

## **Already But Not Yet**

### **By David Feddes**

Today we're going to focus on a particular theme in Romans 8 and throughout the New Testament, the idea of already but not yet. That may sound a little strange, but you'll find out what it means as we go on.

### **Hard questions**

Some of the hardest things in life, when we're thinking through the Christian faith as well as living it, is how we set our expectations. What should we really be looking for and expecting in this life?

We have some hard questions when it comes to the **kingdom** of God and the reign of God. Is it true that God is already reigning on the earth, or is he not yet reigning?

Has Satan already been defeated? Is there **victory** over Satan already now, or is that victory something that's only going to come at some point in the future?

When it comes to **resurrection**, we sing on Easter, "Christ the Lord is risen today." But what does that mean for us? Are we risen? There are certain passages in the Bible that talk about already being raised with Christ, but we know that we still have a lot of funerals that we go to. And we know that somehow the final resurrection is something we're looking forward to. What can we expect from resurrection in this life?

And then there's the **church**. The church is the glorious bride of Christ, the place of fellowship. Or it's horrible mess that you can hardly put up with. What in the world is the church? Is it this beautiful, splendid thing that is amazing, or is it this kind of yucky thing that you can do just as well without and worship God on your own?

What about your own **status**? Can you have peace with God and complete assurance that you belong to him and that Jesus has saved you, or is that something that you'll only find out on judgment day? There are some strands of church teaching that have said you're presuming if you say that you know you're already saved and that you're already right with God; they say you can't know that for sure until the final day. So how much assurance, how certain can we be, how much can we be sure of our status while we're living in this life?

There's a question of **holiness**. Some Christians have said that you can become completely and perfectly holy in this life because God promises the great work of his Holy Spirit and he speaks of this tremendous transformation. And so, they say, already in this life a person can enjoy entire sanctification, be made completely holy. But other Christians say the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and even Christians are rotters throughout their life. So what can we expect when it comes to holiness?

How about **prayer**? That's one that I have struggled with often. How much can we really expect from prayer in this life? Should we be able to pray with such confidence that we know we are

going to get what we request, or should we mumble a few requests to God and say, “If it be thy will,” and get on with our day, not really expecting too much? Praying can be very disappointing if you ask and ask passionately and confidently and with high expectations, but then you don’t get what you prayed for.

Should you adjust expectations on **healing**? That may be a subset of prayer in some cases. But how much healing can we expect in this life? If you struggle with mental illness or with certain kinds of depression, should you expect that such problems should never trouble you again? If you’ve got a serious illness, should you expect that if you pray in the proper manner, your illness will be taken away and you will be completely restored again? Or should you expect the opposite when it comes to healing and say, “I’m going to go to my doctor maybe, and I’ll take good care of my body as well as I can,” but that’s about all you can expect in this whole area of healing?

How about **guidance**? How clear is God’s guidance? Should we take each step through our life only when we have a pretty firm and clear leading from God on that particular matter. Should we wait to take any action until we get that clear leading? Or should we go through life making as sensible choices as we can and hope that God will bless those choices? Or is the truth about guidance something else? What can you really expect from guidance in this life?

And how much can you expect to **encounter** God? According to the Scriptures, we’re going to see God face to face when Christ comes again. But how much can we experience and know him now? How much of the reality of God enters into our experience? How much should we seek? Because if something’s not going to be given in this life, you really shouldn’t waste too much of your time pursuing it. If a closer encounter is possible in this life, you want to seek it. But if a closer encounter isn’t possible until heaven, you don’t want your heart to be continually disappointed due to misguided expectations.

These are the kinds of questions that come up when it comes to this matter of timing, understanding what era we’re living in and how much or how little we ought to be expecting. These are questions that I have wrestled with in my own life because I’ve wanted to know God better. I’ve wanted to see more healing happen through the miraculous power of God. I’ve wanted to see tremendous advances in holiness. I’ve wanted to live by God’s guidance. I’ve wanted to see the church be pure and splendid.

If you’re never wrestling with these things at all, then I wonder whether you’ve been trying to live the Christian life at all, whether you’ve ever heard some of those magnificent promises of the New Testament, and having heard them, ever been disappointed when you didn’t see them carried out to the degree that you were hoping they would be.

