

# **The Kingdom of God is Present and Future: An Historical Survey of Evangelical Eschatology and a Summary of Russell Moore's *The Kingdom of Christ***

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Is eschatology a contentious subject? It depends, partly, on who you ask and on who they have been reading.

More than fifty years ago eschatology sharply divided evangelicals, especially with regards to the timing of the millennium. Coming out of WWII, premillennialism became a litmus test for many Fundamentalists, Dispensationalists, and other self-styled stalwarts of the faith. By contrast, Reformed amillennialists strongly argued for the spiritual nature of the kingdom and wrote against the premillennialists.

If you read the books from teachers of this era (circa 1940s – 1970s), both sides make black-and-white distinctions with respect to the timing of the kingdom. Either the kingdom was entirely future, as premillennialists averred; or it was wholly present in the church, with the predominately Gentile church swallowing up the promises made to Israel. In the days when the neo-evangelical movement began (think: Billy Graham, Harold Ockenga, Carl Henry, and Fuller Seminary), division marked the evangelical landscape.

Fast forward to today and the scene is remarkably different. In academic circles the rancor and rhetoric is much reduced, even as substantial differences persist. Most recently, I read an irenic and scholarly work defending Dispensationalism published by Dallas Theological Seminary professors. In reading *Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption: A Developing and Diverse Tradition*, two thoughts occurred. First, as a non-Dispensational theologian, I agree with many of their points. And second, I don't think the founders of DTS would recognize the brand of Dispensationalism proffered in this book as their own.

What has happened? What became of the strong disagreements and near-slanderous accusations? And how *should* we think of the differences between amillennialism and premillennialism? Those questions are far from academic, as they exist in hundreds, if not thousands, of Bible-believing church. As faithful elders and Bible teachers study to show themselves approved and necessarily read various teachers from various theological perspectives, how should they hold their doctrines and posture themselves against those who differ?

## **Recalling the Last Seventy-Five Years**

Personally, I have found great help by understanding how the evangelical church at large has considered these matters over the last seventy-years. I find it fascinating and encouraging that there has been a growing consensus among Dispensationalists and Covenant Theologians with a view of Christ and his kingdom that has brought former

“enemies” into much closer agreement. Not without eliminating all disagreements, the last two generations have placed greater emphasis on the unifying elements of an inaugurated eschatology—a view of God’s kingdom that affirms its present and future realities. Such emphasis has created space for dialogue and produced greater theological accord. Through this shared perspective, many premillennialists have grown in their understanding of the Spiritual nature of the present kingdom (without denying its future reign), and many Reformed amillennialists have matured in their appreciation for the material (and even national) promises of God’s kingdom.

Still, how did this emerging consensus arise? Who were the major proponents driving this “inaugurated eschatology”? And what can we learn from the development of doctrine over the last seventy-five years? These questions bring us to Russell Moore’s book *The Kingdom of Christ*, a historical-theological survey of neo-evangelicalism’s kingdom theology and its impact on American Christianity since World War II. While the whole book is worth the read, what follows is close summary of his chapter on eschatology, followed by a few examples of how faithful pastors have understood the “already and not yet” aspects of God’s kingdom.

## **Carl F. H. Henry and George Eldon Ladd**

From the outset of his book, Russell Moore, former Dean of Theology at Southern Seminary (Louisville, Kentucky) and current President of the Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission, points to two twentieth century theologians who were instrumental in bridging the gap between Dispensationalists and Covenant Theologians. Through their leadership—theological and relational—they successfully made inaugurated eschatology, with its “already but not yet” view of the kingdom, *the* eschatology of modern evangelicalism.

First, Carl F. H. Henry was the leading theologian of the neo-evangelical movement. He served as the founding editor for *Christianity Today*, taught theology at numerous seminaries, and disciple a generation of rising theologians and institutional leaders. His book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* issued a clarion call for American Christians in the 1940s to engage culture. Himself a premillennial, he chastised his Fundamentalist brethren who separated themselves from the world in order to prepare for the coming kingdom. A firm defender of orthodox theology and biblical inerrancy, he argued that citizens of the kingdom were commissioned to be salt and light in the world. For him the kingdom of Christ had present-tense implications for evangelical engagement and Russell Moore picks these themes up in his book *the Kingdom of Christ*.

