

Part 4 | Christ's Crown, continued

Evangelicals and the Last Days

- What is the difference between evangelicals and fundamentalists?
 - A 1909 series of publications called *The Fundamentals* established the original “fundamentalists.”
 - The publication set forth scholarly articles on five major doctrines, each of which was under attack by the Liberals, who were often called *modernists* in that day.
 - The inspiration and authority of Scripture
 - The virgin birth of Christ
 - The Deity of Christ
 - The substitutionary atonement of Christ
 - The bodily resurrection of Christ and His second coming
 - In the late 1940s, a large portion of fundamentalists began to be known by the term *evangelicals*.
 - While evangelicals held to the five fundamentals, they did not hold to a consistent view of the last portion of the last fundamental. All evangelicals believe in the bodily resurrection and of his bodily second coming. The specifics surrounding the second coming are an area of debate.
- Historical background
 - The evangelicals had such a desire for evangelicalism that they often considered teaching about the end times to be a distraction.
 - Evangelicals have held one of three end-times scenarios.
 - *Premillennialism* is the view that Christ will return and institute a kingdom of perfect peace and righteousness on earth that will last for one thousand years. After this reign of true peace, eternity begins.
 - *Amillennialism* is the view that when Christ returns, eternity begins with no prior thousand-year (millennial) reign on earth.
 - The *postmillennial* view (though out of favor for some time, is again gaining popularity) has it that through the church's influence, the world will be Christianized before Christ returns. Immediately following His return, eternity begins.
 - Whatever else may be said of these views, one thing is sure. They cannot all be right. The views cancel each other out.
- Digging Deeper
 - In *The Fundamentals*, only one of the 90 articles was about the second coming.
 - “The Coming of Christ,” Charles R. Erdman of Princeton Theological Seminary argued that the return of Christ was indeed a fundamental of the historic Christian faith. Erdman insisted Christ's return would be personal and glorious. He was quick to point out the fallacies of the liberal or modernistic view. Christ's promised coming again, he argued, was not to be confused with His spiritual presence among believers, the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, providential events of history, or the believer's death.
 - Interestingly, Erdman was an amillennialist, and did not argue the points between his view and post or pre-millennialism. Rather, his article was directed toward liberals who denied a bodily return altogether.

Evangelical Agreement: Major prophetic areas accepted by Evangelicals

- The Immortality of the Soul – Evangelicals believe in a soul that exists beyond death, into eternity future.
- The Intermediate State - Evangelicals do differ over the nature of the believer's existence in the intermediate state, but there is a general consensus that there is such a state.
- The Future Bodily Resurrection - there is common agreement among evangelicals that all the dead will be raised at God's appointed time in the future.
- Future Divine Judgment - The agreement among evangelicals about the certainty of future divine judgment is not marred by their differences over the order of events. Their high view of God and His Word brings them all to the conclusion that divine judgment is ahead.
- The Future Return of Christ – Though evangelicals do not agree on the manner and timing of His coming, they are unanimous on the fact that He is coming again. It makes no difference whether they embrace the amillennial, the postmillennial, or premillennial scheme, evangelicals all agree that the predictions of Christ's future return have not yet been realized.

- The Eternal State - Evangelicals all believe heaven and hell are real places and human beings will dwell forever in one or the other. This is in stark contrast to liberal theologians like Rudolf Bultmann, who said:

“Man’s knowledge and mastery of the world have advanced to such an extent that through science and technology it is no longer possible for anyone seriously to hold a New Testament view of the world—in fact, there is no one who does... No one who is old enough to think for himself supposes that God lives in a local heaven. There is no longer any heaven in the traditional sense of the word. The same applies to hell in the sense of any mythical underworld beneath our feet. And if this is so, we can no longer accept the story of Christ’s descent into hell or His Ascension into Heaven as literally true. We can no longer look for the return of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven or hope that the faithful will meet in the air (1 Thess. 4:15ff).”¹

How Evangelicals Differ Over Things to Come

- The major differences in evangelicalism center on three questions:
 - Will Christ institute the Davidic kingdom on earth?
 - Will the church succeed in Christianizing society before Christ returns?
 - Will He usher in the eternal state when He comes again?
- The view of liberals (which will not be considered in depth) is *realized eschatology*, the idea that all prophecies have been fulfilled, or were incorrect to begin with.
 - C.H. Dodd (a liberal), said, “The eschaton has moved from the future to the present, from the sphere of expectation into that of realized experience.”²
- The three views of evangelical eschatology:
 - Premillennialism
 - Premillennialism describes the belief that Christ will return before the millennium and, in fact, will establish it when He returns to the earth.
 - The future 1000-year millennium will be characterized by righteousness (Isa. 60:21), holiness (Isa. 52:10), truth (Ps. 45:4) and the fullness of the Holy Spirit of God (Joel 2:28-29). Christ will rule and reign from His throne in Jerusalem over the whole world. Satan will be bound in the abyss for the entire period (Rev. 20:1-6). During that time, all war will cease (Isa. 9:4-7), and there will be joy (Isa. 9:3-4), peace (Isa. 65:25), holiness (Isa. 1:26-27), glory (Isa. 24:23), comfort (Isa. 12:1-2), perfect justice (Isa. 9:7), the lifting of the curse imposed because of sin, the removal of sickness (Isa. 33:24), healing of the deformed (Isa. 29:17-19), great economic prosperity (Isa. 25:1-2), unified worship of God (Isa. 45:23), and the visible manifestation of the very presence of God Himself (Ezek. 34:27-28).
 - The view prevailed and was virtually unchallenged until the time of Origen (185–254 AD) and his allegorical or nonliteral method of interpretation of Scripture.
 - Premillennialism went into something of an eclipse from the time of Origen and about 1830 and the time of the prophetic Bible conferences when it was revived.
 - Differences among premillennialists center chiefly around whether the church will go through the period of tribulation prior to the millennium.
 - Pre-tribulational premillennialists believe the church will be raptured prior to the tribulation.
 - They see a definite distinction between Israel and the church.
 - They are dispensational in interpretation of Scripture.
 - They believe that the Lord could return for the church at any time.
 - Post-tribulational premillennialists believe the church will go through the coming tribulation.
 - They believe the church will be protected *through* the tribulation.
 - They do not see a distinction between Israel and the church, but believe that the church is an extension of Israel.
 - Mid-tribulational and Pre-wrath premillennialists believe the church will go through part of the tribulation.
 - Partial-rapture premillennialists believe that the spiritual believers will be raptured, while carnal believers will not.
 - Amillennialism – stay tuned!

¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth* (London: SPCK, 1954), 4.

² C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Charles Scribner Sons, 1961), 50.