

Eschatological Paradigms

By [Charles Coty](#)

Many Christians today are basically practical pan-millennialists, believing that all of what they perceive as a “*last days*” apocalyptic cornucopia of confusion will *pan* out with or without their commitment to a particular eschatological system. However, it is my contention that although the majority of Christ-followers may not understand every nuance and machination of the main eschatological flavors, they have been significantly influenced by the major futuristic tenets of the most dominant of them all—Dispensationalism. I believe that the faulty presuppositions behind the curtain of this position:

1. unwittingly challenge the faithfulness of God and the inspiration of Scripture
2. compromise the expectations of the Gospel’s potential effectiveness
3. perpetuate a short-term “The end is near” mentality, creating a “Why polish brass on a sinking ship?” paradigm
4. wreak havoc on the potential for peace in the Middle East

Most assume that because eschatology is not a foundational issue, and one’s conclusion about it has little appreciable impact on their lives, the study of eschatology is a colossal waste of time. Furthermore, many assume that since the intelligent, theologically educated and scripturally adept have not formed a consensus for nearly two millennia, there is little reason to believe that we as laypersons have a remote chance of accomplishing what our forefathers could not. Therefore, eschatology has gained the ill-fated reputation of being a rather useless withering appendage, profiting only those astute enough to help the rest of us negotiate the treacherous roadmap of our near-term earthly demise. I’ve shared Preterism with many people, and the truth of the matter is that I first have to alert them to the above problems before they will listen and certainly before they will take the time to investigate.

For the first 33 years of my Christian life I would have agreed wholeheartedly with the presumption of eschatology’s uselessness as it relates to my walk with Christ. However, after considerable study and an increased sensitivity to things eschatological, I now believe this premise to be grossly inaccurate. I have found that eschatological conclusions have a great deal to do with our short and long term expectations and I contend that these presuppositions play a significant role not only in our understanding of God’s faithfulness in real-time historical events, but also in the way in which we process the redemptive story of Christ throughout Scripture.

I believe the predominant theology of our day does not adequately lead us to the faithfulness of God either through recognizing His timely prophetic fulfillment or by the corresponding validation of His inspired Word. Therefore, when I share Preterism I build the foundation on two key ingredients:

1. God’s faithfulness
2. Biblical inspiration

Many of those that immerse themselves in the finer points of Futurism (prophetic events fulfilled in our future) seem somewhat imbalanced and in a sense possessed and overcome by their own conclusions. However, it is the less eschatologically rabid that must be challenged. Put your ear to the ground and listen to the daily conversations. Every natural disaster, skirmish or school shooting becomes proof positive that we are living at the end of times’ “last days.” Negativity and failure earmark our glass-half-empty perception. An earth tremor, disease outbreak or a morally depraved act of violence, cause most to respond with, “*It’s a sign of the times*” or “*The end is near.*” I believe this strikes at the heart of the Gospel and thus generates my fervency in attempting to stem the ever-increasing eschatological tsunami of chaotic expectations.

Try as you might, you cannot escape the ramifications of Left Behindology. Its tentacles flavor the perceptions of every newscast and newspaper headline. Whether you buy into every facet or not, you simply cannot stray far from the sea of corroborating negativity.

So, tired of being captivated by this pessimillennial obsession, I removed myself as far from the discussion as possible. But what was I to do? Where was I to hide? Since 1972, when I first read *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Premillennialism has become so dominant that today most believe it to be the centuries-old orthodox position of the Church.

In 1982, my wife was pregnant with our first child. She was confronted by an overly zealous Dispensationalist who nearly scared the wits right out of her with ***“And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days”*** (Matt 24:19). For goodness sakes, what was she to do?

Even in my confused scriptural understanding of thing’s eschatological, something seemed askew in this interpretative formula. Wasn’t Jesus speaking directly to His disciples? Weren’t any of these prophetic words meant to be understood by the original recipients? Why would Peter, who had denied Jesus less than two months prior, stand up with thundering conviction and proclaim the miraculous Pentecostal events to be proof positive that they were living in the “last days” ([Acts 2:16-21](#))? It seemed rather oxymoronic to assume that the “last days” ([Heb 1:1-2](#)) era would span more time than that of the entire Mosaic economy.

