

THE SPIRIT OF EVANGELICAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ADVOCACY

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In Phil. 2:9-11, the apostle Paul writes, “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”<sup>1</sup> This confession of Jesus’ lordship, according to Rom. 10:9, is at the very heart of the Christian faith.<sup>2</sup> Again Paul writes, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” In both of these passages, the term κύριος (translated as “Lord”) is used as a predicate nominative, defining the subject, Jesus, as one with authority and control. When κύριος was applied to Jesus by the New Testament church,<sup>3</sup> it was seen as a declaration not only of the community’s submission to Jesus as “its Lord, but also their belief that Jesus was the ruler

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all English scripture is taken from the English Standard Version

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the concepts of lordship and kingdom should be understood to be inextricably related to one another. To speak of Jesus’ lordship is to speak of his kingdom and to speak of his kingdom is to speak of his lordship. It is biblically impossible to have one without the other. This assumption will be more fully explored in the next chapter, which deals with the nature of Jesus’ kingdom in greater detail.

<sup>3</sup> There are multiple occasions both in the New Testament and in the Septuagint where κύριος refers to God the Father as well (See Rom. 4:8; 9:28-29; 10:16; 11:3 for examples). Thus, κύριος should not be understood as a Christological title reserved only for Jesus. There are multiple uses of the word. Context must constrain their function in the ancient literature.

of the world.”<sup>4</sup> It was their proclamation that “all powers and beings in the universe must bow the knee before Jesus.”<sup>5</sup> This confession was the good news that Jesus preached when he announced the immanence of the Kingdom of God, as recorded throughout the synoptic gospels.<sup>6</sup> Thus, such a confession was not merely a matter of personal belief,<sup>7</sup> but also public declaration. Or, as Lesslie Newbigin would say, “a public truth.”<sup>8</sup> Such an all-encompassing claim of lordship would have immediately put Christians at odds with similar competing claims.

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<sup>4</sup> Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Second edition. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), Vol. 2, p. 755.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The gospel of John’s comparative lack of “kingdom language” should not be misunderstood as a meaning that the Johannine audience was not concerned with matters of lordship or kingdom. John 18 makes it clear that the high Christology of the gospel as a whole is implicitly tied to the concepts of kingdom and lordship. For, to know the king as he is portrayed in the gospel of John is to know the kingdom and its Lord.

<sup>7</sup> This paper assumes the error of the “Savior-Lord” paradigm, which was popular during the 1980s. The “Savior-Lord” proponents fundamentally misunderstood the nature of biblical faith and grace, believing that one can receive Jesus as savior while waiting until a later time to “make him Lord.” According to the biblical witness, God the Father made Jesus Lord in the resurrection, as is testified to in the abovementioned passages. More could certainly be mentioned on this matter, but for a helpful discussion on this controversy, see John Piper, “Letter to a Friend Concerning the So-Called Lordship Salvation,” (accessed November 25, 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/letter-to-a-friend-concerning-the-so-called-lordship-salvation>).

<sup>8</sup> In Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth*, Osterhaven Lecture Series 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 12. Newbigin writes, “And when the Christian Church affirms the gospel as public truth it is not engaged in a self-serving exercise. It is not simply promoting its own growth, though surely the Church rejoices when there are more people who are grasped by the truth as it is in Jesus and are committed to following the true and living way that Jesus is. But when the Church affirms the gospel as public truth it is challenging the whole of society to wake out of the nightmare of subjectivism and relativism, to escape from captivity of the self turned in upon itself, and to accept the calling which is addressed to every human being to seek, acknowledge, and proclaim the truth.”

All of this leads to an interesting question: How did an inherently exclusivistic religious minority that claimed to follow the resurrected and reigning Lord of the universe live and thrive in a pluralistic society that espoused almost diametrically opposed values? It would seem that the answer is found in the Jn. 18:36, where Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” Or maybe the answer can be traced to the apostle Paul, who in Eph. 6:12, wrote, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” According to these passages, it would seem that Christians were able to pray for God’s kingdom to come while honoring the Emperor of the Roman Empire, because they saw a difference between Jesus’ kingdom and Caesar’s. Yet, history reveals that professing Christians did not always understand the difference between these kingdoms. One does not have to look too hard throughout Christian history for what Peter Leithart calls “Constantinian moments.”<sup>9</sup> According to Leithart, these moments are defined as “a merger of church and empire in which Christians identify some nation or empire or rule with the movement of God in history.”<sup>10</sup> While the extent of such moments will continue to be debated, the reality of their presence reveals an inclination among professing Christians to forget the nature of the kingdom of Christ, especially in regards to church-state relations. This inclination to forget the nature of the kingdom of Christ means that Christians need to revisit the subject frequently and carefully consider the implications of its nature for church-state relationships, lest

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<sup>9</sup> Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2010), 287.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

the pendulum endlessly swing back and forth between “Constantinian moments” and “Benedictine options.”<sup>11</sup> A “more excellent way” exists for navigating the church-state relationship in light of the kingdom of Christ.

