

**The Doctrine of the Parousia of Christ**  
**A Survey of Systematic Theology**

Dan Dery  
2408 - Theological Foundations  
Dr. Jason Van Vliet  
September 26, 2019

## Introduction

It has been widely if not universally recognized that the earnest expectation of both Jesus and His first disciples was focused on what is known as the Parousia, Christ's coming again in glory. **1** But as scholars and critics alike have pointed out, that expectation was not simply that Christ was coming again.... whenever; it was that the eschatological "day of the Lord" in fulfillment of the prophets, was going to be accomplished within the lifetime of Jesus' contemporary generation. **2** As Burrows has well noted, "So far as we have any reliable evidence of Jesus' teaching, honest historical criticism cannot avoid the conclusion that he expected the eschatological consummation of the kingdom of God within his generation...." **3** Russell expresses the same sentiment when he says, "For one thing, He certainly thought that His second coming would occur in the clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at that time." **4** It is in the spirit of these men's convictions, yet not their conclusions, that we enter into discussion on the New Testament doctrine of the Parousia of Christ through a survey of systematic theology. As we hope to demonstrate, there may be no other doctrine so vitally connected to the validity and credibility of both Christ and His gospel.

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1. J. van Genderen and W.H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2008), 838.
  2. Matthew 10:23, 16:27-28, 24:30-34, Mark 13:26-30, Luke 21:27-32, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16, 5:1-9, Revelation 1:1-3,7, 22:6-12 etc.
  3. Millar Burrows, *An Outline of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), 217.
  4. Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian: And Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), 6.

## Perspectives on the Parousia

In his tome, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, J. van Genderen points out that at the beginning of the twentieth century, theologian and physician Albert Schweitzer had arrived at the conclusion that the kingdom of God did not come at the time and in the manner that Jesus and his disciples had imagined. Schweitzer was of the opinion that, “the entire history of Christianity flowed from the delay of the parousia and the abandonment of eschatology.” <sup>5</sup> Following in the steps of Schweitzer, Rudolf Bultman claimed that “it simply was a fact that Christ’s parousia did not take place immediately - contrary to the New Testament expectations - but that world history carried on and will continue to do so.” <sup>6</sup> R.C. Sproul in his book, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, said concerning Schweitzer, “He concluded that Jesus’ own eschatological expectations had been unfulfilled. The historical Jesus believed that the kingdom would be inaugurated by a catastrophic act of God, but this Divine act did not materialize.... For Schweitzer, the eschatology of Jesus was unrealized.” <sup>7</sup> Sproul goes on to note that like Schweitzer, a primary concern of the British philosopher Bertrand Russell was that, “Jesus was wrong in respect to the timing of his future return.” <sup>8</sup> Russell cites Matthew 10:23 and 16:28 as proof that Jesus “believed that His second coming would happen during the lifetime of many then living”, and concluded; “that was belief of His early followers, and it was the basis of a good deal of His moral teaching.” <sup>9</sup> Russell therefore reasoned that “Jesus failed to return during the time frame he had predicted.” <sup>10</sup>

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5. J. van Genderen and W.H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2008), 839.
  6. Ibid.
  7. R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 21.
  8. Ibid. 13.
  9. Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian: And Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), 16-17.
  10. R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 13.

In opposition to the views of Schweitzer and Bultmann, Oscar Cullman attempted to explain away the imminent Parousia time statements by conjuring up the images of “D-Day and V-Day”. For Cullman, the nearness of the Parousia expressed in the New Testament was simply that, “the triumph of the future is based on decisive developments in history, much more than could be imagined in any other situation.” <sup>11</sup> In other words for Cullman, the victory of the cross was so complete and decisive that the culmination of that victory in the eschaton could be thought of as being perpetually imminent, but not objectively near. And finally, Louis Berkhof, while acknowledging the imminence of the Parousia yet not willing to concede to the failure of New Testament prophecy, takes an extremely vague position when he says, “The time-interval pronouncements are indeed difficult scripture verses, but it is not inconceivable that they purport something different from what is frequently read into them.” <sup>12</sup>

It is our conviction that although these men are diverse in their opinions they are united in the errors. Although both Jesus and his disciples did predict the “time of the end”, they did not predict the “end of time”. Nor did they expect the nearness of his Parousia as expressed in the language of imminence to be turned into a “timeless maxim” divorced from a first century context. Furthermore, the “time-interval pronouncements” concerning the coming again of Christ are not at all difficult to understand. They are clear and consistent “time limitations” placed upon prophecies about the eschaton, given to promote both faith and watchfulness among their original audience. As we shall show, the failure lies not in the expectation of Christ or his disciples, but in the lack of biblical literacy on the part of scholars and critics alike.