At a doctrinal level, different strands of Christianity have argued over entire sanctification, or over how much assurance you can have, or over whether God is already reigning now, whether Jesus is already reigning during the thousand years. These are some of the theological questions that come up. At a personal level, thinking through and understanding how to walk the Christian life in the time between the first coming of Jesus and the second coming, these are questions that press on you every day you wake up.

## Expecting

We want to focus on a few verses from Romans that capture a lot of the New Testament teaching. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of **childbirth** right up to the present time" (Romans 8:22). Pregnancy is different from what is ordinarily labeled a disease, even though pregnancy has some things in common with disease. Both involve nausea and not feeling very good. Both involve bodily changes that are not always comfortable to undergo. The swelling of pregnancy can even resemble the growth of a large tumor. And then there's the excruciating pain at the end of pregnancy. And yet you know that a pregnancy is somehow much more wonderful than a nasty illness because of what it produces: something marvelous and miraculous.

When it comes to pregnancy, we also have to think about another dimension of it. When does life begin? Well, at one level, we say life begins when the pregnancy begins. It begins unseen and almost unnoticed for a while. And yet we still date birthdays not from the time of conception but from the time the child emerges from the womb. During pregnancy we might say, "The baby's there, but the baby's not here yet." A woman who is "expecting" already has the baby, but she has not yet had the baby.

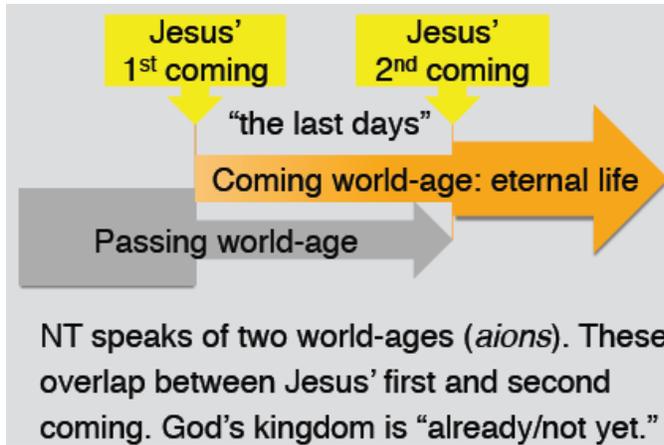
According to the Bible, the creation is kind of like a pregnancy, with all the discomforts and difficulties that go with it, and with some of that ambiguity or two different ways of thinking. The baby's not yet here, and yet the baby is here. So what do we make of this reality in the meantime? The creation is groaning in the pains of childbirth: already but not yet.

Romans 8 goes on to say, "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the **firstfruits** of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:23). Here you have a picture, not so much of pregnancy, although the groaning image is still carried over, but of firstfruits in farming. The first part of the crop tells you that a lot more crop is still coming in. The Holy Spirit whom God has given us is the firstfruits of that crop, but we're still looking forward to the redemption of our bodies, even though. Romans has already said that our body is devoted to the Lord and that our body died with Christ and was raised with Christ. Romans says we've already been adopted, but now it says we eagerly await our adoption. Somehow we are already adopted, but yet there's an adoption, a public adoption, that has not happened yet, that is still to come.

Closely related to the idea of firstfruits is a repeated image in the Bible of the Holy Spirit as the **down payment**, or the earnest payment, the first payment of a lot more to come. In a down payment, you give a large amount initially when you buy a house, but then more and more keeps getting paid. And when the Holy Spirit is given, God gives the Holy Spirit. God anointed us, sealed us, and gave the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts: "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Corinthians 1:21–22). The word picture of a down payment tells you that something's already given and yet there's more that's coming in the future.

Pregnancy says: already and there's more. Firstfruits says: already and there's more. Down payment says: already and there's more. This idea of "already but not yet" runs throughout the Bible. It helps us in thinking through, but also in living out, the reality of the Christian life and the reality of the Holy Spirit.

In the big picture, Jesus has come. He came to earth. He taught. He did his amazing miracles. He died for sin. He rose from the dead. And in that first coming of Jesus, something new entered the world, the new age of God's blessing and reign, and the giving of the Holy Spirit in a degree that had never been given before. At the same time, this was the death blow to the old age.



