizing that the Ephesian church is already experiencing this latter-day tribulation of deceptive teaching and apostasy (see 1 Tim 1:3–4, 6, 7, 19–20; 4:7; 5:13–15; 6:20–21; 2 Tim 1:15; 2:16–19; 2:25–26; 3:2–9).

The author of Hebrews proclaims in his opening two verses that in his own day, “in these last days,” Jesus had begun to fulfill the Psalm 2 prophecy that God’s Son would judge the evil kingdoms and receive the earth as an inheritance from His Father (cf. Ps 2:1–12 with Heb 1:2–5). In like manner, in Heb 9:26 he says “at the consummation of the ages He (Christ) has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” And James 5:1–9 warns its readers not to trust in riches because the “last days” have come. James attempts to motivate his audience to trust in Christ and not worldly possessions by imparting to them a comprehension of what God has accomplished through Christ in these “last days.”

In identical fashion 1 Pet 1:19–21 says that Christ has died as a sacrificial lamb and been resurrected “in these last times.” 2 Pet 3:3 also reflects Paul’s outlook on the end days when he pronounces that “in the last days mockers will come with their mocking” (see 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1). That this is not mere prophecy of the future but description of the present is clear from noticing that Peter recognizes that the mockers are presently spreading false teaching in the church which he is addressing (2 Pet 3:16–17; note the imminent threat of false teachers in 2:1–22). Jude 18 has exactly the same idea (cf. Jude 4, 8, 10–13). In a similar context of false teaching 1 John 2:18 says, “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour.” These “antichrists” were manifesting themselves by attempting to deceive others through erroneous teaching (see 1 John 2:21–23, 26; 4:1–5). Indeed, one of the indications that the latter-day tribulation is continuing

during the present inter-advent period is the pervasive presence of false teaching within the purported covenant community.

This brief survey demonstrates that the last days predicted by the Old Testament began with Christ's first coming, although there is other terminology besides "latter days" in many other passages which could also be adduced as further evidence (e.g., see Paul's use of "now" in 2 Cor 6:2; Eph 3:5, 10; etc.). There are also many passages conveying eschatological concepts but which do not use technical eschatological expressions. Christ's life, death, resurrection, and establishment of the church community have ushered in the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the tribulation, the Messiah's conquering of Gentile enemies, Israel's deliverance, and the long-expected kingdom. In this initial phase of the end-times Christ and the church begin to fulfill the prophecies concerning Israel's tribulation and end-time kingdom because Christ and the church are seen by the New Testament as the true Israel (see 2:25–29; 9:6, 24–26; Gal 3:29; 6:15–16; Eph 2:16–18; 3:6; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 3:9; 5:9–10.)<sup>2</sup> This notion of radical inaugurated fulfillment is best expressed by 2 Cor 1:20: "For as many as may be the promises of God [in the Old Testament], in Him [Christ] they are yes."

Of course, there are passages in the New Testament which speak of the future consummation of the present latter-day period. That is, there are still many end-time prophecies which have not yet been fulfilled but will be when Christ returns a second time: e.g., the bodily resurrection of all people, the destruction of the present cosmos, the creation of a completely new heavens and earth, the final judgment, the eternal Sabbath, etc.

The New Testament writers assert that Christians experience only a part of what will be completely experienced in the final form of the new heavens and earth. There is what some call an "already-and-not-yet" dimension of the end-times. In this respect Oscar Cullmann has metaphorically described Jesus' first coming as "D-day" since this is when Satan was decisively defeated. "V-day" is the second coming when Jesus' enemies will totally surrender and bow down to Him. Cullman says it this way: "The hope of the final victory is so much more the vivid because of the unshakably firm conviction that the battle that decides the victory has already taken place."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See further H. K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1964), 87.