Through the years I had been haunted by the Bible’s barrage of Second Coming “time statements” (*at hand, shortly, soon, in a little while*) that seemed to strike at the heart of the ever-present imminency of Christ’s assumed 21st century return. Have you wondered, like I did, why Jesus and His canon-writing followers would use such imminent language if the prophesied events were thousands of years future? Why would Jesus commit to a “*this generation*” ([Matt 24:34](#)) parousia (return with a consequential presence) while some of His followers were still alive ([Matt 16:27-28](#))? Why would Jesus, in His Olivet Discourse, warn His beloved disciples to ***“flee to the mountains”*** ([Matt 24:16](#)) and away from the heavily fortified city of Jerusalem, if *they* were never to be in any imminent danger? Is this not cruel given the presupposition that His return was still at least two millennia removed? Are we to assume that in order to produce a generational expectancy Jesus deliberately misinformed His avid followers? Are there no consequences of failed expectations?

Consider the psychological impact the following language would have had upon the first-century brethren: To be exhorted to have patience ***“for the coming of the Lord is at hand . . . the judge is standing at the door”*** (James 5:8-9); challenged to be self-controlled because, ***“The end of all things is near”*** (1 Pet 4:7); encouraged to endure the horrific persecution knowing that, ***“In a very little while He who is coming will come and will not delay”*** (Heb 10:36-37); cautioned to stay as they were, free from added anxieties, because, ***“the time is short...the form of this world is passing away”*** (1 Cor 7:29-31); warned to be vigilant because of the ever-present antichrists proving that ***“it is the last hour”*** (1 John 2:18). And when they received their edition of John’s Revelation they were heartened to know that these ***“things that are to take place shortly...for the time is near”*** (Rev 1:1,3).

But doesn’t Peter make it clear that God’s infiniteness proves time irrelevant since ***“with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day”*** (2 Pet 3:8)? Isn’t it possible that Jesus was speaking in some sort of a code that would be understood in due time? The truth is that Jesus inexorably tied the veracity of the Gospel to the timely execution of that which He and His followers prophesied. This is the reason for the writing of Peter’s second epistle. It had been approximately 37 years since Jesus’ “this generation” proclamation and the troops that had been promised vindication ([2 Thess 1:5-9](#)) were growing restless. Time was running out! Was this Jesus ever to come in the glory of His Father in His cloud-coming wrath?

Truthfully, it matters less what we think Jesus and the New Testament writers meant and a great deal more what the direct recipients who received the revealed mysteries understood. Their faith depended upon it. The survival of Christianity hung in the balance. Did Jesus and all the New Testament authors in fact write in code, sealed and only viably understood by the likes of Scofield, Lindsey and LaHaye?

Could the Church have survived the first century if they “*realized*” that Jesus either had no clue or was intentionally deluding them? Faithfulness is predicated upon timely execution, therefore I believe it is an absolutely necessary to focus on the time statements when sharing Preterism.

Could the early church have survived if Christ did not return to the first-century generation as promised? Would not their hopes and dreams have crumbled and crashed to the ground? Are we to ignore the relevance of these time statements to the first-century recipients, whose eager anticipation was created solely by Jesus and the inspired New Testament authors? Could not God have inspired His writers to speak in hazier, imprecise time phrases like “a very long time from now” or “that generation” instead of “in a very little while” and “this generation?” We cannot simply discount the imminent language in the Bible in order to meet our eschatological expectations. I believe it is incumbent upon us to allow the full weight of scriptural evidence to force our worldview into conformity.

 ***For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)***

However, be forewarned that forming scripturally accurate conclusions can in fact be hazardous to your paradigm. It sure was to mine. As you share Preterism you are highlighting the faithfulness of God and the inspiration of His inerrant Word. At costs oftentimes undesirable, Futurism must be challenged within the context of a gentle and loving spirit.

Lastly, sharing Preterism must be done with graciousness and respectfulness. I realize that we each need our space and we all come to the truth at varying paces. In my opinion, too many Preterists are less than loving as they viciously attack their opponents. We need to realize that we are attempting to share the truth of God’s word not prove intellectual prowess. To me, this mindset has no place—especially when arguing that the consummation of the New Covenant has given us access to all spiritual blessings found in the person of Christ. *We* ought to be the most loving, kind and forgiving Christians on the planet! But even when we fail, which we will, that does not disprove Preterism—it only proves our depravity and magnifies his bountiful mercy and grace.

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