

Introduction

Jesus, our sovereign Lord and King, shatters the world's wisdom and reveals the new way of life in His New Covenant kingdom marked out by His New Covenant Law when He says,

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matt 5:38–48

But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from

him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Lk 6:27–36,

In these passages Jesus commands a new way of life previously inaccessible to man. This new way of life is enabled by Jesus' life and cross and the gift of God's Spirit that now dwells in His people empowering them to obey His commands.¹

It is absolutely vital that we take seriously Jesus' commands on nonresistance and love of enemies and live by them, for they are at the heart of what the Father has done down through the ages and what the Son does coming to earth to set to rights what was undone at the Fall. Jesus accomplishes this work nonviolently. Jesus comes and actively loves His enemies, you and I, blessing them, praying for them and doing good to them. He comes to earth, He dies and lives again now for His enemies who will come to Him in repentance. Loving enemies is what the Father and the Son do.²

Jesus' command forbidding resistance of evil men and His command to actively love enemies, as all He commands, first and most importantly glorifies the Father,³ and for us, as we walk in obedience to them, they are not burdensome,⁴ but a blessing and freedom.⁵

This new way of life also necessarily and fundamentally changes human relationships and the relationship of God's people to everything that refuses Jesus' way; in particular, our relationship to the state.

With active love of enemies commanded and resistance forbidden, Jesus cuts off participation in and support of principalities and powers that operate contrary to these commands.

¹Rom 8:12–14; Gal 5:16–24; Eph 5:18; Ezk 36:22–32

²Lest anyone think I do not believe in God's judgment let me make clear that an eternal lake of fire awaits those who refuse to confess Jesus as Lord and King living as He commands in His kingdom.

³Matt 5:16

⁴1 Jn 5:3

⁵Matt 11:29,30; Rom 6; Eph 5:1,13

Thus, nonresistance and love of enemies and their impact on our relationship to the state are not peripheral to Christianity, but at the very heart of our understanding of Jesus, the gospel, the church, ourselves as Christians and the world outside Christ. Understanding Jesus' commands are vital to our Christian life for what we believe determines how we live. Theology does indeed determine action. The failure to keep all of Jesus' ethical imperatives, even nonresistance and separation, has far reaching consequences, not the least of which are a shipwrecked faith, a failure to demonstrate God's love to the world, a failure to faithfully carry out the great commission, live utterly unworthy of our calling, give the world cause to slander the Father's and the Son's name, and ultimately, and most importantly rob God of His glory.

To put a very fine point on what I said in the above paragraph I also say that nonresistance and love of enemies are not suggestions but commanded (Jesus is not the Great Suggester), and if we refuse to live by them we are lawless with respect to Jesus' law and will not enter the kingdom of heaven, for Jesus said

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell – and great was its fall.

Matt 7:21-27

How is it that we understand lawlessness with respect to moral purity, adultery, theft, and so on, but not with respect to Jesus' commands to live nonresistantly and love enemies? Those who determine that nonresistance and love of enemies are not necessary choose to disobey some of Jesus' clearest commands. Personally choosing which commandments to keep is the very definition of heresy. Clearly, a great deal is at stake, namely, God's glory and our eternal destiny.

Sadly, ever since the early fourth century when Constantine merged church and state the vast majority of those bearing the name Christian have largely departed from biblical positions involving nonresistance, love of enemies, church and state, coercion, power and violence with tragic consequences for Christian practice morally, ethically, socially, economically and politically. The tradition from which these Constantinian innovators departed was the tradition held by the early church that obeyed Jesus' commands to love enemies, not to resist evil men and the logical conclusion that Christians could not be involved in institutions that, at their foundations, violated these teachings. Of particular interest here are the ethical, social and political failures brought about by this merger of church and state which are evidenced by an uncritical and wholesale embrace of secular political ethics, means and ends, a complete embrace of and immersion in nationalism and patriotism, a deeply and tightly held belief in the efficacy of coercion, power and violence and a repulsive and obscene militarism so strongly and deeply held that it, rather than Biblical considerations, informs our actions.⁶

Consequently, as Christians adopt the world's ways they look no different from any other self-interested group seeking security by the exercise of power and violence, and demonstrating a willingness to coercively impose their way of life and beliefs on others. In stark contrast Jesus, operating on a radically different foundation of love of enemies and nonresistance, did not employ violence to redeem His creation, nor does He now coerce or employ man's violent methods to bring people to Himself. Jesus saved His creation⁷ by becoming a servant to all, loving enemies, submitting to evil men, and letting them do the worst that can be done to a man, and dying at the hands of His enemies. In what looked like the pathetic weakness of a deluded man, Jesus was redeeming His creation, securing His Lordship over His creation and obtaining a name above all other names, that at His name all will bow and confess Him as Lord to the glory of God. If the greatest exercise of God's redemptive power was achieved by nonviolent means, how is it that we think we can accomplish anything good with coercion, power and violence?

To follow our Lord's example we must recover a biblical understanding of Jesus' Lordship, His kingdom, His new creation now breaking out into the world, and the nature of the world outside Christ.⁸ Under-

⁶These innovations from the Constantinian merger characterize all Christian denominations: Protestant, Catholic and Eastern Orthodox.

⁷The salvation that Jesus brings is not only for those who follow Him now but for the whole creation that will be set free at the revelation of the children of God. Rom 8.

⁸Those who have confessed Jesus as Lord, believe that Jesus rose from the grave and affirm their confession by obedience to His commands are "in Christ." Those not "in

standing Jesus in this way we will preach the true gospel, live obedient to all Christ's commands, committed to moral purity, living as selfless servants, sacrificially caring for those in need, loving all, forgiving all, loving enemies and refusing to employ coercion, power and violence.