Second, George Eldon Ladd, a Harvard-trained Northern Baptist, provided the rigorous scholarship and exegetical labor to convince a generation of scholars that the kingdom of God was already and not yet here. Sitting in a New Testament Theology class in 2006, Tom Schreiner said that Classical Dispensationalism (think Charles Ryrie and

John Walvoord), not Progressive Dispensationalism (as is mostly taught at DTS today) was dead and dying, in large part because of George Eldon Ladd.

Perhaps, his view is overstated, but it bears witness to the way Ladd's series of articles and books on the kingdom of God changed the discussion. For instance, in a 1986 poll of evangelical scholars, Mark Noll discovered that behind Calvin's Institute no book was more influential than Ladd's *A Theology of the New Testament*.<sup>1</sup> This bears witness to Ladd's giftedness as a scholar and the centrality to the work he pursued. Over the course of his career, Ladd engaged German scholarship on the topic of the kingdom of God. In these studies, Ladd consumed the German works and proved himself to be a first-rate scholar among a peer-group that had for fifty years excluded evangelicals. Thus, his academic ministry created a place at the table for evangelical scholars.

Still, some of his most lasting work was intra-evangelical. In turning his attention to Dispensationalism, Ladd another premillennial, made the case from rigorous studies of the New Testament that a view of the kingdom that only considered its future arrival failed to do justice to all the biblical data. In a litany of books (e.g., *The Presence of the Kingdom: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*; *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God*; *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and Rapture*; and *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*), he made cogent biblical arguments for the present and future aspects of the kingdom. In time, his name has become synonymous with the "already not yet," and is still a leading influence and conversation partner with premillennial and amillennial scholars alike.

In short, these two men, with others who will be named below, have shifted the whole discussion about the millennium. Many from Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology have moved towards one another, and in *The Kingdom of Christ* Russell Moore shows how a more Christ-centered, inaugurated eschatology has brought that about in the last two generations.

## **Carl Henry's Approach to the Kingdom of God**

In the start of his chapter on eschatology, Russell Moore appeals to Carl F. H. Henry as a mediating voice between premillennial dispensationalism and Reformed amillennialism. In his book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, he makes equal critiques of both:

- Henry rightly appreciated the way Fundamentalists opposed the Social Gospel of liberal Protestants. However, he critiqued them for wrongly neglecting the Christian's "social imperative." At the same time, he critiqued Fundamentalists for conceiving of amillennialism as a slide towards liberalism. (26–27)

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*. p. 212.

- Henry was not amillennial. He was open to their arguments, but was never convinced exegetically. In fact, he criticized the “growing numbers of evangelicals ‘revolting against the prophetic detail of dispensational premillennialism.’” (29)
- In the end, he did not “deem a millennial view to be a test of evangelical authenticity” and he sought to bring the best aspects of amillennialism and premillennialism to bear on the church and culture. (28–29)

In this Henry proves to be a model for us still today. He puts the greatest emphasis on the most important parts of eschatology and chastens us from being overly consumed with the minor details of dates and times. Moore writes of Henry’s view of the kingdom.

Kingdom theology was precisely what [Henry] was proposing. In calling on evangelicals to abandon the extremes of the Social Gospel and fundamentalist withdrawal, Henry simultaneously exhorted Evangelical theology to underpin its eschatological convictions with a broader understanding of the kingdom of God. (30)

## **George Eldon Ladd’s Inaugurated Eschatology**

Inaugurated Eschatology is a view of God’s Kingdom that says it is already and not yet. C. Everett Berry defines it as a “concept . . . which highlights a theological tension in the New Testament between the temporary co-existence of two mutually exclusive realms.”<sup>2</sup> These realms are the “present age” and the “age to come.” From the Old Testament, the Prophets anticipated the age to come with the arrival of the Messiah. However, as Christ’s first advent proved, he came *first* in humility to die for his people (Matthew 1:23), before receiving his kingdom in glory. This two-phased approach—suffering and glory—was anticipated by the Old Testament Prophets but not understood until he died and rose again. In graphic form, it looks much like the following figure:

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<sup>2</sup> C. Everett Berry, “The SBJT Forum: The Kingdom of God,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 12/1 (2008):109–111.