The New Testament speaks of two world ages, or eons. That first world age is the one of sin and death and fallenness. And with the first coming of Jesus, a new age has broken in. That new age, that coming world age, is here, but more of it is still to come when Jesus comes again. So you have the two world ages, but they are not totally separate in time. The first world age runs up to the coming of Jesus, but then it muddles along and staggers along until the second coming of Jesus. That first world age doesn't have near the power and the same reality that it had until the coming of Christ, but it's still hanging around. And with the coming of Christ, that new age has entered into time, but it's still awaiting certain things that are to come.

In the meantime, you live in the overlap of two different world ages. And in that overlap, you need to not be conformed to this world, or eon, to that old fading-away world age. The Bible speaks of the overlapping time between those ages as "the last times" or "the last days." It's usually an error to think of "the last days" as the decade, or the five years, or the couple of decades right before Jesus comes again. In the New Testament, "the last days," or "the last times," almost always refer to the entire era between the two comings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this period between those two comings, there is always a big *already* of Christ's first coming and a big *not yet* of his coming again. Within that framework, we'll see how "already but not yet" works out in various dimensions of Christian reality and belief, as well as in the way we live the Christian life. We'll see how it works out in the realm of understanding the kingdom, victory over Satan, resurrection, church, our status as Christians, our holiness and sanctification, prayer, healing, guidance, and encounter with God. We'll see what the Bible says about the already and the not yet in each of those areas.

## Already But Not Yet

- Kingdom
- Victory
- Resurrection
- Church
- Status
- Holiness
- Prayer
- Healing
- Guidance
- Encounter

### Kingdom

**Already:** Jesus says, “But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Luke 11:20). Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). It’s here. It’s in you. The kingdom has already come.

**Not yet:** Yet Jesus teaches us to pray, “Your kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). Why would you pray, “Your kingdom come,” if it’s already come in its completeness? Because it hasn’t yet fully come. When Jesus gave the Last Supper, he said, “For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:18). *Until*. That sounds like the kingdom of God hasn’t come after all.

Which is it? Has the kingdom come or hasn’t it? This is a classic example of already but not yet. Already the kingdom of God has broken in, and his reign has claimed his own territory. The earth is rightfully his, and already he’s bringing his reign to bear on it. But the earth has not yielded its full submission and its full allegiance to him. So there’s another sense in which the kingdom hasn’t yet fully come to earth.

So even as we say that God’s kingdom has come in the person of Jesus, we pray, “Your kingdom come,” and we pray for the day when Jesus will come again.

### Victory

**Already:** Jesus states very clearly that he defeats Satan. He defeated Satan in the temptations in the wilderness. He defeated Satan when he expelled demons during his ministry. And when his apostles went out and others were spreading the good news, Jesus said when they came back, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). And the apostle Paul says that something tremendous happened at the cross: “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2:15). Jesus defeated the demons and the prince of demons. Jesus said shortly before he died, “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out” (John 12:31). Already there is victory over Satan!

**Not yet:** In the epistles, you read the apostle Paul saying such things as, “Satan hindered us” (1 Thessalonians 2:18). At the end of Romans he said, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Romans 16:20). You might say, “I thought God already did that. I thought Satan already fell and that victory over Satan had already been won.” The apostle Peter warns, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). So there’s already victory but there’s not yet victory.

New Testament theologian Oscar Cullmann compared this to what happened in Europe late in World War II. Cullmann compared it to D-Day and V-E Day. D-Day was when the Allied forces invaded Normandy. When they won that victory, Hitler was basically finished. When the Allied forces the armies established the beachhead at Normandy and began to move inland, it was only a matter of time. That was the decisive blow, and Hitler could not win. But if you had been a soldier on the ground in Europe at that time, you would not have said, “Victory is fun! Life has gotten really easy!” The nastiest and most brutal offensive of the war, the Battle of the Bulge, came after Hitler was already defeated, basically, but he was still around, and he still had a lot of troops and could still do a lot of damage. So the Battle of the Bulge was a terrible counteroffensive in which many, many people died. D-Day at Normandy meant victory already, but the final victory did not yet come until the absolute destruction of the German army and the death of Hitler.

In a similar way, the book of Revelation speaks of Satan being defeated, and it says that we should sing for joy over his defeat, but it also says, “Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short” (Revelation 12:12). The nastiness of the devil during this present age is not a sign that he is winning, but that he has already lost. But he has not yet been totally wiped out. He’s been limited severely and wounded terribly, but God has not yet finished him off. And so there’s an *already* to victory and a *not yet* to victory.