Furthermore, understanding our faith and practice in this way we will be unable, in virtue of Jesus' commands, to participate in or make common cause with any entity that refuses to love enemies or employs coercion, power or violence. We must separate from, that is not participate in, any private association, institution, organization or government that refuses to employ Jesus' means and seek His ends. The world's means and ends are forbidden to us. We will, like the early church, change our world as God permits by loving enemies, employing God's nonviolent and non-coercive means, and so bear witness to the reality of Jesus' new creation.

Therefore, given such high stakes this book was written to defend and recover biblical understandings and practices on nonresistance, love of enemies and the church's relationship to the state.

Some will insist that these claims are based in lofty idealism and deny cold, hard, reality. Some will further charge that it is not only idealistic and irrelevant, but irresponsible, amounting to a withdrawal from society, refusing to take up power to make things come out right, make the hard decisions and get our hands dirty. Those who make such a charge must be challenged, for they know nothing of Jesus' work on the cross and His new creation.

Committing ourselves to moral purity, living as selfless servants, sacrificially caring for those in need, loving all, forgiving all, loving enemies, preaching the gospel, separating ourselves from the world,⁹ and living nonresistantly, refusing to employ coercion, power and violence are not doing nothing. The spiritual and social salvation of the world outside Christ cannot be achieved by human means or effort.¹⁰ No political or social movement, no matter how grand its message and charismatic its leader, can save mankind from itself. The world's *only* spiritual, social, economic and political hope lies in Jesus and His present incarnation, His Body, the church. Salvation will come to men and women only as Christians faithfully preach the gospel and God's Spirit convicts, resulting in individuals confessing Jesus as Lord, leaving the kingdoms of this world, and entering His kingdom, the church, and adopting the life and practice of the new creation in

Christ" are "outside Christ" and are destined to an eternity in Hell.

⁹A definition of separation is given below.

¹⁰The Scriptures make this abundantly clear as well as the witness of history.

Christ.¹¹

Christians who obediently follow their Lord are participating in the most powerful spiritual, social, economic and political transforming activity on earth. Far from doing nothing, Christians are laboring with God in the *only* activity – the ministry of reconciliation – that can save mankind in any meaningful sense.

The reality is that the world and its ways are passing away,¹² and that at the cross the world was fundamentally changed for those who follow Christ.¹³ In fact, for those in Christ there is a new creation.¹⁴ First, the principalities and powers that oppressed and enslaved mankind were disarmed at the cross and led away in humiliation. In Jesus' death, we too died and are now free from the law of sin and death, and in His resurrection, we too rose in newness of life that we might live unto God. Second, at Pentecost God gave us His Holy Spirit and, unlike those in the Old Covenant, God's people are now careful to obey His commands.¹⁵ God now dwells in men and women as He dwelt in the Holy of Holies and is presently transforming His people into the very image of His Son.¹⁶ God's people are being remade by God Himself. Therefore, the only way Paul can express how deeply the world has changed since Jesus' work on the cross is to declare that in Christ there is a new creation. For the Christian, every dimension of life is radically different. Everything has changed. We inhabit a world made new.

The insistence that it is possible to faithfully live as Jesus commands is, therefore, not based on an absurd juvenile idealism, but a reality grounded in the very power of God. Certainly Jesus and the Apostles believed it was possible.¹⁷ As we live as Jesus commands we work with the grain of the universe, living the future now and we witness to the way things really operate since Jesus performed His

¹¹Salvation comes to individuals not organizations, institutions or systems. Furthermore, Christians will forever remain a minority.

¹²1 Cor 2:6; 7:31; 1 Jn 2:8,17

¹³At some point the entire cosmos will undergo a radical change (Rom 8:18–25; 2 Pet 3:10–13) and God's invisible rule over the universe will be manifest to all as is His rule over the church.

¹⁴1 Cor 5:17. In the original Greek it is not necessary to translate the 2 Cor 5:17 as "he is a new creation" $\chi\alpha\lambda\omega\eta$ – new is in the feminine nominative singular and does not necessarily refer to the individual, but may refer to the newness of the world the person in Christ inhabits. When Paul tells us that we have been raised in Christ and serve in newness of life, that we have died to the Law, that we are free from the law of sin and death, that the principalities have been disarmed and led away in humiliation and that God's Spirit has been given to men to live holy lives, (Ezk 36:22–32), it is certainly proper to describe the world that these men and women now inhabit as a new creation.

¹⁵Ezk 36:22–32

¹⁶Rom 8:29

¹⁷Matt 7:21–23; Rom 6, 8; Jn 14:21–25; Jas 2:14–26; 1 Jn 2:3–6; 3:16–18

work. Those who embrace coercion, power and violence and refuse to love enemies are at odds with the direction of history and the way the universe operates since Jesus completed His work on the cross. Those who willingly give up their lives rather than resist and employ violence to save their lives are aligned with the direction that God is moving the cosmos.¹⁸

But those who live such lives do not naively believe that because of their exemplary behavior and commitment to peace everyone will get along and love will cover the earth or some other nonsense. The gate leading to destruction is *wide* and many pass through it, but the gate leading to eternal life is *narrow* and few find it. Until Jesus comes again and establishes His kingdom in all its glory and rules from Jerusalem, the vast majority of mankind will continue in rebellion and living obedient lives of love and forgiveness that embrace servanthood and nonviolence will be extremely costly. However, the cost, no matter how great, pales in comparison to the gift of such a way of life, a way of life that allows us to please God, living as God always intended humans to live, thereby glorifying our Father.¹⁹

1.1 The Strategy

The argument employed here to defend separation, nonresistance, nonviolence and unconditional love of enemies is fairly straightforward even if it is foreign to the modern mind. However, as we examine the Scriptures we will find that they agree with how the early church thought and operated and reveal why they embraced nonviolence, separation and love of enemies. The argument I set forth in this book is argued the following way:

There is now a King, Jesus the Christ, an absolute Sovereign admitting no rivals, who reigns visibly over those who confess Him as Lord (the church) and invisibly over the entire cosmos, a cosmos that does not yet recognize the reality of His reign. This King's visible reign extends over a world and a people so transformed that they constitute a new creation. His visible kingdom, instantiated in the church, is as real as the Roman Empire or the United States, even if it is not of this world. Jesus shatters the world's wisdom, structures, institutions and ways of life and ushers in His wisdom,

¹⁸Gerald Biesecker-Mast, *Separation and the Sword in Anabaptist Persuasion*, Cascadia Publishing House, 2006

¹⁹It must be emphasized and made clear that the comments above are addressed to those who are true Christians, that is, obedient to Jesus' commands," not those of the world.