In the twentieth century, three New Testament scholars made a compelling case for this view. Outside of evangelicalism, Werner G. Kümmel and Oscar Cullman made the biblical case. Within evangelicalism, George Eldon Ladd, following Cullmann and Vos, argued for the present and future realities of the kingdom. On this topic, Moore points to Ladd as a leading exegetical theologian and writes:

This concept of the eschaton in terms of it “already/ not yet” dualism, Ladd believed, made sense of the biblical data and solve the impasse between the arguments for consistent and realized eschatology in the New Testament writings, especially in the teachings of Jesus. Thus, it resolved the tension between the otherworldly “apocalyptic” interpretation of New Testament eschatology and the historically anchored “prophetic” interpretation, . . . Ladd’s most focused work, however, was forged in response two eschatological questions within Evangelical theology. As such, Ladd’s attempt to amass a Kingdom-oriented eschatology represented an explicit challenge to both dispensationalist and Reformed traditions within the Evangelical coalition. For Ladd, the crucial point for establishing an evangelical inaugurated eschatology was to come to a consensus on the present and future aspects of the reign of Jesus as messianic King.

In this, he found both the dispensational premillennialists and the covenantal amillennialists to be in error.” (32)

In his day, Ladd opposed Dispensationalists and Covenant Theologians. Driven by Scripture’s present and future approach to God’s Kingdom, he challenged the errant spiritualism of the amillennialists and the short-sited futurism of the premillennialists. Moore captures his mediating approach,

While dispensationalists severed the kingdom from the present activity of the Messiah, Ladd argued, the amillennialists severed it from the goal of history by relegating the kingdom to the arena of the human heart, the church, or the supra-temporal heavenly state. (32)

In contrast to both of these narrow extremes, Ladd viewed the Kingdom as “a single concept, the rule of God, which manifests itself in a progressive way and in more than one realm. It is God’s saving will in action” (32, quoting Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God*, 97).

In his disputations, Ladd contested the arguments of Lewis Sperry Chafer, Alva McClain, John Walvoord, and J. Dwight Pentecost, who said the kingdom of God was entirely future and that the current age is merely an “interregnum between the rejection of the kingdom offered to Israel in the person of Christ and establishment of the Kingdom at His return” (33). At the same time, Ladd opposed the views of Louis Berkof, O.T. Allis, and other Covenant Theologians that the kingdom is entirely spiritual (36).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, John McArthur in his six-part study on the millennium makes O.T. Allis and Lorraine Boettner his conversation partners (see “Why Every Calvinist Should Be a Premillennialist,” March 25,

In short, Ladd took up the difficult position of correcting both sides. Such a position invited misunderstanding and much abuse from Westminster and Dallas, but in the end—through much personal suffering—his scholarship forged an emerging consensus, centered on his inaugurated eschatology. Still, it wasn't his mediating position that brought consensus—as if agreement could be fostered by mere compromise. Rather, it was his rigorous exegesis and biblical arguments.

While this paper articulates the historical contours of the last seventy-five years, it is worth noting a summary of Ladd's doctrine of God's kingdom as it relates to the church. These attributes help define the church and show how the kingdom of God is both present and future in the church.

## **Five Realities Concerning Christ's Kingdom**

Against the view that says the kingdom of God has been spiritualized in the individual—a view based on a poor translation of Luke 17:21 (“the kingdom of God is within you,” KJV; rather than “the kingdom of God is in the midst of you,” ESV), George Eldon Ladd centered the presence and present activity of Christ's kingdom in the church. At the same time, he shows that the kingdom of God is found in Christ's reign more than the location of his rule (i.e., his realm).<sup>4</sup> In this way, Ladd opposes both replacement theology and classical Dispensationalism.