But the point of the present discussion is that the great end-time predictions have already begun the process of fulfillment. William Manson has well said,

When we turn to the New Testament, we pass from the climate of prediction to that of fulfillment. The things which God had foreshadowed by the lips of His holy prophets He has now, in part at least, brought to accomplishment . . . The supreme sign of the Eschaton is the Resurrection of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church. The Resurrection of Jesus is not simply a sign which God has granted in favour of His son, but is the inauguration, the entrance into history, of the times of the End. Christians, therefore, have entered through the Christ into the new age . . . What had been predicted in Holy Scripture as to happen to Israel or to man in the "Eschaton" has happened to and in Jesus. The foundation-stone of the New Creation has come into position.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the apostles understood eschatology not merely as futurology but as a mindset for understanding the present within the climaxing context of redemptive history. That is, the apostles understood that they were already living in the end-times and that they were to understand their present salvation in Christ to be already an end-time reality. Every aspect of their salvation was to be conceived of as eschatological in nature. To put this another way, every major doctrine of the Christian faith is charged with eschatological electricity. Just as when you put on green sunglasses, everything you see is green, so Christ had placed eschatological sunglasses on his disciples so that everything they looked at in the Christian faith had an end-time tint. This means that the doctrine of eschatology in New Testament Theology textbooks should not merely be one among many doctrines. Furthermore, eschatology should not be placed at the end of New Testament theology textbooks or at the end of chapters dealing with the different New Testament corpora because it purportedly describes only the very end of the world as we know it. Rather, the doctrine of eschatology should be part of the title of such a textbook, since every major theological concept

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<sup>4</sup> Manson, "Eschatology in the New Testament," (*Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers* No. 2; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953), p. 6 (my italics in the last sentence). Though this sounds like "over-realized eschatology," Manson qualifies it by saying, "The End has come! The end has not come!" (Ibid., 7).

breathes the air of a latter-day atmosphere. Perhaps, the title of a Biblical Theology on the New Testament could read “New Testament Theology as Eschatology.” For the same reason systematic theology textbooks should not place eschatology as the last chapter but should integrate it into discussion of other New Testament doctrines.

It is important to say that our understanding of most of the traditional doctrines is not so much changed but radically enriched by seeing them through end-time sunglasses. But how are some of the crucial doctrines of our faith so enriched when seen as eschatological doctrines? To put it another way, “how can our hermeneutical glasses be re-ground in order to see better the end-time reality of the New Testament?” I believe that the concluding part of W. Manson’s above quotation is a good place to start answering this question. He said the resurrected Christ as “the foundation-stone of the New Creation has come into position.”

We should think of Christ’s life, and especially his death and resurrection and his sending of the Spirit as the central events which launched the latter days. These pivotal events of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection are eschatological because they launched the beginning of the new creation. The end-time new creation has not been recognized sufficiently heretofore as the basis of a Biblical Theology of the New Testament, and it is this concept which I believe has the potential to refine significantly the general scholarly view of the eschatological “already and not yet.”

Of course, the Old Testament prophesied that the destruction of the first creation and the re-creation of a new heavens and earth were to happen at the very end of time. Christ’s work reveals that the end of the world and the coming new creation have begun in his death and resurrection: 2 Cor 5:15 and 17 says Christ “died and rose again . . . so that if any are in Christ, they are a new creation, the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.” Rev 1:5 refers to Christ as “the first-born from the dead” and then Rev 3:14 defines “first-born” as “the beginning of the [new] creation of God.”<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Col 1:18 says that Christ is “the first-born from the dead” and “the beginning” so that “he himself might come to have first place in everything.” In Gal 6:14–15 Paul says that his identification with Christ’s death means that he is a “new creation.”

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<sup>5</sup> For the notion of new creation in the 2 Corinthians 5 and Revelation 3 texts, see G. K. Beale, “The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5–7 and Its Bearing on the Literary Problem of 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1,” *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 550–581, and idem, “The Old Testament Background of Rev 3.14,” *New Testament Studies* 42 (1996): 133–152.