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11. J. van Genderen and W.H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2008), 839.

12. *Ibid.* 840.

## **Coming on the Clouds and the End of The World**

It seems to us incredible that the disciples' questions concerning the Parousia (coming) of Christ at the end of the age, **13** could have ever been misconstrued to mean a bodily return of Jesus at the end of human history. As N.T. Wright has recognized, "The 'coming of the Son of Man' does not refer to the 'parousia' in the modern scholarly, and popular, sense of a human figure travelling downwards towards the earth on actual clouds." **14** In this respect, systematic theologies have shown a neglect for audience relevance and an ignorance of common metaphoric language.

For example, commenting on Matthew 24:3 John Calvin said, "But it must be observed that, having believed from their infancy that the temple would stand till the end of time, and having this opinion deeply rooted in their minds, they did not suppose that, while the building *of the world* stood, *the temple* could fall to ruins. Accordingly, as soon as Christ said that the temple would be destroyed, their thoughts immediately turned to *the end of the world*.... They associate *the coming of Christ* and *the end of the world* as things inseparable from each other..." **15** As should be obvious, Calvin was severely misguided on several key points.

First, he conveniently ignored the language of the text. It was not the "end of the world" in the sense of "the end of time and matter", but "the end of the age" (συντέλεια αἰῶν) that the disciples had asked about (Matthew 24:3). Second, he seems to forget that the Jews of Jesus' day were intimately aware that their temple had previously "fallen to ruins" at the hand of king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BC; yet the material creation had not ended. Thus, the end of

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13. Matthew 24:3

14. N.T. Wright, *Jesus And The Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 361.

15. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, trans. William Pringle, vol. 3 (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 117.

time and the fall of the temple would not have been associated concepts in the minds of first century Jews as Calvin imagines. Finally, Calvin completely disconnects the ruin of the temple with the “age” which it represented. The Jewish temple did not represent the “world” as in the “world of humanity”, but was the quintessential symbol of Torah and thus represented the “age of Judaism”. To paraphrase J. Stuart Russell in the words of R.C. Sproul, “the disciples were asking not about the end of the world, but about the end of the age.... The end in view is not the end of all time but the end of the Jewish age.” **16** This explains how Jesus could say to his disciples in response to their questions; “*Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.*” **17** This brings us to our next point; Jesus’ use of common apocalyptic and metaphoric language, specifically, His “coming on the clouds.”

In his book, “New Testament Theology”, Donald Guthrie says concerning Christ’s “coming on the clouds” in His Olivet discourse; “It was common among the Jewish apocalyptic writers to use such symbols as signs in the heavens to describe the coming hoped for Messiah.” **18** Guthrie goes on to say concerning this language; “It was also used in a non-eschatological way in the OT of political upheavals. When Jesus echoed this familiar language in communicating with his contemporaries he invested the apocalyptic usage with a deeper meaning, because he was referring to himself as the Coming One.” **19** Although we would agree with Guthrie that Jesus did invest this language with a “deeper meaning” in the sense that he was employing it eschatologically;

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16. R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 32. (Sproul’s paraphrase of J. Stuart Russell from his book, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord’s Second Coming* (London: Daldy, Isbister, 1878).

17. Matthew 24:34

18. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 792.

19. *Ibid.*

we deny that “eschatology” implies an “end of time” context. Jesus like the prophets, was applying the apocalyptic language of the day to describe an in-time eschatological judgment that would imminently be executed upon the Old Covenant people of God. **20**

A great example of this is found in Isaiah 19:1 where the prophet says, *“The oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and is about to come to Egypt; the idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.”* This prophecy was fulfilled when Babylon subdued Egypt, yet the Lord did not literally descend from heaven riding on a literal cloud. This was typical metaphoric language to denote the judgment of almighty God. We see the similar language employed in Zephaniah 1:3-4 concerning the judgment of Jerusalem and Samaria; *“For behold, the Lord is coming forth from His place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under Him and the valleys will be split, like wax before the fire, like water poured down a steep place.”* Historically, this prophecy was fulfilled when Jerusalem and Judea was razed by the Babylonians in 586BC. Yet again, the Lord did not literally “come forth from His place” (descend from heaven) nor did He literally “tread on the earth” at that time. God was revealing in the language of metaphor that through the instrumentality of a foreign nation (Babylon) He was bringing “covenant-judgment” against his apostate covenant people.

