

A new dispensation

By [Jin S. Kim](#)

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The promise of Isaiah 65 is that God is doing a new thing: a new heaven and a new earth. In this new dispensation things are going to change big time. “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox.” No longer must one consume another to survive in this new world. The old ways—dog eat dog, human eat human, male against female, race against race, nation lifting up sword against nation—no longer apply.

If there were no God, human beings would have invented religion to keep from eating each other. We might be the highest-order mammals, but that still makes us animals. Like survivors of a plane crash, we are all just a tragic incident away from facing cannibalism as a real option. If there were no God, we would have to invent one so that we have the self-control to turn the other cheek, be exploited rather than retaliate, and willingly die rather than kill.

The truth is, God is our best hope for human maturity. Every person has some form of conventional morality – only God can serve as a divine enforcer who keeps us from exploiting another when we see an opportunity, killing another when we feel threatened, or eating another when we are starving. We’re just a circumstance away from becoming cunning, murderous cannibals.

But Jesus changed all that on Good Friday. Like Jesus, we must embrace the cross fully even as we anticipate the resurrection. But we need to distinguish between a longing for Jesus who makes all things new, and a fetish for novelty that mars our present society. We need to distinguish between anticipation and impatience. To anticipate is to believe that God will act decisively in God’s good time and judgment. To be impatient is to wrest the mantle of authority from God and to judge God as slow, uncaring, or even evil.

Once we give in to impatience, we have opened the door to violence as a means to an end, however good that end might be. Jesus will not wage war to bring peace. He will not adopt violence to end violence. In Christ the wolf and the lamb, the lion and the ox break bread together and commune. In Christ, “we will all be changed, in a

moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.” Our very impulse to impatience, vengeance and violence will be changed not by a violent inauguration of the last dispensation, but by the eschatological pull of God’s kingdom on all creation, old and new.

Violence itself was crucified in Jesus. When we follow Jesus unto death, on the third day we are raised in power to embody this new dispensation by renouncing the violent ways of the world and living into the call to be a new creation. In the risen Christ, we, the risen people of God, are the peace and justice that the world has been waiting for.

He is a candidate for moderator of the 2010 General Assembly of the PCUSA.

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