

# The Kingdom of God



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GRACE COMMUNION  
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*Living and Sharing the Gospel*

# The Kingdom of God

By Gary W. Deddo

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# **Part 1: Introduction**

## Introduction

Down through the ages, the kingdom of God has been the focus of much Christian teaching, and rightly so. As a result, controversy has arisen, particularly in the 20th century. Consensus is hard to come by in large part due to the volume and complexity of the biblical material and the many theological themes that intersect at this topic. Also at work are wide differences of theological commitments and assumptions that scholars and pastors bring to the task and that then lead them to offer a wide range of conclusions.

For the purpose of growing our faith in understanding, let's review the central issues related to the kingdom of God. I'll be drawing on the scholarship and perspective of others who share the same basic historic orthodox Christian faith—a faith that is grounded in Scripture and interpreted with Jesus Christ at its center. He is the one who leads us in our worship of the Triune God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This incarnational and Trinitarian approach, while faithful, will not directly answer every question we might have concerning the kingdom of God. But it will provide a secure foundation and a reliable guide for pursuing a faithful understanding.

Over the past 100 years, there has been a growing consensus on central issues among those involved in biblical studies who share those fundamental theological convictions that align with our own. Those convictions involve the reality and reliability of biblical revelation, a sound approach to biblical interpretation and the basics of Christian understanding (doctrine) concerning such matters as the divinity of Christ, the triune nature of God, the centrality of the gracious work of God fulfilled in Christ through the Holy Spirit, and the redemptive working of God in and through history to bring it to its consummation—its God-given purpose or *telos*.

While there are many scholars from whom we could benefit, two

companion guides seem to be particularly helpful in putting the myriad pieces of the biblical evidence concerning the kingdom together: George Ladd, writing from the perspective of biblical studies; and Thomas F. Torrance, writing from the perspective of theology. Both of these scholars have learned from many others and draw on and refer to them. They have done a tremendous amount of sifting through the larger body of biblical and theological studies. They give primary weight to those whose understanding is in harmony with those more foundational biblical and theological assumptions mentioned above and who seem to offer the most coherent, comprehensive and consistent arguments concerning the kingdom of God. I will point out a number of the most important aspects of their conclusions that contribute to our growing faith and deepening understanding.<sup>1</sup>

### **The centrality of Jesus Christ**

Ladd and Torrance have both made it emphatically clear that the biblical revelation, in no uncertain terms, identifies the kingdom of God with the person and mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ himself embodies and brings the kingdom of God. Why? Because he is the King of all creation. His ministry as mediator between God and creation involves kingship as well as priestly and prophetic elements. The kingdom of God is real and actual in and through Jesus Christ, since he reigns wherever he is. The kingdom of God is his kingdom. Jesus tells us so: “I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:29-30).

At another time Jesus declares that the kingdom of God belongs to him. He says, “My kingdom is not from this world” (John 18:36). So the kingdom of God cannot be understood apart from who Jesus is and what his entire mission is about. Any study of Scripture or any theological synthesis of the

exegetical material that does not interpret the kingdom of God on the basis of the person and work of Jesus Christ will be off-center. It will end up at a different place than one that operates from this living center of Christian faith.

Working from that center, what can we begin to understand about the kingdom of God? We should first note that it is Jesus himself who announces the arrival of the kingdom of God and makes this a comprehensive theme of his teaching (Mark 1:15). Jesus brings with him the actual presence of the kingdom, not just a message about the kingdom. The kingdom of God is operating wherever Jesus is—because he is the King. The kingdom of God has its reality in the living presence and activity of King Jesus.

Following on that point, then, what Jesus says and does conveys the character of his kingdom. The kingdom he offers has a character identical to his own. Jesus offers a certain kind of kingdom, one that embodies his own character and purpose. Our ideas of the kingdom of God then must cohere with who Jesus is. Everything about it must remind us of him. It should look, sound, act, smell and carry itself in a way that points us to and reminds us of him so that we get the idea that this kingdom is his—it belongs to him and has his fingerprints all over it. The implication of this connection is that the kingdom of God is primarily about the rule or reign of Christ and not so much, as it has sometimes been put, about a realm or a spatial or geographical location. Wherever Christ's lordship is operating according to his will and purpose, there is found the kingdom of God.

More particularly, his kingdom must have to do with his redemptive purposes and so it is bound up with his incarnation, vicarious life, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and return for us, and for our salvation. That is, his rule as King cannot be understood apart from his revelatory and mediating ministry of also being Prophet and Priest. All three of these Old Testament

offices (represented by Moses, Aaron and David) are uniquely combined and fulfilled in him.

The purpose of his rule and will is to bring his creation into and under his gracious protection and beneficence, that is, into fellowship, communion and participation with him by reconciling us to God through his self-offering. The ultimate result of being under his rule is for us to share in his rule and experience all the benefits of his kingdom. And this rule will be characterized by God's own love for us in Christ and worked out in us by the Spirit. Love of God and love of neighbor (in the way Jesus embodied it) will be marks of participating in his kingdom. The kingdom of God is a fellowship, a people, a community in communion with God through Jesus Christ and therefore with each other in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

But such love in fellowship, as shared in Christ, will emanate from a lived trust (faith/belief) in the redeeming, living God and his rule being continually exercised by Christ. So faith or belief in Jesus Christ will necessarily bring about involvement in his kingdom. This is because Jesus not only proclaims the nearness of the kingdom of God as he draws near, but he also calls for the response of belief (trust/faith) in its presence accompanying him. So we read: "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'" (Mark 1:15). Belief in the kingdom of God cannot be separated from faith in Jesus Christ. Putting our faith in him means putting our trust in his rule or reign, that is, in his fellowship-creating kingdom. To love Jesus and the Father through him is to love and trust in all his ways that are embodied in his kingdom.

### **Jesus is King of kings over all the universe**

The kingdom reign of Jesus Christ is universal and unrivalled. There is no corner of the cosmos that does not fall under his redemptive sway. So Jesus

proclaims that all authority has been given him in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18)—that is, throughout all creation. All things were created through him and for him, notes the apostle Paul (Colossians 1:16).

Echoing back to God's promises to Israel, Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords (Psalm 136:1-3; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16). The extent of his reign corresponds exactly to who he is: the one through whom all things were made and who upholds everything in existence by his power and life-giving will (Hebrews 1:2-3; Colossians 1:17).

It should be evident that this Jesus, the Lord of the universe, has no equal—no rivals, neither in terms of creation nor our great redemption. While there were contenders, pretenders and usurpers who had no power nor will to create or give life, Jesus has overcome and vanquished all enemies who refused his reign. As the incarnate agent of the Father in the power of the Spirit, this Son opposes all that opposes his good creation and God's good purposes for all creation.

The strength of his opposition to all that would maim and destroy his good creation and deviate from his glorious ends is proportional to his love for his good creation. Were he not to oppose that which would undo his creation, he would not be its loving Lord. Jesus with his heavenly Father and Holy Spirit is implacably opposed to all evil — everything that distorts, twists and destroys life and loving relationships in fellowship, first with him and in turn with each other and creation. To bring about his original ultimate purposes, all opposition to his rule and right must submit in repentance or be undone. Evil has no future in the kingdom of God.

So Jesus regards himself and is depicted by the New Testament witnesses as a redeeming victor who delivers his people from all evil, all enemies. He sets the captives free (Luke 4:18; 2 Corinthians 2:14). He transfers us from the kingdoms of darkness to his kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13). He “gave



himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Galatians 1:4). It is in this sense that Jesus has “overcome the world” (John 16:33 NIV). And in doing so, he is “making all things new” (Revelation 21:5; Matthew 19:28). The cosmic scope of his reign and the absolute banishment of evil under his Lordship describe beyond our imaginations the wonder of his gracious kingdom rule.

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<sup>1</sup> For the relevant works of Thomas F. Torrance, see his two volumes, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* and its companion *Atonement: the Person and Work of Christ*. For the relevant work of George E. Ladd, see his *A Theology of the New Testament*. We are under no obligation to slavishly follow either of these men’s teachings and we may depart from any particular point if compelled by good reasons that are backed by biblical revelation, and when there seems to be a better alternative theological understanding.

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## **Part 2: The Two Ages**

### **The kingdom's presence in two phases**

Biblical revelation conveys two things that are hard to put together: that the kingdom is present but also that it is future. Biblical scholars and theologians have often seized on one of these two aspects, giving either one or the other prominence. But a significant consensus has developed over the past 50 years or so as to how best to grasp these two dimensions of the kingdom. That consensus coheres with who Jesus is.

The Son of God became incarnate by the virgin Mary about 2000 years ago and shared in our humanity and lived under our fallen condition here on earth for 33 years. Seizing our human nature<sup>1</sup> from conception to death, thereby uniting it with himself, he went through our death to resurrection and then after some days of appearances, ascended bodily, that is, remained united to our humanity, to return to the presence of the Father and full communion with him.

