

Week 3

Discussion Guide

Today we looked at Matthew 16 which could be described as the “charter passage” for the New Testament Church. Peter sees Christ clearly and Christ in turn reveals that He is building a church on Himself. This passage is pivotal in the unfolding of a new era of redemptive history and it is here that Jesus will explain the purpose, meaning, and work of His church.

“The Lord Jesus did not come, in His first coming, to clean up all demonic activity and to eradicate all sin from the world. There will be a time when He will come to do that. Now, however, is the time for the preaching of the gospel. Is that not a message to the church? Our job is not to eradicate all the forces of evil in the world. Our job is to proclaim the gospel, live as Christians, bear witness to Christ, and to do specific good to our neighbor, never thinking that we are somehow going to establish perfection on earth. When the church confuses its task in that area we are misguided.” Ligon Duncan, *Sermon on Matthew 8*

Q: What is the purpose of the church and what are the ways we tend to confuse this?

Q: What are the historic ways that the church has forsaken this calling?

“The tragedy is that, in part, the Christian Church is to blame. The church had failed to preach the gospel as truly and wholly the Word of God and as a Gospel of redemption instead of a program of social reform...the church had stepped out of its spiritual role, to meddle, as the Church, in political and economic matters and affairs of State.”
L. Nelson Bell

Q: If the church is to be primarily concerned with spiritual matters, what is the primary problem the church is called to address?

Q: What do you believe are the principal tools of the people of God for doing the work of the kingdom?

Christ is building his church from His spot as ascended Lord and head of the church. He has left His Spirit to do the regular work of building the church. His Spirit is active through the preaching of the gospel by the power of His word and through the ordinary means of grace. His work is primarily one of calling ordinary sinners and transferring them into His kingdom.

Q: How should the church address matters of temporal relevance without compromising her primary calling to the proclamation of the gospel?

Q: How would you compare the calling of the church (the whole bride of Christ) with the calling of individual Christians?

There seems to be a fundamental call to the church to set herself to this spiritual work but the call on the life of individual Christians is a bit more complicated. After all, we live in this physical, earthly world. We have a physical, earthly existence. And yet the call of Christ's spiritual kingdom still remains. It would seem that the church is called to the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments and as the believer is fueled by spiritual revival each week, they are then sent out to apply spiritual truths to earthly situations, relationships, and challenges. This is why J.I. Packer called each Sunday a foretaste of heavenly perfection and said on the Lord's day, "We are to cease the activities of our earthly calling to execute the activities of our heavenly calling."

Spend some time interacting with these two quotes. The first is an historical observation of the early church and the second is from Jason Stellman, a former PCA pastor:

"For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language, or custom. For nowhere do they live in cities of their own, nor do they speak some unusual dialect, nor do they practice an eccentric way of life... For while they live in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one's lot was cast, and follow the local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship. They live in their own countries but only as nonresidents, they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign. They marry like everyone else, and have children, but they do not expose their offspring. They share their food but not their wives. They are in the flesh, but they do not live according to the flesh. They live on earth but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws; indeed in their private lives they transcend the laws. They love everyone, and by everyone they are persecuted."

Epistle to Diognetus (c. 150 AD), 5.1–11.

"Church leaders and members often ask themselves, "If our church were to pack up and leave town, would the community lament its loss and beg the church to stay?" The underlying assumption is that one of the ways to measure a church's success is by gauging how popular and appreciated it is among those within its city or community. It must be asked, however, whether such an expectation is the result of actual exegesis of Scripture or of confusing the earthly kingdom's idea of success with that of the heavenly kingdom? In a word, does the question above represent a biblical expectation to lay on the shoulders of the local church?" P.48 *Dual Citizens*

“As a result, they continue to think of their cultural work as the work of bringing creation to its eschatological sabbath rest, failing to see that Jesus has definitively brought creation to its fulfillment in his death and resurrection.”

Tuninga, Matthew; *Two kingdoms doctrine: What's the Fuss All About*

“The difference between progressives and conservatives centered on what was primary: did the church lead with gospel proclamation based on an inspired and inerrant Bible, which would result first in moral and then political and economic transformation? Or did the church lead with a prophetic word to the culture and a priestly activity of social concern, which would interest women and men in the gospel's spiritual and moral focus?”

Lucas, Sean Michael; *The Historical Roots of the PCA*, p.100

“God indeed calls Christians to suffer and to pursue cultural tasks obediently through our lives. But to think that our sufferings contribute to atoning for sin or that our cultural obedience contributes to building the new creation is to compromise the all-sufficient work of Christ.”

VanDrunen, David; *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture*, pp. 50-51

“First, it means we as believers, who are members of the covenant of special grace and heirs of the eschatological kingdom, should not try to get the common grace realm or any institution within it, such as the state or civil government, to confess or promote the true religion. Nor should we drag the church into the cultural activities and political debates of the City of Man, as if these activities and debates were an integral part of God's holy kingdom program. We must uphold the spirituality of the church as a corollary of the cultic boundary.”

Irons, Lee Charles; *Meredith Kline's View of the Cultural Mandate*, p. 16

“For why does the very apostle who bids us stand fast and not submit to the yoke of slavery (Gal.5:1), elsewhere teach slaves not to worry about their condition (1 Cor. 7:20-21), if not because spiritual freedom and civil bondage can fully coexist? In saying this Paul shows that it does not matter what our standing is among men, or by what nation's laws we live, because Christ's kingdom lies in none of these things.”

Calvin, John; *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 756 (updated version)