His kingdom and His way of life; all is centered on Him. All this He made possible by His obedience to the Father's plan, for His Father's glory, and by the Spirit, first given to Him by the Father, and whom He now gives to those who follow Him empowering them to live obediently to King Jesus' commands to the glory of the Father.

King Jesus redefines reality and illusion, the possible and the impossible, the realistic and the unrealistic, the responsible and the irresponsible, the idealistic and the realistic, the attainable and the unattainable and the desirable and undesirable. He turns the world upside down. Nothing was the same after He triumphed on the cross appearing to die as, what most thought, a failed messiah, a delusional man fit only for scorn, abuse and death.

For all those who live under His rule every dimension of life is radically altered. The difference between the King's way of life and that of all other kingdoms could not be more stark; His citizens unconditionally forgive, unconditionally love, sacrificially serve and care for others before seeking their own good, live in mutual submission, and refuse to resist, retaliate, coerce, or use violence, great or small. They even love enemies, praying for them, blessing them and doing good to them. Thus, the end to which King Jesus directs His people (God's glory) and the means employed in seeking this end look nothing like the means and ends of those outside His rule. Our previous life of bondage in other kingdoms was but a rebellious, tragic and wretched parody of true life. The life He calls us to under His rule is not an unrealizable ideal but realizable by the transforming power of God's Spirit.

So different are King Jesus' people, their task and the kingdom they inhabit from all other peoples, tasks and kingdoms, and so deep is the enmity of the world to King Jesus and His people, we find that no meaningful accommodation with or participation in these other kingdoms is possible. His people live in a world made new; all others live in a dying world, a world in rebellion, a world passing away, a world that all must leave if they are to escape destruction.

This book is devoted to establishing the truth of this argument.

The attempt to call Christians back to a theology and way of life consistent with Biblical Christianity is, in some ways, agreeable to many. However, for the majority, what is defined here as real Christianity is either wrong, irresponsible, foolish, naive or simply impossible

to realize. None of these charges are true and I affirm that what is claimed here does represent authentic Christianity with roots firmly established in the first century.

Establishing the truth of the above claims will be difficult, not because the Scriptures and history do not support them, but because of what passes for conventional wisdom, the filter through which we read the Scriptures, particularly, modernism and post-modernism, and the competing metanarratives of the state, scientism, Christendom, capitalism, socialism and globalism.

The task is made no less difficult since it touches on Christian foundations, for we must rediscover Jesus, His church, His kingdom, the essence of our new nature and identity in Christ and the true nature of the principalities and powers among which the state is numbered. The problem is that our relationship to coercion, power and violence, and the state do not stand alone. These are not things we can separate and address independently of other Christian concerns. In truth, they are completely entangled with Jesus, His kingdom, our identity and what God is doing now on the earth through His church, and to fail to understand that we must remain separate and not employ coercion, power and violence for any end signals a failure so massive and deep that it destroys the very possibility of authentic Christianity.

The strategy employed here consists of three major thrusts — theological, philosophical, and historical. We begin with theology since it forms the foundation of our argument and addresses the most important issues: Jesus, Jesus' kingdom instantiated in the church, our nature and identity and the principalities and powers. Political philosophy is needed to help us understand that the various political systems that have arisen are not authored by God or specially sanctioned by Him and neither are they founded on Christian principles. Finally, historical analysis is needful for the particular task of destroying the state's metanarrative. Although this is a negative task and the one that will generate the most conflict, it is nevertheless an essential task, for there is not enough room for two salvation metanarratives — God's and the state's. Examining the state's metanarrative we will find that the state's description of itself bears little resemblance to reality and certainly does not look like the Christian's kingdom, thus making separation from the state necessary.

A complete treatment of political philosophy and historical analysis will have to wait for later volumes. However, I do spend a fair bit of time on each. These analyses show up primarily in the chapter where I examine the nature of the state and in an appendix where the myth of religious neutrality is developed.

To complete the strategy there are several other topics that must be addressed. The concept of ethical dualism, the idea that there is a private ethic established by Jesus' law in the Sermon on the Mount and another gotten from the state that permits us to kill enemies, is an idea that is frequently used against the assertion that Christians must be nonresistant. This concept is completely foreign to Christianity, having no precedent in the first three centuries. I address this challenge in a separate chapter where I examine how ethical dualism came about during the Constantinian merge of church and state.

There is also a chapter that presents the ante-Nicene views on nonresistance, war, separation and holding public office. In this chapter there are many quotes from the ante-Nicenes who speak with one voice on these topics. By the end of this chapter it is clear that the church before Constantine believed that Christian nonresistance and separation were normative, and essential, in the Christian life.

Additionally, it is necessary to deal with the Old Testament since it is frequently used to support Christian participation in the state and its wars. This challenge is easily dealt with by paying attention to the apostolic writings of Paul where he makes it clear that the Old Testament and its Law have been set aside having accomplished their task – leading us to faith in Christ. God, in virtue of the gift of the Spirit, now calls His people to a higher ethical standard than they were called to in the Old Testament.

Lastly, a chapter is devoted to many of the more common arguments against nonresistance followed by a chapter on what it really means to affirm Christ as Lord.

The book is obviously large, but the task which I taken up is a difficult one given how far we have moved from authentic Christianity. Much needs to be rebuilt and much needs to be torn down.