A comprehensive consideration of the kingdom of Christ and all of its implications for church-state relations is admittedly beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, this paper will attempt to focus on but one aspect of church-state relations from a kingdom perspective. The hope is to provide an example for handling similar issues in the future. While several issues related to church-state relations could be considered, this paper will explore religious liberty advocacy from the perspective of evangelical Christianity in the United States. There was a time within the United States when evangelicals banded together with other likeminded citizens to form a “moral majority.” Yet, those days have passed, and an ironically intolerant, relativistic pluralism has taken root within the United States. From the nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage to the attacks on religious liberty, the world within which evangelicalism once thrived has changed at blinding speeds. In the midst of such changes, there is a risk of evangelicals becoming motivated primarily by self-preservation in their religious liberty advocacy efforts. The tendency will be to fight for their place at the table and view competing ideologies as a threat to be silenced or suppressed.<sup>12</sup> Yet, such motivations fail to understand the nature of the

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<sup>11</sup> The “Benedict Option” refers to a “communal withdrawal from the mainstream, for the sake of sheltering one’s faith and family from corrosive modernity and cultivating a more traditional way of life.” See Rod Dreher, “The American Conservative,” *Benedict Option, A Medieval Model Inspires Christian Communities Today*, December 12, 2013, (accessed November 29, 2015, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/benedict-option/>).

<sup>12</sup> See Richard Land, “Ground Zero Mosque Too Close for Comfort, SBC’s Land Says,” *ERLC*, <http://erlc.com/article/ground-zero-mosque-too-close-for-comfort-sbcs-land-says/> for a recent example of evangelical concern about mosques in public places. See Bart Barber’s response to unrest in Farmerville, TX regarding the building of Muslim buildings here: Bart Barber, “4 Things Christians Say When They Deny Religious Liberty to Others,” *ERLC*,

kingdom. The antidote for self-preservation in religious liberty advocacy, as will be argued in this paper, is found in an evangelical understanding of the kingdom of Christ. However, the purpose of this paper is not simply to restate an evangelical understanding of the kingdom. Instead, this paper will seek to advance an argument referenced but left undeveloped in the *Kingdom of Christ* by Russell Moore. He writes

A Kingdom eschatology can maintain that Christ will indeed rule over His enemies coercively while also keeping in healthy tension the New Testament emphasis that that day has not yet come (John 18:36). Rather the gospel comes now only in the persuasion of the sword of the Spirit, not with the coercion of the sword of steel. “The mystery of the Kingdom is this: This Kingdom is here but not with irresistible power,” Ladd counseled evangelicals. “The Kingdom of God has come, but is not like a stone grinding an image to power.”

As will be demonstrated in this paper, an evangelical understanding of the kingdom ideally leads to religious liberty advocacy. Ultimately, when armed with a better understanding of the kingdom of Christ, evangelicals will advocate for religious liberty in the public square in such a way that the present lordship of Christ is magnified, instead of their own self-preservation.

In order to accomplish this stated goal, a brief survey of the nature of the kingdom in the Pauline epistles will be provided in the next chapter. The Pauline epistles were chosen due to the fact that they provide the largest sampling of epistolary material on the kingdom in the New Testament. Following the survey, this paper will consider the specific principles of the kingdom and their implications for the religious liberty advocacy in the United States. The paper will conclude with a final chapter of summary and reflection upon the kingdom principles that should shape evangelical religious advocacy.

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<https://erlc.com/article/4-things-christians-say-when-they-deny-religious-liberty-to-others>  
Barber’s thought on the matter are more balanced than Land’s thoughts. However, the fact that such an article must be written to defend the rights of Muslims in the United States reveals that there is a fair amount of people who quietly but firmly oppose an Islamic presence in the United States.



## CHAPTER 2

### A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE KINGDOM IN PAULINE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

It is a bold thing to suggest that one will provide a “brief” survey of the kingdom of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Such a survey is exceedingly difficult due to the possibility of committing a word-thing fallacy, which reduces a broad concept like “kingdom” to mere mentions of the word in the text instead of considering the various echoes through out Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Given, then, the difficult of the

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<sup>1</sup> In Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *The Kingdom of God, Theology in Community* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2012), multiple authors noted the numerous studies of the kingdom of God. In particular, Robert W. Yarbrough mentions a “recent bibliography” that listed “more than 10,000 publications pertaining to research on the kingdom of God in the twentieth century alone.”