The result is that, although still sharing in our now glorified human nature, he is not present in the way he was before his ascension. He is, in a way, absent from earth. He has sent the Spirit as another comforter to be with us, but he in his own person is unavailable to us as he was. But he has promised us that he will return.

Parallel to this is the nature of the kingdom. It was “near” and active in Jesus’ earthly ministry. It was so near and available that it called for an immediate response, just as Jesus himself called for a response of faith in him. However, as Jesus taught, his rule and reign had not yet come in its fullness. There was more to come. That time will coincide with Christ’s return (often called his “second coming”).

So faith in the kingdom includes hope for the coming of the fullness of

the kingdom as well. The kingdom was already present in Jesus and continues to be present by his Spirit. But its completion is not yet. This is often summarized by saying the kingdom of God is already, but not yet. George Ladd's careful work solidified this way of understanding for many orthodox/evangelical Christian believers, at least in the English-speaking world (also see the article at [www.gci.org/gospel/kingdom](http://www.gci.org/gospel/kingdom)).

## **The kingdom and the two ages**

The biblical understanding clearly distinguishes between two times, two ages, two epochs: the “present evil age” and what is called “the age to come.” We currently live in the “present evil age.” We live in hope of “the age to come,” but we do not yet live in that age. We are still, in biblical perspective, in the present evil age. So we live between the times. Biblical passages that clearly indicate this scheme are ones like these (the NRSV translation is quoted throughout this article):

- “God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come” (Ephesians 1:20-21).
- “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Galatians 1:3-4).
- “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life” (Luke 18:29-30).
- “So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous” (Matthew 13:49).
- Some “have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Hebrews 6:5).

This two-fold understanding of ages or epochs is unfortunately made less

obvious by the fact that the Greek word for “age” (*aion*) is translated a number of ways, including “eternity,” “world,” “forever,” and “long ago.” Those translations contrast time with endless time, or this earthly realm with a future heavenly realm. While the idea of different ages or epochs includes these temporal or spatial contrasts, the word *aion* actually brings out a much more comprehensive contrast between qualitatively different kinds of life now and in the future.

So in some translations we read that the seeds that grow in certain soils are choked by the “cares of this world” (Mark 4:19). But since the Greek word *aion* is used, we should also take it to mean choked by “the cares of this present evil age.” So also in Romans 12:2 we read that we should not be conformed to this “world,” but we should also understand this to mean not conformed to this present “age.”

The words translated “eternal life” mean also having the life of the age to come. This is made clear in Luke 18:29-30, quoted above. Eternal life is “eternal,” but there is much more to that life, compared to life in this present evil age, than just being much longer! It’s life that belongs to a whole different age or epoch. The contrast is not just short compared to infinitely long life, but rather between life in our current age that is still fallen—infected by evil, sin and death—and life in the age to come, where all traces of evil will be eradicated. In the age to come, there will be established a new heaven and earth and a new relationship between them. That will be a whole different kind and quality of life—God’s kind of life.

The kingdom of God then is ultimately aligned with the age to come, with the kind of life that is eternal, and also with Christ’s return. Before he returns, we live in the “present evil age” and wait in hope for the age to come. We continue to live under fallen conditions, where nothing is ideal—where everything is less than perfect even though Christ is risen and ascended.

The surprising thing, however, is that even though we continue to live in the present evil age, by the grace of God we can experience in part the kingdom of God now. There is a way that it is present here and now before the present evil age is displaced. Unexpectedly, the future kingdom has broken into the present without bringing God's final judgment and the ending of this age.

The kingdom is here and now foreshadowed. We are given foretastes of it. We experience some of its blessings here and now. And we can belong to it, which means belonging to Christ, here and now, even though we remain in this present age. This is possible because the Son of God came into this present age and completed his mission and sent us his Spirit, even though he is not bodily present. We enjoy now the firstfruits of his victorious reign. But there is an interim period (or an "eschatological pause," as T.F. Torrance liked to phrase it) before Christ returns, where God's saving purposes continue to be worked out in this age.

Building on the biblical vocabulary, biblical scholars and theologians have used a variety of words to convey this complicated situation. Many, following George Ladd, have expressed this contrast by saying that the rule of God was *fulfilled* in Jesus, but is yet to be *consummated* by Jesus upon his return. The kingdom of God is already present, but it is not yet here in its fullness. Another way to express this dynamic reality is to say that the kingdom has been *inaugurated* but we wait for its completion. This understanding is sometimes referred to as "inaugurated eschatology." By the grace of God, the future has broken into the present!

The implications are that the total truth and reality of what Christ has done is now significantly hidden from view because we are living under the conditions of the Fall. In this present evil age the rule of Christ is real, yet hidden. In the age to come, the kingdom of God will be manifested fully

because all the remaining effects of the Fall will be removed. Then the full effects of Christ's work will be gloriously and universally manifested.<sup>2</sup> The contrast being made is between the kingdom hidden, as compared to being fully manifested — not between a kingdom present as compared to a kingdom that is absent.

## **The Spirit and the two ages**

This view of the kingdom corresponds to what is revealed in Scripture about the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised and, with the Father, sent the Holy Spirit to be with us. He breathed on the disciples his Spirit and then on Pentecost the Spirit descended upon those gathered. The Spirit empowered the early church to be faithful witnesses to what was accomplished in Christ so that others may enter Christ's kingdom. The Spirit sends God's people out to the ends of the earth to proclaim the gospel of the Son of God. We thus join in the Spirit's mission.

However, we do not yet have the complete fullness of the Spirit and we are to hope in that completion some day. Paul indicates that our experience today is only a beginning. He uses the image of a down payment, pledge and earnest (*arrabōn*) to convey the idea of an advance giving that is partial, that is, a security for the complete giving (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5). The image of inheritance, used throughout the New Testament, also conveys the idea of having now in the present something that will surely be greater in the future. Note these words from Paul:

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will.... This is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory...so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints. (Ephesians 1:11, 14, 18)

Paul also uses the image of us having now only the “firstfruits” of the Spirit, not his fullness. We experience now only the beginning of the harvest, not its complete blessings (Romans 8:23). Another important biblical image is of having a “taste” now of what is to come (Hebrews 6:4-5). In his first epistle, Peter puts many of the pieces of the puzzle together when he writes about those who have been “sanctified by the Spirit”:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Our present experience in the Holy Spirit is indispensable, though it is but partial. Our experience of the ministry of the Spirit now is connected to a much greater fulfillment that one day will be fully manifested. Our present experience fosters a hope that will not be disappointed.

### **This present evil age**

That we are now living in the present evil age is crucial to understand. The earthly work of Christ, though finished and victorious, has not yet eradicated from this time, this epoch, all the effects of the Fall and all its consequences. So we should not expect the effects of the Fall to be obliterated before Jesus returns. The New Testament witness to the continuing fallen condition of the cosmos (including humanity) is pervasive.

In his high priestly prayer of John 17, Jesus prays that we not be taken out of our current situation — even though he knows that we will suffer and be rejected or persecuted in this age. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus points out that here and now we will not yet receive all that the kingdom offers, such as having our hunger and thirst for righteousness fulfilled. Rather, we

will experience a persecution that mirrors his own. Just as clearly, he indicates that our longings will be fulfilled, but in the future.

The apostle Paul notes that our true selves, rather than being obvious, are “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). He points out that we are earthen vessels, which contain the glory of the presence of Christ but which do not yet appear glorious themselves (2 Corinthians 4:7), but one day will shine forth (Colossians 3:4). Paul indicates that “the present form of this world is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:31, cf. 1 John 2:8, 17) but that it has not yet reached the final end.

The author of Hebrews admits that it does not yet seem that all things are in subjection to Christ and his people (Hebrews 2:8-9), even though Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33).

In his epistle to the church in Rome, Paul notes how the whole creation has been “groaning with labor pains” and how “we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:22-23). Although Christ has completed his earthly ministry, our current state does not manifest the fullness of his reign and victory. We remain within this present evil age. The kingdom is present, but not yet in its fullness.

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<sup>1</sup> In Hebrews 2:16 the Greek word *epilambanetai* is best translated “seize,” not “help” or “concerned.” See Hebrews 8:9, where the same word is used for God’s taking Israel out of the grip of Egypt’s slavery.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek word used throughout the New Testament, and emphasized in the name of the last book of the New Testament, is *apokalypsis*. It can be translated “revelation,” “manifestation,” “uncovering,” “disclosure” “appearing” and “coming.”



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## Part 3: Our Hope

So far, we've looked at how Jesus is central to the kingdom of God and how the kingdom is now present. Now we'll see how this reality is a source of great hope for those who believe. Note Paul's words of encouragement in the book of Romans:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us... for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God... For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:18, 20-21, 24-25)

Later, John wrote this:

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)

The message regarding the kingdom is essentially one of hope—hope for ourselves and for all of God's creation. The pain, suffering and horrors that we experience in this present evil age are, thankfully, coming to an end. Evil has no future in the kingdom of God (Revelation 21:4).