From his *A Theology of the New Testament*, he makes the five following points from a chapter entitled “The Kingdom and the Church.”<sup>5</sup>

### **(1) The Church is not the Kingdom.**

In the Gospels, the disciples were never equated with the kingdom. It is wrong to base such a reading on Matthew 16:18–19. While Reformed theologians like Geerhardus Vos equated church and kingdom and spoke of the kingdom as an internal reality, according to Ladd, he missed the metaphorical language. Just the same Matthew 13:41 cannot be used to defend the equivalency of church and kingdom. The parable is self-interpreting and Jesus clearly teaches that the world is the field, not the church. Moreover, Christian apostles and missionaries proclaimed the Gospel of the kingdom, not the gospel of the church. In a sentence, then, the Church is the people of the coming Kingdom; the citizens of heaven. Local churches, therefore, live out their calling as embassies of king Jesus, anticipating and announcing Christ's coming kingdom.

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2007, <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/90-334/why-every-calvinist-should-be-a-premillennialist-part-1>; accessed May 31, 2016). These older amillennialists do not well represent the views of more recent advocates of amillennialism (e.g., Sam Storms, Kim Riddlebarger, or Sam Storms). Accordingly, McArthur overshoots his target. He criticizes the same errors that I would critique in the older amillennialists. McArthur proves the need for updating the conversation with inaugurated eschatology.

<sup>4</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 60–61.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 103–117.

## **(2) The Kingdom creates the Church.**

The rule of God, proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ called (and calls) men and women to fellowship in God's kingdom. It should not be supposed that the result is the creation of a totally pure church—i.e., a local church who contains only sheep and no goats. Ladd, following Jesus teaching (Matthew 13), is clear on this: the kingdom brings in good fish and bad. Nevertheless, in the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom, local churches comprised of Spirit-born citizens of the kingdom are created.

## **(3) The Church witnesses to the Kingdom.**

Speaking specifically, the church cannot “build” or “become” the kingdom; rather it “witnesses” to the kingdom (Acts 1:8; 26:16). Hence the primary activity of the church is defending the truth of the gospel (1 Tim 3:15) and declaring its contents (2 Corinthians 5:21). In this context, Ladd explains how the gospel of the kingdom must be proclaimed to all the nations. While growing up out of Jewish soil, the gospel is for all peoples. The seventy emissaries sent out in Luke 10 evidence the fact that God seeks to gather men and women for his kingdom among all peoples—seventy is the number of nations in Genesis 10. Thus the church will be established among all nations, and once established a multi-national people will bear witness to the king and his kingdom.

The church not only witnesses the kingdom through its proclamation, but also in its character. The Sermon on the Mount reflects the kind of living, true disciples of the kingdom will exhibit. In demonstrating mercy, meekness, and forgiveness, the world beholds the love of God's kingdom. Thus while inhabiting an age of hostility and oppression, the church is a community of forgiveness, humility, and peace-making.

## **(4) The Church is the instrument of the Kingdom.**

In addition to proclaiming the gospel, the church also functions as a means of healing and restoration. While Ladd is not as clear on this point, it means at least that in the age of the apostles, Christ gave his messengers the power to cast out demons, heal the sick, and perform miracles. This continued in Acts, and in some ways the power of God continues today, in that miracles of conversion and healing continue.

Likewise, the church functions as an aggregate of believers who are salt and light in the world. In these ways, the blessedness of the kingdom is leaked into the present age, but only in ways that tell of the coming kingdom. The church does not convert this age to the coming Spiritual age (contra postmillennialism); rather, in the present age churches are communities of hope and healing which foreshadow the kingdom to come.

## **(5) The Church is the custodian of the Kingdom.**

Ladd contrasts the church with Israel. Under the old covenant, Israel functioned as the elected custodian of God's kingdom. However, in Christ, the people chosen to steward the keys of the kingdom are the people of the church—comprised of Jews and Gentiles.

Ladd shows how this develops in the gospels themselves. Matthew 21:43–44 (“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. <sup>44</sup> And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him”) records the way that the kingdom has been taken away from Israel and given to a people bearing fruit. From teaching of Jesus (see John 15), the fruit-bearing people are those who receive the gospel—the Jew first and then all nations (cf. Romans 1:16–17).