<sup>2</sup> A good example of this is found in the gospel of John, which rarely uses the word “kingdom,” yet describes kingdom work as a testimony to the truth (Jn. 18:37). Therefore, while the gospel of John does not frequently refer to the “kingdom” directly, at every point that truth is concerned, the author presupposes the work of King Jesus. This is just one example of the pervasiveness of the kingdom in just one book of the New Testament. Another example of this fallacy would be to assume that every time a particular word is used that a particular concept is always in mind. However, the “meaning” of a word depends on its respective context. With the word “kingdom,” there are can be what D.A. Carson calls “false assumptions about technical meaning.” Carson states that with this fallacy, “an interpreter falsely assumes that a word always or nearly always has a certain technical meaning – a meaning usually derived either from a subset of the evidence or from the interpreter’s personal systematic theology.” D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd Edition. (Carlisle, U.K. : Grand Rapids: Paternoster ; Baker Books, 1996), 45. In addition to Carson’s work in this area, see following works as well James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004); Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words*

task in constrained space, this paper will purposely limit its survey to the Pauline corpus<sup>3</sup> and deal only with passages that relate the kingdom and its theological cognates to present Christian living. Most studies of the kingdom of God focus heavily upon on gospel accounts.<sup>4</sup> No doubt this is related to the volume of kingdom references in the preaching and teaching ministry of Jesus. Admittedly, in comparison to the gospel writers, Paul does not refer to the kingdom very often. The reason for the relative lack of “kingdom” language will become clearer as the Pauline text are considered below. Yet, before jumping to a study of the Pauline text, some background information regarding the concept of lordship in the first-century will prove helpful for

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*and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, Revised and Expanded. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Moisés Silva, *God, Language, and Scripture: Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation v. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> As understood by the vast majority of evangelicals as consisting of the epistles to the Romans to the epistle to Philemon.

<sup>4</sup> The following volumes are a small sampling of works that demonstrate a primarily gospel-oriented focus of kingdom studies: George Raymond Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); Bruce Chilton and James I. H. McDonald, *Jesus and the Ethics of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1988); Bruce Chilton, *Pure Kingdom: Jesus' Vision of God*, Studying the Historical Jesus (Grand Rapids : London: Eerdmans ; Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996); Bruce David Chilton, ed., *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, Issues in Religion and Theology 5 (London: SPCK, 1984); Richard H. Hiers, *The Historical Jesus and the Kingdom of God: Present and Future in the Message and Ministry of Jesus*, University of Florida - Humanities Monograph 38 (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1973); W.G. Kümmel, *Verheissung Und Erfüllung : Untersuchungen Zur Eschatologischen Verkündigung Jesu*, 2nd ed., 23 (Zurich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1956); George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1959); George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future - The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1975); Mark Saucy, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus in 20th Century Theology* (Dallas: Word, 1997); Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Gottes Herrschaft Und Reich* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959); Johannes Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu Vom Reiche Gottes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892); Ben Witherington, *Imminent Domain: The Story of the Kingdom of God and Its Celebration* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2009).

understanding the nature of the claims of the kingdom of Christ.

### **A First-Century Perspective on Lordship**

The confession of Jesus' lordship did not develop in a vacuum. When first-century Christians publicly confessed Jesus as lord, their confession both declared and defied various expectations of their day. For starters, Christians understood Jesus to fulfill Old Testament messianic expectations, which put them at odds with the Jews of their day. The confession of Jesus as Lord revealed the Christian belief that Jesus was the long-awaited fulfillment of the Davidic promise found in 2 Sam. 7. Luke records the angel's account of this fulfillment in Lk. 1:32-33, writing, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most high. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." As a sort of bookend to the gospel of Luke, Jesus explained to the disciples on the road to Emmaus how he had fulfilled these Old Testament expectations. Luke 24:25-27 records, "And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Clearly, the suffering and subsequent exaltation of Jesus was something that the Jews should have understood. However, Jesus' lordship and kingdom did not conform to the Jewish expectation of his day, which led many Jews to reject him as the messiah. Jesus was simply not the type of lord the Jews were expecting. They refused to accept him on his terms.

While first-century Jews had their own understanding of the concept of lordship, they were not the only people of their day. The people of Greco-Roman society were very familiar with the concept of lordship. If the Jews had their own understanding, then the Gentiles surely

did as well. Within the general Greco-Roman literature of first century, the term κύριος referred to those who had authority or control over others. And while this general usage persisted for some time, this was not the only significant usage in the first century. In particular, Roman emperors, like Caligula, Nero, and Domitian favored the use of the word κύριος with their imperial titles. The NIDNTTE provides a helpful explanation of the function of the term κύριος during first century, particular during the timeframe of the composition of the New Testament documents. The entry notes<sup>5</sup>

The term κύριος as such does not ascribe deity to the emperor; but when he is worshiped as a god, the title counts as a divine predicate. It was against such a religious claim, which demanded so much of the burdened conscience, that the Christians turned and rejected the totalitarian attitudes of the state.

Against this backdrop, one can better grasp Pilate's willingness to appease the Jewish mob by killing Jesus is best understood. While Jesus may not have appeared to be a king in Roman eyes, any such claim to possessing a kingdom or being a king would have been understood as being in direct defiance to Caesar's claims. Pilate would be seen as no "friend of Caesar" if he did not dispense the "king of the Jews."