Jesus Christ himself is not only the first word but also the last word. Or as we say in the vernacular: *he has the last word*. Therefore, we need not worry about where things will ultimately end up. We know. We can count on it. God will put everything right, and all those willing to humbly receive it will know it and experience it one day. It is, as we say, "a done deal." The new heaven and new earth are coming with Jesus Christ as its resurrected Creator,

Lord and Savior. God's original purposes will be consummated. The glory of God will fill the whole earth with his light, life, love and utter goodness.

And we will be vindicated—proven right and not fools—for having counted on and lived by that hope. We can benefit now, in part, by living in the hope of Christ's victory over every evil and in his power to renew all things. Acting out of hope in the sure coming of the fullness of the kingdom will affect our daily lives, our personal and our social ethics. It will affect how we go through trials, temptations, suffering, and even our being persecuted for our hope in the living God.

Having hope will propel us to want others to join in and gain from that hope, a hope that does not depend on us, but on God's own working. And so the gospel of Jesus is not only a message about Jesus, but proclaims who he is and all he has accomplished—and that must include the hope in the consummation of his reign, his kingdom, his ultimate purposes coming to fruition. A full gospel must include notice of his sure return and the consummation of his kingdom.

### **Hope, but not predictability**

However, such hope in the coming kingdom does not mean that we can predict the pathway to that sure and complete end. The ways that God now interacts with this age that is still passing away are largely unpredictable. That is because God is far wiser than we are. When and what God chooses to do out of his great compassion, takes into account everything in all time and space. We cannot possibly comprehend that. God could not explain it to us even if he wanted to. But it's also true that we don't need any more explanation than what has been demonstrated in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. He remains the same, yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

God continues to act today exactly according to the character revealed in Jesus. One day, in retrospect, we will see this clearly. All that God does will

be incorporated into and consistent with what we hear and see in the earthly life of Jesus. We'll look back and say, "Ah, yes, I now see how, when the Triune God did x, y, and z, that was just like him! It has the fingerprints of Jesus all over it. I should have known. I should have guessed. I should have suspected. That's just like Jesus; it all leads from death to resurrection and ascension."

Even in the earthly life of Jesus, what he would do and say was not predictable to those around him. The disciples had a difficult time keeping up with Jesus. Though we have the benefit of hindsight, the reign of Jesus is still being worked out, and so our hindsight doesn't give us (and we don't need to have) foresight that yields predictability. We can be sure, however, that God will be true to his nature, to his character as the triune God of holy love.

It also might be good to note that evil is unpredictable, unreliable, capricious, random and arbitrary. That, in part, is what makes evil, evil. So our experience in this age will have some of that same character insofar as evil has some continuing effect. But God is counteracting and outmaneuvering the chaos and capricious conniving of evil—making it, in the end, serve his purposes—a sort of "forced labor." For God allows only that which can be redeemed, for in the end it will come under Christ's rule and reign with the establishment of a new heaven and earth by his death-defying resurrection power.

Our hope is in the nature and character of God, in his good purposes, not in being able to predict how and when God will act. It is Christ's own redeeming victory that provides those who believe and hope in the coming kingdom with patience, longsuffering and endurance, all with peace. The end is not up for grabs and is not up to us. It is secured for us in Christ — and so, in this present age that is passing away, we need not be anxious about anything.

We will sometimes grieve, but not without hope. We will sometimes suffer, but with a trusting hope that our sovereign God oversees all, and allows nothing that he cannot fully redeem, and indeed, in principle, has already redeemed in Christ's person and work. Every tear will be wiped away (Revelation 7:17; 21:4).

## **The kingdom is God's gift and God's accomplishment**

A reading of the New Testament along with the Old Testament, which leads up to it, makes clear that the kingdom of God is God's possession, God's gift, God's achievement — not ours! Abraham sought a city “whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10). It belongs in the first place to the eternal Son of God, incarnate. Jesus identifies it as “my kingdom” (John 18:36). He announces it as his work—his accomplishment. He brings it; he sustains it. When he returns, he will bring the full extent of his saving work to completion. How could it be otherwise, when he is the King and his work gives the kingdom its essence, its meaning, its reality?

The kingdom is God's achievement and it is God's gift to mankind. A gift, by its very nature, can only be received—not earned or established by the receiver. So, what is our “part”? Even to put it that way is a bit dangerous. We have no “part” in making it real, in actualizing the kingdom of God. But we do receive it, enter into it and begin to experience some of the benefits of Christ's reign even now as we live in the hope of its consummation.

However, the New Testament never speaks of us “building” or “creating” or “making” the kingdom. Unfortunately, such language has caught on in some Christian circles. Such misunderstanding is disturbingly misleading. The kingdom of God is not our project. We are not helping God, bit by bit, realize his ideal kingdom. We are not somehow actualizing God's hope—making his dream come true!

While telling people that “God is depending on us” may get people to “do

stuff for God,” such motivation tends to be short-lived, and often leads to burnout or disillusionment. But the most damaging and dangerous aspect of representing Christ and his kingdom this way is that it completely inverts God’s relationship with us. God then becomes dependent on us.

The hidden assumption is that God cannot, then, be more faithful than we are. We somehow become the main actors in realizing God’s ideal. God simply makes his kingdom possible and then assists us in making it real, as best he can, limited by our efforts. There is no real sovereignty or grace of God in this distorted scheme. It can only devolve into a “works righteousness” orientation that fuels pride or collapses into disappointment or perhaps even abandonment of the Christian faith.

The kingdom of God must never be presented as a human project or achievement, no matter what kind of sincere motivation or ethical conviction might move someone to do so. Such a misguided approach seriously distorts the nature of our relationship with God and misrepresents the extent of Christ’s finished work. For if God cannot be more faithful than we are, then there is no saving grace. We must not fall back into a form of self-salvation, for in that, there is no hope.

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## **Part 4: Our Relationship to the Kingdom**

### **Our relationship to the coming kingdom of God**

How should we understand our relationship, as believers, to a kingdom that the Bible says is now present, but is yet to come? Borrowing from Karl Barth, T. F. Torrance and George Ladd (others could be included) I think we can describe it this way: *We are called to experience now the blessings of and embody a witness to Christ's coming kingdom in partial, provisional and temporary ways.*

Our present experience of the kingdom, including our actions, as they are joined to Jesus' ongoing ministry in the power of his Spirit, stand as a witness or sign of the coming kingdom. A witness bears testimony not to itself, but to a reality of which the witness has first-hand knowledge. Similarly, a "sign" does not point to itself, but to another and far greater reality. As Christians, we bear witness to the thing signified—the coming kingdom. Thus our witness is important, but has certain limitations.

First, our witness is only a partial indicator of the coming kingdom of God. It does not, because it cannot, bear the whole truth and reality of the kingdom. Our actions cannot uncover the depth and scope of Christ's full reign, which, for now, remains largely hidden. Our words and actions may even obscure some aspects of the kingdom while pointing to other aspects. Our various acts of witness may, under fallen conditions, not seem to be entirely consistent with each other, or possibly even seem to contradict each other.

A perfect solution to every problem may not be achievable by us, no matter how sincere or committed or skilled. In some cases, every available choice may involve some unavoidable combination of advantages and disadvantages. A fallen world does not always allow a perfectly ideal

solution, not even for the church. So the church's witness in this age will be partial.

Second, our witness provides only restricted vision that looks off towards the future and gives a glimpse of the coming kingdom. But it does not bring into the present an apprehension of its total reality. We see "dimly in a glass." That's what is meant by saying it's "provisional."

Third, our witness is temporary—what is accomplished comes and goes. Some of the things done in the name of Christ may remain viable longer than others. Some of our acts of witness may only be momentary and not be able to be sustained. However, as signs, our witness need not be permanent for it to do its job of pointing to what is permanent, the eternal reign of God through Christ in the Spirit.

Our witness, then, is not absolute, not perfect, not total and not permanent, though it has great and even indispensable value just because its value is gained by being relative to the coming reality of the kingdom, which is absolute, perfect and eternal.

### **Two false resolutions to the complex *already-not yet* kingdom**

Some may ask, "What is the point, then, of our present experience and witness, if it is not the kingdom itself? Why bother? What good will it do? If we can't establish the ideal, why invest any great effort or resources in such a project?" So these people opt to do nothing.

Others may respond by saying, "God would not call us to get involved in anything less than achieving the ideal and realizing perfection. With God's help we can consistently make progress towards bringing the kingdom of God to earth." So these people act as if it all depends on them.

Responses to the complexity of the "already but not yet" kingdom have most often, down through the history of the church, resulted in divergent answers much like the two indicated above. This has been the case even



though there have been consistent warnings against both of these approaches, declaring them to be serious errors. Their formal names are quietism and triumphalism.