Although set in an eschatological context, Jesus application of this apocalyptic and metaphoric language was identical in that it referred to an in-time historical judgment upon the covenant people of God. Within the context of the AD70 destruction of Jerusalem and the temple

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20. For example, the language and imagery of the “Son of Man coming on the clouds” is drawn from the eschatological prophecy of Daniel 7. But, Daniel 7 does not support an “end of time” coming of the Lord. The “coming of the Son of Man” in Daniel 7 is synchronous with the time that “the saints take possession of the kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14,17-27) which Jesus placed at the fall of Jerusalem and the judgment of the Jewish nation (Matthew 8:11-12, 21:33-45, Luke 21:20-22,27-32). Thus, according to Jesus, the eschatological coming of the Son of Man in both Daniel 7 and the Olivet discourse must be limited to the in-time judgment of Israel (AD70) within the lifetime of the first century generation.

(Matthew 24:2-3, Luke 21:20-22) Jesus said, *“And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.... “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”*

**21** Through the military might of the Romans, Christ “came with the clouds of heaven” to execute eschatological judgment upon the Old Covenant people of God, “dealing out retribution to those who did not know God and to those who did not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” **22** Just as His Father had “come” in judgement throughout the Old Testament, so Christ was about to “come” at the end of that age, “in the glory of His Father with His angels”, and would then “repay every man according to his deeds”. And according to Jesus, there would be some of His disciples who would “not taste death until they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” **23**

Thus, by making “age” to mean “world” and turning apocalyptic metaphor into literary prose, both the critic and the scholar have distorted the New Testament doctrine of the Parousia. Although honoring the element of imminence, the critic sees the Parousia as a failed event and thus Jesus as a false prophet. The scholar, unwilling to charge Jesus with error has rejected the language of imminence and divorced the Parousia from its original first century context. In the minds of systematic theologians, the Parousia of Christ is better obscured in the unknowable future, then lost in the unrecoverable past. But as we shall now demonstrate, had they understood the “signs of the times” they would never have postponed coming again of the King in the power and glory of God.

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21. Mathew 24:30,34

22. 2 Thessalonians 1:8

23. Matthew 16:27-28

## **The Signs of “The End”**

In his book “New Testament Theology”, Donald Guthrie writes concerning the Olivet Discourse, “In all accounts of the eschatological discourse, various events are mentioned which must happen before the coming: wars, earthquakes, famines, persecutions.” **24** Ironically, these so-called “signs” that modern theologians link to the imminent coming of the Lord were only “the beginning of birth pangs”, of which the disciples were not to be afraid. According to Jesus, those things had to take place, but “the end” was not yet. **25**

However, one of the events that would in fact signify that the end was truly at hand was the presence of the abomination of desolation; “*Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.*” **26** It was “then” that there would be great tribulation followed by the “coming of the Son of Man” on the clouds of heaven. Significantly, Luke identifies this abomination of desolation as the armies of Rome that surrounded Jerusalem in 66AD; “*But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains....*” **27** What this means is, the “sign” which Jesus gave to signify His end of the age Parousia was a first century event, which his disciples did in fact witness. Therefore, “the end” as in, the eschatological Parousia of Christ, was in fact “near” in the first century.

Guthrie sees this connection when he says, “The desolating sacrilege of Daniel’s vision in mentioned by both Mark and Matthew (Mk. 13:14 = Mt. 24:15; cf. Dn. 9:27), but Luke gives it as armies surrounding Jerusalem (Lk. 21:20).” However, to avoid the obvious conclusion and cling to

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24. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 793.

25. Matthew 24:6-8

26. Matthew 24:15-16

27. Luke 21:20-21

his futurist eschatology, Guthrie goes on to say; “What took place then may be regarded as a foreshadowing of events at the end of the age.” **28** This is to say the least, completely arbitrary on the part of Guthrie. Nowhere in the passage is there the slightest indication that the abomination of desolation and the coming (Parousia) of the Son of Man were to be a “foreshadow” or a “type” of future and greater events. As a matter of fact, it was through those first century events that, “all things which are written would be fulfilled.” **29** We see here a powerful example of where the dogmas of men seek to usurp the authority of the Word of God.