Indeed, the resurrection was predicted by the Old Testament to occur at the end of the world as part of the new creation. God would make redeemed humanity a part of the new creation by recreating their bodies through resurrection (cf. Dan 12:1–2). Of course, we still look forward to the time when our bodies will be raised at Christ’s final parousia, and we will become part of the consummated new creation. Christ’s resurrection, however, placed him into the beginning of the new creation. The resurrected Christ is not merely spiritually the inauguration of the new cosmos, but he is literally its beginning, since he was resurrected with a physically resurrected, newly created body. Recall that when Matt 27:50 narrates Jesus’ death, Matthew immediately adds in vv. 51–53, “the earth shook; and the rocks split, and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.” These strange phenomena are recorded by Matthew to signal to his readers that Christ’s death was the beginning of the end of the old creation and the inauguration of a new creation. Likewise, 1 John 2:17–18 can say “the world is passing away . . . it is the last hour.” You see, Christ’s death is not just any death but it is the beginning of the destruction of the entire world, which will not be consummated until the very end. Likewise, 1 Cor 15:22–24 says the resurrection launched in Christ will be consummated when he returns.

New creation is in mind wherever the mention of resurrection or the concept occurs, since it is essentially the new creation of humanity. The equivalence of resurrection with new creation is apparent also from noticing that three of the four most explicit new creation texts in the New Testament refer to Christ’s resurrection (2 Cor 5:14–17; Rev 1:5 and 3:14; Col 1:15–18), while the fourth refers to His death (Gal 6:14–15; 2 Cor 5:14–17 likely also includes both the death and resurrection as a part of the new creation). These are significant observations, since the idea of resurrection occurs so much throughout the New Testament; likewise Christ’s death can be seen as part of the process of new creation, as hinted at just above in the Matthew 27 discussion, and as will be explained further below. Likewise, mention of Christ’s death throughout the New Testament probably carries connotations of the beginning destruction of the old world which paves the way for the new. In the light of these observations, new creation also can be seen as a more dominant notion than one might at first think.

In the light of what we have said so far, we can state the overriding storyline idea of New Testament theology, especially in Paul and the Apocalypse but also in the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament.



The storyline is this: Christ's life, and especially death and resurrection through the Spirit launched the end-time new creation reign, propelling worldwide mission, resulting in blessing and judgment, all for God's glory.

It is at this precise point that I hope to build on the foundational work of such theologians as Geerhardus Vos,<sup>6</sup> Oscar Cullmann,<sup>7</sup> Herman Ridderbos,<sup>8</sup> and George Eldon Ladd,<sup>9</sup> among others.<sup>10</sup> They also saw that Christ's redemptive work inaugurated the latter days and that the eschatological period would be consummated at some point in the future.<sup>11</sup> These scholars understood that eschatology was a crucial

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<sup>6</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979); see also *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (ed. R. B. Gaffin; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> Cullmann, *Christ and Time*.

<sup>8</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers, 1962).

<sup>9</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974).

<sup>10</sup> C. M. Pate has developed view of eschatology like Vos's as the framework within which to understand best Pauline theology, though interestingly he does not interact with Vos (*The End of the Ages Has Come: The Theology of Paul* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995]).

Here also should be included Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1991), which also sees the new creation and kingdom as the thrust of the Bible's redemptive-historical and eschatological development, and is written explicitly at a popular level for people in the church. See, e.g., also H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; London: SCM, 1952–1955), who in his first volume integrates already and not yet eschatology into such topics as Christ's message, justification, reconciliation, the Spirit, and the church's existence; however, he does not conduct penetrating studies on the eschatological nature of these ideas (though, of course, he demythologizes the supernatural aspects of these notions).

<sup>11</sup> Though there were a few others who held this view. These scholars brought together the polar positions of A. Schweitzer and C. H. Dodd, who believed respectively that the end-times were imminent but not yet fulfilled, and, on the other hand, that the latter-days had fully arrived in the coming of Jesus (for a brief overview of the two positions, see D. E. Aune, "Eschatology, Early Christian," *ABD* 2:599–600, who also cites J. Jeremias and W. G. Kummel as holding a synthesis of the two perspectives). Interestingly, Vos appears to be the first European or American scholar to espouse an "already and not yet eschatology" as a major theological approach to Paul! Recently, C. M. Pate has

influence upon the thinking of the New Testament writers. More specifically, Richard Gaffin in his book *The Centrality of the Resurrection*<sup>12</sup> affirms that the resurrection as an end-time event is the all-encompassing thought in Paul. Seyoon Kim in his *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*<sup>13</sup> explains why the resurrection dominated Paul's thinking: it was because the risen Christ's confrontation with Paul on the Damascus Road left such a lasting impact on Paul that it continued to dominate his thinking when writing his epistles.