We should never give in and say, “Satan is winning and the demons are too dominant. I can’t resist anymore.” But we should not be naive and think that the battle is over. “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:10–12). We need fight, because we are victorious but we’re not yet fully victorious. We need to keep battling Satan until Christ comes again and the victory is complete.

## **Resurrection**

**Already:** Jesus has been raised from the dead, and we share in his resurrection. “Just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:4). So it’s not only true that Jesus has been raised, but we’re linked to his resurrection. “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). The Bible repeatedly emphasizes that in the resurrection of Christ, new life has come into the world and into the lives of God’s people because we’re in union with Christ. Already we’re raised with Christ and seated with him in heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

**Not yet:** “We wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). Our bodies aren’t yet glorified and raised. “For Jesus must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:25–26). We know from our own experience that death still has a kind of power because people still die.

If we take just the *already* side of the equation, we make the mistake that some people in Corinth made. They were saying, “Christ has been raised. We’re raised with him. We can already now live in perfect health and all is good.” The apostle said there are some people who say that the resurrection has already happened, but they are wrong. The general resurrection of all people, has not happened. And yet, “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). Regarding resurrection, if you make it either-or, either already or else not yet, you’re going to miss the fullness of what the Bible teaches, the *already* aspect of resurrection and also the *not yet*.

## Church

**Already:** The church is a marvel, and the church is a muddle. The Bible says, “God’s intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 3:10). You can’t say much about the church that’s higher than that, that God decided that now, through the church, he’s going to show off to the angels and to all the powers how wise he is. The church is God’s display of how brilliant he is. The head of the church, Jesus Christ, is a perfect display of that, and the way God brings different peoples together, the way he transforms people in the body of the church, it’s wonderful and glorious.

**Not yet:** If the wonder and glory of the church is the only thing you gather from the Bible, you will be savagely shocked and disappointed, because there is a not yet. There is also the church in its current condition, which is not yet the perfect bride of Christ. The apostle writes to the Galatian church, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6). Paul writes many things in his epistles to different churches which indicate that those churches had many problems and a long way to go. If you read Jesus’ letters to the seven churches early in the book of Revelation, he has some pretty strong words of rebuke as well as words of encouragement and praise for them, because the church is not yet what he has called it and designed it to be.

If you’re going to relate to the church at all, you need to relate in both of these ways. You need to know the glory of the body of Christ. But you shouldn’t go around acting shocked when you find out that it’s not yet as glorious as it’s going to be. You need to be able to live with the disappointments of the not yet and still understand the glory, and let the church still be a treasure to you, as it is to God.

## Status

**Already:** Our status is that we’re already right with God. “Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained

access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1–2). We have peace with God already. But there’s a not yet to it as well.

**Not yet:** “By faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope” (Galatians 5:5). The righteousness from God has already been revealed. It’s been given to people when we’re justified. And yet we’re waiting for the righteousness for which we hope. The apostle says at the very end of his life, when he’s sitting in a dungeon awaiting execution, “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day” (2 Timothy 4:8). He’s been declared righteous long before that, and yet he’s looking forward to the crown of righteousness.

Already we can know what God’s verdict on us is. We can already know that our status is justified, at peace with God, children of God. But yet that verdict is not quite as clear to us sometimes, and certainly not as clear to the world, as it will be when Christ comes again and declares his verdict of not guilty over each person who belongs to Jesus Christ. So there’s the already of rejoicing that you’re right with God, and there is the longing that this declaration will be made public, to remove all doubt about it from anybody else, as well as sometimes from your own heart when doubts creep in. We need to be able to live with some elements of not yet being crowned with righteousness, while already knowing that we have peace with God and a secure status of acceptance by him.

## **Holiness**

**Already:** “We died to sin... You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (Romans 6:18). With language like that, you can see why some people have said perfection is possible in this life. The Bible uses very strong words about the liberation that we have from sin and the fact that we can’t go on sinning if God’s seed lives in us. “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him” (1 John 3:9).

**Not yet:** The Bible also says that holiness is not yet. “For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Romans 7:18). “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Galatians 5:17).