### ***Triumphalism***

Some who are not comfortable with merely experiencing and enacting signs insist that we do indeed build the kingdom—although with God’s help. They insist, for example, that we can be “world-changers” if only enough people would become really committed to the cause of Christ and would be willing to pay the price called for. If enough people try hard enough and are sincere enough and know the right techniques or methods, then gradually our world will more and more be transformed into the complete kingdom. Christ will then return as the kingdom is gradually brought to completion by our efforts. This is to be achieved, of course, with the help of God.

Although not overtly put this way, this way of thinking about the kingdom assumes that what we achieve is based on the *potential* made *possible* (but not actual or real) by the earthly ministry and teaching of Jesus Christ. Christ has triumphed in such a way that we now work out—actualize, or make real—the *possibility* established by Christ.

The triumphalist response tends to emphasize efforts that bring changes in the spheres of social justice and public morality, over changes in private relationships or personal morality. Enlistment of Christians in this program is often promoted on the basis of indicating that God somehow is depending on us. God is looking for “heroes.” God has given us the ideal, the blueprint, the plan of his kingdom, so now all it takes is for the church to make it real and actual. The idea is that we have the potential to realize the ideal—if only we are convinced that this is true and are really, truly and radically committed and ready to show God how truly thankful we are for all that he has done to make our reaching the ideal possible. We have the potential to close the gap

between the “real” and God’s ideal—so sign on right away.

Recruitment for the triumphalist program will often be fueled by the critique that the reason non-believing persons are not joining in, not becoming Christians or Christ-followers, is because the church does not do nearly enough to make the kingdom real and actual—to make God’s ideal way of life a present reality. The argument continues: There are so many nominal (in name only) Christians and outright hypocrites in the church who don’t love and pursue justice as Jesus taught, that unbelievers won’t join—and they have every right and reason not to! It is further claimed that the blame for why non-believers don’t become Christians is essentially because of half-hearted, compromised or hypocritical Christians.

The solution to this problem, therefore, is to get all Christians “fired up,” turning into *really committed* and *truly radical* people who begin living fully the kingdom life here and now. Only then, as Christians exemplify to a much greater extent God’s will and way, will the gospel of Christ become persuasive to others as they come to see and believe in the glory of Jesus Christ. To back up the point, people often (improperly) bring in Jesus’ saying, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” The implication is that if we don’t love enough, then others can’t or won’t come to faith. Their coming to faith depends on the extent of our being loving as Christ was.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Quietism***

At the other end of the spectrum, the quietist response, some have addressed the already-not-yet complexity by deciding that there is nothing much that can be done now. They assume the glory is all in the future. Christ secured the victory in his earthly ministry, and he alone will bring it entirely to consummation at some time in the future. We are now simply waiting for Christ to return and to take us to heaven, perhaps after some years of reigning

on earth.

While Christians will experience some spiritual blessings now (like the forgiveness of sins), creation, including nature itself and especially all social, cultural, scientific and economic institutions, are simply fallen, captive to evil. These things cannot and will not be saved. They have no good purpose, as far as eternity is concerned. These things can only be condemned by the wrath of God and brought to a total end. People for the most part have to be removed from this fallen world to be saved.

Sometimes in accord with this quietist approach, a kind of separatism is taught—we must remain apart and be disconnected from the earthly endeavors of this world. For other quietists, the fact of the hopelessness and helplessness of this world means you can take advantage of it in many ways, since in the end it won't matter—it's all going to come under judgment.

For yet others, a passive or quietist approach means that the best that Christians can do is be an example set apart, individually or in community. The emphasis is often on personal, family and church morality. But direct attempts to influence or change things outside the Christian community are for the most part discouraged or sometimes even condemned. It is held that directly engaging the unbelieving surrounding culture could only amount to compromise and ultimate failure. So personal devotion and moral purity are the dominant themes.

Often, in this mode, the end of history is regarded as the termination of creation. It is destroyed. Created time and space are no more. Some people, those who believe, will be rescued from its dissolution and be taken away to the ideal, purely spiritual reality of an eternal heaven with God.

These two extremes are representative of tendencies. Many sub-variations and in-between positions operate in the church. But most operate somewhere along this continuum and tend to lean toward one side or the other. The

triumphalist side tends to attract optimistic and “idealistic” personalities, while the main appeal of the quietist is among those who are more pessimistic or “realistic.” But again, these are large generalizations and are not meant to identify any particular groups that strictly conform to one extreme or the other. These are tendencies that in effect, one way or another, attempt to simplify the complexity of the already-not-yet truth and reality of the kingdom of God.

### **An alternative to triumphalism and quietism**

But there is a more biblically and theologically viable alternative that not only avoids either extreme, but regards the very idea of such an either-or polarity as false—as not doing justice to the whole of biblical revelation. The triumphalist and quietist alternatives, and the debates between their respective representatives, both assume that the complex truth of the kingdom puts us in a situation in which a tension needs to be resolved. Either God does it all, or we make it real. These two views make it seem we have to choose between being activists or being relatively passive, or figure out how to reside somewhere in the middle.

The biblical view of the already but not yet kingdom is complex. However, there is no tension that needs to be resolved. There is no balance to be achieved or some middle or moderate position between the two poles to be found. The present age is not in tension with the future coming age. Rather, we are called to live in this already-fulfilled-but-not-yet-consummated situation. We are situated now in a state of hope that, as we saw in part two of this series, the image of *inheritance* seems to represent quite well. We live securely now in confident possession of our inheritance, even though we don't have access to the assets we will one day fully benefit from.

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<sup>1</sup> This saying of Jesus (John 13:35) does not declare that others will

become *believers*, only that they will identify these disciples as belonging to Jesus since they love like he does. He's indicating that our love can be useful in directing others to him. That's wonderful. Who would want to miss out on that?

However, this saying does not assert that the belief/salvation of others depends on the extent of the disciples' love. On the basis of this verse, it is logically false to turn it into the negative claim that if the disciples do not love, then others *cannot* know they are disciples of Jesus and so *will not* believe in him. If that were the case, then God could never be more faithful than we are. It would not be true, then, that "if we are faithless, he remains faithful" (2 Timothy 2:13).

All who have ever come to faith have realized there are some inconsistencies and imperfections in the church as a whole and its individual members. They entrusted themselves to their Lord because they also realize the distinction between the One who is worshiped and the ones who worship. Consider your own faith and see if this isn't so. God is greater than our witness to him. God is more faithful than we are. This is no excuse to be unfaithful witnesses to the perfect love of Christ.

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## Part 5: Participating in Jesus' Ministry

### Participation in Jesus' ongoing kingdom ministry

Instead of triumphalism (activism that seeks to bring about the kingdom), or quietism (passivity that withdraws, leaving it all up to God), we are called to live hope-filled lives that embody real signs of the coming kingdom. Of course, such signs have limits—they do not build the kingdom, nor do they make it real and present. But signs do point beyond themselves to what is coming. They make a real difference here and now, even though they do not make all the difference. Signs make a relative difference, not an absolute difference. This accords with what God intends as the church lives in this present evil age.

Some who prefer either the triumphalist or quietist alternatives will object and say that setting out mere signs of the coming kingdom has little or no value. They say that signs are not worth the effort if they don't bring about lasting change—if they don't make the world a better place or, at least, bring others to faith in God. But what these objections overlook is that the partial, provisional and temporary signs that Christians can exhibit here and now are not to be regarded as separate from the coming kingdom.

Why not? *Because Christian action is participation in the continuing ministry of Jesus through the Spirit.* By the Spirit we join with the King in what he is doing here and now even within this present evil age—an age that is passing away! The God of the coming kingdom can break into the present and use the partial, provisional and temporary witness of the church. The church's witness makes a relative but real difference here and now, although it does not make the absolute difference that the consummation of the kingdom will achieve.

Light from the coming kingdom reaches us and lights our path in this dark

world. Like starlight piercing the darkness of the night, the church's spoken and enacted signs point to the coming kingdom in full noonday sunlight. These pinpoints of light make a real difference, even if only partial, provisional and temporary. By the gracious action of God, our signs and witness are used by God's Word and Spirit to put people into contact with Christ and his coming kingdom.

God is at work even now before the kingdom reaches its consummation. We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us (2 Corinthians 5:20). Preaching as used by the Spirit does enable people to enter into and become members of the coming kingdom, here and now! (Romans 1:16). Every simple cup of water given in Christ's name will not go unrewarded (Matthew 10:42). So we shouldn't regard the signs or witness of the church as being ethereal, mere symbols or gestures towards something absent and not yet real.

Christ joins our sign-work to his—using our witness to draw people into relationship with himself, then to come under his lordship, where they experience his joy, peace and hope in his final reign. This is so even though those signs do not convey the whole truth of the coming reality, but only point to it. They point forward as well as back to Jesus Christ, who has become Savior and King over all creation in his earthly life and ministry.

These signs are not mere ideas, words, concepts or individual, private, spiritual experiences. Christian signs embody, in time and space, in flesh and blood, a witness to who Jesus is and the nature of his coming kingdom. They take time and money and effort and skill, thought and planning, individual and corporate coordination. God can and does use them by his Spirit to serve a purpose—an actual introduction of persons to God in Christ. Such an introduction bears fruit in conversion that is evidenced in repentance and faith, and in lives lived out in hope of the coming kingdom.

