

The Kingdom and the World

By

Curtis Dickinson

“And this is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (I John 5:4).

Jesus had a lot to say about the kingdom of God, which He said was “at hand.” He also repeatedly warned His disciples against “the world.” Modern proponents of a “millennium,” both pre-millennial and post-millennial, have convinced many believers that the kingdom has not yet been established and that, when it is, it will be a material, earthly government similar to world governments, except Jesus will be the ruler.

The “keys of the kingdom” were given to Peter, and on the Day of Pentecost he announced that the King had been seated on the throne and had begun His reign from heaven (Acts 2:29–36). Paul taught that Christians have been translated into that kingdom (Col. 1:13).

So we are citizens of the kingdom of God but live in a world that is extremely opposed to it. The prophecy is fulfilled that the King should reign “in the midst of (his) enemies” (Psa. 110:2). By “world” we do not mean the earth, the animals and what is considered nature, all which was created for our use, but rather the system of society which seeks to operate outside of God’s purpose and contrary to His law. It refers to the people who seek security in possessions, who measure success by material accumulation or social standing. One does not have to be into sexual immorality, pornography, drunkenness and downright corruption to be “of the world.” One is of the world when he puts human reasoning before God’s revealed truth. That’s called humanism, but it is also worldliness.

An example of worldly thinking is seen in the reaction to the danger of AIDS, as the world’s representatives began to advocate “safe sex.” Those who wanted to indulge in illicit sex were told to go ahead but to try to protect themselves from infection. Go on, violate God’s law, but shield yourself from the physical consequences. The only sure protection against AIDS is abstinence from sex except for married couples. But those who suggest this find themselves the target of the world’s anger and hatred.

The world insists that everyone participate in its system, and all who refuse to conform are considered incompetent, insane or enemies of society. Aristotle said, “Do not suppose that any of the citizens belong to themselves, for they all belong to the state” (*The Politics*). The world hasn’t changed in this regard. In 1986 it was reported that Texas Attorney General James Mattox was asked, “Is it true that the State of Texas owns our children?” “Yes,” was the answer, “It is true, and not only your children, but you too.”

Alice Bailey, originator of the modern “New Age” movement, wrote that the only sin in the New Age will be the sin of separateness. “To be separate, and to be exclusive will come to be regarded as the only sin” (*Exposing New Age Philosophies*, page 31). To a large extent the New Age is here. Don Bell reported in 1987 that a spokesman for the predominantly Jewish organization, the ACLU, said, “Our purpose is to wipe the last vestiges of religion from public life in America.” So far, their target for destruction has

been the Christian faith. Why this animosity against the kingdom of God? Jesus said, “The world hates me because I testify that its works are evil” (John 7:7). If the world hates the King, it should be no surprise that it also hates the citizens of His kingdom.

And what of the Kingdom of God? As the world is the system of society that operates contrary to God’s law, His kingdom is that system in society that operates according to His law and makes His purpose the basis of life. “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

Christ’s kingdom is composed of those whose allegiance is to Him, who recognized Him as the King above all rulers, and therefore to be obeyed in spite of the world’s customs, fashions or laws. The world is expressly said to be evil (Gal. 1:4); it has rejected God and stands in rebellion against Him. The way of Christ is not the way of the world, and those who are in real friendship with the world are at enmity with God (James 4:4). Jesus taught us not to seek the world’s approval, the world’s treasures and the world’s goals. Paul wrote, “And be not fashioned according to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” (Rom. 12:2). When one becomes a citizen of God’s kingdom, his hopes and aspirations are no longer centered in this life and this world or this nation. The world is under condemnation and will finally perish, while the child of God is forgiven and is destined for life that is imperishable in a new and eternal creation.

It follows that as a Christian grows in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and as he is transformed more nearly to the Creator’s image, his desire for this world and its ways will diminish, while his longing for the eternal will increase.

An appropriate question is: Does the modern church help to create a greater desire for the new creation, or does it build on natural desires and appeals of this world? In many congregations I have visited in the past two years, it appears that there is a concerted effort to build a church that fits into the world. It patterns its programs after the world’s entertainments, and sometimes a service is more like theatre or vaudeville than worship, with appropriate applause for good theatrical showmanship. It adopts the world’s music, encourages worldly goals, and tries desperately to make the world “feel at home” with it. It is more concerned that its minister/pastor/priest be acceptable to the world than that he know the word of God. In the words of Richard C. Halverson, “When corporate leadership—powerful people—become the model for Christian leaders...that is worldliness—the very antithesis of Christ’s model—the “suffering servant.”

Many modern church members act as though you are out of your mind to expect anyone to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” as Jesus instructed. One church member said that in spite of the fact that his union was advocating and practicing certain evil things, he had to go along with it in order to get more money. This is exactly the opposite of overcoming the world. Satan offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world if He would bow down and worship him. Today Satan offers the world to Christians and finds many quite willing to follow its pattern while remaining quite at home in the church.

Being Christian and fulfilling the purpose of God does not depend upon anything in the world, so we are told to “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world (I John 2:15).

As pilgrims and sojourners in the world, we are to hold forth the word of life, the truth of Christ, that we may be “seen as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15), but we must sit loose from it and not become attached to it. We must not allow its evil and corruption nor its ambitions, motives, and goals to have any place in our lives or to influence our character and actions.

But, someone asks, how can we survive in the modern world if we take such a radical position? Jesus gives the answer: “Be not anxious for your life, what you shall eat; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on...for all these things do the nations of the world seek after: but your Father knows that you have need of these things. Yet seek you his kingdom, and these things shall be added unto you” (Luke 12:22, 30–31).

The bottom line is this: Do we believe Jesus? If we resist the world and seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, will He keep His word? This is the test of our faith.

On one hand are all the fearful and unbelieving, who follow the world’s dictates, afraid of its disapproval, grasping for some tangible security from a world that is destined for destruction. On the other hand is the little flock, the kingdom lovers, whose purpose is to please God and live according to His system. Our ambition is realized every moment in our fellowship with God, and our future is the eternal creation “wherein dwells righteousness” (II Peter 3:13). This difference is faith, faith that overcomes the world.

.....
Copyright © Curtis Dickinson. Formatted and Posted by Ken Fortier Ministries. Permission is hereby granted by Mrs. Regina Dickinson to reproduce and distribute Curtis’ articles to as many as possible. This statement is to remain attached to this article for permission to be valid. Vol. XXIX, Number 9.
.....