

ETHICS FOR KINGDOM SUBJECTS :: JESUS' EXPECTATIONS FOR HOW HIS  
FOLLOWERS SHOULD LIVE

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(Written for my New Testament Course during the Spring of 2013)

## I. Introduction

*“I do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the men of old; I seek the things they sought.”* – Basho

The above quote—from Japanese poet, Matsuo Basho, comes from a framed photograph that used to hang in my father's study; now hanging directly next to my front door. Whether he knows it or not, some of my most treasured possessions—those of utmost significance to me, come directly from my father. Some, that used to belong to him—which I grew up observing in his possession constantly; like this photograph, or the “*Trust God*” mug he always drank out of and never seemed to wash, or my first “grown up” bible: formerly his and still containing his highlights and underlinings; to books which were given to me and I may or may not have gotten around to reading, but whenever I did, happened to poignantly contain exactly what I needed, when I needed it. I cannot say truly whether their significance lay in what they have *come to mean to me personally*; or because they *were* my fathers: items which served to shape my formative definition of him; or because—somehow, whatever significance they themselves have on and in my life, I find all the more in the thought that they possibly had the *same* significance in and on my father's, and there's beauty in the thought of that parallelism (although, this may verily be the closest to what lay at the root).

Whatever it may be, there are two things my father has gifted me with that stand apart as the most meaningful, most invaluable, most significant of all these. One is a consuming dissatisfaction with *this age* and a craving for the reality that is (and is to come).

And the other, is a bookshelf.

A bookshelf we recently crafted this past year together, from raw lumber to completion.

The first has shaped my very life as one which seeks (what I have come to know *now* is) the Kingdom of which Christ spoke.

The later, has shaped my understanding, belief, and hope of what that Kingdom is at its core; what *I feel* to be the heart of that Kingdom.

And while with each day both my seeking and my understanding are being refined and continually elucidated by my *Heavenly Father*, these two gifts remain at the heart of me—of who I am, granting me the desire to constantly, irrevocably, brazenly both seek the good news that I have come to know and share it, by continually reminding me of just what it is.

To seek the Kingdom.

To bare witness to the Kingdom.

Through the continual revelation and emotive elation of that which I have come to know the Kingdom to be.

When challenged with the thesis of defining “Ethics for Kingdom Subjects,” more questions arise initially than do answers. While this *may* stem mostly from a spirit sensitive to what comes accross as a cleverly disguised form of *legalism*—especially with the baggage associated with words like “expectations<sup>1</sup>” and “should,<sup>2</sup>” it nevertheless proves advantageous to *the thesis itself to* question it, rather than merely set about to “answer” it.

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<sup>1</sup>When I hear “*expectations*” my mind immediately thinks of when parents leave a child somewhere with the statement “We expect you to behave.” This is almost always associated with some unspoken “*or else*” statement, thus irrevocably connecting and associating “expectation” with a fear of what may occur if the expectation—whatever it may be, is not fulfilled. This association between “*expectation*” and the unspoken “*or else*” —that is, the connotation of the word expectation with *consequence* if what is expected goes unfulfilled is not at all what the word expectation is actually defined as—namely, as to regard as likely to happen, to be in anticipation, to look forward to with reason or justification. The former places the focus of “expectation” on the object, who in turn functions out of fear of consequence of the unaccomplished expectation; the later, actual definition places the focus of “expectation” on the subject doing the expecting, conveying the understanding that they have due justification to anticipate their expectation, *void* of any requisites connotative with what will occur in their expectation does not occur; for with an understanding that an expectation is that which you anticipate will happen without any reason to think otherwise, there is no need to even formulate consequence for its incompleteness.

As such, there are three questions—distinct among the thesis, of which the interpretation *of the thesis itself* seems dependent on how each question is answered. These are:

- What is meant by ethics?
- What is meant by subjects?
- Ultimately, just what is the Kingdom?

And because reaching a definitive answer to the last question both shapes and limits conclusively the prior two, it is in the question of the Kingdom *itself* where we shall both begin, and conclude.