So we commit to our Lord's use our time, energy, resources, vocations and leisure. We allow concerns about our current world to take concrete shape in activities, events, involvement and engagement with one another within our church communities. But they also take shape in relation to those who are not yet part of those communities.

Our embodied witness to Jesus can be personal and verbal, but it also should be public and social. We should make use of whatever resources we have at our disposal so that with everything we have, do and say, we broadcast on every channel available to us the same message of who God in Christ is and that his rule and reign is sure and is coming. We live now, even under fallen conditions, in communion with Christ and in hope of the full manifestation of his Lordship. We live in the hope of a renewed and thus a new heaven and earth in the age to come. We live in this age as if it were passing away—because under the impact of Jesus Christ, it is! We live now as if the kingdom is coming—because it is!

So our embodied Christian witness, although partial, provisional and temporary, is real in the sense that it affects our current situation and all our relationships, even if it does not embody itself the full reality of the coming kingdom that is not yet fully here. It is real in the sense that by the grace of God, we participate, in mustard-seed type of ways, in what God is now doing by the Spirit to point people to Jesus Christ and his coming kingdom. We can today experience some of the blessings of the reign of Christ and his kingdom at both the personal and social dimensions of life, as God allows.

### **The real manifested**

To fill this out just a bit more, we can note that our actions do not establish or vindicate the reality of Christ's lordship, rule and reign. God—Father, Son and Spirit—has already done that. The coming kingdom is real and fulfilled. Its coming has been guaranteed to us. We can count on it, and



its coming doesn't depend on us. This is a work of God.

So if we, by our witness—by our embodied signs—do not actualize the kingdom of God nor make it progressively more real, what do we accomplish? The answer is that our embodied signs make manifest in small bits and pieces the coming kingdom. Our purpose and privilege now is simply and profoundly to be, in word and deed, witnesses to the reality of the kingdom!

What then will the end, the return of Christ, accomplish? His return does not make the kingdom finally real, as though it was only a potential up to the time of his return. It is, right now, fully real, actual. Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior now. He is reigning. But that kingdom is now hidden. The full effects of his reign are not exhibited in the present evil age. When Christ returns, the reality of the kingdom will then be fully manifested—be made obvious, will have its full effect. Christ's second coming or appearance (his *parousia*) will be a revelation, manifestation, uncovering (an *apokalypsis*) of the truth and reality of who he is and what he has accomplished.

At that time, the truth and reality of who Christ is and what he has done for us and our salvation will be revealed to all. It will amount to the final unveiling of what took place in the Person and work of Christ. The glory of it all will shine forth everywhere so that it will have its full effect. The time for partial, provisional and temporary witness will be completed. The kingdom of God will no longer be hidden at all. We will enter the new heavens and earth. There will be no more need for witness, for we will all stand before the reality itself. That's what Christ's return will accomplish.

So the Christian life is not about making actual the potential of the kingdom of God. We are not tasked with closing the gap between the reality of the fallen world and the ideal of God's kingdom on earth so that by our efforts God's ideal finally supplants the reality of the broken and rebellious

creation. No, the reality is that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, and his kingdom is real and actual—although now hidden. This present evil age is passing away. We are now living in a kind of unreality, with a corrupted, twisted, distorted form of God’s good creation that Christ has won back, being victorious over the powers of evil and putting it back on track to serve its original purpose, to reach God’s final intention.

Through Christ, the entire creation is being freed from its bondage and groaning (Romans 8). Christ is making all things new. That is the decisive and determining reality. But that reality is yet to be fully manifest. Nevertheless, we can bear witness now in partial, provisional and temporary ways in every area of life to that coming reality as God’s Spirit moves us. In doing so, we are not bearing witness to a possibility, especially one that we make real, but to Christ and his kingship, which will be fully manifested one day. That reality is our sure hope—one that we live by today and every day.

### **The civic and political spheres**

What are the civic and political implications for Christians who acknowledge Christ’s Lordship and hold the hope of the coming kingdom? The biblical revelation does not support the idea of a Christian “takeover” of any political party or any nation or institution outside the worshiping community. But neither does it call for non-involvement—what is called “separatism.”

Christ prayed that we not be taken out of this fallen and corrupted world (John 17:15). Members of ancient Israel, when in exile in a foreign land, were told to seek the welfare of the cities they inhabited (Jeremiah 29:7). Daniel served God in the midst of a pagan culture and contributed to it while being faithful to the God of Israel. Paul tells us to pray for civil authorities and to respect human authority that promotes good and hinders evil. He instructs us to maintain good reputations among those who are not yet

believing. These admonitions indicate contact, involvement and even responsibility to our common citizenship and institutions, not complete separation.

Biblical teaching indicates that we are citizens of this age. But, at the same time, it announces that we are, more importantly, citizens of God's kingdom. So Paul proclaims in his letters: "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19), and says, "Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20).

Christians have a new citizenship that takes unrivaled precedence over any current earthly citizenship. However, it does not obliterate our old citizenship. When jailed, Paul did not repudiate his Roman citizenship, but made use of it to secure his release. As Christians, our old citizenship is radically relativized—brought into submission to Christ's reign. Here again we meet a complex situation; one that can lure us to seek a resolution or attempt a simplification. But faith, hope and love lead us to live in the complexity for the sake of our witness to the kingdom and the reign of Christ.

### **Dual citizenship**

Following Karl Barth's synthesis of biblical teaching, and mindful of church teaching down through the ages, it seems that those who belong to Christ and his kingdom in this present age simultaneously belong to two very distinct communities. We have dual citizenship. This complex situation seems unavoidable, because it aligns with the truth that there are two ages that overlap, but only one that will, in the end, prevail, namely, the age to come.

Each of our citizenships has unavoidable responsibilities, and there is no guarantee that they won't come into conflict. There is especially no guarantee

that there will be no cost involved in seeking to be responsible to both. So Jesus tells his disciples, “As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them” (Mark 13:9). Similar situations took place throughout the book of Acts, mirroring what happened to Jesus himself. So conflicts may arise between our dual citizenships that may be hard if not impossible to entirely resolve in this present age.

### **Relating the dual responsibilities around the one true center**

It is important to discern how these two sets of responsibilities are properly interrelated. It is usually not helpful to think of them as competing, even if at times they come into conflict. Nor is it helpful to regard them as being ordered in a hierarchical layering, where there is always a first and then, subsequently, a second or third action or decision called for after the prior things are fully taken care of. In that case, many if not most secondary things will end up being neglected, rarely attended to.

Nor is it useful to use a slightly different hierarchical scheme—thinking that the secondary things are to be pursued in a way separate from the primary or first things. In this scheme, we make sure we take care of the first things of the church community, and then we also take care of the secondary things in the civic community, as if the secondary things are relatively independent, having their own norms or standards, ends or aims that determine what responsibility looks like in that sphere outside the church. Such an approach amounts to a compartmentalization that doesn’t do justice to the fact that the kingdom has broken into this age and so we live now between the times, in the overlap.

The first things of the church’s witness always influence and shape how we engage the secondary things of our earthly commonwealth. The two sets

of responsibilities overlap one another, with our hope and witness to the coming kingdom informing all we do, whether primary or secondary.

Given the lordship of Christ, the unity of God's purpose for all creation and the consummation of all things under Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, God's single purpose stands at the center of all reality—at the center of both communities to which we belong.<sup>1</sup> All human activity ought to be arranged, organized, ordered and even made to serve that center.

Think of the Triune God as being at the center of a series of circles all sharing that same center. Jesus Christ, with his coming kingdom, is this center. The church, which belongs to Christ, knows and worships him alone, stands in the innermost circle surrounding the center. The church knows this center. It knows the character of the coming kingdom. It has a sure foundation for its hope and a grip on the nature of love and righteousness and justice and even of genuine human community in Christ. Its ministry is to proclaim that center and invite others to come into that innermost circle, because that's the source of their life and hope.

All should belong to both communities! The center of their existence is the center of the church's existence, even if their current allegiance is only and primarily to the wider civic community. God in Christ according to his purposes is the center of all created reality, of both communities. Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of all creation—of every power and authority, whether they know it or not.

The civic community outside the church can be thought of as a surrounding circle located at a greater distance from the center than the inner circle of the church community. It does not know or acknowledge the center, and its God-given mission is not to proclaim that center. Its purpose is not to become or replace the church community (as was attempted by Nazi Germany and assented to by the leaders of the German state church).

Nor is the church to become the larger community, taking over its functions. But the surrounding civic community (even though it does not know it) does have the same center, and its destiny is bound up entirely with Jesus, who is Lord over all time and space, over all history and all authority. Our common civic community is not independent of the same center, the same living reality which the church acknowledges and gives ultimate allegiance to.