When it comes to holiness, something tremendous has happened that sets us free from the grip and power of sin, but there’s a not yet. I want to be better, but I can’t seem to do it all the time, sometimes not even much of the time. There’s this inner conflict that continues.

Part of the Christian life is realizing both of these things. If you say to yourself, “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and people are always going to be sinners,” if you take an entirely not yet approach to holiness, there’s a terrible danger of not expecting any growth in holiness. It’s not enough to say, “We’re going to keep on sinning and hopefully Jesus will show up and then we’ll get forgiven and go to heaven.” This is not the full teaching of the Bible at all. If you’re all focused on the not yet, what about the tremendous liberation that can already happen now, the progress that you can make in the Christian life?

It's one thing to say the Bible does not teach that progress leads to absolute perfection in this life. But does the Bible teach that it doesn't lead anywhere? Does the Bible teach that there's no change, that you're not set free from the grip of sin, that the power of the one who is in you is not greater than the power of the one who is in the world? "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). It is very far from the truth to see holiness as totally impossible in this life.

Granted, it would be a mistake to say that you can become perfect and entirely sanctified in this life. But it is also a dreadful mistake to live entirely in the not yet and underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit as the down payment. It's one thing to say the full payment hasn't been made. It's quite another thing to say nothing's been given. So we need to understand that in this realm of holiness, much has been given, though not yet everything.

## **Prayer**

**Already:** The Bible makes some tremendous statements about prayer. For example, Jesus says, "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24). That is a tremendous promise. Sometimes it's qualified by other statements that say, "If you ask anything in my name" (John 14:14), or "If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14).

Such promises have led to many teachings on prayer that say that if you can (by whatever method the teacher recommends) have full confidence that your prayer is going to be answered, then it will be. Such teachings considers only the *already* of prayer. But those kinds of approaches to prayer neglect the very clear *not yet* that's also in Scripture.

**Not yet:** "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:26-27). So we don't know how to pray, but the Holy Spirit is somehow sending up unspoken prayers to God, and the Father knows what we need.

That seems to be quite different from the name-it-and-claim-it approach, or praying boldly because you know what God's going to do: he's going to give you exactly what you ask.

We must not to go entirely in one direction or the other. Even though it's uncomfortable at times to live in the tension between the two, that's the only place to live, to realize that there are tremendous promises of what can already happen through prayer, and to also realize there is a not yet. There is a muddledness where we don't always know God's will. We don't always know and have the boldness to ask in Christ's name because we don't know if we can attach Christ's name to that request. So prayer has this already and not yet dimension to it.

## **Healing**

**Already:** When it comes to prayers of healing or expectations of miracles, when you read the Gospels you find that "Jesus healed all the sick" (Matthew 8:16). And when you read in Acts

about the apostles, there are tremendous things happening. "Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed" (Acts 5:16). "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul" (Acts 19:11). These tremendous miracles of healing are something that has already happened. They're not things that are only going to happen when Jesus comes again. These things happened the first time he came. These things happened through his apostles and many of his early followers. So we cannot just say, "Well, that's something way off in the future." These things have already happened.

**Not yet:** But there was a not yet as well. Paul did many mighty miracles. But when Timothy had chronic stomach problems, what did Paul do? Did he say, "The Lord Jesus heals you, Timothy, and liberates you to go on with your ministry"? No, he said, "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses" (1 Timothy 5:23). Or when Paul is talking about some dear colleagues in ministry, he says, "I left Trophimus sick in Miletus" (2 Timothy 4:20). How in the world can you leave Trophimus, your fellow worker, sick in Miletus when all you've got to do is say, "Be healed"? That seems pretty simple. But the New Testament has a mix of some people being miraculously healing, and others not.

Once again, it is a mistake to dive into one side or the other just because either of those poles is more comfortable intellectually and a easier to live with practically. You can say, "If you just have enough faith, it's going to happen." And then if somebody doesn't have it happen, you say, "You must not have had enough faith." That's a pretty easy position intellectually, but it's very devastating to those to whom you say it.

The opposite is to keep expectations low: "Miraculous healings don't happen anymore." In the teaching of cessationism, God doesn't give the same supernatural gifts that he used to give or do the same supernatural miracles that he used to do in the era of Christ and the apostles. That is an intellectually settled way of doing things and maybe an easy way to live with it as well. If you don't expect much, you're never disappointed. If you never expect healings and then they don't happen, at least you didn't get your hopes up.