In the dualistic context of Jewish messianic expectations and Roman emperor worship, the Christian community confessed both personally and publically, "Jesus is Lord." Yet, there was something about Jesus' lordship that still allowed the Christians to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's,"<sup>6</sup> "be subject to governing authorities,"<sup>7</sup> and "honor the Emperor."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 2, p. 769.

<sup>6</sup> Mt. 22:21

<sup>7</sup> Rom. 13:1ff

<sup>8</sup> 1 Pet. 2:17

Some within the school of empire criticism,<sup>9</sup> a subset of post-colonial criticism, see such examples of deference to the empire in the New Testament to be veiled attempts to overthrow the empire. They find such statements to be subversive to the kingdom. For the most part, however, such a reading of the New Testament is not compelling. Instead of subverting submission to the Roman Empire, a clear reading of the abovementioned texts reveals that in most regards it was right for the Christian to live peaceably and obediently under imperial rule as long as the empire was not forcing them to violate their conscience.<sup>10</sup> Obviously, there are clear cases where the Christian must “obey God rather than men,”<sup>11</sup> but, as Scot McKnight notes, anti-imperialism was

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<sup>9</sup> For a survey of modern examples of empire criticism, see the following works: Richard J. Cassidy, *Christians and Roman Rule in the New Testament: New Perspectives*, Companions to the New Testament (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2001); H.H. Bingham Colloquium in New Testament, Stanley E Porter, and Cynthia Long Westfall, eds., *Empire in the New Testament* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2011); John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: HarperOne, 2008); Tom Thatcher, *Greater than Caesar: Christology and Empire in the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009); Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003); Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Powers: Conflict, Covenant, and the Hope of the Poor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011); Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*, 1st edition. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); Warren Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008); Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 1997); Richard A. Horsley, *Religion and Empire: People, Power, and The Life of the Spirit*, Facets (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003); Lance Byron Richey, *Roman Imperial Ideology and the Gospel of John*, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 43 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2007); Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed, eds., *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult*, Society of Biblical Literature writings from the greco-roman world supplement series v. 5 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011); William V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome, 327-70 B.C* (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent survey and rebuttal of many of the empire critical conclusions, see Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica, eds., *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Acts 5:29

most likely an implication of declaration regarding the lordship of Christ, not its the main objective.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Kingdom of God: A First-Century Jewish Perspective**

A definition of that Kingdom of God is somewhat elusive for modern readers due to its historical situation. Yet, for the first-century Jew, the concept was readily understood, which at least, in part, is why there is not formulated explanation of the kingdom in scripture, just declaration and demonstration in Jesus. N.T. Wright helpfully explains this foreign concept to modern reader in his book, *Jesus and the Victory of God*. He writes<sup>13</sup>

The most important thing to recognize about the first-century Jewish use of Kingdom-language is that it was bound up with the hopes and expectations of Israel. ‘Kingdom of god’ was not a vague phrase, or a cipher with a general aura. It has nothing much, at least in the first instance, to do with what happened to human beings after they died. They reverent periphrasis ‘kingdom of heaven’, so long misunderstood by some Christians to mean ‘a place, namely heaven, where saved souls go to live after death’, meant nothing of the sort in Jesus’ world: it was simply a Jewish way of talking about Israel’s god becoming king. And, when this god became king, the whole world, the world of space and time, would at least be put to rights... The phrase ‘kingdom of god’, therefore, carried unambiguously the hope that YHWH would act thus, within history, to vindicate Israel; the question, why he was taking so long about doing so; and the agenda, for those with watchful hearts, not only to wait for him to act, but to work, in whatever way was deemed appropriate, towards that day... Thus, week after week, and year after year, Israel kept alive the memory of what YHWH had done in the past to show that he was king, both in Israel and of the whole world, and so kept alive the hope that his kingdom would soon come, and his will be done, on earth as it was (they believed) in heaven. God’s kingdom, to the Jew-in-the-village in the first half of the first century, meant the coming vindication of Israel, victory over the pagans, the eventual gift of peace, justice, and prosperity.

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<sup>12</sup> Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2011), 144.

<sup>13</sup> N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 1st North American ed., vol. Second, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 202–4.

When Jesus came, his message was that the kingdom was near, which to his primarily Jewish audience was the good news announcement that God was beginning his redemptive work in the present through the ministry of Jesus, who brings resolution to the story of Israel as the fulfillment of Old Testament expectations on multiple fronts.<sup>14</sup> The tension, though, as Sam Storms mentions, is that there was a lack of “eschatological consummation” with the presence of the kingdom in Jesus’ ministry.<sup>15</sup> There were things that the Jews were expecting that simply did not come with the inbreaking of God’s kingdom. At least they did not come yet. In summary, then, for the first-century Jewish reader, the kingdom of God was the dynamic activity of God in fulfillment of Old Testament expectations of God’s restoration. As will be seen, though, this fulfillment has multiple stages, which was not the expectation of the Jews. This perspective must be remembered when considering Paul’s teaching on the kingdom of God.