But these scholars did not attempt to explain in programmatic fashion how inaugurated eschatology relates to and sheds light on the major theological doctrines of the New Testament.<sup>14</sup> Nor did they see that the controlling conception of eschatology was the kingdom of the new creation. William Dumbrell is the only consistent exception to this, since he sees creation and kingdom as the central theme of both Old and New Testaments: all of the Old Testament works toward the goal of the new creation reign, and the New Testament begins to fulfill that primary goal.<sup>15</sup>

There are, nevertheless, weaknesses in Dumbrell's approach. His work is too much of a sweeping brush stroke which surveys broad themes (with brief summaries of important passages), does not work trenchantly at the exegetical level<sup>16</sup> (though it was not intended to be such a work), does not try organically to relate the major New Testament doctrines specifically to Christ's life, death, and resurrection, nor does it attempt to explain specifically how the notion of new creational kingdom relates organically to the major New Testament ideas and doctrines. Nowhere is there a sufficiently precise explanation of how Christ's life, death, and resurrection relate to or inaugurate the new creation. Despite

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developed Vos's view of eschatology as the framework within which to understand best Pauline theology in a more thoroughgoing manner than before, though he does not interact with Vos (*The End of the Ages Has Come: The Theology of Paul* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995]).

<sup>12</sup> (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).

<sup>14</sup> Though Pate, *End of the Ages Has Come*, has made a better attempt at this in Paul than have others.

<sup>15</sup> See his *The Search for Order* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994); *The End of the Beginning* (Homebush West NSW, Australia: Lancer, 1985); cf. his Old Testament theology, *Covenant and Creation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> E.g., there needed to be serious discussion of texts in the New Testament which actually associate Christ with the language of new creation (especially Gal 6:14–18; 2 Cor 5:14–17; Eph 2:13–25 [cf. 1:20–23 and 2:10]; Col 1:15–18; Rev 3:14 [cf. with 1:5]).

these weaknesses, Dumbrell's is one of the best canonical Biblical Theologies which I have read.

My own view is broadly similar to Dumbrell's, but I am trying to establish the centrality of new creation in a much more exegetical and theologically trenchant manner. My thesis is that the major theological ideas of the New Testament flow out of the storyline that Christ's life, and especially death and resurrection through the Spirit launched the end-time new creation reign, propelling worldwide mission and resulting in blessing and judgment for God's glory.

Every significant theological idea in the New Testament gains its fullest meaning within the framework of this overriding storyline and are but facets of it. We can think of Christ's life, and particularly death and resurrection as a diamond which represents the new creation reign. The various theological ideas are the facets of the diamond, which are inseparable from the diamond itself.

This idea of new creational kingdom is clearest in Paul and the Apocalypse, but apparent, I believe, also elsewhere in the New Testament. It must also be acknowledged that the actual terminology "new creation" does not occur much even in Paul, but, as we have said above, the notion of resurrection is central in Paul, it is the climactic goal of the four gospels, and resurrection is essentially a piece of new creation; indeed, resurrection is the new creation of humanity.

Though the phrase "new creation" does not appear often,<sup>17</sup> we must be careful of deducing that the idea is not pervasive. We should beware of always assuming that for an idea to be prevalent the technical term usually associated with the idea must be used numerously.

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<sup>17</sup> In fact, the actual phrase *καινή κτίσις* occurs only twice (2 Cor 5:17 and Gal 6:15), though paraphrastic variants of the phrase occur six times ("creation itself will be set free" in Rom 8:20, "new heavens and a new earth" in 2 Pet 3:13, "beginning of the creation of God" in Rev 3:14, "a new heaven and a new earth" in Rev 21:1, and "I am making all things new" in Rev 21:5), and the theme occurs explicitly (along with the word "create" and synonyms) in several other passages: Eph 2:10–17; Col 1:15–20; 3:10–11; Matt 19:28 has *παλιγγενεσία* ("regeneration, rebirth") which likely refers to the creation of a new cosmos (so D. C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* [SNTSMS 88; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996], 111–114), and Titus 3:5 employs the same word to refer to the believers' part in the regenerated cosmos, which is emphasized by the directly following phrase in 3:5, "renewing by the Holy Spirit," a likely reference to the Spirit's creation of people by giving them new life (which is made explicit in the "eternal life" of 3:7); cf. also Jas 1:18: "He brought us forth by the exercise of His will through the word of truth in order that we should be a certain firstfruit among His creatures."

