

I. THE NEED FOR A SCRIPTURALLY-DEFINED THEOLOGY OF ENGAGEMENT

- A. In our sinful fallen state, all humans are prone to react and too frequently over-react. This is true, even within the Church, where reactionary theology and practices often direct the next alleged “move of the Spirit”.
- B. But despite our tendency (particularly within the charismatic movement) to simply go along with whatever new wave sweeps through the Church, the Lord nevertheless desires to redirect our man-inspired trends for the good of the body, the furtherance of the Gospel, and ultimately, His own glory.
- C. Because of our propensity to engage in reactionary theology, successive waves (trends) in the Church often embody excessive swings of the pendulum from one extreme to another.
- D. An important example: Pretribulational Dispensational Premillennialism (Left-Behind theology) dominated large segments of the Church during the 70’s, 80’s, and into the 90’s. PDP as an eschatological worldview is deeply pessimistic and thus tends toward an eschatology of abandonment. (The whole world will only get worse until Jesus finally raptures the Church... Why polish the brass on a sinking ship?)
- E. Much of today’s Christian youth culture has arguably over-reacted to the abandonment theology, praxis and overall end-time focused culture of Dispensationalism. They see cultural engagement, primarily in the form of “social justice” as the primary mandate, and chief end of the Christianity. They often equate social justice with the Gospel. Beyond this, many have rejected any emphasis on eschatology altogether, particularly premillennialism. Dispensationalism has driven many into the embrace of a Kingdom Now oriented social justice movement.

Dispensationalism	Popular faith today
Abandon’s culture to its own devices	Deeply engaged in culture
Emphasizes proclamation, but less justice ministry	Deeply emphasizes justice ministry, but often neglects proclaiming the Gospel, particularly repentance
Pessimistic	Optimistic-Triumphant-Utopian
Thoroughly Apocalyptic	Anti-Apocalyptic / Realized Eschatology

- F. As those who desire to see the Church get back on a more Biblically-defined track, it is incumbent on us to meet the popular Christian youth culture where they are, by articulating, teaching, trumpeting, and calling them into a more correct Biblical-defined theology and praxis—specifically into a proper form of cultural engagement. I believe the issue of engagement is a key to winning the youth.

- G. Therefore, thus says the LORD, "If you return, then I will restore you— Before Me you will stand; and if you extract the precious from the worthless, You will become My spokesman. They for their part may turn to you, but as for you, you must not turn to them. —**Jeremiah 15:19**
- H. We should seize upon the popular desire to engage with culture, but help redirect this passion toward a properly aligned perspective on eschatology, engagement and justice.
- I. It is also essential that as we ourselves come to understand the overarching emphasis throughout the Scriptures on the Age to Come, that we likewise recognize the proper role of cultural engagement within that theological and eschatological framework. The Lord is never pleased with passivity.

II. A THEOLOGY OF ENGAGEMENT—A THEOLOGY OF MARTYRDOM

- A. How we understand the Kingdom of God determines our mandate and thus our identity in this age.
 - 1. Kingdom Now versus Kingdom to Come (Theology)
 - 2. Being Triumphalistic Dominionist Conquerers versus being Witnesses / Martyrs (Application)

Theology	Application
Kingdom Now	Dominionism / Triumphalism (Conquerers are not Pilgrims)
Kingdom to Come (Pure Premillennialism)	Pilgrim-Witnesses
Inaugurated Kingdom (Now and not yet)	Confusion (Yet most often results in a Dominionist Kingdom Now emphasis)

- B. Only Premillennialism creates a proper framework for a Pilgrim and Martyr identity
 - 1. Maintaining a Pilgrim identity does not mean disengagement. It means that we are to positively influence the world around us, as salt and light as a faithful presence. But as soon as we use language of conquering, or as soon as we see our primary mandate to effect laws or government, then we have crossed into a fundamentally unbiblical arena.
 - 2. The Pilgrim identity refers to the World. It means that we are foreigners, aliens, strangers in an inherently wicked, adversarial culture and system.
- C. The Kingdom Now mentality looks to this present culture and system and sees a system that simply needs tweaking, mere realignment under Christian leadership.

- D. This present system will only be corrected through destruction, judgment and fire at the Day of the Lord.
1. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men... But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. —**2 Peter 3:7-10**
- E. When we understand that this age is utterly wicked, then cultural engagement by necessity must ultimately involve martyrdom. Martyrdom is the ultimate expression of cultural engagement!
- F. We must return to the Kingdom of God orientation-emphasis-longing. All expectation, longing, hope and emphasis is placed on the Day of the Lord and the age to come. Thus “The Gospel of the Kingdom” (Matt 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Luke 16:16; Mark 1:15) thus “Maranatha” thus “Come lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).
1. “...having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.” —**Hebrew 11:11-16**
- G. Our mandate is to bear witness and point to the looming Day of judgment followed by the glories of the age to come as we identify with the groan for that Day that is presently being experienced by all of creation.
1. “For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now”. —**Romans 8:22**
 2. As such, everything that we do, whether by work or by deed is aimed at, and points to the Day of the Lord, and the Kingdom to follow. We are to be Witnesses to the coming Kingdom.
 3. In terms of cultural engagement, and social justice, this means that yes, we fight to deliver some who are slaves now, as we point to the Kingdom when all slaves will be free, ultimately by Jesus. Thus the glory belongs to Jesus, and not to us.
- H. The Kingdom Now, Seven Mountain Mandate, Dominionist worldview, often presents the believer as one who is part of an end time army that will conquer the world through prayer and justice. It is very dangerous in that it can empower some with a self-deluding, self-glorifying vision of oneself.
- I. We must be extremely cautious of falling into the mentality that we are personally destined or called to Christianize the World ourselves. Instead we should see each act as pointing to the ultimate victory that will be accomplished only by the perfect divine God-man Jesus!