1.2 Four Views on the Topic

Historically, since the Reformation four distinct views have been held regarding the relationship of the church to the state, and the use of coercion and violence.²⁰

The Lutheran position distinguishes between acting privately as an individual and acting officially as a representative of or on behalf of society. The Christian functions under two separate kingdoms.

²⁰This section closely follows that given by Archie Penner in *The Christian, The State, and the New Testament*, pp. 17–19

Acting privately the individual is fully responsible for his actions and must act according to biblical ethical imperatives. However, acting as a representative of society, for example as a magistrate, soldier, or policeman, the individual is not personally responsible. Therefore, the individual may fully participate in politics, even employing violence, no matter what the nature of the state. Absolute obedience to the state is expected.

The Calvinist position, based on the Old Testament, makes no distinction between public and private ethics. As to public action, "The magistrate does not act at all for himself, but merely executes the judgment of God." The Christian is in no way polluted by political activity. The Christian is rather obliged to participate fully. Calvin asserts that man stands under a double government, one spiritual another political, and the laws and demands of the secular government are equivalent to the laws and demands of God in an absolute sense.

The Neo-orthodox position accepts personal guilt when acting politically. The moral dualism between Christian ethics and secular public action must simply be accepted. However, the Christian is freed from this guilt by God's grace and is thus free to act on behalf of the state.

Nonresistance, the position argued for in this book and embraced by the early (ante-Nicene) church, follows from a plain reading of the ethical teaching and witness of Jesus, the apostles and the early church. There is no ethical dualism. There are not two separate ethical realms, sacred and secular. For God's people there are only Jesus' kingdom ethics, ethics we live by as we are empowered by the Spirit. The reality of Jesus' kingship and the actual presence of His kingdom now in His church make such a stand not only possible but a reality. It is the only consistent and reasonable position a Christian may take.

1.3 Assumptions

Assumptions are the unspoken foundations upon which all of us operate. In any careful discussion, these must be made explicit to prevent confusion. The major assumptions under which I operate are explained below.

1.3.1 Inspiration of the Scriptures

The Scriptures, consisting of those books considered as canon by the early church, are God-breathed. The Spirit guided the authors of the

Scriptures in their writing of the original autographs, even to the very words employed and preserved the text from serious error. By textual analysis we are certain that we essentially have the original autographs. As to the canon, it is closed after John's Revelation.

1.3.2 Authority of the Scriptures

The Scriptures are the Christian's absolute and final authority for doctrine and practice. Nothing is more authoritative. They describe God's purpose and actions in the world, and man's purpose and place within it. As such they must be obeyed.

1.3.3 Exegesis & Hermeneutics

The exegetical grammatico-historical method is employed here. This method determines the authors' intended meaning based on textual, grammatical, rhetorical, social, religious, political and general historical contexts. Given these considerations the texts are severely constrained in their meaning. The text cannot mean for us what it could not have meant for the author and his audience.

Hermeneutically, this means that we cannot apply the Word in a way inconsistent with the meaning we have found in our exegesis. Thus, applications must be consistent with the meaning of the text established by exegesis.

Finally, the Scriptures are not read in a modern critical fashion, constantly questioning the authorship and authenticity of each passage. Instead, the Scriptures will be taken at face value; Christ's words remain His and similarly, Paul's and Peter's and others remain theirs.²¹

1.3.4 The Coherence of the New Testament

The New Testament is a coherent and consistent document. No book or author is autonomous and must be interpreted in light of the whole. No one book or author contains all knowledge revealed by God to His people. When tensions appear between various texts, their resolution is sought by proper exegesis.

²¹Much has been made of modern higher criticism, but it is largely a failed project having been proven wrong on many occasions. This is not to say that nothing good has come out of it, but that as a project it is unhelpful.

1.3.5 Use of the Old Testament

The God of the New Testament is the God of the Old Testament. God in His wisdom and grace has chosen to relate to man in various ways, at various times, and as time passes He progressively reveals more truth about Himself and His redemptive plan.²² This progressive revelation culminates in the person of Jesus Christ who institutes the New Covenant with His death and resurrection. His apostles complete God's special revelation to His people. When John finished his Apocalypse God's communication of His special revelation ended. However, by His Spirit, God does speak through the body of Christ, the church, but these communications are always consistent with His special revelation given in the Scriptures.

Thus, given the incomplete nature of God's revelation within it²³ the Old Testament does not aid in our discussion except as historical and supplemental.²⁴ Use of the Old Testament is limited further because the Law and the Prophets are obsolete having been superseded by Jesus' Law of the New Covenant. Old Testament practice no longer fully informs the ethical behavior of God's people. Hence, we must rely on the New Testament for the foundation of our present discussion. However, we will make frequent use of the Old Testament to help us understand the New and the New to understand the Old.

This in no way diminishes the importance or utility of the Old Testament, but places it in the proper light so we can view it like the New Testament writers who see on one level a perfect continuity between the Old and New Covenants, while on another level a radical discontinuity. Continuity is observed in the fulfillment of God's covenant promises while discontinuity is observed in the nature of the two covenants.²⁵ So great is this discontinuity that the New Covenant can only be described as a new creation,²⁶ while the Old is described to be without glory, obsolete and ready to disappear.²⁷

Much more could be said on this topic but it must be left for another chapter.

²²For a discussion on God's progressive revelation and a discussion on conserving and redemptive grace see Leonard Verduin's *The Anatomy of a Hybrid*, Christian Hymnary Pub., 1998

²³The Old Testament speaks to the Old Covenant and only promises the New Covenant

²⁴Penner *The Christian, The State, and the New Testament*, pp. 15, 16

²⁵Even the prophets expected a radically different covenant to come once God acted. Jer 31; Ezk 36:22–32

²⁶2 Cor 5:17

²⁷2 Cor 3:9–11; Heb 8:6–13

1.3.6 Jesus and His Kingdom

Although developed fully later on we must address some issues regarding Jesus as king and His kingdom.