## **II. A Kingdom of Love**

*“The Kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history, and consummation at the end of history.”*<sup>3</sup>

### ***The Mystery of the Kingdom***

While much of Jesus' teaching was concerned with human conduct, it has been widely concluded that not only was the core of His ministry concerned with “the Kingdom,” but that the

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<sup>2</sup>The problem with the word “*should*” goes beyond its implication that you are already wrong. It has a strong emphasis that there is nothing good with you as you are. You should be or do something else. Herein that whatever your actions are at present, they should be something else entirely. Yet if there's nothing right or good about you to begin with, how “the hell” do you achieve that which you should? Positive results are impossible because you're doomed right off the bat. “Should” has the direct implication that we are not, should implies that we cannot, that we may never be good enough because we're not ever allowed to just be. Ultimately, “should” is emphatically correlated to an understanding that we are not loved as we are—and thus free to be, but are loved only if we succeed in being what we should be, that is, what's expected of us. This will be discussed later, but what lay at the heart is the difference between should, and could. Wherein should implies inability in ones current state, coupled with a “causal love,” spurring attempts at action to “earn” love, could implies not only ability, but freedom, and ultimately love. Spurring one to act not only because they are made aware that they can—that they possess the ability and power to act, but that they possess the freedom both to do so, and to act as they are, knowing they are not “shoulded” to be anything else. These actions can be concluded as the most pure because they are done purely for the sake of the action itself, void of any motivation based on being loved for action, because it is understood that one is loved so that they can act thusly, not loved provided that they act thusly.

<sup>3</sup>George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: the Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.,: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 218.

*entirety* of His ministry—His teachings (ethical, parabolic, and otherwise), His performance of miracles, acts of healing, and ultimately, the very consummation of Himself on the Cross, was dependent on His message of the imminent (and perhaps even, *immanent*) Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the first gospel records Jesus beginning His ministry following the structure and message of His cousin John, preaching and saying, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17 NASBStr)

Yet while this is understood to be the case, what remains mystery is the Kingdom *itself*. Not once (with the exclusion of Paul in Romans 14:17) is the Kingdom clearly defined or explained (spoken of only parabolically or metaphorically, “the Kingdom is like a...” “the Kingdom will be like a...”) And truly, *mystery* seems to purposefully be the defining attribute of the Kingdom itself. For although the Matthew and Luke accounts (13:11, and 8:10, respectively) speak of the “mysteries” of the Kingdom—suggesting a truth embodied in several aspects, Mark's wording suggests a single truth: *the* mystery of the Kingdom. It is here which Mark summarized the message of the Kingdom parables: the mystery of the Kingdom has been given to the disciples of Jesus.

So what is *the* mystery? It's important to note that the idea of God disclosing his secrets (mystery) to men is a familiar Old Testament concept,<sup>5</sup> and furthermore, the mere fact that God proposes to bring about his Kingdom—that it was to come in apocalyptic power and timeframe, was no “secret.”<sup>6</sup> It is also critical to the understanding of “the mystery” of the Kingdom to do away with the notion and interpretation of a “mystery” as something esoteric, proclaimed only to

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<sup>4</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*. (Philadelphia,: Westminster John Knox Pr, 1969), 102.

<sup>5</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark: an Introduction and Commentary* by C.e.b. Cranfield., Reprinted 1974 ed. (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 152.

<sup>6</sup>Given, within the prophetic Old Testament texts of Daniel, of Jewish Orthodoxy, etc.

the initiated.<sup>7</sup> Not only is the opposite (*full disclosure to all*) founded Scripturally,<sup>8</sup> it is widely accepted historically/culturally.<sup>9</sup> *The mystery of Kingdom*, then, is a *new disclosure* of God's purpose for the establishment of His Kingdom,<sup>10</sup> *a new revelation* about the Kingdom; *the very Kingdom anticipated already* by many. The mystery of Kingdom Jesus gave to His disciples was the revelation that that Kingdom, the Kingdom which is to come, has—in fact, entered into the world in advance in the hidden form of *the person and mission of Jesus* to work secretly within and among men.<sup>11</sup>

In short, the mystery of the Kingdom, a proclamation utterly novel amongst Jesus' contemporaries—of which the OT gave no such promise, is that the Kingdom has come into history in advance of its apocalyptic manifestation. It is actually present but in a new, unexpected way. It has entered history without transforming history. It has come into human society without purifying society.

It has been fulfilled in the person and presence of Jesus, without yet being consummated in the age to come.

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<sup>7</sup>George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: the Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.,: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 224.

<sup>8</sup>In Romans 16:25-26, Paul expresses his understanding of “mysteries” which are now finally disclosed to all men.

<sup>9</sup>While *Mystery* designates “the secret thoughts, plans, and dispensations of God which are hidden from the human reason, as well as from all other comprehension below the divine level and hence must be revealed to those for whom they are intended.”

William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: a Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schriften Des Neuen Testaments Und der Übrigen Urchristlichen Literatur*, 2d ed. (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1979), 532.

