

Doctrine of Eschatology

Understanding the Parousia

1. In the nineteenth century, biblical criticism was dominated by the theory of evolution which moved from the biological sciences into a metaphysical understanding of history, according to the German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (August 27, 1770 – November 31, 1831).
2. The metaphysical thoughts of men like Hegel influenced the church, which produced a religious-historical school of thought which dominated Liberal theology.
3. The teaching soon emerged that Biblical religion followed the same religious pattern that all religions followed in their historic developments.
4. Religion begins in a simple manner, and then develops into a highly complex point of view.
5. Religion begins in animism, whereby spirits, usually evil spirits, inhabit inanimate objects. It moves on to polytheism, pantheism, and finally monotheism.
6. Emerging at the same time as evolutionary thought in the nineteenth century, was Rationalism, with its anti-supernatural biases.
7. Like evolution, Rationalism influenced Liberal theology, which began to reject the supernatural, including the miracles, the Virgin Birth of Christ, and the atonement as a reconciliation event between the human and the divine. The resurrection was rejected, the Ascension of Christ, and His second coming.
8. A crisis was produced in the church because Liberal ministers were changing the orthodox faith.
9. A large part of the church embraced the modern theories, and cultural relativism. The teaching of the NT was reduced, and the ministry of Christ was transformed into a concern for social issues.
10. The kingdom of God was reinterpreted to reflect contemporary, ethical, and social values. There was to be a Social Gospel.
11. The idea of love for one another was promoted, along with the care for the poor. Within the church, dogma was diminished, as an ecumenical spirit was promoted.
12. The main message of the historic church was the need for repentance from sin, redemption by the blood of Christ, and reconciliation with God.
13. The new emphasis of the church was to promote love, peace, and harmony, while taking care of social needs.

14. Influencing the discussion was German missionary and scholar Albert Schweitzer, who, in 1906, published *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.
15. After reviewing previous positions on the historical Jesus, Schweitzer concluded that Christ was a product of His generation and thinking. Schweitzer said that while Jesus genuinely believed that His ministry would bring the end of history, Christ failed to see the prolonged period elapsing between His ministry on earth, and the final day of God's judgment.
16. For Schweitzer, the eschatological kingdom that Jesus spoke about, would come suddenly, super nationally, with catastrophe. It would come from above, and intrude into the normal process and progress of history. The kingdom would not come slowly, or gradually through ethical and social reformation.
17. By taking this position, Schweitzer rebuked the Liberal interpretation of the kingdom of heaven of his day. He declared it a fundamentally dishonest view of Scripture, and the teaching of Jesus.
18. While Albert Schweitzer rejected the Liberal understanding of the kingdom of God, he was not orthodox in his own view, because he undermined the ministry of Christ, and the Lord being a true Prophet.
19. Schweitzer said that Jesus had to go through a period of delayed expectations in His own ministry, reflected in the sending forth the seventy disciples. But then, on the Cross, Jesus finally realized that His eschatological expectations were not going to happen.
20. At Calvary, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" For Schweitzer, this was the moment, not of triumph, but of failure. At Calvary, Christ knew He had failed.
21. Nevertheless, said Schweitzer, Jesus died as a noble figure. He was a great teacher, who embodied the essence of the kingdom of God, and gave His life to express His faith in that kingdom.
22. The "Jesus" of Schweitzer's imagination is a tragic figure, for Jesus died in disillusionment about the coming of the kingdom.
23. The "Jesus" Albert Schweitzer conjured up is not the glorious and triumphant Jesus of the Bible. Therefore, the view of Schweitzer must be vigorously opposed, and throughly rejected.
24. The value of Schweitzer's work is that he did arrest the Liberal position, which was trying to cast the ministry of Christ in contemporary, and social terms, and without any eschatological understanding. That was dishonest.

25. The idea of a “delayed Parousia” remained in the consciousness of the church long after Albert Schweitzer’s death on September 4, 1965 at the age of ninety.
26. Ironically enough, a conservative group of Christians, known as the Fundamentalist, advanced the idea of a “delayed parousia” in their theological understanding known as Dispensationalism.
27. According to Dispensational teaching, Jesus came to establish His kingdom, but was rejected. He therefore returned to heaven for an indeterminate period of time, established the church as an intercalary period, and will come again one day to fully establish His kingdom on earth which will last a thousand years.
28. Despite the influence of Albert Schweitzer, even on conservative Christians, other scholars rose to challenge the concept of a “delayed parousia”. One such scholar was C. H. Dodd.
29. Charles Harold Dodd (April 7, 1884 – September 21, 1973) was a Welsh New Testament scholar and Protestant theologian who argued for a "realized eschatology", or the belief that the references of Christ to the kingdom of God refers to a present reality, rather than a future apocalypse.
30. Dodd took seriously the time frame passages of the New Testament. He did not believe that Jesus was disillusioned. The prophesies of Jesus did not fail, but took place in the framework in which He said they would, but in a spiritual sense.
31. The seventy disciples sent forth to the cities of Israel did see the Son of Man in power and glory. The kingdom of God was made present, as many New Testament passages make reference.
- *Mark 1:14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*
 - *Luke 17:21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.*
32. The very presence of Jesus was a manifestation of the coming (parousia) of Jesus and His kingdom.
33. In addition, the disciples of Jesus did see the Son of Man coming in power through the miracles He performed, through His life changing message, in the Transfiguration, in His resurrection from the dead, and in His ascension. The disciples beheld His glory.
- *John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

34. It is important to note that at both His resurrection, and at His ascension, angels were present. There were clouds.

- *Matthew 28:1 In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. 2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. 3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: 4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. 5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. 6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. 7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.*
- *Acts 1:9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.*

35. For Dodd, the *parousia* of Jesus was realized in the time frame of the first century.

36. Another individual who contributed to the discussion of the *parousia* was the Lutheran theologian from Strasbourg, Oscar Cullman (February 25, 1902 – January 16, 1999). A colleague of Karl Barth, Cullman proposed what became known as “redemptive history”, or “inaugurated eschatology”.

37. In this view Jesus Christ was the midpoint of sacred history, which guides general history, and which runs linearly from creation to consummation.

Special Note.

The image of D Day, the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, and V Day, or Victory in Europe Day, May 8, 1945, was invoked to illustrate the relationship between the death of Jesus and the resurrection, and His *parousia*, or Second Coming. The turning point of the war was D Day. In like manner, the resurrection of Christ decisively came to pass during the earthly ministry of Christ, even though its full manifestations is in the future.

38. Herman Nicolaas Ridderbos (February 13, 1909 – March 8, 2007) was a Dutch Reformed theologian and biblical scholar. He developed what is called the “als, nog niet”, or the “already, but not yet” position of eschatology.

39. The kingdom of God has already come, in large measure. But, the full manifestation of the kingdom is not yet realized.