

CHRIST AND CULTURE: THREE MODELS

“Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world.’” (John 18:38)

I. Foundations for Kingdom Thinking

A. God’s goal for creation from the very beginning: God’s glory revealed in His *unbreakable* fellowship with a holy people in a holy place under an obedient covenant representative.

“There is an absolute end posited for the universe before and apart from sin. The universe, as created, was only a beginning . . . [The goal was] an absolute, perfect, ethical relation to God and a supernaturalizing of man and the world.” – G. Vos, *The Eschatology of the OT*, p. 73.

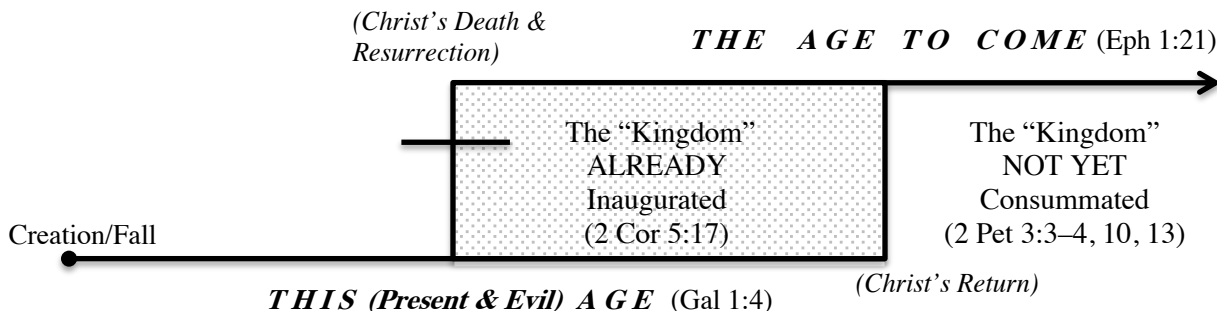
WCF 7.2 – The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

B. Christ has secured this unbreakable fellowship with His people by inaugurating the “latter days” (Old Testament prophets), “the age to come” (apostle Paul), or the “kingdom of heaven” (Matthew) in his life, death and resurrection.

1. Jer 23:5 – “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.”
2. Gal 4:4 – “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

C. Christ will perfect this unbreakable fellowship with His people by consummating “the age to come” (apostle Paul) or the “kingdom of heaven” (Matthew) on the “last day” (John).

1. Acts 3:19–21 – “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.” (see also Phil 3:20–21, Rev 21:1–4)



“The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, **not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven**, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.”
- Westminster Confession of Faith, 8.5

II. The Kingdom of God

“[T]he idea of the coming of the kingdom is pre-eminently the idea of the kingly self-assertion of God, of his coming to the world in order to reveal his royal majesty, power and right.” (Herman Ridderbos)

A. Anticipated in the Old Testament

Dan 2:44 – “[T]he God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.” (Cf. Zech 14:9; 2 Sam 7:12–13)

B. Fulfilled in Jesus Christ

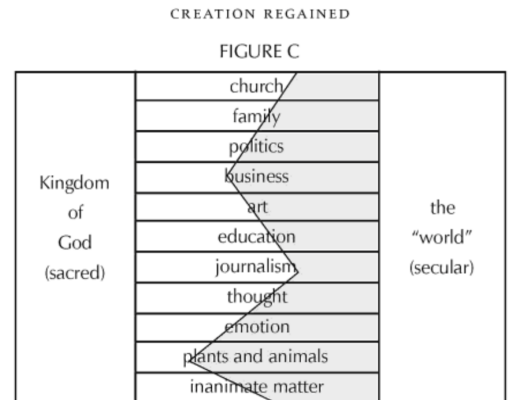
ALREADY – **Matt 4:17** – “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” (Cf. Matt 12:28)

NOT YET – **Matt 7:21** – “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Cf. Luke 21:51; John 3:3)

III. A Christian’s “Good Works” and the Kingdom of God

A. View #1: A Christian’s good works transform this world into Christ’s Kingdom on earth (see Albert Wolters’ *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformation Worldview* [2005]).

1. “Both God and Satan lay claim to the whole of creation, leaving nothing neutral or undisputed . . . The divine line between them cuts across every creational reality . . . Moreover the line moves: whenever family life, for example, grows in obedience and conformity to God’s creational law, there **the kingdom advances** and the world is pushed back. Wherever the spirit of humanism secularizes human thought, there **the kingdom of God loses terrain** and is taken captive ‘through hollow and deceptive philosophy...’ Redemption, then, is the recovery of creational goodness through the annulment of sin and the effort toward the progressive removal of its effects everywhere.”¹



(a) Does the expanding Kingdom of Christ ever “lose terrain” (cf. John 6:37, 10:29)?

(b) How does Christ build his redemptive kingdom on earth? Does it expand as Christians “take dominion” of the culture?

B. View #2: Even though Christians are members of an eternal kingdom identified with the church, their good works “out there” in the world accord with non-Christian ethical works, which will all come to nothing on the last day (see David VanDrunen’s *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* [2010]).

1. “[Scripture teaches] that the affairs of human culture are temporary, provisional, and bound to pass away. **The Kingdom of God proclaimed by the Lord Jesus Christ is not built through politics, commerce, music, or sports.** Redemption does not consist in restoring

¹ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, pp. 81, 83; bold emphasis added.

people to fulfill Adam's original task, but consists in the Lord Jesus Christ himself fulfilling Adam's original task once and for all, on our behalf. Thus redemption is not 'creation regained' but 'recreation gained.'"²

2. "For many readers I hope this book will be liberating, freeing you from well-meaning but nonbiblical pressure from other Christians to 'transform' your workplace or to find uniquely 'Christian' ways of doing ordinary tasks."³
3. "It is correct to view cultural activities as gifts of God and as opportunities to please and glorify him. **But the inherent goodness of cultural activities is not at all the emphasis of the New Testament.** In comparison to many contemporary books that issue rousing calls to honor God in our studies, occupations, music, and other cultural activities, the New Testament is much more subdued and cautionary."⁶

(a) Evaluation?

- C. View #3: A Christian's good works *testify* or *bear witness* to the redemptive kingdom of Christ, who through the gospel preached is gathering a people who will, one day, will enjoy a transformed new heaven and new earth.
 - A. Christians are a "pilgrim people," whose works are to *reflect* the goodness, righteousness and beauty of the invisible kingdom of Christ, who will one day visibly transform this fallen world into a perfected paradise at his return.
 - B. To embrace your pilgrim identity does NOT mean abdicating this world (see Matt 5:13–14; 2 Cor 2:14–16).
 - C. To bear witness to the redemptive kingdom of Christ in all areas of life does NOT mean that we are called to usher in the New Heavens and New Earth before Christ's return (see Phil 3:20–21; Heb 11:13–16; 1 Pet 1:3–5).

IV. Conclusion

"[G]ood works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith: and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life." (WCF 16.2)

"[T]he essential feature of all our labor that we perform under the sun is what we become through our work, what our personality acquires by way of the consciousness, spirit, power, richness, and fullness of living. That is what abides. That is never lost. That does not disappear like so many insignificant works of our hands. That is what we carry with us out of this world into the future world. That constitutes the work that follow us." (Herman Bavinck, "The Kingdom of God: Our Highest Good," trans. Nelson Kloosterman, *TBR* 2 [2011]: 154–55).

² David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, p. 26; bold emphasis added.

³ David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, p. 27.

⁶ David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, p. 124; bold emphasis added.