So the church's responsibility, with its individual members who live in both circles, is to inform and continually remind that wider circle of the central reality of Jesus and his coming reign. It does so by seeking to embody within that wider community ways of acting, functioning, being, and relating that, although indirectly, point to that same central reality. These ways, embodied in the wider circle of responsibility, will have a resonance or be analogous to the ways of the church. But they will only be able to reflect them indirectly, dimly and likely inconsistently — and not without some ambiguity. But that is to be expected. The wider community is not the church and is not expected to be the church. But it is to continually benefit from the church as its members seek to be responsible to it also, as unto the Lord.

### **Analogous signs of preservation**

The fact that we are operating in this present evil age will be especially evident in this wider sphere of citizenship to those who hope in the age to come and know and worship the Living Center. The theological foundations and spiritual resources of open communion with God through Christ will not be apparent or made readily available through those civic activities dedicated to serving the surrounding community. But the practices, standards, principles, rules, laws, ways of being and relating in that wider sphere can more or less be aligned with or become somewhat parallel to the life God has for us in Christ.

Christian influence will seek to engage the wider sphere of responsibility in a prudent manner, attempting to realize at any given moment the most it can of the patterns of organization and principles of behavior and practice that best align with God's purpose and ways, ways that will one day be manifest to the whole world. The church serves as a kind of conscience for the wider community. It seeks to prevent the surrounding community from falling further away from God's purpose and design for humanity. It does so not just through its pronouncements but through personal involvement that will also, no doubt, include personal cost. By word and deed, it serves as a kind of preservative, even though, at times, its wisdom, warnings and involvement may go unheeded or be rejected.

### **Infusing indirect signs of hope**

The members of the church can also inject into the surrounding culture social material products as well as patterns of organization and production that are informed by the gospel of Christ—as a kind of leaven, or light. But such a witness will only be able to serve as an indirect pointer that will only be analogous to the church's direct ministry and message concerning God in Christ and the presence and coming of his kingdom. These creative efforts, which serve as indirect signs, should not be substituted for the life of the church or for its central message and ministry. Jesus or God or Scripture will likely not be mentioned at all. The source behind these actions will rarely (if at all) be mentioned, although what is done or accomplished will have the aroma of Christ about it.

There will be limits to such indirect witness. It will likely be somewhat ambiguous compared to the church's direct witness and ministry. The results will likely be inconsistent compared to the church's primary word and witness. Sometimes what Christians propose for the common good will not be allowed or be severely restricted by various public or private powers,

influences and authorities. At other times these proposals may be allowed to persist in a way that leads to having wide, kingdom-directed impact. The ministry of Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship serving in state or federal prisons is a good example of this.

Just how much influence might be allowed is unpredictable. Some successes may be disappointingly temporary. And there will be failures. But those who gladly receive even these indirect witnesses that conform at some distance to God's will and ways, will be drawn by them to the heart of what the church has to offer. They will serve as a kind of pre-evangelistic preparation.

The primary responsibility of the surrounding civic community is to provide a good and just order so that, whether intended or not, the church can carry out its essential ministry as the church, and so that its members can be allowed to live out their indirect witness within the wider community. Much of its aim will be the establishment of the rule of law, of public justice. It will aim for the common good. It will protect the weak from being taken advantage of by the strong.

This seems to be what Paul had in mind when he described the proper responsibilities of the secular authorities in Romans 13. It may also reflect what Jesus meant when he said: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21, ESV) and what Peter wrote: "For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right" (1 Peter 2:13-14).

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<sup>1</sup> The following section makes use of much of the biblical/theological synthesis found in Karl Barth's little book, *Community, State and Church*:



*Three Essays*, especially the third essay, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community.”

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## **Part 6: The Church and the Kingdom**

Broadly speaking, three views have been suggested regarding the relationship of the church and the kingdom of God. The view that fits with the biblical revelation and with a theology that takes the person and work of Christ and the Spirit into full account aligns well with what George Ladd laid out in his *Theology of the New Testament*. Thomas F. Torrance has helpfully brought out some important implications for such a view.

Some have thought of the church and the kingdom of God as being essentially identical. Others have regarded them as distinct, if not entirely separate.<sup>1</sup> Grasping the complete biblical account requires a comprehensive survey of the New Testament involving many passages and subtopics, which Ladd has done. On that basis, he offers a third alternative, namely, that the church and the kingdom are not identical but that they cannot be separated. They overlap.

Perhaps the simplest way to indicate the relationship is to note that the church is the people of God. These people are the subjects of the kingdom, but they cannot be equated with the kingdom that is identical with the full rule and reign of God through Christ in the Spirit. The kingdom is perfect, but the church is not. The subjects are subjects of the King, but they are not the King himself and should not be confused with him.

### **The church is not the kingdom of God**

In the New Testament the church (*ekklesia* in Greek) is identified as the people of God gathered or assembled into a fellowship in this current age (the time since Christ's first advent). They gather in response to the proclamation of the gospel taught by the first apostles—those who were authorized and sent by Jesus himself. The people of God receive the message of the biblical revelation preserved for us and who, by repentance and faith, respond to the

reality of who God is as disclosed in that revelation. As described in the book of Acts, they are the ones who “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

At first, the church was made up of faithful remnants of ancient Israel who believed that Jesus fulfilled the promises made to them as God’s Messiah and Redeemer. But almost immediately, beginning with Pentecost, the people of God expanded to include all nations, tongues and ethnicities (*ethnoi*). The people of God thus became international, fulfilling God’s promises to bless all nations through Israel (Genesis 12:2-3) and to pour out the Spirit upon all people (Joel 2:28).

According to Peter, the church is an international priesthood for the sake of all the nations (1 Peter 2:9-10). God’s intention for this reconfiguration of his people was demonstrated at Pentecost by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon representatives of a host of the nations of the earth who had been drawn together in one place (Acts 2).

There is one church, one multinational people, meeting or gathering in numerous local congregations. Together they are the church or the body of Christ. The church gathers around Christ and his Word, being drawn by his Spirit as God works through those called to preach and teach. They then pass on the good news of Christ and his present and coming kingdom. This much is clear in Paul’s writings regarding the nature of the church (see, for example, Ephesians 4:4-6).

### **God’s people under grace, not the ideal people**

However, the New Testament indicates that this people will not be ideal, will not be perfect. This comes out especially in the parable of the gathering of fish in the net (Matthew 13:47-49). The church community, gathered around Jesus and his word, will eventually need to be sorted out. There will come a time when it will become clear that some who have been associated

with this community have not been receptive and responsive to Christ and the Spirit, but have actually resisted and rejected them. That is, some who have been a part of the community will not have come under Christ's rule and reign but rather have refused to repent and receive the grace of God's forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit. Others will be inconsistent in their response and receptivity to the working of Christ in submission to his word.

All will have to fight the fight of faith every day. All will be addressed and compassionately confronted by the Spirit's work of sharing with us the sanctification Christ himself worked out in his humanity—a sanctification that calls for daily dying to our old, false selves. So the life of this church community will be mixed, not ideal, not pure. The church will therefore continually live in God's grace. It will be the first to repent—and be continually renewed and restored.

Much of the instruction given to the church throughout the New Testament indicates an ongoing process of renewal that includes repentance, faith, growth in understanding, prayer, resisting temptation, correction and restoration. None of this would be needed if the church were expected to manifest the ideal now. The shape of this dynamic life of growth fits well with the idea that the kingdom of God is not manifested in its fullness in this age. The people of God are those who wait in hope—their lives are hidden in Christ (Colossians 3:3), often looking now like ordinary earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). We too are waiting to enter into our full and complete salvation.

### **The kingdom preached, not the church**

It should be noted, as does Ladd, that the first apostles did not preach the church. Rather, they preached the kingdom of God. Those who responded positively to their message then drew together as the church, as Christ's *ekklesia*. This means that the church, the people of God, is not an object of

faith or worship. Only the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are objects/subjects of faith and worship.

The preaching and teaching of the church should not make itself the object of faith, should not be preoccupied with itself. This is why Paul points out that “what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5, ESV). The message and ministry of the church should point away from itself to the reign of the Triune God, the source of its hope—because God will establish his reign throughout creation, a reign inaugurated by Christ in his earthly ministry and in the coming of the Spirit, but yet to be consummated. The church gathered around Christ looks back to his finished work and forward to the completion of his continuing work. Those are the proper objects of its focus.

### **The kingdom of God is not the product of the church**

The distinction between the kingdom and the church is also apparent in that the kingdom is strictly spoken of as the work and gift of God. It cannot be erected or built by humans, not even those who are part of God’s new fellowship. In the New Testament, persons can receive, enter and inherit the kingdom, but they cannot destroy it or bring it to earth. They can do things for the sake of the kingdom, but the kingdom is never subject to human agency. Ladd is especially emphatic on this point.

### **The kingdom of God: inaugurated but not yet consummated**

The kingdom has been inaugurated, but is not yet fully manifested and consummated. As Ladd likes to say, it is “already, but not yet.” The kingdom on earth is not yet fully realized. All people, whether joined to the fellowship of the people of God or not, live in this as-yet-to-be-consummated epoch of time.