### **The Interrelated Nature of the Kingdom of God**

With basic understanding of the kingdom of God, one can now consider specific Pauline passages on the kingdom of God. The first passages reflect an “Already Present” understanding of the kingdom in Paul’s writing. Admittedly, this is not his primary focus with the kingdom of God. There are more passages in the Pauline corpus that address the “Not Yet” understanding of the kingdom.<sup>16</sup> However, there are a few passages that reflect a “realized” understanding of

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<sup>14</sup> For one of the best treatments of this subject, see McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*.

<sup>15</sup> C. Samuel Storms, *The Restoration of All Things* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2011), 9.

<sup>16</sup> See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 857n40 for more details.

the kingdom.<sup>17</sup>

In Col 1:13-14, Paul writes, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Keeping step with the expectations of deliverance from evil, Paul describes the work of God the Father as one of “delivering” from being under a specific dominion of darkness to the kingdom of His Son. Peter O’Brien notes that this concept of deliverance from “an alien power” was prominent in the Old Testament.<sup>18</sup> Such an understanding of deliverance fits well within the Jewish framework of kingdom expectations. Thus, according to Paul, one is not waiting to be under the lordship of Christ, but is already transferred there by virtue of their “faith in Christ Jesus” (Col 1:4).<sup>19</sup> In a very real sense, the kingdom of Christ is already active in the world, plundering the domain of darkness, serving the future purpose of the Christian’s inheritance (Col 1:12). The present reign of the kingdom is, then, inextricably related to the future inheritance of the kingdom for Christians.

In addition to the present reality of the kingdom, there is also a “not yet” element that is awaiting consummation. The Jews were expecting this consummation at the time of the coming of the Christ, but Jesus’ kingdom did not conform to those expectations. In 1 Cor 15:20-28, Paul writes of this full consummation, stating,

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<sup>17</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids : Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing : Paternoster Press, 1996), 77.

<sup>18</sup> Peter O’Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David Allan Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Bruce M. Metzger, vol. 44, Colossians, Philemon (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 27.

<sup>19</sup> Paul commends the Colossians for their faith and love while also highlighting the sovereign work of God in their salvation. Both agents are active in this regard, which will be important for the future argument to be made regarding uncoerced faith in the public square and the need for religious advocacy.



But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

As with the passage in Col 1, this passage also speaks of a present reign of Christ, wherein he is “destroying every rule and every authority and power” prior to delivering the kingdom to his Father. In the here and now, though, the implication of this passage is that there are genuine rulers and authorities and powers that are not yet in full subjection to Christ. Therefore, according to Paul, Christ must continue to reign until all is subjected. The present reign of the Son serves the future reign of the Father. Christ fulfills his work in order to aid in the future fulfillment of the Father’s work. The present expression of the kingdom has a purpose to fulfill for the future expression of the kingdom.

### **The Interrelated Kingdom of God and Some of Its Ethical Implications**

In the previous section, the present aspects of the kingdom of God were shown to be related to the future consummation of the kingdom of God. In this section, the ethical implications for the Christian community will be considered in light of the interrelated kingdom. In Rom 14:13-19, Paul writes,

Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For

the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Here Paul addresses the matter of New Covenant freedoms and Christian love from the perspective of the present nature of the kingdom of God. The present expression of the kingdom of God is not to be marked by an individualistic libertarianism, but by a concern for righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. According to Paul, Christians have a kingdom-oriented obligation not to “destroy the one for whom Christ died” with their attitudes and actions. For, their present life under the rule of Christ had future implications for others; implications related to the very faith of those for whom Christ died. The implication is that to disregard the present ideals of the kingdom could lead to the future destruction of one’s faith. Paul, therefore, grounds his warnings about present actions, like eating and drinking among those with a weak faith, in the possible future consequences of those actions. For Paul, there is far more to kingdom live in the present than the freedom to eat pork and enjoy wine, which is the future consummation of righteousness, peace, and joy in the kingdom of God.

### **Conclusion**

In these key Pauline texts regarding the kingdom of God, it is clear that Paul believed that the present activity both of Christ and of his followers had major implications for the future expression of the kingdom of God. The present rule of Christ over those transferred from the domain of darkness was necessary if they hoped to “share in the inheritance of the saints.” The present reign of the Son was necessary in order to secure the future reign of the Father over all. And in a similar, though not contingent way, the present kingdom-oriented life of the one with strong faith promoted the future perseverance of the one with weak faith. The point here is simple: the present expression of the kingdom is inextricable related to future expressions of the

kingdom, which means one cannot isolate the two from one another. All there of these elements have significance in the present expression of the kingdom and in the future expressions of the kingdom. Therefore, when a person thinks about a particular action or attitude in the present, they must also consider the implications it has for the future. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, this is particular true in regards to religious liberty advocacy.

