

Moore, Russell. *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004.

Introduction

Russell Moore's book the *Kingdom of Christ* is a biblical theological approach to understanding some of the greatest doctrines in the Bible, and how they impel believers to live in this world. In the first chapter, relying heavily on the work of Carl Henry, Moore exposes evangelicalism's unstable foundation, its lack of theological agreement. Chapters two through four examine in turn, eschatology, soteriology, and ecclesiology. Here Moore expounds a Kingdom theology that bridges the gap between classical dispensationalism and reformed theology. He shows how these two poles of conservative theology have been converging within the last 50 years, and how fixing Christ at the center of this Kingdom theology does the most to explain and apply the comprehensive message of the Bible. Finally in chapter five, Moore makes a clarion call for evangelicals to embrace an agreed upon Kingdom theology that will identify evangelicals and help them cooperate to spread the gospel of the Kingdom in America and beyond.

Evaluation

Of the three primary doctrines examined in *The Kingdom of Christ*, eschatology comes first. When I began reading this book I wondered why Moore gave this doctrine the pride of place. To me it made the most sense to put the "last things" last. Yet, as I read the book, and saw the centrality of eschatology, not only in Russell Moore's thought, but also in the minds of

the biblical authors, I began to understand the primary importance of eschatology. God had the end in mind from the beginning, and has from then been aiming for the eschaton (Is. 46:9).

For so long, salvation was the singular focus of my Christian life. Eschatology was a peripheral afterthought, and the church a universal and generic community that had little effect on my daily living. Thankfully, these perspectives have changed and are changing today. Still, as I wrestled with this book, latent indifferences concerning eschatology arose and were overcome by a sense of urgency to live for and about the inbreaking Kingdom of Christ.

Moore begins *The Kingdom of Christ* with his understanding of eschatology precisely because of its effects on salvation and the church. In the final sentence of the chapter he says that an “inaugurated eschatology [provides] the foundation for reexamining...the doctrines of salvation and the church” (80). In positing this view of eschatology, Moore follows the trail blazed by G. E. Ladd that the Kingdom has come, but not fully. Like Ladd, Moore articulates an “already / not yet” understanding of the Kingdom of God. Citing the dispensational and covenantal models of eschatology, Moore shows how his “inaugurated eschatology” answers many of the outstanding questions left by both hermeneutical extremes. Moreover, he elucidates many ways in which these two traditional readings of the Bible are incomplete. He shows the importance of reading the Bible well, and more specifically, reveals how eschatology impacts today. He summarizes, “the commitment to an ‘already’ of the Kingdom protects against an otherworldly flight from political and social responsibility while the ‘not yet’ chastens the prospects of such activity” (79).

With this attention to the Kingdom of God, its current reality and yet future arrival, I have become hooked on considering the last things of God. Before, the problem I had with eschatology was its seemingly unimportant attention to trivial detail. All I had been exposed to

was a “Left Behind” theology that made much of charting the end times. Reading Moore’s explanation of Christ’s kingdom remedied many of those theological ailments and finally gave me a vision of something more significant, substantial, and grand. Consequently, my thirst for understanding eschatology has grown. I now see that all things are moving towards their consummation in Christ (Eph. 1:10); thus, soteriology and ecclesiology are both heavily eschatological.

Advocating this exact point, Moore continues in the next chapter by discussing salvation with its personal and cosmic implications. He maintains that Christ’s death on the cross is for the salvation of sinners. Yet drawing on passages like Colossians 1:20, he asserts that Christ’s work on the cross accomplished more than salvation for sinners, but redemption for all of creation. He writes, “Salvation is, as Michael Williams notes, ‘a foretaste of cosmic regeneration,’ as the Spirit of Christ creates in the human heart the same kind of new creation that will one day take place ‘with the eschatological renewal of the natural order’ through the work of Christ” (100).

Never considering salvation this way before, Moore maximizes the work of the Cross by holding on to its salvific work for sinners, and adding to it the power to redeem creation, the dwelling place of humanity. He, in fact, increases the efficacy of the Cross by adding cosmic renewal. Again, as this quote suggests, salvation is vitally linked with eschatology. And when they are understood in tandem, they give an incredible picture of hope for the future and a present-day power to live set apart for Christ in order to receive his coming Kingdom. In short, Moore’s articulation of cosmic renewal was something I had never long considered and was greatly enlightened and encouraged by his biblical descriptions and expositions.

Finally, Moore moves to consider the church. His primary contention is with the rise of parachurches and the ways in which they undermine the role of the church. Though seeking to “salvage their soteriology from their ecclesiology” (158), twentieth century American evangelicals moved away from growing Christians in the context of the local church and moved instead toward parachurch ministries built on various affinities and particularities. This is incredibly problematic, since it is within full-orbed local churches that the kingdom of God is manifested (164). Moore pushes for a “congregationally focused engagement, one that [should expect] a culture of explicit Christianity to flourish under the reign of Christ in the church, rather than expecting a ‘generic’ Christian culture in the outside social structures” (165).

This argument by Moore reinforced what the Lord has been teaching me ever since coming to seminary. It is the local church that is to be the hub of Christian living. Ministers of the gospel are to shepherd Christians within the church and reach society by way of that same local congregation. Attending college in a town devoid of any strong local churches, Campus Crusade met my spiritual needs, but it did not foster within me a love for the bride of Christ. I am thankful for Crusade, and yet as I prepare for the ministry and consider the ecclesiological needs of Christians, I am more and more committed to serving Christ in the context of a local body of believers. It is this community of saints that has the greatest chance of impacting a world full of lost people. It is also this community that best represents the forthcoming kingdom of Christ, by manifesting the love, forgiveness, gifts, and healing of the all-powerful gospel of the kingdom.

Conclusion

The Kingdom of Christ has been immensely helpful in showing me more clearly three of the most fundamental Biblical doctrines—eschatology, soteriology, and ecclesiology—and

their relationship to the eternal kingdom God has been seeking to establish since the beginning of the world (Matthew 25:34). It has helped cut a path through the mire of arguments laid out by dispensationalists and reformed theologians, while giving me helpful guidance for reading Scripture more comprehensively. In addition, it has motivated me to live for the Kingdom of God and to proclaim that kingdom as I preach and teach. Finally, it has encouraged me to set my hope on the coming reality of Christ's everlasting, righteous reign. In all of this, *The Kingdom of Christ* was worth all the labor to read, for it was incredibly thought-provoking, ministry-shaping, and above all edifying.