Similarly, in the Old Testament Israel functioned as the custodian to the knowledge of salvation. Sadly, too many teachers of the law failed to lead people to saving faith (Matthew 23:13). Thus, God chose a new people—a remnant from Israel and Gentiles too—to be his appointed custodians of salvation. Interestingly, in Mark 10:17–31 (the story of the Rich Young Ruler), we find Jesus speaking of the kingdom, salvation, and eternal life as three synonymous realities. Thus, those who receive Christ’s salvation are guaranteed eternal life; and such eternal life is the present experience of the coming kingdom.

Ladd continues to explain the content of the church’s custodianship. At minimum it is the onerous task of declaring forgiveness and condemnation. What Matthew 16:18–20 and 18:15–20 describe as binding and loosing, is the church’s task. In baptism, the church publicly declaring that a man or woman has been forgiven by God (cf. John 20:23). Likewise, in the act of church discipline the church is declaring the judgment of Christ’s royal law. The Lord’s Supper, too, is officiated by the church, where the congregation—a royal assembly—admits to the table those who have identified with Jesus and walk in his ways. As custodians of the kingdom, the church has the royal authority to bind and loose, what the king in heaven has already declared.

In these five ways, Ladd provides a very concrete explanation of the way God’s kingdom operates in the world today. Wherever the gospel of the kingdom is present and people are gathered by mutual adherence to that proclamation, there exists a covenant community that reflects the power, values, and life of the age to come. In this way, inaugurated eschatology is not abstract or theoretical, it is as tangible as our communion bread and as practical as the wisdom needed to perform church discipline.

In sum, Ladd’s approach to the kingdom of God became a staple of evangelical scholarship and helped forged an evangelical consensus about the present and future realities of God’s kingdom.

### **The Emerging Evangelical Consensus**

Since World War II, evangelical eschatology, spurred on by the neo-evangelical labors of Henry and Ladd, has achieved a most improbable consensus. While the debate remains over the timing of the millennium, the inaugurated eschatology of Henry and Ladd has made great strides, influencing a generation of evangelical theologians. Moore records some of their appraisals:

- **Stanley Grenz:** “Recent theological discussions have been fruitful in that most scholars now agree that eschatology focuses primarily on the kingdom of God. . . . They also speak of this kingdom as in some sense both a present and a future reality, so that ours is the time of the already and the not yet.”
- **Craig Blomberg:** Eschatology “reflects a growing consensus among evangelicals, that are endorsed by not a few outside our circles, and that should be widely accepted and promoted, particularly in light of so much misinformation at the level of popular preaching, especially over radio and television.”
- **Millard Erickson:** “We need to recognize that eschatology does not pertain exclusively to the future. Jesus did introduce a new age, and the victory over the powers of evil has already been won, even though the struggle is still to be enacted in history” (205; citing *Christian Theology*, 1170).

N.B. While recognizing Erickson’s awareness of inaugurated eschatology, Moore critiques Erickson and Grudem for their failure to incorporate the already/not yet schema into their systematic theologies.

With various approaches and applications, evangelicals on the left (Greg Boyd and Stanley Grenz) and the right (Gordon Lewis, Bruce Demarest, Bruce Ware) have become convinced of Ladd and Henry’s inaugurated eschatology. Bruce Ware observes this encouraging development in evangelical theology:

What is heartening is that a basic eschatological framework established by inaugurated eschatology is now widely shared by these two theological traditions [Dispensationalism and Covenant theology]. . . . Our arguments have more to do with the specific manner in which aspects of the already and not yet find their fulfillment than with fundamentally different schemes of eschatology viewed more holistically.” (39)

### **How Have Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology Moved?**

It is this sentiment that Moore highlights as he shows how Dispensational and Covenant Theology, as two opposing movements, have both moved towards one another over the last half-century.

First, Moore cites the rise of “Progressive Dispensationalism,” which incorporates an inaugurated eschatology into its biblical theology and doctrine of eschatology. Although denounced by some Classical Dispensationalists, this movement has taken seriously the elements of Scripture which point to the current reign of Christ and the way the New Testament speaks of royal promises being already fulfilled (39).