## CHAPTER 3

### EVANGELICAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ADVOCACY IN LIGHT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

After an exceedingly brief survey of Pauline text on the kingdom, the last chapter concluded by stressing the interrelated reality of the present and future expressions of the kingdom. Specifically, Christ's present kingdom reign was shown to contribute to the future consummation of the kingdom of God while the Christian's present actions under that reign were shown to impact the future perseverance of others. The point was to demonstrate that while the future consummation of the kingdom is not contingent upon present Christian activity under the rule of God, there is still a relationship present, and that relationship should impact the way that Christians think about their present actions beyond their own personal destinies. Therefore, having demonstrated the interrelated nature of the present and future expression of the kingdom, this paper will now turn to how that interrelated nature of the kingdom impacts evangelical religious liberty advocacy in the United States.

Religious liberty has been described as America's first freedom, and evangelicals have a rich heritage of advocating for it both in the United States and all over the world. Yet, while not questioning the virtue of their advocacy, some have challenged the warrant that Christians have to be advocates in light of the Bible. Luke Timothy Johnson, for instance, in the book *Religious*

*Human Rights in Global Perspective*, in his chapter, entitled “Religious Rights and Christian Texts,” writes<sup>1</sup>

The Christian scriptures, in short, do not in any direct or obvious way provide support for the contemporary proposition that “it is a human right to be religious.” Another way of framing the issue of “religious rights,” of course, is in terms of freedom to be religious differently. But if by religious rights we are speaking of tolerance for religious diversity both in thought and in expression, then an assessment of the Christian tradition should also create concern, for it has been for much of its history and agent for the suppression of religious liberty.

Some evangelicals, like Barrett Duke, provide helpful responses to such reasoning by arguing from the perspective of the nature of humanity and their relationship to God has one created in his image.<sup>2</sup> Others, like Russell Moore, argue compellingly for religious liberty advocacy on the basis of understanding the different realms of authority in light of the kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, both of these approaches are helpful and to be commended, yet this chapter will contend that there is a more compelling argument for religious liberty advocacy to be found in the nature of the kingdom of God. There are intrinsic aspects of the future kingdom of God that demand a particular approach to religious liberty.

According to Paul, the kingdom of God is a matter of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, at the center of the kingdom of God is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring about these three realities, advancing the reign of Christ. This work begins in the life of the

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<sup>1</sup> Johan David Van der Vyver and John Witte, eds., *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective: Religious Perspectives* (The Hague ; Boston : Cambridge, MA: M. Nijhoff Publishers ; Sold and distributed in the U.S.A. and Canada by Kluwer Law International, 1996), 65.

<sup>2</sup> For more examples of responses to arguments like Johnson’s, see Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Yarnell, eds., *First Freedom: The Baptist Perspective on Religious Liberty* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> See Russell Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 138–60.

believer by faith, when they are united to Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. In Eph 1:13-14, Paul writes of this reality, saying, “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”<sup>4</sup> Paul continues in Eph 2, stressing the work of the Holy Spirit who on account of Christ, conquers spiritual death (Eph 2:5-6), brings about righteousness (Eph 2:8-10), and makes peace (Eph 2:14-17). And why does Paul stress the sovereign, kingdom-advancing work of the Spirit in such an emphatic way? According to Eph 1:6,19; 2:4, 7; 3:8, 14-21, Paul so highlights the free and sovereign work of the Spirit that believers might praise the glorious grace of God, consider the immeasurable greatness of God’s power, see the immeasurable riches of God’s grace in kindness, and comprehend with all the saints the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge and be filled with all the fullness of God for the sake of his glory in the church. For Paul, the kingdom of God is a matter of the Holy Spirit working now in the present to maximize the revelation of the redemptive glory of God in the future, which reveals an aspect of the nature of the future kingdom that demands a particular perspective for religious liberty advocacy.

Unlike some evangelicals, Paul was not afraid of a pluralistic society, marked by competing truth claims. Acts 17:16-34 is a clear case in point. While understandably being provoked by the presence of idolatry, his solution was not to remove the idols, but instead, to challenge the local religious ideology. In fact, the spirituality of the people even seemed to provide Paul with a helpful point of engagement. And while not everyone believed Paul’s message, some did thanks to the Holy Spirit working in his faithful ministry of the gospel. And

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<sup>4</sup> Notice the parallels between Eph 1:13-14 and Col 1:11-14. Both speak of an inheritance that depends upon the sovereign work of God. Contextually, both highlight the necessity of faith and union with Christ.

just like that, the domain of darkness was plunder and Dionysius and Damaris among others came under the rule of Christ and thus demonstrated the power of the grace of God.