I believe the way to live is to remain in the tension, to believe that yes, God can and still does do mighty miracles, but not all the time.

Only when Christ comes again will the great miracle of full resurrection bring complete healing to all and everybody. In the meantime, some of us are going to live with illnesses that we wish were gone, and they don't leave. Even when that happens, should you say, "I'm turning that into a theology. I have not been healed. Several other people whom I love have not been healed. Therefore, I believe healings stopped in the era of the apostles"? You really shouldn't draw too strong a conclusion based on your own experience, because sometimes your own experience can mislead you. The Lord might have great miracles in store for you too, and you dismissed the possibility too quickly. So when it comes to healing, you've got to live in this tension that God does mighty things, but he doesn't do them always or every time that we ask for them.

## Guidance

**Already:** When it comes to guidance, the apostle writes, “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). When you have the Holy Spirit, God gives you this mind of Christ, and he promises to lead you and guide you throughout your life. Sometimes there is very specific, particular guidance. The apostle Paul was prevented by the Holy Spirit from going to one place. Then he was prevented from going another place, and he knew it was from the Holy Spirit. Then he had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). Right away Paul knew, “This is the Holy Spirit. This is God’s guidance. And we’re off to Macedonia.” Already in this life, there is clear guidance through the Holy Spirit.

**Not yet:** Paul writes to the Corinthians that he had some plans. He was going to go to Macedonia and thought, “I’ll stop in at Corinth on the way.” He even sent the Corinthian Christians a message that he was planning to stop on the way. But he didn’t make it. He says, “I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia. When I planned this, did I do it lightly?” (2 Corinthians 1:16–17). It wasn’t that he was careless. He planned on it but couldn’t do it. So what happened to the divine guidance? Sometimes God tells you exactly what’s coming next and what to do next. But sometimes he doesn’t. You make your plans, and some of those plans come true and some of them don’t. Planning is a good thing, but whenever you make your plans, be careful to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that” (James 4:15).

You can live in either of those poles if you want to. If you focus on *already* in God's guidance, you can say, “I’m always going to wait to do anything until I have a strong and clear prompting or direct word from God.” But that might result in doing nothing at all, or in playing mind tricks to convince yourself that God has given you clear guidance even though he hasn't.

If you focus on *not yet*, you can say, “God never sends clear signals like that anymore. He never gives the kind of guidance that he gave to the apostle Paul. That was the time of the apostles.” But specific guidance did not stop after the apostles. Saint Patrick had a dream in which Irish voices were saying, “Come and walk among us,” so the great missionary went to Ireland and helped bring the gospel to that island. So let’s not just say, “We read about this stuff in the Bible, but it never happens anymore.” It can still happen today.

Be open to the possibility of very clear and specific guidance in your life from the Holy Spirit. But don’t put every decision on hold until that kind of guidance comes, because there is an *already* and a *not yet* to the clarity of the guidance that God gives.

## Encounter

The final, and maybe the most important, area to consider is encounter. How much can I expect to know God or experience God in this life?

**Already:** “God made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). What a tremendous statement. He sent his light into our hearts, and we can see God’s glory in the face of Christ already.

**Not yet:** This very same apostle, writing to the very same church, can say, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Which is it? Do you see the glory of God in the face of Christ, or do you see a poor reflection as in a mirror? Mirrors were not clear back in those days. They were like polished metal. So which is it? Again, it’s both. There is an *already* in which God has revealed himself more clearly than people prior to the time of Christ and the giving of the Holy Spirit could ever have known him. And there is a *not yet*, because we don’t know him nearly as well as we’re going to.

We need to be able to live in that tension, to delight in the light that God has already given, but not to settle. Just because we’re not going to see everything until we see him face to face does not mean we’re not going to see more in this life, or experience more, or draw closer to him, or grow greater in love for him and in experience of his love for us.

### **Healthy realism**

When we live in the *already* and the *not yet*, we need healthy realism.

First of all, treasure what’s already been given in the first coming of Christ. So much has been given, forgiveness of sins, life everlasting already coming into our lives now, the giving of the Holy Spirit, and all these other blessings that we realize through God’s new covenant since the first coming of Jesus.