The church itself, the fellowship of people gathered around Jesus Christ

with his gospel and mission, does not escape the problems and limits of still living under fallen conditions subject to sin and death. Thus the church needs continual renewal and refreshment. It needs continuously to abide or remain in fellowship with Christ, living under his Word, being continually nourished, renewed and restored by his gracious Spirit.

Ladd summarized the relationship of the church and the kingdom in these five points:<sup>2</sup>

- 1) The church is not the kingdom.
- 2) The kingdom creates the church—the church does not create the kingdom.
- 3) The church witnesses to the kingdom.
- 4) The church is the instrument of the kingdom.
- 5) The church is the custodian of the kingdom.

In sum, we can say that the kingdom of God includes the people of God, but not all those who gather with the church at any given time are necessarily submitting to the kingdom-reign of Christ. The people of God are those who have entered the kingdom and are submitting to the rule and reign of Christ, but some of those associated with the church at any given time may not manifest very much of the character of the present and coming kingdom. Some may still be resisting God's grace offered to them by Christ in and through the church's ministry.

So we see that the kingdom and the church are inseparable, though not identical. When the kingdom comes in its fullness with Christ's return, the people of God will all come fully under his rule and reign, and their lives together will perfectly manifest that truth.

### **Implications of the distinction yet inseparability of the church and the kingdom of God**

There are many implications related to the distinction between the church

and the kingdom of God. We can only touch here on a few here.

### **Embodying concrete witness to the coming kingdom**

An important implication of both the distinction and the inseparability of the church and kingdom is that the church is to be the concrete and visible manifestation of the coming kingdom. Thomas F. Torrance was especially emphatic about this in his teaching. Although the kingdom of God is not yet fully manifest, the church in its common life is to embody a witness here and now in the present fallen age to what is not yet fully present. That is, the church is not simply a spiritual reality that cannot be grasped or experienced here and now, just because the kingdom is not yet fully present. By the Word and Spirit and in union with Christ, the people of God can give concrete evidence in time and space, in flesh and blood, to the watching world of the character of the coming kingdom.

The church will not do this completely or perfectly or permanently. However, since Christ has been victorious over sin, evil and death itself, and since we can have real hope in the coming kingdom, then by the power of the Spirit in union with Christ, the blessing of the coming kingdom can be given form and shape by the people of God.

The primary sign of that coming kingdom is summed up by love—love that mirrors the love of the Father for the Son in the Spirit and the Father’s love for us and his entire creation through the Son and in the Spirit. The church can bear witness to the lordship of Christ in its worship and in its common life as well as in its service to bring about the common good of those not a part of the Christian community.

The single and central evidence the church can give to this reality is its offering of communion at the Lord’s Table as interpreted by the preaching of the Word in its worship. Here, in the church gathered, we have the most concrete, simple, real, direct and effective witness to the grace of God in

Christ. At his table we experience the already-and-not-yet reign of Christ in person by the Spirit. At the Lord's Table we look back to his cross and forward to his kingdom as we share in fellowship with him, as he is present by the Spirit. At his table we get a foretaste of his coming kingdom. We come forward to the Lord's Table to receive Christ, just as he is proclaimed, as our Lord and Savior.

### **God is not finished with any of us**

Living between the times of Christ's first advent and his second advent has another important implication. It means that everyone is on a spiritual pilgrimage—in an on-going “becoming” relationship with God. God is not finished with anyone in drawing them to himself and in transforming them to trust him more and more and receive his grace and new life every moment of every day.

The church's mission is to continue to proclaim and live out as best it can the truth of who God in Christ is and to continually bear witness in word and deed to the nature and character of Christ and his coming kingdom. Yet, we cannot know ahead of time who will turn out to be weeds or bad fish (to use Jesus' imagery). God has to do the final sorting himself, in his own time. It is not up to us to speed up (or slow down) the process. We are not the final judges here and now. Rather, we are to remain faithful and patiently discerning while hopeful of God's work in everyone by his Word and Spirit. Staying “on message” and keeping first things first, majoring in the majors and minoring in the minors is important in this time between the times. And of course, we must discern which is major and which is minor.

Second, the church provides a fellowship of love. The church's primary “job” is not to insure an ideal or absolutely pure church by making its priority keeping out or rooting out those people who join in the fellowship of God's people but who are not yet believing or whose lives do not yet manifest much



of the life of Christ. It is impossible to do so in this present age. As Jesus taught, attempting to dig out the tares (Matthew 13:29-30) or separate the fish (verse 48) in this age will not bring about an ideal fellowship, but will instead damage the body of Christ and its witness. It will always amount to some “lording it over” others in the church. It will add up to a severe and judgmental legalism that will not represent Christ’s own ministry, nor faith and hope in Christ’s coming kingdom.

Third, the mixed nature of the church assembly also does not mean that just anyone can serve in its leadership. The church is not at root a popular democracy, even if some of its practical deliberations are conducted in that manner. There are clear criteria for church leadership noted in various places in the New Testament and practiced in the early church as recorded in the book of Acts, for example. Leadership is a matter of spiritual maturity and wisdom. Leaders must be prepared, and exhibit maturity in their relationship with God through Christ according to Scripture. Their lives will come to exhibit a genuine, joyful and free desire to serve Jesus Christ above all by participating in his ongoing mission and ministry out of faith, hope and love.

But finally and most importantly, leadership in the church is a matter of Christ’s calling by the Spirit and the confirmation by others to the Spirit’s calling or appointing individuals to serve in particular ways. Exactly why some are called and others are not will not always be known. So some, who by grace have great spiritual maturity, still might not be called to formal or ordained leadership! God’s calling to leadership or not has nothing to do with God’s approval of them or not. It has to do with the often hidden wisdom of God. However, given the criteria laid out in the New Testament, confirmation of their calling will include the matter of character, reputation and weighing evidence of their willingness and ability to equip, encourage and enable the members of the local congregation to trust in Christ and to join in his mission

as best they can at any given moment.

## **Hopeful discipline and discernment**

Living between Christ's advents does not rule out the need for appropriate church discipline, but it will be a discerning, patient, compassionate and even longsuffering discipline in hope for every individual because of God's love for all. It will not, however, allow members to trample fellow sheep (Ezekiel 34) but will take measures to protect them. It will give hospitality, fellowship, time and space for people to seek God and his kingdom ways, and time to repent, receive and grow towards Christ. But there will be limits as to what is allowed, so as to monitor and limit harm done to other members.

We see this dynamic at work in the early life of the church in the New Testament. The book of Acts and the epistles bear witness to this internal ministry of discipline within the church. It calls for wise and compassionate leadership. However, it will not be possible to attain perfection in church discipline. Nevertheless, it must be pursued because the alternatives — either no discipline at all or harsh, judgmental and self-righteous idealism — are both wrong ways to go, and unfaithful to Christ.

Christ accepted all those who came to him, but he never left them where they were. Rather, he directed them to follow him. Some did and some didn't. Christ accepts us all where we are, but in order to take us where he is going. The church's ministry is one of receiving and welcoming, but also of directing and disciplining those who remain to repent and trust in Christ and to follow in his ways. Although, as a last resort, dis-fellowshipping may be necessary, it should be done in the hope of future restoration, as we have example in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 2:5-7; Galatians 6:1).

## **The church's message of hope in Christ's continuing ministry**

Another implication of the distinction and connection between the church

and kingdom is that the message of the church must include speaking about the continuing work of Christ, not just the completed work of the cross. That is, our message should indicate that all the effects of what Christ has accomplished through his saving work have not yet been worked out in history. His earthly ministry did not bring about and was not intended to bring about an ideal world here and now.

The church is not the realization of God's ideal. The gospel we preach should not lead people to believe that the church is the kingdom, God's ideal. Our message and example should include a word of hope about Christ's coming kingdom. It should be clear that the church is made up of a mixed people, people who are on the way, people who are repenting and being renewed and restored to faith, hope and love.

The church, then, is a herald of that coming kingdom, of the fruit guaranteed by Christ himself, crucified and resurrected. The church is the people who live in the presence of the kingdom by the grace of God each day and in hope of the consummation of Christ's rule and reign in the future.

### **Repenting of idealism to take up hope in the coming kingdom**

Too many have gotten the idea that Jesus came to set up here and now an ideal people or to establish an ideal world. The church itself may have given this impression, perhaps thinking that is what Jesus intended. It may be that much of the unbelieving world rejects the gospel because the church has failed to achieve the ideal community or world.

Many seem to believe that Christianity offers a form of idealism—but then they notice that such idealism has failed to be realized. Consequently, some reject Christ and his gospel because they're looking for an established ideal, or at least one that can be realized soon, and find that the church doesn't have this to offer. Some will want the ideal now, instantly or nothing at all.