If, therefore, the work of the Holy Spirit, which is revealed by Paul to be inextricably related to the activity kingdom of God in the present, is so ordered as to bring the maximal amount of glory and honor to God in the future, then evangelicals ought to advocate for an environment of religious liberty that promotes the sovereign power of the Spirit, not the state. In other words, when the “faith” spoken of in Eph 1:13 is coerced by the state rather than the Spirit, all of the resulting glory that belongs to God is gravely diminished. For, as Carl F.H. Henry put it, “Coerced faith has no value,” and no glory.<sup>5</sup> “Only a sincere faith,” writes Greg Forster, “can be a saving faith, and faith adopted in obedience to government rather than out of conviction is insincere.”<sup>6</sup>

As evangelicals grasp the Spirit’s work in the present expression of the kingdom of God, they will recognize that their present call to offer the gospel and issue ambassadorial calls for repentance have major implications for the future. They will come to understand what W.A. Visser ’t Hooft meant when he wrote, “Christ desires to be obeyed for his own sake and not because of ulterior motives. In his relations with men he refused systematically to use the worldly and demonic means. He demanded free and willing obedience.”<sup>7</sup> For it is in the context of this “free and willing obedience” that the gospel of Christ outshines the other gospels of the

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<sup>5</sup> Richard D. Land and Louis Moore, eds., *Citizen Christians: The Rights and Responsibilities of Dual Citizenship* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1994), 65.

<sup>6</sup> Greg Forster, *The Contested Public Square: The Crisis of Christianity and Politics* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 160.

<sup>7</sup> W.A. Visser’t Hooft, *The Kingship of Christ: An Interpretation of Recent European Theology* (New York : London: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 134.

world. Yet, without ambassadors who issue the call to be reconciled to Christ, there is no “free and willing obedience to the gospel. And, if there is no obedience to the gospel, then there is no magnification of the glory of God in the work of the Holy Spirit. For the Spirit’s kingdom work, as seen in Eph 1, is explicitly tied to the “hearing of the word of truth.” Evangelicals that care about the glory of God must care about religious liberty, because without an environment of religious liberty, the glory of God is diminished on account of the stifling of the Holy Spirit’s work. Evangelicals do not fight with the weapons of the flesh, which depend upon human coercion. Instead, they preach and teach the gospel of Christ with confidence in a pluralistic society, where various claims of truth and ultimate reality abound, as they did in Athens of Paul’s day.

God has expressly ordained spiritual searching in a pluralistic context. Any attempt by governmental or ecclesiastical authorities to impose religious uniformity upon a society is guilty of attempting to usurp sovereignty of God. Acts 17:26-27 states, “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him.” This search for God, though, is not simply rooted in the *imago dei*. It is also rooted in the universal work of the Holy Spirit, who “convicts the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”<sup>8</sup> These works by the Spirit are fundamentally revelatory. The Spirit constantly brings to bear the realities of God in Christ on the consciences of people without violating the integrity of choice.<sup>9</sup> A pattern of such work is discernible

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<sup>8</sup> Jn. 16:8-11

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that this paper is not concerned with the question of the inherent ability of mankind to choose or reject God. Such a study would require an extensive study of the nature of man. This paper is specifically concerned with evangelicals advocating for a societal



throughout the synoptic accounts of Jesus' ministry. As the Spirit worked to empower Jesus for the advancement of the kingdom of God, people were confronted with the truth about Jesus' identity. In other words, as they beheld the work of the Spirit in Jesus, they were brought to a point of crisis. A choice had to be made regarding whether or not Jesus was in fact the Lord. When a choice was made to receive the testimony of the kingdom on account of the Spirit's work in Jesus, the grace of God was magnified and sinners were forgiven. However, when a choice was made to reject the testimony of the Spirit in Jesus, a person found that they were beyond forgiveness and guilty of shunning the grace of God. A clear example of this can be found in Mk 3:28-29, which reads, "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of eternal sin." Verse 30 goes on to explain the problem, stating, "for they were saying 'he has an unclean spirit.'" Therefore, when a person rejected the work of Jesus, which was inextricably related to the testimony of the kingdom, they were choosing to deny the Holy Spirit's work among them. In other words, when confronted with the realities of God in Christ, they chose to reject them. And, according to Jesus, such a present rejection made them more liable for future judgment.<sup>10</sup> Luke 10:13-14 makes this clear, stating, "Woe to you,

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environment in which no God-ordained authority transgresses the boundaries of its power and attempt to do what only the Spirit of God can do.