Doubtless, some will conclude that to reduce the centre of the New Testament down to the hub of the new creation reign is to add to the already too many reductionistic New Testament theologies previously proposed, and that we must be content with a multiperspectival approach.<sup>18</sup> It is important to recall that I am not contending that this is the “centre” of the New Testament but that it is the penultimate part of *the storyline* leading to mission, blessing, judgment and, finally, divine glory. I think, however, that the storyline that I am proposing is supported by the broad sweep of canonical thought, wherein the Bible begins with the original creation and kingdom which is corrupted, and the rest of the Old Testament is a redemptive-historical process working toward a restoration of fallen creation in a new creation where the triune God reigns. I believe partial validity of this approach is borne out in the simplicity of its narrative story-line that begins in Genesis 1–3 and ends climactically in Rev 21:1–22:5.

Now, I want to give some examples of how the lens of the new creational kingdom as the hub of the NT storyline enhances our understanding of various aspects of Christian theology, and how this eschatological enhancement of the various doctrines also gives insight into the practical application of these doctrines to our lives.

### **III. CHRISTIANS AS RESURRECTED NEW CREATIONS AND HOW THIS RELATES TO THE PROBLEM OF THE INDICATIVE TO THE IMPARATIVE**

The way the inaugurated eschatological lens sheds significant light on the connection between the indicative and the imperative can be observed in three classic Pauline texts:

- A. Eph 4:20–24 (the indicative) in comparison to 4:25–32;
- B. Col 3:1–4 in comparison to 3:5–9a, followed again by the indicative of 3:9b–11;
- C. Rom. 6:1–11 in comparison to 6:12–14.

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<sup>18</sup> Of course, though I have mentioned some other New Testament theological approaches, the limits of the present study prohibit a serious attempt to survey and evaluate these and additional approaches, but it is a worthy task, and some have done it (e.g., G. Hasel, *New Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978], and Scobie more recently, but not as thoroughly).

Again and again in these passages, Paul first refers to the reality of the believers' identification with Christ's death and especially resurrection and then speaks of the behavior the believers should have, which can only be performed by having the power of the indicative of Christ's resurrection.

Consequently, for example, Paul's affirmation of the believers' possession of "eternal life" (Rom 6:22–23) is likely an "already and not yet" reality. Hence, saints are not merely like resurrected beings, but they actually have begun to experience the end-time resurrection that Christ experienced, since they are identified with him by faith. Though Paul can use the language of being in "the likeness of his resurrection" (supplying the ellipsis in Rom 6:5b), he does not mean this in some purely metaphorical way, as some scholars such as dispensationalists and as Tom Wright, among others, contend—strange theological bed-partners.<sup>19</sup> That Paul intends to refer to literal resurrection is apparent from observing that he parallels it with being in "the likeness of his death" in Rom 6:5a, which refers to real identification with his death, such that "our old man was crucified with him" (v. 6) and that believers have really "died" (vv. 7–8). Paul does not refer to identification with Christ's death in a metaphorical manner. So, likewise believers are in the "likeness" of Christ's resurrection because they actually have begun to be identified with it and participate in it. Of course, they are not fully identified with Christ's resurrection, since he has experienced full physical resurrection life and those identified with him have experienced only inaugurated resurrection life on the spiritual level. Nevertheless, this inauguration is the beginning of true resurrection existence and is not metaphorical only because it is spiritual, as evident from John 5:25–29's use of Dan 12:2. If saints are only like Christ's resurrection, then Paul's exhortation to them to live as resurrected beings is emptied of its force: if Christians have begun to be end-time resurrected creatures, then they have resurrection power not to "let sin reign in [their mortal bodies] . . . but present [themselves] to God as those alive from the dead" (Rom 6:12–13).