In other words, unlike Classical Dispensationalists who equate the kingdom of God with the millennial reign of Christ, Progressive Dispensationalists allow for a more nuanced position: “They see it [the millennial kingdom] as a particular manifestation of the Kingdom that stands in continuity with the progressive development of the Kingdom throughout the dispensations of redemptive history” (43). For Progressive Dispensationalists, therefore, the kingdom is still a future reality, but as “Bock argues, in the person Jesus, the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ aspects of the Kingdom are complementary, not held in a conflicted or paradoxical tension” (41).

Next, covenant theology has also been impacted by inaugurated eschatology. Whereas previous generations of Covenant Theologians—Louis Berkhof, in particular—“tended to emphasize the Kingdom of Christ in almost entirely present, spiritual terms” (45), newer Covenant theologians have given more attention to the earthly aspects of the Old Testament promises. Following Herman Ridderbos, Anthony Hoekema, and Richard Gaffin, Covenant theology has shown growing appreciation for the new creation and the physical realities of Christ’s resurrection. In other words, Covenant theology is not merely spiritualizing the physical promises of God; they are also emphasizing future realities of the kingdom’s physical consummation. On this Moore writes,

For modified covenantalists, Hoekema’s “new earth” model of future consummation corrects the crypto-Platonic aspects of the older model of amillennial eschatological hope, while reasserting the New Testament goal as the Kingdom, not heaven. It also seeks to address the premillennial argument that the picture of eschatology in the Old and New Testament Scriptures is earthly and material, not static and timeless in heaven or exclusively spiritual and ethical in the life of the church. In so doing, Poythress argues, the modified ‘new earth’ eschatology ‘helps to bring the traditional millennial positions closer to one another,’ and thus may even serve to transcend the millennial impasse between covenantalists and dispensationalists and other evangelicals. (51)

### **And at the Popular Level**

What has been considered thus far has delved deeply into seminary discussions and academic research. At a more popular level, however, we also find many pastors and noted authors who have incorporated an already but not yet view of the kingdom. For sake of time, let me point to one very well-respected preacher who appeals to inaugurated eschatology in his preaching: John Piper.

John Piper’s “Christian Hedonism” strongly emphasizes the doctrines of God, Scripture, salvation, justification, missions, etc. but he is less likely to preach or write about eschatology and ecclesiology. That being said, he does employ an inaugurated eschatology in a handful of sermons. For instance, in the first of eight messages on Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1 – 12), he shows how Jesus bookends six future kingdom blessings (“They shall . . .” 6x in vv. 4 – 9), between two present-tense verses (“Theirs is the kingdom of heaven” in vv. 3, 10). He writes,

I think this is Jesus' way of saying that in some sense the kingdom of heaven is present with the disciples now ("Theirs is the kingdom of heaven") but that the full blessings of the kingdom will have to wait for the age to come ("They shall inherit the earth").

Another way to put it is that Jesus has brought the kingdom of heaven to earth in his own kingly power and fellowship, and we can enjoy foretastes of it here and now; but the full experience of the life of the kingdom will have to wait for the age to come.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, in a sermon entitled, "Is the Kingdom Present or Future?" Piper argues from a bevy of texts that the kingdom is here and not yet fully here. As if taking class notes from his training at Fuller Seminary (where George Eldon Ladd taught), Piper marshals evidence for the presence of the kingdom (Luke 17:20–21; Matthew 12:28) in the Gospels and then for its future anticipation (Luke 19:11–12). Then, like Ladd, he turns to the 'mystery' of the kingdom, which is best seen in the parable of Jesus (esp. Matthew 13). He works his way through these parables showing the present and yet progressive growth of the kingdom. In the end, he concludes with two applications:

1. "Beware of insisting that God demonstrate dimensions of the kingdom now which he has reserved for the consummation. The kingdom now is limited in its scope and effects. And beware of assuming that all who are swept into the power of God's kingdom are the children of the kingdom.
2. "The kingdom really has arrived. Unprecedented fulfillments of God's purposes are in the offing. The King has come. The King has dealt with sin once for all in the sacrifice of himself. The King sits at the Father's right hand and reigns now until all his enemies are under his feet. The King's righteousness is now already ours by faith. The King's Spirit is now already dwelling in us. The King's holiness is now already being produced in us. The King's joy and peace have now already been given to us. The King's victory over Satan is now already ours as we use the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. The King's power to witness is now already available to us. And the King's gifts—the gifts of his Spirit—are now already available for ministry.

