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"Cross-Examination: Christ's Kingdom"

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Each month the "Cross-Examination" column presents a summary statement of a Reformed and Reconstructionist conviction in theology or ethics, and then offers brief answers to common questions, objections or confusions which people have about that belief. Send issues or questions you would like addressed by Dr. Bahnsen to the editor.

We Believe

Scripture teaches us that when Christ came into this world, He came to establish His saving kingdom among men. After His death and resurrection for the salvation of His people, He ascended to the right hand of God to be enthroned as King over all creation. In the course of time prior to His glorious return, Christ will gradually but powerfully extend the saving influence of His kingdom through the work of the Holy Spirit, with the result that the vast majority of men in all nations will come to faith and exercise a sanctifying influence in all areas of life.

In Matthew 12:28 Christ proved that the kingdom of God had come because He was casting out demons by the power of God's Spirit - thereby indicating that the strong man, Satan, had now been bound (v. 29; cf. Revelation 20:2).

The book of Hebrews tells us that because of His redemptive work Christ has been "crowned with glory and honor," having "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:3; 2:9). As the enthroned King, Christ looks for all the world to be subdued to Him. "But He, when He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God, henceforth expecting His enemies to be made the footstool of His feet" (Hebrews 10:12-13). Christ the Son is assured by the Father: "Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession" (Psalm 2:8).

Consequently, the kingdom of God will grow from small beginnings to become very large - like a mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32). It will permeate the whole of life - like leaven in the dough (Matthew 13:33). Christ has sent the church to disciple the nations (Matthew 28:18-20), and the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church as it is built up by the Lord (Matthew 16:19).

Eventually true religion will engulf the world, "from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same" (Malachi 1:11). All the ends of the earth will finally turn unto Jehovah (Psalm 22:27), and "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). In that day every aspect of life will be consecrated unto the Lord - even the bells of the horses will say "Holy unto Jehovah" on them (Zechariah 14:20). Justice will be victorious (Matthew 12:20; cf. Psalm 72), and the nations will be instructed out of God's law rather than learning war (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Examination

Question: But doesn't the Bible say that none of these things can take place in the fallen world until Jesus comes again? The kingdom of God requires God's king.

Answer: It is true that the Bible teaches us that sin, unbelief and rebellion against the Lord could not be defeated in this fallen world until the King should come. But it also teaches us that the King has already come - and did at that time establish His kingdom on earth. He did not leave this world defeated, abandoning a throne and any hope for the kingdom at the present time. He left this world victorious (Ephesians 1:19-23; cf. 2 Corinthians 2:14), precisely to be enthroned as the King over His kingdom.

To those who say "No kingdom without a king," we say "The King has come!" Just reflect on the stirring words of the hymn "Joy to the World." Let earth receive her King! Christ has come to make the nations prove the wonders of His love - and to make His blessings flow as far as the curse is found.

Question: Doesn't Revelation 20 say that the millennium - the time of God's kingdom on earth - will not take place until after Jesus comes again?

Answer: Actually, Revelation 20 shows us that the millennium began at the time that Jesus came the first time - when a powerful Messenger ("angel") from heaven came down and bound Satan so that He would not deceive the nations (Revelation 20:1-3). This is what took place at the *first* coming of our Lord. He came from heaven to bind the strong man, Satan (Matthew 12:28-29), and by the gospel keep him from deceiving the nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

Revelation 20 identifies the time of the millennium as the time of "the first resurrection" (v. 5). Jesus taught there would be two resurrections (John 5:25-29). The first resurrection takes place when those who are spiritually dead hear the voice of God's Son in the gospel and are raised to new life. Thus Paul spoke of believers who had been dead in trespasses and sins as now raised with Christ (Ephesians 2:1, 6). The second resurrection takes place when all men, the saved and the lost, are physically raised from the tombs for final judgment (John 5:28-29). So then, this current age - the time of the first resurrection - is Biblically identified as the millennial age.

Finally, Revelation 20 teaches that after the millennium is finished, those who have rebelled against Christ will be destroyed with judgmental "fire from heaven" (v. 9) - which is a familiar Biblical literary figure for the return of Jesus Christ (e.g., 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8; 2 Peter 3:7). Therefore, according to Revelation 20, the return of Christ will be after the millennium (post-millennial).

Question: How can we be expected to believe that this world will get any better when we see all of the horrible effects of sin and unbelief all around us today?

Answer: The same question could be asked about individual conversions and about individual growth in grace. When we see how ugly and powerful unbelief is in the unregenerate man, how could we believe that anybody could ever be saved and sanctified? Well, the answer in both cases is that God is sovereign, and by the powerful working of His Holy Spirit men can be regenerated, be given the gift of faith, and grow in holiness. If God can do this for one man, He can certainly do it for many. There is no limit to His power.

When we have little faith that God can or will do what He has promised, we need to turn away from our small conceptions and finite understanding and rest entirely upon the truth of His holy word. Scripture assures us: "Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even forever." Can we be sure? "The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this!" (Isaiah 9:7).