The relation of the "indicative" to the "imperative" in Paul has been an issue of some debate. But if the above is a correct analysis of the saints' resurrection life, then the basis of Paul issuing commands to people is that such people have the ability to obey the commands because they been raised from the dead, regenerated, and are "new creatures," reigning with the risen Christ, who have the power to obey. In fact, Paul

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<sup>19</sup> E.g., most recently, see N. T. Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 347.

refers to this resurrection life with new creation language, “newness [*kainotēti*] of life” (Rom 6:4, or “new life”), a cognate of the word *kainos* found in 2 Cor 5:17 and Gal 6:15 in the well-known inaugurated eschatological expression “new creation,” where in both cases it refers to resurrection life.<sup>20</sup> Not coincidentally, one of the early references to “resurrection” in Romans directly connects resurrection and creation: “God, who makes alive the dead ones and calls into being that which does not exist” (4:17). This statement is not a mere gnomic saying about God’s attributes but likely connects resurrection to *new* creation (not merely the first creation), since Rom 4:17 prepares for the conclusion that such a God not only can bring life from Sarah’s dead womb (vv. 18–21), but also he can, and has, brought Jesus up from the dead (vv. 24–25).

Thus, Paul does not give commands to live righteously to those outside the community of faith. This is because they do not have this power of the inbreaking age of the new creation, but are still part of the old age (the “old man” [6:6]), in which they are dominated by sin, Satan, and the influence of the world (so Eph 2:1–3).

Not taking seriously enough the resurrection language applied to the Christian’s present experience to designate real eschatological resurrection existence, albeit on the spiritual level, has unintentionally eviscerated the ethical power of church teaching and preaching, since Christians need to know that they have resurrection power to please and obey God! This is why in Romans 6 and elsewhere Paul employs Christ’s latter-day resurrection to be the basis for the believer’s resurrection identity and for his exhortations that they rule over sin.

#### IV. THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE RESURRECTION –NEW CREATION FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING AND PREACHING: PRACTICAL/PASTORAL/RHETORICAL IMPLICATIONS

If the end-time new creation has truly begun, how should this affect the way Christians live? Recall that for the Christian, to be a new creation is to begin to experience spiritual resurrection from the dead, which will be consummated in physical resurrection at the very end of time. This stage of spiritual resurrection is the beginning fulfillment of

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<sup>20</sup> On which see discussion below in this article. *Kainos* also appears in Eph. 2:15 and 4:24 with reference to the new creation (see below), and in 1 Cor 11:25 and 2 Cor 3:6 in the phrase “new covenant,” which also refers to the beginning of the new age, in allusion to Jer 31:31–34.

the Old Testament prophecy of the resurrection of God's people, whereby both the spirit and the body were to be resurrected. Therefore, while being only a spiritual resurrection, it is not a metaphorical or figurative resurrection but a literal beginning resurrection from the dead.

We have seen, for example, that throughout his epistles Paul views true believers as those who have begun to experience true eschatological resurrection existence. By the way, this is not a mere new creation existence but in the above three passages this is identity with Christ's resurrected *reign!* Paul's affirmation of this is absolutely critical, since the many commands and exhortations that he gives assume that true saints can obey them because they have the resurrection power to do so. This is why Paul and other writers emphasize the readers' participation in eschatological realities in the midst of exhorting them to obedience to God. Those who merely profess to be saints, but are not truly regenerate, have no persevering desire to do God's will because they do not have the power of the new creation to obey. Genuine eschatological saints have both the desire and the ability to obey and please God. We have given a number of examples illustrating how having the power to do something gives one the desire to do it.

This notion is important for all Christians to know, but those who teach and preach in the church should especially have an awareness of the inaugurated end-time new creation. Such awareness should color all that they exposit from God's word. It is especially important that pastors make clear to their congregations the eschatological resurrection power that they possess, because awareness of this power enables believers to realize that they have the ability to carry out God's commands. On this basis, God's "commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). And, as we have seen, it is God's life-giving Spirit that empowers his people to carry out his commands, which would otherwise be too burdensome to obey.