The current instantiation of Jesus' kingdom is rather curious. Jesus' kingdom has a king, a law, citizens and a location. However, the citizens are located in localized *ekklesia* dispersed all over the earth. We may properly call them colonies.²⁸ However, despite the dispersal of these colonies there remains a kingdom, a king, a law and citizens located in space and time.

With this observation, Jesus' kingship and kingdom are understood in the following way. First, as already stated, Jesus is a real king of a present kingdom, a kingdom as real as Rome or the United States, but operating on principles unlike worldly kingdoms, employing means and seeking ends radically different from worldly kingdoms. Second, His kingdom is, in part, located in His church where He rules visibly over those who have confessed Him as Lord. He also rules invisibly over the entire cosmos which includes all other kingdoms. Third, the kingdom is not now in its final glory, even if Jesus has been exalted and sits at the Father's right hand having authority over all creation. Lastly, kingdom ethics are for Christians. It is a blessing when those outside Jesus' kingdom adopt His ways, but an effort to make the state Christian is doomed to failure.

At present, Satan is still permitted a great measure of control over the earth and leads a rebellion against God. In fact, John says "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."²⁹ However, the victory over God's enemies is certain, having been secured by Jesus, our Lord and Christ and one day all of God's enemies will suffer a final and crushing defeat and He will reign over a new Earth and new Jerusalem in a creation made new by a cosmic fire.³⁰

1.3.7 The Myth of Religious Neutrality

Roy Clouser³¹ has correctly pointed out that there is no religiously neutral position in human endeavors despite claims to the contrary.

²⁸This is the translators choice when translating the salutation of many of the early church writings. The literal rendering for colony in the salutation in *The First Epistle of Clement* is "The church of God that is transiently sojourning in Rome."

²⁹1 Jn 5:19

³⁰2 Pet 3:10–13

³¹Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*

Something always functions as an absolute and hence something akin to God appears in all human action. This is especially illuminating for American politics since it is claimed that the state is religiously neutral and based on rational principles that all reasonable people can agree upon and unite around regardless of their religious disposition. Unfortunately, many Christians believe this fiction. In reality, the claimed religious neutrality is not present. The state shrine is not empty, but is filled with the State itself or some other idol such as “the right to worship,” either of which must be protected at any cost.

Understanding the myth of religious neutrality will greatly assist in understanding the relationship between church and state. An appendix is devoted to a presentation of Dr. Clouser’s thesis.

1.3.8 The Condition of the World Apart from Christ

The condition of the world apart from Christ is desperate beyond description. There are none righteous, none who understand, none who seek God, none who do good, they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips, they are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, they do not know the way of peace, they do not fear God and they are under God’s wrath and judgment.³²

This is the condition not only of individuals, but all human principalities and powers. This truth has shattering consequences for the Christian’s involvement in structures outside the church.

1.3.9 Some Qualifications

The Subordination of the “Spiritual”

At the risk of being charged with teaching a social gospel I have subordinated the use of the word *spiritual*. I have done this deliberately because it is a word nearly without meaning, much like the word *religious*. The word *spiritual* is used to loosely describe God’s activity, Christ’s activity and our activity as we engage in the things of God. Unfortunately this *spiritual* activity, at least among many Christians, does not include social, economic and political activity, things that God is intimately involved in as He builds His kingdom.³³ The notion of Jesus reigning over His people who constitute, in large part, God’s

³²Rom 3:10–18

³³Political activity should be understood in its foundational sense, that of ordering the lives of a separate people according to a given set of principles.

kingdom is presently so weak that God only does “spiritual” things while the state speaks to our social, economic and political ordering. This is a fiction for God does have His kingdom and fully informs our lives socially, economically and politically.

Thus, social, economic and political activity are “spiritual” activities along with whatever else God does or what we do in obedience to His will. For the Christian there are not separate spiritual and non-spiritual activities, there is only life lived before a holy God to whom belong glory and honor and power forevermore.

Power

I claim that coercion, resistance, the exercise of power and the use of violence of any kind are not proper activities for a Christian. However, even those who would agree that resistance, coercion and violence are improper might have some problem with the claim that Christians should not exercise power in a general sense. Certainly, Christians may exercise their power over the created order and employ the power of the Spirit to convict of sin, live holy lives, perform good works, and through prayer accomplish good and prevent evil. However, the use of personal power almost always implies power over another and certainly no one would argue that coercion and violence are not predicated on the actualization of personal power over another person. It is this notion, the exercise of power over another or “lording it over” another, that is the sort of power I am referring to. More specifically, for the Christian, servanthood, nonresistance and love of enemies mediates human relationships and we must not “lord it over” or control another or act like their master, and when we fight we do not war according to the flesh, for our weapons are not carnal, but spiritual.³⁴

Capitalism and Socialism

From a Christian perspective, neither capitalism nor socialism is an acceptable way of ordering an economic/political system. Christian politics are Jesus’ kingdom politics and Jesus’ economics are clearly stated in the gospels and the epistles and, among other things, affirm private property and free markets. However, wealth is not to be accumulated and instead we are to sacrificially care for the needs of our brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ. Caring for the *world* is not our task, caring for the Body of Christ is.

³⁴2 Cor 10:3–6

As you read the book you will notice that I spend more time critiquing socialism/communism than I do capitalism. I have done this for the simple fact that socialism is a far greater threat to the church as this point in time. With the apparent failure of capitalism many Christians are turning to socialism. Unfortunately, the goals and practices of socialism, like capitalism are at odds with Jesus' ways.

A Word About Sources

I employ a diverse assortment of sources in this book. Although I do not agree with large portions of the theology of some of the authors I employ, I find some of their insights truly profound and helpful.

I employ the works of Anglicans, Anabaptists, Eastern Orthodox, Catholics, atheist historians, secular philosophers and the like. However, do not assume that I approve of all they say. In many cases I have employed their analysis, not their prescription. Even the atheist gets things right at times. I believe that Nietzsche had a fairly accurate critique of Christendom even if the rest of what he said was straight from hell. Even Marx got some things right in his critique of capitalism; the rest of what he had to say was pretty much garbage.