*However*, the mystery is proclaimed to **all** men even though it is understood only by the few.

<sup>10</sup>George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: the Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.,: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 225.

<sup>11</sup>Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (Cambridge, UK: SCM Press, 2010), 13ff.

Indeed, the mystery of the Kingdom—manifest in Jesus' person and mission, brought with it the present enjoyment of the blessings (namely: forgiveness of sins, and fellowship—specifically table/feasting fellowship with Jesus Himself)<sup>12</sup> and life [eternal] by all who came into contact with the ministry of Jesus. However, with the Resurrection and with Pentecost the dynamics of the mystery of the Kingdom drastically changed; altering the rest of history with it.<sup>13</sup> Prior to these events, the above described experience of the Kingdom was limited both spatially and temporally to the person of Jesus. Following these events, Jesus—now glorified and returned in the Spirit (as promised in John 14:16-18), had done away with any and all limitations previously imposed. Now the experience and enjoyment of the Kingdom was available to all, regardless of temporal and spatial limitations.<sup>14</sup> The authority to forgive sins was now passed on to the disciples (the church),<sup>15</sup> and fellowship, table/feasting fellowship continued—albeit in a new form.<sup>16</sup>

Because of the fulfillment of the promises of Jesus, *the mystery* of the Kingdom—that is, the person of the *now resurrected Jesus*, is **present everywhere**, and *every when*, not only able to be experienced and enjoyed by all, but *actively working* to bring about the consummation of the very Kingdom He is.

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<sup>12</sup>George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: the Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.,: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 210ff.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. 272.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. 273.

<sup>15</sup>rf. John 20:23, when Jesus breathes on His disciples.

<sup>16</sup>Believers everywhere gathered together at the table with one another, “in remembrance of Him,” Acts 2:46; thus invoking the presence of Christ.

***A Kingdom Ruled by a Giver, a Forgiver, a Redeemer, a Conquerer, an Actor, a Lover, a Father, a Son—A Kingdom Ruled by One***

“For God *so loved* the world that He *gave...*” (John 3:16; emphasis mine)

If there is to only be one revelation of which the entirety of Scripture attests to—and of which all conceptions and perceptions ought to thusly be based on, it lay in the declaration that the substance and essential nature of this Yahweh God is *love*. This truth does not lay solely in the written narrative itself,<sup>17</sup> but in the implications derived from the characters/characterizations, the implications from the definition of roles, and through the interaction—both personal and historical, of God with and through His creation. Yet it is God's triune nature, portrayed and depicted most clear through the gospels which serves as the greatest, richest expression that God is indeed love.<sup>18</sup> This revelation of divine love permeates the gospel narratives, swirling continually around the person of Jesus. Indeed, God's very action from the beginning—giving His son, stemmed from love. (John 3:16) Jesus not only proclaims His father as a strong lover, both capable and active in loving His *enemies* (Matthew 5:43-47; wherein “perfection” lay), but a gentle lover, caring even for the smallest of things (Matthew 6:26-30). Even the very relational characterization of God as Father is both lived and displayed by and through Jesus, and oft used in parables to refer God. And this was not merely an inclusive view and understanding of God—a relation allowed only for a few elect initiates, but rather, proclaimed by Jesus as a drastic shift in the relational understanding of God and man. The depth and emotive affect of such a loving

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<sup>17</sup>rf. Exodus 34:6 cf. Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:5; 103:8; 111:4; 116:5; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Isaiah 54:10.

<sup>18</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 285ff.

perspective can be seen in the disciples' experience of Jesus' relationship with the Father through prayer, and their expressed longing for that same relationship (Luke 11:1-4 cf Matthew 6:9-13)

It is this God—portrayed as an overwhelmingly forgiving King (Matthew 18:23ff), a father, longing for the return of his youngest and desperate for the return of his eldest (Luke 15:11ff), who gracefully gave His son (John 3:16) to redeem, to reconcile the world to Him, that is ruler of the very Kingdom fulfilled, and who is actively working in and through history to bring *history—this age*, to a divinely directed goal: the consummation of the Kingdom.

Yet it is this God, whom His son proclaimed that in knowing (present tense marks a continual, progressive seeking and “knowing”) lay eternal life (John 17:3); of which has been equated as synonymous with the Kingdom.<sup>19</sup> To know the Father and the Son, is to have eternal life, and to have eternal life is to have entered the Kingdom—whether in this age, or the age to come. And it is this Son, Jesus, who mysteriously states both that, “no one comes to the Father [and thus, *know* the Father] except through” Him (John 14:6), but also that, “no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him (John 6:44).