Such an "already and not yet" end-time framework for knowing who we are and what God consequently expects from us cannot be communicated effectively in just a few sermons or Sunday school lessons, but must be part of the warp and woof of a pastor's teaching and preaching over the years. Only then can such a notion be absorbed effectively by God's grace. One should be aware of passages that are not normally understood as eschatological. When one becomes more aware of this possibility, it can affect the preacher's interpretation of the text and the congregation's desire to carry out the commands of Scripture that are preached upon. For example, take the following texts:

For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered himself up for me (Gal 2:19–20).

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:24–25).

The “living” mentioned in these texts is not mere Christian living in this world but resurrection living, which gives believers the desire and the power to do what God commands them to do. Many think “inaugurated eschatology” is some ivory tower theoretical academic notion, but it is a crucial biblical idea, which has immense practical, pastoral and homiletical implications.

Consequently, the New Testament’s interpretation of the Old has been “written for our instruction” because “upon us the ends of the ages have come,” giving us the ability “to stand and endure and not fall into sin” (1 Cor 10:11–12).<sup>21</sup>

A book on practical theology and preaching could be written on this topic, but we must leave that task to others. C. S. Lewis pictures this theological reality putting off the “old Adamic man” and “putting on new Adamic man” in his *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.<sup>22</sup> The character, Eustace, was a very spoiled boy, who had become so enamored with a dragon’s treasure that he became the dragon itself. Lewis’ point is that Eustace’s transformation into a dragon represented his dragon-like heart. In a subsequent scene, Lewis depicts Aslan, the messianic lion, leading Eustace the dragon up to a mountain, at the top of which was a garden (echoing the Garden of Eden) and a big pool of water, which had marble steps leading down into it (reflecting a baptismal scene). Aslan tells Eustace to undress himself by shedding his dragon skin and go into the water. Eustace realizes that he has no clothes, except for his dragon skin. So, he begins to scratch off a layer like a snake casts off its old skin. But, after doing so, he still looks like a dragon, with dragon skin. So he scratches off the next layer, but he still appears as a dragon, so he scratches off yet a third layer of scales, but he cannot change the fact that he is still a dragon. No matter how hard he tries, Eustace has no ability to

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<sup>21</sup> This is a highly interpretative paraphrase of 1 Cor 10:11–13.

<sup>22</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 88–92.



change his dragon-like nature. Finally, Aslan tells Eustace to lay down and he will remove his dragon skin once for all:

The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt . . . Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off – just as I thought I'd done . . . and there it was lying on the grass: only ever so much thicker, and darker, and more knobbly looking than the others had been . . . and [he] threw me into the water . . . After that . . . I'd turned into a boy again. After a bit the lion took me out and dressed me . . . .

Afterward, Eustace rejoins his friends, and he apologizes for his bad, spoiled behavior: "I'm afraid I've been pretty beastly." With regard to Eustace's subsequent behavior, Lewis concludes:

It would be nice, fairly nearly true, to say that "from that time forth Eustace was a different boy." To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of those I shall not notice. The cure had begun.

Lewis' description is clearly his attempt to represent the biblical portrayal of the reality that people, on the basis of their own innate ability, cannot do anything to take out their old, fallen sinful heart and create a new heart for themselves. Only God can bring people back to Eden and create them anew in the last Adam, and when he does, the bent of one's desires and behavior begins to change and to reflect the image of the God who has recreated them into a new creation. Immediate perfection does not come about, but a progressive growth in doing those things that please God occurs. That is, people who have been made into a new creation continue to develop as a new creation until at the end of the age that development reaches full maturity in the final resurrection of the body and the spirit.

Consequently, while there are "ups and downs" in the Christian life, Christians can be confident that they will progressively conquer the remaining sin in their lives, though in this age that victory will never be complete. Believers as "already and not yet" new creations may be compared to an incomplete puzzle. We have all had the experience of trying to put a puzzle together and reached a stage whereby we have put

together much of the central part of the puzzle and some of the outer parts. Nevertheless, there were still some significant pieces that we have not yet been able to put into their place to complete the full picture. God has constructed believers into new creations at the core of their inner, unseen beings, but that core is not perfected nor are their bodies until the final resurrection, when all the parts of the believer will be pieced together by God in Christ (cf. Phil 1:6).