Some may object to my use of these sources, but I believe that I have only taken those insights that are consistent with biblical Christianity.

Thus, I give the following warning. The wise reader must exercise considerable discernment in following some of the sources I employ. Just because I use them does not mean that some of what they teach is not dangerous.

While on the topic of sources I must acknowledge two excellent sources that I was unable to use in this book since they were only available in 2012, the year this book was published. The first book, *Caesar and the Lamb*, by George Kalantzis is a work on early Christian attitudes on war and military service. The other book, *The Early Church on Killing*, by Ronald Sider, is a comprehensive sourcebook on war, abortion, and capital punishment seen from the view of the early church. I highly recommend both these works.

1.4 Definitions

The definitions that follow are not meant to be exhaustive, but explain how various terms are used in this book.

1.4.1 The State

The state can be defined concretely as “a sovereign political and social body, occupying a definite territory, which expresses itself in the government of its people by one of a number of types of human government.”³⁵

Creveld gives another useful definition emphasizing the less concrete nature of the state.

The state is an abstract entity which can neither be seen, nor heard, nor touched. This entity is not identical with either the rulers or the ruled, neither the president, nor a citizen, nor even an assembly of all the citizens acting in common can claim that they are the state. On the other hand it includes them both and claims to stand over them both.

This is as much to say that the state, being separate from both its members and its rulers, is a corporation, just as universities, trade unions, and churches *inter alia* are, much like any corporation, it too has directors, employees, and shareholders. Above all, it is a corporation in the sense that it possesses a legal persona of its own, which means that it has rights and duties and may engage in various activities as if it were a real, flesh-and-blood, living individual. The points where the state differs from other corporations are, first, the fact that it authorizes them all but is itself authorized (recognized) solely by others of its kind; secondly, that certain functions (known collectively as the attributes of sovereignty) are reserved for it alone; and thirdly, that it exercises those functions over a certain territory inside which its jurisdiction is both exclusive and all-embracing.³⁶

Creveld’s definition is particularly useful as we view the state as one of the principalities and powers.

With respect to God, the state is neither benign nor neutral, but in rebellion against Him and is chief among the fallen principalities and powers. In spite of itself, it does have the God-authorized function under God’s common grace to preserve some measure of order within society by punishing evil and protecting the innocent. To accomplish this task God has conceded the use of violence, that is, the sword. It

³⁵ Archie Penner, *The Christian, The State and the New Testament*, pg. 19

³⁶ Martin Van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State*, pg. 1

thus provides a space in which God may carry out, by His redemptive grace,³⁷ the ministry of reconciliation He has given to His church.

However, even if the state has a God-given purpose, it is in no way autonomous and it may not legitimately insist that all its demands must be obeyed unconditionally. Neither does it mean that a Christian may participate in the state's activities. On the contrary, the Christian holds allegiance to King Jesus and lives under His imperatives in His kingdom. The state, being given a legitimate task by God or being called His minister does not thereby mean that God's people may become part of or participate in its task. This is made clear when we consider Cyrus,³⁸ God's anointed, who ended Judah's and Benjamin's exile. We observe the same with regard to Assyria, and Nebuchadnezzar who were appointed by God to punish Israel. This has obvious repercussions when applying Romans 13.

1.4.2 Christian

True Christians have confessed Jesus as Lord and that God has raised Him from the dead. They have been transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of the Father's beloved Son, Jesus Christ. God's Spirit now dwells within them transforming them into the very image of Christ enabling them to walk just as He walked.

Because God Himself is transforming His people, and they have been empowered by His Spirit, God expects that obedience characterize Christian life. The person calling himself a Christian but living in disobedience is more than confused, "for the one who says that I have come to know Him, and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him;. . . the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked."³⁹ James tells us that faith without works is dead⁴⁰ and Jesus asks "Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?"⁴¹

A true Christian not only believes rightly but lives rightly, that is obediently. The Scriptures know nothing of a Christian who is not obedient.

³⁷Leonard Verduin, *The Anatomy of a Hybrid*

³⁸This is the king Cyrus who released the Jewish people from captivity in Babylon.

³⁹1 Jn 2:4,6

⁴⁰Jas 2:14–26

⁴¹Matt 7:21–23; Lk 6:46–49

1.4.3 Church

The church, the Body and Bride of Christ, consists of all true Christians and is the location of Jesus' visible kingdom. Jesus' redemptive work has so transformed the Christian's world and themselves that Paul describes it as a new creation. The church then is also the location of the new creation.

1.4.4 Principalities and Powers

Considerable attention is given to defining the principalities and powers in a later chapter. However, they will be referred to frequently before we reach that chapter, thus we must examine them briefly now.

The principalities and powers are the nearly limitless human and angelic powers that rule over men, oppressing and enslaving. The New Testament typically uses this term and those like it negatively. These powers can take many forms and among them are numbered states, governments, institutions, ideologies, religions, professions, militaries, unions, economies, conventional wisdom, philosophy, and so on. The list is limitless.

Being ubiquitous and pervasive in human life, the principalities and powers form the unquestioned backdrop before which we live our lives. Their wisdom is simply assumed to be true and we believe that things cannot be otherwise. There are, of course, many such powers that oppress man, but for this book, we are most concerned with the state, and those like it, whose wisdom tells us that resistance, coercion and violence are not only permissible, but virtuous.

By God's power, we must tear down these strongholds raised up against the knowledge of God. This book is devoted to this task.