At the same time, while we treasure what’s already been given, we have to accept that during these last days, this overlap of the two ages, there’s a mixture of kingdom glory with a fallen, fading world. There is the glory and there is the suffering, and they’re both here.

Another part of healthy realism is this: don’t be too quick to give up on others or to give up on yourself due to faults and failures, because we have not yet arrived. We are not yet in glory, and all has not yet been made perfect. That’s true of me. It’s true of every one of you. We’re not perfectly healthy. We’re not perfectly free from sin. And we need to deal with each other very graciously and with a great deal of acceptance in the meantime, because we can recognize what God’s *already* doing in somebody while realizing that there’s a *not yet*, and sometimes a big and ugly *not yet* going on. That’s true of me. It’s true of you.

In all of that, we should expect and groan for Jesus to return and bring heaven to earth fully. Until the redemption of our bodies, until Jesus comes again, the *not yet* looms large. So we need to long for our Savior's return.

### **Press on toward the goal!**

In the meantime, the apostle Paul tells us what to do: Keep seeking more each day. Keep pressing on! Paul writes, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10–11). He says, “That’s what I’m aiming

for. That's what I'm pushing for. That's what I'm straining toward every day of my life." And then he adds, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. One thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

That's how you live in the tension between already and not yet. You say:

Jesus has started something wonderful and it's unfolding in all these dimensions of my life. The **kingdom** is here, but it's not fully here. So I'm going to do what I can to help show God's reign in my domain, in the part of this world where God has given me an area of authority.

In dealing with Satan, I'm going to claim **victory**, trusting that there is someone greater in me than the one who is in the world. I know Satan is angry. I know he goes around like a roaring lion. I know he's furious that his time is short. But I am going to battle him with all I've got, and I'm not going to say that he's stronger than I am by God's grace.

When it comes to **resurrection**, my body is not going to be made perfect until then. But in the meantime, I'm going to take good care of my body. I'm going to offer it as a living sacrifice to God, and I'm going to live in the light of his resurrection.

I'm going to love the **church** with all of its faults, because it is also the display of God's wisdom.

I'm going to enjoy my **status** of peace with God and enjoy being adopted as his child, even though the public adoption has not yet been announced to the whole world.

I'm going to strain forward for **holiness** and more holiness. I know I'm going to fall far short in this life, but I can be a lot closer than I am now. And so, by God's grace and with the help of the Holy Spirit, I'm going to pursue holiness.

I'm going to devote myself to **prayer**, and I'm going to pray daringly. I'm going to pray for some things that, if I were living only by a *not yet* mindset, I would not even dare to ask for. But I'm going to ask God to help me grow in prayer, to discern more clearly what he wants to give, and then to be bold in asking for it.

When it comes to **healing**, I'm going to be able to live with God's will if he chooses to say no when I ask him to remove a thorn from my life. But I'm not going to assume ahead of time that he's not going to grant any mighty answers to prayer for healing. I'm going to ask, and I'm going to ask boldly, on my own behalf and on behalf of others.

I'm going to be open to the **guidance** of God. I'm not going to insist that every decision I make and every step I take be guided by an audible message from God. But I am going to seek his guidance, and I'm going to be open to the possibility that he will sometimes give me guidance

that I would not have gotten if I had not sought it, guidance that I would not have chosen if it had been left to my own thinking and planning.

When it comes to an **encounter** with God, I can thank God for the ways in which I have already experienced him and come to know him, but I am not going to settle. I'm going to be like Moses and say, "Show me your glory." God told Moses, "There are some things I can't show you because it would be too much for you," but God still showed him more than Moses had ever seen before. So when it comes to your encounter with God, don't settle for less than he is willing to give. On this side of heaven, it is always going to be through a glass darkly. Remember, the apostle Paul said he was seeing through a glass darkly even after he had been to heaven and back. If that was true for him, we are likely seeing much more dimly than that. But the point is that even if you have come to know God in amazing ways, there is so much of God to know that no matter how well you know him, there is still infinitely more.

Those who have known God the best often talk like they know him the least. It's like the greatest geniuses of physics. You get a high school sophomore who thinks he knows all there is to know about physics, and then you get the greatest physicists in the world who think they hardly know anything for sure, because they know how vast and astounding the universe really is. So it is in our walk with God. The better you come to know him, the more you can say, "I hardly know anything. I have a long, long way to go."

