

# THE CONSUMMATION OF THE AGE AND THE COMING OF THE LORD

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God is a God of purpose, having a will according to His good pleasure (Eph. 1:9). In Ephesians 3:11 the apostle Paul speaks of “the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The eternal purpose—the purpose of the ages—is the eternal plan that God made in eternity past. The eternal purpose of God and His work in eternity past regarding holiness and sonship (1:4-5) are accomplished in time. Between the two ends of eternity—eternity past and eternity future—there is a lengthy interval, which is the bridge of time. God’s purpose in eternity past and for eternity future has been and now is being accomplished on earth in time. According to the Bible, as seen from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, there are four ages (dispensations) on the bridge of time. These ages are the dispensation of the patriarchs (from Adam to Moses), the dispensation of law (from Moses to the first coming of the Lord Jesus), the dispensation of grace (from the resurrection and ascension of Christ until Christ’s coming again), and the dispensation of righteousness (the manifestation of the kingdom of God) for a thousand years. In order to understand the expression *the consummation of the age*, we need to concentrate on the aspects of the third age—the present age, the age of the church.

## The Age of Grace, Mystery, and Faith

We need to study and know the Bible not only according to its spiritual principles but also according to the various dispensations. Many Reformed theologians reject any teaching concerning ages or dispensations and claim that the Old Testament and the New Testament are the same, insisting that there is no difference between the age of the law and the age of grace. However, according to the Scriptures, God deals with His people who are in different ages in different ways. In the age of the law, God dealt with His people according to the law, and in the present age, the age of grace, God deals with His redeemed and regenerated people according to grace by faith.

The common theological definition describes grace as “unmerited favor.” God’s grace, His favor, is received by those who did not merit it. This common definition is accurate when applied to certain verses in the New Testament, such as Romans 5:2 and Ephesians 2:8; however, such a definition is not applicable to many other verses, verses that speak of spiritual experience, not merely of unmerited favor. In those instances such a definition is shallow, infantile, and immature. Grace came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17), and “of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (v. 16). Did unmerited favor come through Christ? Are we receiving grace as nothing more than unmerited favor upon unmerited favor? Certainly not! In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul testifies, saying, “By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me.” The grace of God, not simply unmerited favor, was with Paul, and by this grace Paul was what he was in Christ. After Paul entreated the Lord three times to remove the thorn in his flesh (2 Cor. 12:8), the Lord said, “My grace is sufficient for