Another sign which Jesus gave to signify the time of the end was the fulfillment of the great commission. Sproul says, “Jesus cites another phenomenon which must take place before “the end” comes: The gospel will be preached into all the world.” **30** Guthrie says, “Another special sign of a totally different kind was that the gospel was to be preached to all nations (Mk. 13:10 = Mt. 24:14). The parousia will not happen until the work of grace has been accomplished. This sets the parousia at the end of the present age. Both Mark’s and Matthew’s accounts specifically link this sign to the end.” **31** What Guthrie misses entirely is that the “end of the present age” which Jesus connected to His Parousia was end of “His present age”; that is, the Old Covenant age of Judaism which ended with the fall of the temple in that generation. Thus, the fulfillment of the great commission was the sign of the imminent coming of the Lord to bring an end to the Old Covenant age of the Jews which was governed by Torah; and to establish in its’ place the New Covenant age of Christ in all its glory.

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28. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 794.

29. Luke 20:22

30. R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 37.

31. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 793.

In support of this position, we have definitive biblical evidence which proves that the great commission was in fact fulfilled during the apostolic generation. For example, in the context of the preaching of the gospel, Paul in Romans 10:18 uses the identical word for “world” (οἰκουμένη) that Jesus used in Matthew 24:14 when commanding the great commission; *“But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world (οἰκουμένη).”* Likewise, in Colossians 1:6,23 Paul uses the identical words for “world” (κόσμος) and “creation” (κτίσις) that Jesus used when commanding the great commission in Matthew 16:15; *“because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world (κόσμος) also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing.... if indeed you continue firmly in the faith established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation (κτίσις) under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.”* As a matter of fact, as Don K. Preston has observed; every Greek word used by Jesus to command the preaching of the great commission (οἰκουμένη, κόσμος, ἔθνος, γῆ, κτίσις) was also used by Paul to express its fulfillment later in that same generation. **32**

What we have then is inspired biblical testimony that the definitive signs which marked the imminent fulfillment of the Parousia had in fact been witnessed by the first century generation. This means that (1) the “end of the age” connected with the fulfillment of the great commission was the end of the Jewish age, not the “end of time”. (2) That the time of the end, that is, the time of the Parousia was in fact “near” and about to be fulfilled in the lifetime of the apostolic generation. And (3) that systematic theology has literally missed the Parousia of Christ due to a failure to see

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32. See Don K. Preston’s, *Into All the World Then Comes the End* (Ardmore Oklahoma: Bible Prophecy, 1996) for an exhaustive and enlightening study on the connection between eschatology and the fulfillment of the great commission.

the fulfillment of the signs within the context of the first century. With these things in mind let us turn to the language of imminence among the first century Church, who, having witnessed the signs proclaimed; “.... the coming of the Lord is near.” **33**

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33. James 5:8

### **The New Testament Expectation of the Parousia**

As just mentioned, the fulfillment of the “signs of the times” served as Divine confirmation to the first century generation that the Parousia of Christ was about to be accomplished. Commenting on the testimony of the New Testament writers concerning the imminent coming of Christ, J. van Genderen has noted; “It does not merely say that “the end of all things is at hand” (1 Peter 4:7), but also that “the day is at hand” or “the time is at hand” (Rom. 13:12, Rev. 22:10), or that the day approaches (Heb. 10:25). “For yet in a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Heb. 10:37). Jesus says: “I come quickly” (Rev. 3:11; 22:20).” **34** Yet, despite this overwhelming testimony within the New Testament, Guthrie has the gall to say, “The most explicit statement showing that the time of the coming is unknown is Mark 13:32 (‘But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father’; cf. Mt.24:36). **35** This again is a feeble attempt on the part of Guthrie to maintain his futurist eschatology.

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34. J. van Genderen and W.H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2008), 838-839.

35. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 794.

There is absolutely no contradiction whatsoever to say that no one could know the “day and the hour” but that Christ would return within “this generation”. What we have is the “general” in contrast to the “specific”. Much like a pregnancy, before it takes place no one knows “the day or the hour”, but the “generation” (even the month) is most definitively known. So it was with the Parousia; the “day and the hour” knew no man, but many men knew it was going to occur within their own generation, **36** just as Jesus had promised. Below is but a small sampling of the eager expectation of an imminent end of the age Parousia, expressed either explicitly or implicitly in the pages of New Testament scripture.