With that balanced application, he charges his congregation to be a church who seeks first the kingdom of God and labors to proclaim the message of the kingdom.<sup>7</sup> This is the ethical imperative of inaugurated eschatology—to be ready for the coming of the king at any time and to make the most of this age in preparation for the next. While postmillennialists believe they can usher in the kingdom, and hyper-fundamentalists effectively disengaged from culture because it is all going to burn, those who see the

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<sup>6</sup> John Piper, "The Beatitudes and the Gospel of the Kingdom," <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-beatitudes-and-the-gospel-of-the-kingdom>, January 26, 1986; accessed May 30, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> John Piper, "Is the Kingdom Present or Future?" <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/is-the-kingdom-present-or-future>, February 4, 1990; accessed May 30, 2016.

kingdom as already and not yet are both committed to preaching the gospel of the coming kingdom, even as they show seek to bring about good to the fallen world around them. This was Carl F. H. Henry's plea and the practice of all who live in this world as citizens of heaven.

## **Making Application**

From observing the history of eschatology from the bitter debates in the 1940s and 50s until the present, there is great reason to give thanks for those who labored in the Word of God and let the contours of Scripture override systems of theology. While there remain some hard-line Dispensationalists and Covenant Theologians, the effects of Henry's kingdom theology and Ladd's inaugurated eschatology have been to create a Christ-centered consensus that did not exist fifty years ago.

If you read the literature from that era, the tone was antagonistic and the arguments were black-and-white. Instead of retaining the fundamental doctrines of Christ's bodily resurrection, fundamentalists in the mid-twentieth century divided themselves over the timing of the millennium. Instead of linking arms with other evangelicals who believed in the inerrancy of Scripture, the penal substitution of Christ's cross, or the exclusivity of the gospel, fundamentalists in the name of fidelity to Scripture broke fellowship with those who held a different millennial position. Departing from *The Fundamentals* (written in 1909 which included statements on eschatology from various positions—amillennialist from Princeton and the other a premillennialist from Toronto Bible Training School) the fighting fundamentalists of mid-twentieth century made dispensational eschatology a litmus test for orthodoxy.

It is no surprise that those who have spent their time studying eschatology at the feet of Dwight Pentecost or, on the other side, Louis Berkhof would have an either-or approach to eschatology. Thankfully, in the last fifty years there has been an emerging consensus that has put Christ's kingdom at the center and sought to give balanced attention to all parts of Scripture. Through inaugurated eschatology, both sides have come towards the center, such that amillennialists must give an account for the physical realities of the promises to Israel and premillennialists must see how the presence of Christ's Spirit is the beginning of the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom.

While differences remain between amillennial and premillennial positions, there is truly an "evangelical eschatology" that depends upon an already/not yet view of Christ's kingdom. This kingdom theology has great potential for serving the universal and local church. At the level of the universal church, a robust inaugurated eschatology encourages irenic debate and biblical research. Unlike the salvos launched between John Walvoord and George Ladd, more recent discussions between Progressive Dispensationalists and modified covenantalists have produced a body of literature that examines the Scriptures without the rancor that once marked the debate. This is an edifying and most encouraging trend.

At the same time, local churches are also benefitted by this emerging consensus, as premillennial and amillennial brothers can largely agree on the main portions of their eschatology. If the kingdom is both present and future, the debates over timing can be downplayed; the reality of Christ's return can be rejoiced in; spiritual warfare in this age can be taken seriously; and unity can be found in putting stress on Christ and the gospel. Moreover, where core doctrines are affirmed, further discussion in the church can help both sides better understand the Scriptures. And even when millennial disagreements persist, a unified vision of Christ's already/not yet kingdom can supply ample eschatological unity.

It is with this in mind that I hope and pray, God will grant Word-centered, Christ-honoring, evangelism-impelling unity in our church.