Others may reject Christ and his gospel because they have given up altogether and have already lost hope in everyone and everything, including the church. Perhaps some have left the community of faith because the church did not realize an ideal they thought God was going to help his people accomplish. Those making this assumption—which amounts to identifying the church with the kingdom—will conclude that either God failed (perhaps by not helping his people enough), or that his people failed (possibly by not trying hard enough). In either case, the ideal wasn't realized, so for many there seems to be no reason for continuing to be a part of this community.

But Christianity is not about becoming ideal people who realize an ideal community or world with God's help. This Christianized form of idealism insists that if we would just be pure enough, sincere enough, committed enough, radical enough, or clever enough with our strategies, we would make real the ideal that God desires for his people. Since this has never happened in the entire history of the church, the idealists know just where to place the blame—on others—on “so-called Christians.” In the end, the finger of blame often points back on the idealists, who find that they are also unable to meet the ideal. When this happens, idealism collapses into a heap of hopelessness and self-accusation.

The gospel truth is that by God's grace, the blessings of a future kingdom already have broken into this present evil age. Because this is so, we can share now in the benefits of what Christ has done before his kingdom is fully manifested and established. The primary evidence of the certainty of this coming kingdom is the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the living Lord. He promised the arrival of his future kingdom and taught us to expect now in this current evil age only a foretaste, a down payment, the first fruits, an inheritance of that kingdom to come. We must preach hope in Christ and his finished and continuing work, not Christian idealism. We do so by

distinguishing the church and the kingdom while also noting its connection in Christ by the Spirit and our participation as witnesses—living signs and parables of the coming kingdom.

In summary, the distinction yet connection between the church and kingdom means that the church is not to be an object of worship or of faith, for that would be idolatry. Rather, the church points away from itself to Christ and his mission. It does have a share in that mission: to point away from itself, by word and deed, to Christ, who leads us in our worship and who makes us new creatures in him in hope of a new heaven and earth that can only be realized when Christ himself, the Lord and Savior of the universe, returns.

### **Christ's ascension and return**

A final element that ought to contribute to our understanding the kingdom of God and our relationship to Christ's rule is Christ's ascension. Jesus' earthly ministry came to a close not with his resurrection, but with his ascension. Jesus left the earthly realm and the present age to relate to and interact with us in a different way. That way is through the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit, he is not absent. He is present in a certain way. Yet he is also absent in a certain way.

John Calvin used to say that Christ was “in a manner absent and in a manner present.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus indicates his being in some way absent by telling his disciples that he is going away to prepare a place where they cannot now follow him. He is going to be with the Father in a way he wasn't while on earth (John 8:21; 14:28). He knows his disciples may regard this as a disadvantage, but he instructs them rather to regard it as a step of progress and so of benefit to them, even though it does not represent the final and full benefit to come. The Spirit that was with them will now be able to be in them, indwell them (John 14:17).

However, Jesus also promises that he will return—and return in the same way that he left—in human form, bodily, visibly (Acts 1:11). His being away for now corresponds to the kingdom not yet being consummated and so being, in a way, absent. The present evil age is in a state of passing away, ceasing to be present (see 1 Corinthians 7:31; 1 John 2:8; 1 John 2:1).

All things are now in the process of being put under the authority of the reigning King. When Jesus completes that phase of his ongoing ministry, he will return, and the extent of his universal rule and reign will be in full effect—all of who he is and what he has done will then be evident to everyone. Every knee will bow and everyone acknowledge the truth and reality of who he is (Philippians 2:10). Only then will the totality of his work be manifested.

So his absence indicates something important that corresponds with other teaching. While he is away, the kingdom will not be universally acknowledged. The extent of Christ's reign will not be fully manifested, but remain to a significant degree hidden. Many aspects of the current fallen age will continue to express themselves and do so even at the expense of those who identify with Christ and acknowledge his kingdom and his kingship. Suffering, persecution, and evil, both moral (enacted by human agents) and natural (the result of the fallenness of nature itself), will continue. Evil will continue to the extent that it will appear to some as if Christ was not victorious and his reign not preeminent.

Jesus' parables about the kingdom indicate that our present experience will involve a mixture of responses to the Word, living, written and preached. Some soils to one degree or another will resist the Word being sown, while others will receive it. The field of the world will contain both wheat and tares. The nets will catch fish both good and bad. The church will be persecuted, and those blessed in it will hunger for righteousness and peace and a clear vision of God.

Jesus does not envision the appearance of an ideal world once he has departed. Rather, he takes measures to prepare his followers to expect that his victory and redemption will only be fully apparent some time in the future.

This means that living in hope is essential to the life of the church, but not with the misguided hope (idealism really) that, with just a little more effort (or a lot) from a few more people (or a lot), we will realize the ideal, bring in the kingdom or gradually build the kingdom. Rather, the good news is that in God's good time—at just the right time—Christ will return in full glory and power, vindicating our hope and regenerating heaven and earth, making everything new.

The ascension reminds us that we should not expect Christ and his rule and reign to be entirely manifested, but remain hidden at some distance. His ascension signals to us the need to continue to hope in Christ and the future outworking of what he accomplished in his earthly ministry. It reminds us to wait and live now confidently and expectantly for Christ to return, bringing with him the fullness of all his redemption as Lord of lords and King of kings, the Savior of all creation.

## **Conclusion to this series**

With these words of hope we bring to a close our series on the kingdom of God. As incomplete as it is, I trust the God of all grace may find a way to edify you with it.

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<sup>1</sup> For much of what follows I am indebted to Ladd's discussion, *A Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 105-119.

<sup>2</sup> Ladd, pp. 111-119.

<sup>3</sup> See Calvin's *Commentary* on 2 Corinthians 2:5:1-8.

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# Understanding the Kingdom

By Joseph Tkach

Jesus told his disciples to pray, “your kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). But what is that kingdom? And when and how will it come?

Noting the rather mysterious nature of the kingdom (Matthew 13:11), Jesus gave his disciples homespun illustrations to help them understand. He would say, “The kingdom is like....,” then offer analogies like a mustard seed that starts small, a man who finds hidden treasure in a field, a farmer who sows seed, or a merchant who sells his entire inventory to buy a pearl of great price.

Through such analogies, Jesus sought to help his disciples understand that the kingdom of God is “not of this world” (John 18:36). Yet, they continued to misunderstand, expecting Jesus to lead their occupied nation into a worldly kingdom that would give them political freedom, power and prestige.

Many of Jesus’ followers have continued to misunderstand. Some think that the kingdom is an event that pertains more to the future than to the present. Based on that wrong premise, they speak of a “soon-coming kingdom.” This mistaken understanding results from poor exegesis and confused interpretations of Scripture. Though they may not intentionally seek to diminish the triumph of Christ’s birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, this misunderstanding of the kingdom of God does just that.

## **Like a three-stage rocket**

Though no single illustration perfectly captures the full scope of the kingdom of God, one might be helpful in our modern context: *The kingdom of God is like a three-stage rocket*. The first two stages pertain to the present reality of the kingdom and the third to its future fullness.

### **Stage 1: Launch**



The first stage was the “launch” of the kingdom into our world through the Word of God becoming flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Being fully God and fully human, Jesus brings the kingdom of God to us. As the King of kings, wherever Jesus is, the kingdom is present.

## **Stage 2: Present reality**

The second stage began with what Jesus accomplished through his death, resurrection, ascension and the sending of the Spirit. Though he no longer dwells among us physically, Jesus dwells within us by the Spirit, knitting us together as one. The kingdom of God is now present—it has broken into all of creation. No matter which country is our earthly home, our citizenship is in heaven, for we live now under the sovereign reign and rule (kingdom) of God.

Those who follow Jesus come under that reign and rule. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10), he was instructing them to pray concerning both the here and now as well as the future aspects of the kingdom. As followers of Jesus we are called to bear witness to our citizenship in a kingdom that already is present. We are not to think of the kingdom as only something in the future. As citizens of the kingdom here and now, we are about our Father’s business, doing his kingdom work now. That work includes caring for the poor and needy and faithfully stewarding God’s creation. Through such works of kingdom righteousness, we share in the ongoing mission of Jesus, demonstrating the character of his present kingdom rule and reign.

## **Stage 3: Future fullness**

The third stage of the kingdom is yet future. It will occur when Jesus returns in glory to usher in a new heaven and new earth.

At that time, God will be known by all and will be seen to be who he truly

is—“all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). We have the sure hope that everything will then be put right. It is encouraging for us to dream and imagine what that will be like, although we remember Paul’s words that no mind is able to fully conceive of it (1 Corinthians 2:9).

As we dream of the kingdom’s third stage, let’s not forget the first two. Though having a future aspect, the kingdom is here now. Because that is so, we are called to live accordingly, to share with others the good news (gospel) of Jesus the King, and of his present and future reign in the kingdom of God.

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## About the Author

Gary Deddo earned his PhD at the University of Aberdeen in Aberdeen, Scotland, under Professor James Torrance. He helped begin the T.F. Torrance Theological Fellowship. He is author of numerous articles and books, including

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