<sup>10</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that there appears to be an escalation of judgment throughout scripture based upon available revelation. Romans 1:19-20 states, "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." While Rom 1 certainly has implications for all people through out history, it seems as though the present work of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment compounds the reality of judgment in a greater way on this side of the resurrection. The exact nature of the Holy Spirit's work outside of the covenant community is disputed by some, but the reality of the Spirit's work cannot be denied, for his work in Christ and, by

Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.” The works done in Chorazin and Bethsaida were works empowered by the Holy Spirit. Hence, those who rejected the present work of the Holy Spirit incurred a greater future judgment. In a similar way, when evangelicals bear witness to the realities of God in Christ and give people a choice to accept or reject their testimony, they are emulating the work of Christ as one empowered by the Holy Spirit offering a pardon to the guilt. Yet, they are not forcing the pardon upon anyone, for a pardon must be received in order to be effective. And when a pardon is rejected, the due consequences of one’s actions are incurred. Therefore, when evangelicals advocate for the rights of others to accept or reject their message, they not only provide an opportunity for magnification of the grace of God, but also the potential compounding of judgment in light of one’s free choice.

Ultimately, then, religious liberty advocacy is not about the evangelical’s own voice, but instead, it is about advocating for a context in which the manifold glory of God is able to be most glorified, which is one of externally uncoerced decision regarding religion. Evangelical must not look at the presence of the Muslim or the Mormon or the Buddhist and their respective messages as a threat to their religion, but rather as an occasion for the display of the glory of the grace of God, which conquers competing claims by the righteous, peacemaking, joy-filled work of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the retribution entailed in the rejection of the grace of God should not be co-opted by a governing authority. Such retribution belongs to the wrath of God, not governors. The evangelical’s work is to plead, beg, appeal, and implore on behalf of Christ for

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implication, in Christians leads to both the magnification of God’s grace in salvation and the magnification of God’s righteousness in judgment.

sinners to be reconciled to God. It is not to coerce reconciliation through governmental pressure or constraint. Such coercion undermines the work of the Spirit, which by implication robs God of the glory due to his grace.

In summary, then, the glory of future expressions of the kingdom of Christ in the magnification of the grace of God and the intensification of the judgment of God is proportionally contingent upon the present work of the Holy Spirit being in an environment of religious liberty, where free acceptance and rejection of the Spirit's work is possible. When the truth of the kingdom of Christ is freely offered and received by faith in an environment of competing truth claims, the grace of God is magnified. When the truth of the kingdom of Christ and the work of the Spirit are freely rejected in an environment of religious plurality, the judgment of God is intensified. This, of course, is not to suggest that acceptance and rejection are equally valuable responses to the truth of the kingdom of Christ. Evangelicals should long for others to embrace the truth of Christ, yet such an embrace is only valid if it originates from within instead from without. For the evangelical, then, advocacy for a public environment of religious liberty facilitates a context for "beholding the kindness and severity of God."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Rom 11:22

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

In speaking of the concept of the liberty of conscience<sup>1</sup> in the works of Isaac Backus, Stanley Grenz wrote, “This liberty, then consists in the freedom of each individual to weigh the case and judge for himself in soul matters.”<sup>2</sup> It is precisely in this context of the individual’s judgment of truth that the gospel of Jesus Christ shines the brightest and clearest. For, it is in the deep recess of an individual’s contemplation of divine truth that the Holy Spirit most often grants spiritual eyes to behold spiritual truth. When evangelicals insist upon coercive or constraining tactics to advance the kingdom, they ultimately undermine the kingdom. For the truth of the kingdom of God is spiritually discerned. Man cannot and must not attempt to expedite or subvert the Spirit’s work by means of human effort. Such attempts betray a fundamental misunderstanding of evangelical pneumatology. Grenz continues, stating, “If God communicates directly with individuals through the Scripturally-molded conscience, then as Roger Williams has said, ‘it is impossible for any man or men to... fight against all consciences opposite to theirs, and not to fight against God in some of them, and to hunt after the precious life of the true Lord Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> This paper assumes that the terms “liberty of conscience” and “religious liberty” are essentially synonymous.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Isaac Backus - Puritan and Baptist: His Place in History, His Thought, and Their Implications for Modern Baptist Theology*, NABPR Dissertation Series no. 4 (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), 171.

Christ.”<sup>3</sup> The only proper method, according to Backus, for the promotion of the truth of the kingdom is by “holding forth light, or speaking the truth in love.”<sup>4</sup> “Truth,” as Grenz concludes, “carries with it its own convincing power,” and from the perspective of this paper, truth’s convincing power is resident in the present kingdom work of the Holy Spirit. Evangelicals that value the truth and the power of the kingdom will resist the urge to advance the kingdom in their own strength. They will recognize that the most faithful way to magnify the glory of the future kingdom is by depending upon the power of the present kingdom. They will advocate for others to maintain their “sincerely held religious beliefs,” not because they fear the loss of their own, but because they are confident in the sufficiency of their God and his great gospel. This is the spirit that evangelicals must have toward religious liberty advocacy. Not one of fear or self-preservation, but faith. For, they must remember that they were once just like those that seem to threaten their existence, but “they were washed, sanctified, justified in the name of King Jesus and by the sovereign Spirit of their God.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor 6:11

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