“.... For truly I say to you, *you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.*”  
(Matthew 10:23)

“For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to His deeds. Truly I say to you, *there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.*” (Matthew 16:27-28)

“.... they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.... *Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.*” (Matthew 24:30-31,34)

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36. Compare Matthew 16:27-28 with Revelation 22:12, the latter is a direct allusion to the former. This is undeniable proof that Matthew 16:27-28 prophesied the second coming of Christ (the Parousia) which Jesus himself limited to the lifetime of his contemporary disciples.

“.... *There is about to be a rising again of the dead, both of righteous and unrighteous.*” (Acts 24:15 YLT)

“Do this, knowing the time, for *it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation nearer to us than when we believed*” (Romans 13:11).

“But this I say, brethren, *the time has been shortened.... For the form of this world is passing away.*”

(1 Corinthians 7:29,31)

“Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for *our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*” (1 Corinthians 10:11)

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; *we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.*” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

“.... *the Lord is near*” (Philippians 4:5)

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that *we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.... Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.*”

(1 Thessalonians 4:15,17)

“For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well *when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire.*” (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7)

“I do fully testify, then, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, *who is about to judge living and dead at his manifestation and his reign.*” (2 Timothy 4:1 YLT)

“*Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.... for the coming of the Lord is near.*” (James 5:7-8)

“For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, *but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you.*” (1 Peter 1:20)

“But they will give account to *Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.... the end of all things is near...*” (1 Peter 4:5,7)

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.... Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, *looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God.... But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.*” (2 Peter 3:10-13)

“*.... the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining.*” (1 John 2:8)

“*The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.... Children, it is the last hour....*” (1 John 2:17-18)

“Nevertheless what you have, *hold fast until I come.*” (Revelation 2:25)

“*I am coming quickly...*” (Revelation 3:11)

“And behold, *I am coming quickly.* Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book....

And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, *for the time is near...*

*Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done...*

He who testifies to these things says, “*Yes, I am coming quickly.*” *Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*

(Revelation 22:7,10,12,20)

## **Conclusion**

We began our discussion on the doctrine of the Parousia of Christ by surveying several of the scholarly perspectives. The liberals are convinced that the eschatological promises of Christ and the Church have failed, while the conservatives in an attempt to “save scripture” have launched them into the future. As we have shown, both these positions are flawed. The second coming of Christ and the time of the eschaton concerns neither the end of time nor the end of the New Covenant age, but the end of the Old Covenant age of Judaism. Furthermore, not once is the Parousia of Christ placed beyond the lifetime of the apostolic generation. The clear and consistent teaching of Christ and the Church was that the “coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven” was about to be accomplished within the lifetime of the first century disciples.

We have seen that the “signs of the times” were fulfilled within a first century context. Both the abomination of desolation and the fulfillment of the great commission as portends to the Parousia were in fact witnessed by the men of Jesus’ generation. In connection to the fulfillment of these signs, the message of the imminent end of the Old Covenant age and the arrival of the age

to come became increasingly pronounced in the writings of the New Testament epistles. Such phrases as “the Lord is at hand” and the “end of all things is near”, capture the spirit of imminence expressed among the first disciples.

Based on these conclusions, we find the overall treatment of the doctrine of the Parousia in the pages of systematic theology to be lacking in the extreme. Audience relevance is ignored, the “signs of the times” are anachronistically applied, and the clear and consistent first century time limitation imposed on the Parousia has been twisted into timeless and meaningless mantra. It is time for the great dogmaticians of the Church to allow the words of God rather than the traditions of men be both the beginning and the end in the study of the doctrine of the Parousia.

Therefore, we maintain that although systematic theologies admit the objective nearness of the Parousia in the first century, they have denied its historical fulfillment. Thus, the dogmas of the church concerning the “time” of the Parousia are contrary to the Word of God, and therefore have ceased to be authoritative. In the words of the late Louis Berkhof; “While they expect acceptance of their dogmas, because they regard them as correct formulations of scripture truth, they admit the possibility that the Church may have been in error in defining the truth. And if dogmas are found to be contrary to the Word of God, they cease to be authoritative.” **37**

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37. Louis Berkhof, *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), 33.

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