Yet it is this Son who bounced children on His knee (Mark 10:13-16; cf. Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17); who accepted into His personal fellowship, women (Luke 8:1-3); who dined with sinners and tax collectors—the outcasts, the rejects, and those frowned upon by society (Mark 2:15-17 cf Matthew 9:10; Luke 5:29-32; note especially Luke 7:36-50); who stated that the Father judges no one but has entrusted all judgment to Him (John 5:22, 27), that it is for judgment that he came into this world (John 9:39), yet that although his judgments are right, he passes judgment on no one (John 8:15), and further, that he did not come to judge the world, but to save it (John 12:47).

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<sup>19</sup>George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: the Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.,: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 196.

A God who entered into the world *for judgment*, but not *to judge*. A ruler who judges by not judging.

And it is this Son who introduced new conceptions of Himself with definite articles—*the* bread of life (John 6:35), *the* light of the world (John 8:12), *the* good shepherd (John 10:14), *the* way, *the* truth, *the* life (John 14:6), who comforted and encouraged His disciples that it was good that he was leaving, promising return as the Spirit (John 14:16-20). And it is this Spirit which God the Father is himself called by the Son (John 4:24), and to which itself provides life (John 6:63), and ultimately, it is this Spirit, which the Father gives freely, and without limit (Luke 11:13 cf Matthew 7:11; John 3:34). “The God who is love cannot but respond to the world in accordance with God's own eternal essence—love.”<sup>20</sup>

God is One. God is Father. God is Spirit. God is Son. He is *the* Way, *the* Truth, *the* Life.

God is Love. These cannot be interchanged at the expense of each other. They are holistically complementing, complete in every way together. As such, their eternal existence never changes. God is One and God is Trinity and God is Love. 3 persons, one substance, and that substance is Love.

And Love is Truth.

So Love is Life.

And Spirit.

And Love is *the* Way; to the Father and to the Son.

Love is Jesus.

And as such, Love is the Kingdom. A Kingdom that romances you to it, leads you

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<sup>20</sup>Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 285.

continually on the way—which *is life*. And it does not change in any way once you've entered. For then it would not be One. And then it would not be God.

***A Kingdom of Forgiveness, of Relation, of Celebration, of Worship—A Kingdom of Love,  
A Kingdom Now***

*“For perfect forgiveness is an evidence of love.”<sup>21</sup>*

As stated previously, the gospels parabolically reference God as a forgiving King. But with Jesus—during His ministry, claiming authority to forgive sins not only stirred the initial conflict between Jesus and the scribes, it points to a deeper significance about the Kingdom, and the messianic salvation. On all accounts and presuppositions, the scribes were right in their accusation of blasphemy. Within the prophets, forgiveness is one of the blessings of the messianic age, the age to come—the Kingdom. Yet there is no source known<sup>22</sup> in which the Messiah—by virtue of his promises men the forgiveness of sins,<sup>23</sup> this function was limited to God. Furthermore, while God forgave sins, Judaism never solved the problem created by the tension between God's justice and his grace. The righteous man was not one who had been *freely pardoned* by God, but whose merit outweighed his debt.<sup>24</sup> Thus, when Jesus—on His own authority, pronounced the forgiveness of sins, the shock and dismay amongst the scribes is readily understood.

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<sup>21</sup>George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: the Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.,: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 268.

<sup>22</sup>With the possible exception of Isaiah 53:11-12.

<sup>23</sup>Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1 ED ed. (Indiana University: Bloch Pub Co, 1997), 379.

<sup>24</sup>George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: the Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.,: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 214.

Yet Jesus didn't teach a new *doctrine* of forgiveness; He brought to the lost, the apollumi, to sinners a new *experience* of forgiveness. And this *new experience of forgiveness* was and is one and the same inherently as the *new revelation of the Kingdom*, which is *the mystery*, which is Jesus Christ Himself. For the same revealer of the mystery is the same forgiver of sins. It is this subject which seems tantamount in understanding Jesus' ministry and preaching the Kingdom; and ultimately, the Kingdom itself.