1.4.5 Separation

For our purposes here separation is not isolation, but separation from all principalities and powers in rebellion against God. The Christian who separates in this way refuses to support or participate in these powers. This does not necessitate isolation since we can be fully engaged with those about us and yet not participate in the powers. For example, we can refuse to participate in government and refuse to support its violent ends and still associate with non-Christians who are involved in these principalities. This is supported by Paul in 1 Cor 5:9–13. However, this passage and 2 Thess 3:6,14 along with

Matt 18:15–20 and 2 Jn 1:10,11 command that obedient Christians cannot associate or eat with Christians whose lives are characterized by disobedience. This is obviously a matter internal to the Body of Christ and is not the focus of this work but will be a consequence of it.

1.4.6 Nonresistance, Nonviolence and Pacifism

Nonresistance (understood to include nonviolence and non-retaliation) is an essential Christian belief affecting every dimension of a Christian's life and is based in Jesus' example and His commands to not resist an evil man, not to retaliate and, most importantly His command to love enemies. It is further established by the apostle's writings and lives as well as the witness of the early church. Christians thus coerce no one, never retaliate, resist not the evil man, employ no violence and love enemies, praying for them, blessing them, doing good to them. To refuse to treat all enemies this way is to disobey Jesus' clear command and thus, deny that Jesus is Lord.

This book focuses on Jesus' commands of nonresistance, nonviolence and love of enemies. However, the reader must not assume then that Jesus' commands regarding these are more important than any other command. On the contrary, these commands are no more important than say His command to care for the needy or His command to be morally pure, but neither are they less important than these.

Nonresistance and nonviolence are not limited to "big" violences. To limit them so is a serious error. A Christian's obedience to Jesus' command extends down to even the "little" violences, down to the very words we use and the little, almost unnoticed, ways we retaliate in our most familiar relationships.

In what follows, nonresistance, nonviolence and pacifism will often be used interchangeably, although I prefer to use the term nonresistance. This is imprecise, but I do not believe that greater precision is needed since context will establish the desired meaning.

It is vitally important to understand that nonresistance is made possible by the transforming power of the Spirit and is thus really only possible for Christians.⁴² Correlative to this is the conclusion that Christian ethics are for Christians and cannot be transported outside the church. Hence, projects to make the state "Christian" are doomed to failure.

⁴²Of course, there is the rare non-Christian who makes a commitment to nonresistance but they generally find it difficult to consistently live that way and are so rare that they essentially prove the general rule stated above.

Closely related to this is the truth that Christians are not nonresistant and nonviolent because they want to achieve some political end or right an injustice. The Christian does not follow the way of Martin Luther King or India's Gandhi. These men employed nonresistance to *force* the political powers to implement the changes on which they insisted.⁴³ To be sure, we are grateful that these men refused the way of violence, but their nonresistance was employed to achieve a political end by the exercise of power over others. Clearly, their efforts were deliberately coercive. Christians, on the other hand, are nonviolent and nonresistant because it is God's way. We have no desire to coerce another, even by nonresistance. Our desire is that they affirm Jesus as Lord and King, and leave the kingdom in which they presently reside. We understand that the kingdoms of this world are rebellious principalities and powers and cannot be made Christian. The world's only hope is Jesus and the new creation found only in Him.

However, those Christians rightly outraged by evil governments and abortive justice ask if we may use power to force a just outcome. We may use power, but it is not the sort of power that men apart from Christ employ, but the power God has given His people. It is the power of the Spirit of God to transform men and women into the image of Christ, the power to build His church in the midst of a crooked and perverse world, and it is the non-carnal power that is powerful for the tearing down of strongholds and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. Jesus did not set to rights the Fall of man and remake the world by resisting evil men or violent action, instead He accomplished His task by sacrificing Himself for His enemies. We may do nothing less.

1.5 A Comment About Style: Certainty

Any reader paying even the slightest attention will notice that this book is not written in the typical postmodern style: "Well, this is what I think might be true, but it's OK if you don't agree." Instead I have employed an authoritative style that intentionally comes off as "God's Word and the witness of the church affirm that we must live as commanded if we are not to suffer eternal damnation." A hundred years ago this would not have been surprising at all, however, today, we are only allowed to share our opinions, not our certain beliefs. The only true virtue today, the only thing we must be certain of, is that we must never be certain, and if we should dare think we are certain we should never make it known.

⁴³Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, Porter Sargent, 1973

This perverse modern virtue assumes several things, among them a false humility and that truth really can't be known. Historically, this intolerance of certainty is a new development and the facts do not support or warrant such intolerance. First, the Scriptures assume that absolute truth can be known, first through God's revelation of Himself through nature and second through His special revelation in His written and Living Word, the Son of God. These certain truths are themselves apprehended by our God-given cognitive capacity, our reason, whereby we employ deductive and inductive logic to make new rational connections between existing knowledge and even come to understand new things. This is not to say that our reasoning may take us in directions skew to God's revelation. On the contrary, our rational activity must be bounded by and conform to God's revelation. However, our apprehension of God's truth requires that we skillfully employ God's gift of reason.

We know that God expects us to employ our reason for we find a multitude of examples in Scripture where God makes an appeal to our reason. Over and over again God employs rational arguments to communicate some truth or call men to repentance. Jesus and His apostles do the same. The other thing we find is that none of the authors of the Scriptures "shares his opinion." On the contrary, they state truth and they certainly assume that certainty with respect to God's revelation is not only possible but a certain fact.

But some will insist that this was fine for God, the Christ, the Prophets and the Apostles but certainly not for us. In other words, they are certain that we cannot be certain. The absurdity of this assertion is revealed by a moments reflection. What good is their certainty if we cannot know of what they were certain? If we can't establish of what they were certain then not only is their certainty of no use, but we have no reason to affirm that they may have been certain.

However, an important question remains even if we admit that certainty exists and it is a question of method; How can we know what the Father, the Son and His Apostles actually meant? This is not an intractable problem for God has provided many resources which if employed can establish the texts and their meanings in almost all cases, certainly in those cases where it really matters. Thus, we can be sure of what the author meant and how his audience understood him. This then allows us to speak God's Word with authority. But notice the focus, we speak God's Word with authority, not our opinions.

