

"Cross-Examination: The Universal Lordship of Christ"

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen

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

Jesus Christ as Creator of heaven and earth is the universal Lord over all men and nations, and over all areas of human life. The Son of God also holds the position of universal Lord in virtue of His incarnation as the Messiah, His saving work, His death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God to rule over all the world.

Scripture teaches us that God ordained His Son to come into this world as His chosen Servant, endowed with the Holy Spirit, to bring justice to the nations (Isaiah 42:1). Already in the Old Testament there was the expectation that God would establish His King upon the holy hill of Zion (Psalm 2:6) and give Him the nations for His inheritance over which to rule (vv. 8-12).

Thus Isaiah prophesied: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called... the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever" (9:6-7). At the announcement of the coming birth of Jesus Christ, the angel said to Mary: "He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

When Christ came into the world he preached that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17) -- indeed, that the kingdom of God had come upon his hearers (Matthew 12:28). The church holds the keys of entrance to this saving kingdom (Matthew 16:18-19), although the kingdom itself -- Christ's rule as incarnate Redeemer -- extends over the entire world (Matthew 13:38, 41). After his resurrection, Christ proclaimed that "all authority in heaven and on earth" was his (Matthew 28:18), in which case the nations were to be disciplined, baptized, and taught to obey all that he had commanded (vv. 19-20).

In virtue of His office as Messiah and Savior, Christ is presented in the New Testament as the universal Lord over all men, over all the world, and over all areas of life. Hebrews 1:3-4 tells us that, after He had made purification for sins, Christ ascended and "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" -- and God "left nothing that is not subject to him" (2:8). After his ascension and enthronement, Christ's expectation was that all his enemies would be subdued under his feet (Hebrews 10:12-13). Paul says that "He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25), meaning that all things are to be subjected to him (v. 28). In Paul's perspective, God has raised Christ from the dead and made him to sit as His right hand, above all rule and authority; "and He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things for the sake of the church" (Ephesians 1:20-22). "God highly exalted him and gave unto him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:9-11)

There can be no doubt about it, then, that the New Testament portrays Jesus Christ the Redeemer as not only the Head of the church, but also "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Revelation 1:5). His saving rule breaks the power of sin and extends over all nations and men, including all areas of life, such as civil government. Christ is recognized and proclaimed as "the blessed and only

Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:15; cf. Rev. 17:14). Because Christ holds this position as universal Lord, all the kings and judges of the earth are expected to serve him (Psalm 2:10-12). The kings of the earth will render tribute to him and bow down before him; all nations shall serve him (Psalm 72:10-11, 17). Scripture assures us that even the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24).

Thus the Reformed faith teaches that Christianity constitutes not simply a perspective on a narrow slice of life (private, inward spirituality or the soul's eternal salvation) but is an entire world-and-life-view. Because Christ has come into this world as the incarnate Son of God, our Savior, and is now ruling over all the world as the universal Lord of men, there cannot be any area of life which is free from the obligation to submit to His revealed standards. Because Jesus Christ is the one and only Savior of men who is universal Lord, religious faith has implications for every aspect of human experience and all human activities. No man or nation is exempt from the absolute demand to bow before the King of kings and serve Him in all that they do.

Examination

Question: But Christianity shouldn't have anything to do with the secular affairs of this world like politics, for Jesus said "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

Answer: In this famous passage from John's gospel Jesus was speaking of the *origin* of his kingdom and authority, as the careful reader can clearly see from the end of the verse cited. Explaining that his servants do not take up arms to fight in his defense, Jesus said "thus my kingdom is not *from here*." The kingdom of Christ does not originate -- like that of Pilate or Rome itself -- from the created order, nor is it based upon the mere authority of men. It is "not of this world," but rather a kingdom granted from above, by God Himself. This kingdom does not advance by means of military power and threats, but through the power of preaching and bearing witness to the truth (John 18:37; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Question: You cannot expect the civil government to submit to the authority and revelation of Jesus Christ because that would be a violation of the "separation of church and state."

Answer: The scriptures which we have surveyed are abundantly clear that, in Biblical perspective, the state is not "separated" from the authority of Jesus Christ as universal Lord -- the "King of kings." To argue that the state cannot recognize and obey Jesus Christ in this capacity is to argue that Christ is not universal Lord after all. It is uncritically to accept the modern prejudice that civil government must be secular in character -- a viewpoint which diametrically conflicts with the infallible teaching of God's holy word. No human pursuit is literally "secular." All are to be consecrated to the service of Christ our Lord. "Whether therefore you eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). So a Christian citizen, whether a political or voter, must be guided in all his thinking and activities within the state by loyalty to Jesus Christ. This means obeying whatever Christ has commanded, whether or not it is the popular viewpoint of your culture.

Further Investigation

A three tape series by Dr. Bahnsen on the Kingdom of Christ (its nature, laws, and future) will be of great benefit in deepening the truths in this lesson. You may order them (\$15) from Covenant Tape Ministry, 24198 Ash Court, Auburn, CA 95603.

And if you would like to be on the mailing list for Dr. Bahnsen's ministry with the Southern California Center for Christian Studies, just drop a note to them at P. O. Box 18021, Irvine, CA 92713.