It is this theological and anthropological outlook about the new man that Paul and other New Testament writers use as the rhetorical basis to exhort and encourage believers on to godliness. Again and again, the indicative new creation (or resurrected status in Christ) is given as the foundation for believers being able to perform God's commands. The point is that "because you Christians have the power to obey and please God, you should be motivated and desire to do so when God's commands are issued to you." Sometimes this basis for obedience is supplemented with the additional basis that since God has planned that his newly created eschatological people will be faithful, they should have even more motivation to please him, since he will give them the ability to fulfill his plan: e.g., Eph 2:10, "For we are his creation, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."<sup>23</sup> At other times this basis is seen as God actually active "to will and to work" in a Christian to bring about that Christian's obedience:

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; because it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *his* good pleasure (Phil 2:12–13).

Here Paul tells his readers to continue to "obey" in "working out their salvation" in v. 12, and then in v. 13 he explains that the ground for how they are able to do this is God "willing and working" in them (which is likely a development of Phil 1:6 and 1:29). Here the order is reversed: the commands come first, then the basis for doing the commands is given.

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<sup>23</sup>So likewise 1 Thess 3:12–13 in relation to 4:1; 5:15 in relation to 5:23–24, where a series of commands comes first, then the basis for fulfilling them; 2 Thess 2:13–14 in relation to 2:15; 2:16–17 in relation to 3:1–2; 3:3 in relation to 3:4.

Some might respond and say, “Since I have the power, I don’t need to be motivated to obey, since God’s power will work through me regardless of whether or not I am motivated to obey; I can just sit back and do nothing, and God will nevertheless work through me.” On the contrary, those who are not motivated to obey God’s commands are those who have no power to do so but are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1), are captive to the powers of evil (Eph 2:2), and “by [their fallen] nature” do sin (Eph 2:3).

Instead, true saints should be psychologically motivated to fulfill God’s precepts because they know that God has given them the power to do so. Commands by themselves do not imply that people have the strength innately within themselves to obey (as Pelagius and later Erasmus contended), but they only set a standard of what is expected. Rather, the reason Paul so often mixes the commands with the believer’s standing in Christ is to show that the basis for fulfilling the commands is in Christ’s and God’s power, which provides the motivation to obey (on which see Martin Luther’s responses to Erasmus<sup>24</sup>).

This kind of motivation is comparable to my neighbor’s desire to remove snow from his driveway. He has a fine snow-blower in his garage and after it snows a few inches, he hops right out of his house and starts up his snow-blower and gets his driveway cleaned off quickly. On the other hand, I do not own a snow-blower but have only a rusty snow shovel. When it snows a few inches, I have no desire to go out and shovel the snow. After it keeps on snowing and I still don’t go out to clear it off, my wife gives me a polite implied command by way of questioning, “When are you going to shovel the driveway?” But I have no desire to respond positively to her command. I continue to let the snow build up until after the snow has finished falling, and then I go out rather reluctantly to shovel. I don’t have the motivation to clear off the snow because I don’t have the power to do it effectively. On the other hand, my neighbor has all the desire in the world because he has the power to remove the snow effectively. When one has the power to do something, the motivation for doing it follows.

I often fly on a jet to get to various destinations. However, I would have no desire to get to those destinations if I had to walk or ride a bicycle because it would take a ridiculous amount of time and effort to do so. But because I can board a jet and fly to my destinations, I have motivation to travel. When you have the power to do something, this then wells up into a desire to do it.

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<sup>24</sup>Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston; Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1957).

It is the same with the commands of Scripture, which are addressed to the believer. The authentic Christian, who is a true new creation, has the moral power to please God and is therefore typically motivated to fulfill God's commands when those commands are heard. Christians should want to please God because he is their Father who has created them as adopted sons. All of this is why Paul and other writers repeatedly assert their readers' participation in eschatological realities in the midst of exhorting them to be obedient to God.

The concluding thesis of my address this morning is that only people who are part of the new creation and kingdom have the ability to obey the commands. It was in the light of such texts we are about to study that St. Augustine formulated his famous prayer, "Grant what Thou dost command and command what Thou wilt" (*Confessions*, Book 10, chap. 29).