In the end our opinions really don't amount to anything significant, especially uninformed opinions. If I had a nickle for every uninformed

opinion offered in a Bible study I would be a rich man. I am not interested in your opinion, but in what God's Word actually says. I'm not even interested in my opinion. But how do we move from opinion to certainty?

I was recently asked why I am now certain that God's Word unequivocally affirms that Christians must live nonresistantly and separate from the evil principalities and powers, among which the state is numbered. It was a great question.

To answer this question let us back up a bit and consider how we come to our initial convictions on essentially everything. It is obvious that none of us come to any area of knowledge or body of truth unbiased. This inability to come to anything unbiased is a consequence of the following. We are all born into a family which itself is embedded in a community of some kind. As we grow, at a minimum, even without formal training, by observation of those about us, we come to understand what passes for truth in our social setting. With formal training we are carefully schooled in what our community believes to be true.

For most people their epistemological development goes no further than the training they receive in their youth and if it progresses it is through assimilation of assumed truth from a new community in which they find themselves, such as a university. People who essentially catch their epistemological system from either an informal or formal educational environment, in a sense, do not really possess certainty for their truth has not survived a serious challenge. They have not put it to the test, and it really isn't theirs but another's. They may possess certain truth but they don't actually know it.

A few brave souls, however, pose the following question: "Is what I have been taught true?", and "How can I know the truth?"

Starting with the Scriptures we find that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. A logical consequence of a proper fear of God is obedience to His commands which are found in the Scriptures. Thus, we must place ourselves under God's rule and follow His imperatives if we are to know truth.

But what does God expect of us? How can we know with certainty what is expected? The answer to this question is not all that difficult; the answer lies in our resolve to search for the answer and the methods we employ.

Obviously then we must understand what the Scriptures actually teach. Many affirm that this is an impossible task for various reasons, or insist as postmoderns insist, that the Scriptures have no fixed

meaning and must be reworked in every generation. The postmodern position is incoherent for the Scriptures would have no meaning at all, for a text that can mean anything means nothing. Thus I will give that position no further consideration. For the one who says that the text has a fixed meaning but we cannot be certain of it I provide the following.

It is a fact that by textual analysis, especially in light of the great number of New Testament manuscripts, it is scientifically possible to essentially determine the text of the original autographs. For all practical purposes there is no doubt as to the form of the original manuscripts. It is also possible through linguistic studies to establish a thorough understanding of the original language. Certainly there will be some questions, but we can essentially know how to translate the original language into our modern language. These two activities then provide us with texts in our language that are very close to the original.

The next task is to establish the meaning of these texts, in particular, “What did the author mean and how did his audience understand him?” Once again we have considerable help. By studying the historical context, that is the political, religious, economic, and social contexts we may gain a very clear picture of how people thought at that ancient time. This knowledge places very severe limitations on the possible meaning of the texts, essentially forcing us to take them as the author intended, provided we are honest. At this point we have accurate texts and understand what the author meant. But we might well ask if this was the same understanding of the earliest Christians; is it possible to compare our results with other authentic early Christians?

To help answer this question we have a huge volume of literature written by the early church, in particular the ante-Nicenes, the Christians of the first three centuries. We must not forget that the earliest ante-Nicenes knew the apostles or were only a few generations removed. When we study the ante-Nicenes we find that they agree with a plain reading of the original texts, that is a reading one would perform when setting aside the biases we normally bring.

Now that we have established the text, its historical context, its original meaning and that the church of the first three centuries agrees with this plain meaning we have to decide what to do with this knowledge. Will we change our beliefs that are inconsistent with it or will we say that we know better and set it aside. If we set it aside we will have to give a very good reason to do so. Unfortunately, most do not give a reasoned answer. At most they say “Why listen to the ante-Nicenes, they weren’t writing Scripture? We’re just going

to listen to the Scriptures.” The problem with this response is the following.

As was pointed out none of us come to the Scriptures unbiased, for we have already been conditioned by our teachers, formal or otherwise. None of us only use the Scriptures; we really can't. All we can do is search out the truth in an honest study of God's word, and see how it lines up with various Christian traditions, even the one in which we are currently located. That is, we will listen to some tradition as well as our personal study and, hopefully, we will be led by the Spirit. You see, we cannot make our decision apart from some Christian tradition. The question is then which tradition will you use, whose teachers will you listen to? Some will listen to Martin Luther or John Calvin, the Pope or some modern teacher. However, are there better, more trustworthy men who walked in the tradition set down by Jesus and His Apostles? Of course there are, and they are found with the ante-Nicenes.

You see, we can't do better than the ante-Nicenes as exemplars that help us understand Jesus and the Apostles for they were closest to them in space and time. Now if you want to say that they got it wrong from the start and cannot be trusted you are making a very bold and unsupported assertion for they agree with a plain reading of the Scriptures. Furthermore, in every historical activity, it is assumed that the earliest forms are the more accurate forms, especially when it comes to religion. On what basis then will you insist that this case is different?

The reader now has the answer to the original question posed above. I am certain that Christians must be nonresistant and separate from the principalities and powers because this is what a plain reading of Jesus and the Apostles yields and it agrees with the ante-Nicene tradition, and as an extrabiblical tradition, I can't do better than the ante-Nicenes. I have placed myself under the authority of God's word and walk in the path of the original Christian tradition of the ante-Nicenes. I am not doing my own thing and I am not giving my opinion. I am boldly proclaiming God's certain truth.

1.6 A Note to the Reader

By now, the reader is likely to have amassed many questions. To be sure, given our cultural and historical context, many things need to be answered and proven. A profitable task for the reader is to write down his questions and challenges and read the book with these

firmly in mind. To assist in this task a number of questions are given in appendix A. Careful consideration of these questions will greatly assist the reader in the task ahead.

Having established the necessary boiler plate, lets get started.

Recommended Reading

Nonresistance, Nonviolence and Pacifism

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