1. While we must fight now for justice, it must be done with the understanding that our efforts are merely signs, examples, and foretastes, of the victory that Jesus will accomplish fully when he comes. Its okay to shoot high, so long as we remain Biblical. The idea that we will, as many Christians declare, “end poverty in this generation”, is either ignorant of Scripture, or self-deluded.
 - a) Jesus said, “The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me”. —**Matthew 26:11** (The same can be said for the sick).
 2. When we view our divine mandate to be Witnesses of the coming Kingdom, then we will be content with failures and set-backs, as our eyes are firmly fixed on the day when our victory will be complete.
 3. But when we view our mandate as conquering the World or conquering some particular sphere of influence, then we inadvertently have placed ourselves on “the Kingdom Now Hamster-Wheel”. We will forever work hard to accomplish something that is neither our mandate nor is it something we will ever accomplish.
 4. We will be in great danger of burn out. Even the strongest will eventually burn out with disappointment. This is why so many Christian gatherings are little more than pep rallies to get back on board the hamster wheel and endure a bit longer.
- J. Again, we must have a theology of engagement that allows for, and even finds satisfaction with repeated disappointment and let downs. Only then can we sustain ourselves for the long haul to the final day.
1. "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." —**John 16:33**
- K. There is great danger in believing that it is our divine destiny to win win win. Because most often we will be met with resistance, failure, pain, and disappointment.

“Don’t just accept whatever comes your way in life. You were born to win; you were born for greatness; you were created to be a champion in life.” —Joel Osteen

“Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well, with my soul. It is well, it is well, with my soul”. —Horatio Spafford

1. Which slogan is more comforting to the majority of (real) humans, including Christians?
2. Should we then abandon cultural engagement? Should we abandon the public arena? Should we abandon fighting for the freedom of sex-slaves or to end abortion? Of course not!
3. Should we not bother to vote? Of course not! We are commanded to be good stewards of the things we have been given. Even as the Lord would see it as a

sin to waste our money, resources or our time, so also is it irresponsible to waste our freedoms, etc.

- L. Another good example would be peace and reconciliation in the Middle East. While it is hopeless to think that we will ever see comprehensive peace in the region before He returns, we can however bring peace and reconciliation to some individuals. We can win on the micro level, bring peace between some individuals and even groups, but not comprehensively.
- M. So in all things, we work hard with our words and our actions to bear witness to the King and His Kingdom. But the ultimate expression of bearing witness is Martyrdom. The word itself literally means Witness. Suffering martyrdom is the ultimate expression of bearing witness to, of pointing to the Day of the Lord and the physical resurrection of the body.

III. SOME THOUGHTS ON MARTYRDOM: COUNTING THE COSTS OF SAYING YES

- A. Martyrdom, throughout Christian history has been both celebrated and romanticized.
 - 1. Martyrdom is more than just a glorious, painful death. It is more than achieving the status of Christian saint-legend.
 - 2. Martyrdom involves great shame, chaos and confusion. It is messy and destructive.
 - 3. While men may fondly romanticize being beaten and killed, for most women, the reality is that martyrdom will likely include being raped. Torture is never romantic.
 - 4. For married men, saying yes to martyrdom could include having your wife and perhaps even your daughters raped or seeing your own family tortured. In such a perverse world, today even the men may be raped.
- B. Stories out of Iraq before Saddam fell demonstrate how wicked mankind can be.
 - 1. Many in persecuted countries will be heard to pray, "Father, please take me, but do not take or hurt my family". This is okay to pray. But we cannot demand it of God. We must even say yes to the chance that we will outlive our families, our spouses, our children.
 - 2. How many truly are willing to raise their hand and say yes. To come forward for an altar call to sign up for this?
- C. Yet Jesus says that if you are not willing, you cannot be His disciples. And we actually have no place in the Kingdom of Heaven.
 - 1. "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. —**Luke 14:26-27**

- D. Paul said that we are already dead. We have been crucified with Christ, and no longer live. This must become our reality.
1. "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. —**Galatians 2:20**
- E. We must come to the cross to die. To die to our desires. To our own dreams, our own plans and hopes. The world says, "hold onto your dreams".
- F. Jesus says that clinging to dreams is the quickest way to lose your life and end up being disappointed for eternity.
- G. We must begin occasionally talking about the realities of Martyrdom and each of us must begin meditating on these things on a regular basis. Not in a morbid or suicidal way, but in a sober manner.
- H. Each of us must begin preparing our hearts for loss. We must daily practice letting go of the things we cling to.
- I. Conversely, we will be encouraged by daily pondering the beauty and worth of Jesus, and the glories of the age to come. Only will this sustain us.
- J. We need more sermons about the specifics laid out in Scripture concerning resurrection of the dead, the age to come, and the glories to follow.
- K. In the days to come, we will all be tested to the core of who we are. The whole world will be tested.
- L. We must prepare for reality: In my own experience, in the tests that I have passed, I rarely get an A or even a B. Almost never. This also is done to show us who we are and to cause us to rely only on Him, and not glory in our own self-righteousness.
- M. Victory will only come through letting go of this world. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb. (The shed blood of our master) and they likewise did not love their lives unto death.
1. The finished work of Christ, without its appropriation, without our saying yes to it, is not sufficient. It also requires that we also do not love our own lives. This is the proof that we are in Him and not self-deluded and self-deceived.
 2. "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even unto death". —**Revelation 12:11**