

Week 2

Discussion Guide

Today we looked at John 17 which is a very complex passage. In this chapter Jesus speaks about His kingdom and His people while also shedding light on the kingdom of this world and the differences between the two kingdoms. Many of the issues that we have faced this year can be directly connected to our understanding, misunderstanding, or ignorance of Christ's teaching summarized in John 17 and found throughout all of Scripture. Christ's kingdom is "already realized/not yet realized" (he reigns now in heaven and over the church, but in this world we anticipate this as a future reality). What does that mean for us now, in this world?

D.L. Moody said concerning the church in the world, "The place for a ship is the sea. But God help the ship if the sea gets into it." This quote begins to highlight some of the important distinctions that Christ makes between the church and the world.

Q: What sort of relationship do you hear Christ describing in John 17 between the church and the world? *See verses 9, 11, 14, etc. also John 15:18-25*

And yet Christ will not speak of the world as one that is constantly or inherently opposed to his kingdom. Likewise, he will not exhort his disciples to an adversarial role against the world but rather to a kingdom-minded existence.

Q: What does this look like for Christ-followers? *See Matthew 5:13-16*

"We seek to influence the world by being the church, that is, by being something the world is not and never can be." Stanley Hauerwas/William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*

Of course there are some important questions as to what exactly our goal ought to be when we are living and working and contributing in society. Are we agents of life in a dying world? Do we have some sort of transformative power? Or possibly is our work meaningless in a world that will one day be replaced with a new heaven and new earth? *The answer seems to be not in what we do, but in what Christ does. Our ability in this world to work unto Christ, to do all things for the glory of Christ, and to reflect Christ is the way in which we can invest ourselves in society without fooling ourselves of the power of our work (in and of itself it can't transform) or convincing ourselves that it is simply meaningless to do anything in this world.*

It is clear from Jesus' prayer in John 17 that there is a priority for the church to glorify God and enjoy him *most especially* in our time together as the church (v.11). The more we understand Christ's words, the more we understand that time spent under the already realized kingdom of God in the church is time spent with glimpses of future glory.

Q: How much time do you spend together with other brothers and sisters in Christ? Do you think that amount of time is sufficient for your building up as the body of Christ? How does John 17 help prioritize our gathering each week for worship?

John 17 is also interesting because it represents the important shift in Jesus' ministry, being near to his final earthly work (death and resurrection), where he begins to more explicitly spell out his purpose in coming and likewise the purpose and focus of those who would come after Him, in His name.

Q: What does Christ indicate should be the primary focus of the people of God? *See v. 3, 4, 8, and 15*

Q: What are the tools, given here by Christ, used in the kingdom of God? *See v.6 and 17*

In the coming weeks, I am sure you can see how an understanding of this idea is necessary for a conversation on what the church and Christians should be doing/advocating for/fighting against in our society. Consider briefly how this might impact your thoughts on:

1. *Slavery*
2. *Social political movements*
3. *Do we obey the government and to what extent?*
4. *How Christians should disagree*
 - a. *We should be a reflection of the kingdom of our Lord - **This might be the only easy answer!** "The beatitudes are not simply a prescription for a better life; they are, first and foremost, a description of what life in the kingdom of God is like." Tullian Tchividjian, *Kingdom of God**

In Calvin's commentary on John he says, "Though godly kings defend the kingdom of Christ by the sword, still it is done in a different manner from that in which worldly kingdoms are wont to be defended; for the kingdom of Christ, being spiritual must be founded on the doctrine and power of the Spirit. In the same manner, too, its edification is promoted; for neither the laws and edicts of men, nor the punishments inflicted by them, enter into the consciences. It results, however, from the depravity of the world that the kingdom of Christ is strengthened more by the blood of the martyrs than by the aid of arms." **David Hall, *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, pg. 417**

How then does the kingdom advance in the New Testament? In every case the expression of Christ's universal lordship is explained not in terms of social or political power but in terms of the proclamation of the truth (John 18:37) and the preaching of the gospel to all nations, that they might keep his commandments (Matthew 28:19-20). It is the preaching of the gospel and the biblical administration of church discipline, the "keys of the kingdom," that open and close the kingdom of heaven (16:19; 18:15-20). The transformation for which the creation groans is contingent upon the proclamation of the gospel and the revelation of the sons of God (Romans 8:19). **Matthew Tuninga, *Two Kingdoms Doctrine: What is all the fuss about?***

Let us first consider that there is a twofold government in man: one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political, whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men. These are usually called the 'spiritual' and the 'temporal' jurisdiction (not improper terms) by which is meant that the former sort of government pertains to the life of the soul, while the latter has to do with the concerns of the present life - not only with food and clothing but with laying down laws whereby a man may live his life among other men holily, honorably, and temperately. *For the former resides in the inner mind, while the latter regulates only outward behavior. The one we may call the spiritual kingdom, the other, the political kingdom. Now these two, as we have divided them, must always be examined separately; and while one is being considered, we must call away and turn aside the mind from thinking about the other. There are in man, so to speak, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority.* **John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (3.19.15)**

To be sure, ministers of the gospel only communicate Christ's spiritual government if they faithfully preach his word. Where this does not occur, as in the case of Rome, the clergy constitute a merely human tyranny, with no relation to Christ's kingdom or his church. To sum up, since the church is Christ's kingdom, and he reigns by his word alone, will it not be clear to any man that those are lying words by which the kingdom of Christ is imagined to exist apart from his scepter (that is, his most holy word)? **John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (4.2.4)**