### **Confident yet groaning**

So in your personal life, keep pressing on toward the goal, and do so with confidence. The Bible says, "Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:5). You have the Holy Spirit. That is your tremendous comfort. "For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently" (Romans 8:24-25). So you have the Holy Spirit with you in this hope and in this expectation.

And you have these promises. "He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:8). "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). In the gap between already and not yet, God will keep you strong all the way to the end.

In the meantime, don't try to get too comfortable. Don't settle into a mindset of saying, "I can't expect very much. Not yet. Not yet. Not yet." And don't swing to the other extreme of saying, "Already, already," as though everything is going to go exactly the way you expect and hope just because you have focused only on the *already* dimensions of what the Bible says. Be willing to live with tension. Be willing to groan. You don't groan unless there is something uncomfortable going on. The groaning of Romans 8:22-23 is the groaning of living between the already and the not yet. Be willing to put up with groaning and tension between *already* and *not yet*, because that tension is pulling you closer and closer to the day when you will see him face to face.

## **Prayer**

Dear Lord, we thank you for your great work begun on this earth in Christ, launched and accomplished in such wonderful ways. We praise you for the finished work of Christ and the already initiated work of the Holy Spirit. And we look forward to the day, Lord Jesus, when you come again, when the Holy Spirit in all his fullness overflows us and fills us with the reality of God. We pray for that day. And we pray, Lord, that as we struggle sometimes with puzzlement and questions, trying to think things through and trying to live things through in this time between the times, in these last days between the already and the not yet, you will give us strength by your Spirit each day, that we may live and rejoice in you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## **Already But Not Yet** **By David Feddes** **Slide Contents**

### **Hard questions**

- Kingdom
- Victory
- Resurrection
- Church
- Status
- Holiness
- Prayer
- Healing
- Guidance
- Encounter

### **Expecting**

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (Romans 8:22)

### **Firstfruits of <sup>[ ]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>the Spirit**

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom 8:23)

### **Spirit as Down Payment**

God anointed us, sealed us, and gave the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts. (2 Cor 1:21)



### Already But Not Yet

- Kingdom
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### Kingdom

**Already:** If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. (Luke 11:20) The kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17:21)

**Not yet:** Thy kingdom come. (Matthew 6:10) I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. (Luke 22:18)

### Victory

**Already:** I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. (Luke 10:18) Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:15)

**Not yet:** Satan hindered us. (1 Thess. 2:18)

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. (Romans 16:20)

### Resurrection

**Already:** Just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:4)

**Not yet:** We wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom 8:23)  
The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Cor. 15:26)

## **Church**

**Already:** His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 3:10).

**Not yet:** I am astonished that you are turning to a different gospel. (Gal 1:6)

## **Status**

**Already:** Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:1)

**Not yet:** But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. (Galatians 5:5)

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness. (2 Timothy 4:8)

## **Holiness**

**Already:** We died to sin... You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (Rom 6:2,18)

**Not yet:** I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. (Rom 7:18)

Flesh and Spirit are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. (Galatians 5:17)

## **Prayer**

**Already:** Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mark 11:24)

**Not yet:** We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with unspoken groans. (Rom 8:26)

## **Healing**

**Already:** Jesus healed all the sick. (Matthew 8:16) Crowds gathered ... and all of them were healed. (Acts 5:16) God did extraordinary miracles through Paul. (Acts 19:11)

**Not yet:** Use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. (1 Tim 5:23)

I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. (2 Tim 4:20)

## **Guidance**

**Already:** We have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor 2:16)

Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." (Acts 16:9)

**Not yet:** I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia... When I planned this, did I do it lightly? (2 Cor 1:16-17)

## **Encounter**

**Already:** God made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ. (2 Cor 4:6-7)

**Not yet:** Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. (1 Cor 13:12)

## **Healthy realism**

- Treasure what has already been given.
- Accept that these last days mix kingdom glory with a fallen, fading world.
- Don't give up on others or yourself due to faults and failures.
- Expect and groan for Jesus to return and bring heaven to earth fully.
- Keep seeking more each day. Press on!

## **Press on toward the goal!**

- Kingdom
- Victory
- Resurrection
- Church
- Status
- Holiness
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- Encounter

## **Certain hope**

In this hope we were saved. (Rom 8:24)

He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:8)

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)