In Matthew's account of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus seems to teach an inseparable connection between human forgiveness, and divine forgiveness (cf Matthew 6:12, 14). In fact, later in the narrative, the parable on forgiveness (cf 18:23-35) makes clear that human forgiveness is conditioned by divine forgiveness. This is further given validity in Luke when Jesus is anointed by the "sinful woman," stating the negative that "he who has been forgiven little, loves little," yet implicitly stating that the one forgiven much, loves much. (Luke 7:36-49) This narrative significantly draws the correlation between forgiveness and love. Furthermore, this forgiveness—a sign of ultimate love, not only creates a direct correlation with love, but also freedom. For the woman was told to "go and sin no more." As if—somehow, she was now free to do so. She was told to sin no more *because* she was forgiven, *because* she was freed, and because now she *could* go and sin no more. This was a proclamation of authority passed forward; not a *should*, but a *could*. She was forgiven much, and thus, loved much. She was not told that she *should* love, that she *should* sin no more, but instead had forgiveness proclaimed over her in such a way as to prove to her that she could go out in freedom to love much; and by loving, "sin no more."

This conclusion centers itself as the core expression of the Kingdom—given by Jesus to the church upon His resurrection (John 20:23); the very action which caused conflict during

Jesus' ministry, this authority has now been passed to His followers. The Kingdom is to be fellowship, and until it is consummated in the age to come, it entails the constitution of sinful men. Yet this entrusting of the authority of forgiveness truly seems to be more cautionary, than promissory. For if the Kingdom is one of forgiveness, of fellowship with others who have been forgiven, who are loved, and who in turn, *forgive* and love, a refusal to do so is a blatant denial of the already fulfilled Kingdom. It is a denial of reality, almost as if you were *throwing yourself out* of the Kingdom, refusing to take part, like the older prodigal in Luke 15:11-32, or the Sons of the Kingdom in Matthew 8:11-12.

For if the Kingdom is indeed a celebration of redemption, a Kingdom of forgiveness of ones self, and forgiveness in relationship with others(perhaps this will not be so in the Kingdom's consummation, but in *this age*—as an expression of that perfect love)—*the ultimate expression* of perfect love, *the Kingdom of Love*, here in this age. Perhaps that is why there is great emphasis placed on the connection between this age and the age to come. For like the Father in the Prodigal son parable, the Heavenly Father longs to have all his heirs join in the celebration. And if you are unforgiving in this age, if you deny the Kingdom of Love in this age, will you not be unforgiving and deny the consummated Kingdom in the age to come?

### **III. Kingdom Subjects: The Church Is *NOT* the Kingdom**

With a proper exposition of the Kingdom, the next question of defining the subjects duly arises. And while there indeed is a relationship between the Kingdom and the church, the Kingdom—as previously expounded, is a distinguished concept not to be identified with the church; much like any kingdom is never to be identified with its subjects. They are *of* the

kingdom, but they are never the kingdom *itself*. In understanding the relationship between the Kingdom and the church (and thus, arriving at a clear, or at least *clearer* consensus of defining Kingdom subjects), G E Ladd outlined 5 distinct points serving to characterize and clarify the relation.<sup>25</sup>

First, the New Testament does not equate believers with the Kingdom. Throughout Acts, it was the Kingdom of God preached, not the church (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31), nor could there be any possibility of substituting “church” for “Kingdom” in such sayings. Furthermore, none of the sayings in the Gospels equate the disciples with the Kingdom, *including* parables used to do so, like that of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13. The parable itself expressly identifies the field as the world, *not* as the church (13:38). This parable serves to affirm the reality that the Kingdom has “invaded history without disrupting the present structure of society.”<sup>26</sup>

Second, it is *the Kingdom* which *creates* the church, *not* the church which brings forth the Kingdom. Given the outline that it is in the person of Jesus which the Kingdom is fulfilled, though yet unconsummated, the church is merely the result of the the Kingdom's entrance into history—into this age in the person and mission of Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup>

Third, it is the church's explicit charge to witness *to* the Kingdom. For since the Resurrection and Pentecost, the Spirit has been active—both in bringing this age to the divine end, the consummated Kingdom, and participating in the fulfilled Kingdom present at all time and space. The church can't build the Kingdom, nor become it; nor was it even instructed to do

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid, 262ff.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, 263.

<sup>27</sup>H.D. Wendland, “The Kingdom of God and History,” in “H.G. Wood. ed.,” special issue, *The Kingdom of God* (1938): 188.

so. Rather, the church witnesses God's Kingdom—the active work of the Spirit, redeeming and drawing all to Christ (Acts 1:8 cf with Luke 24:48; John 15:27; leading to a clear understanding that within this 'commission' in Acts, Jesus is using the indicative case, not imperative. They will be His witnesses—not out of duty or command, but because they were there from the beginning.) Further, one of the main (if not *the* main) outlets of the church to bear witness to the Kingdom, was/is to display the life of fellowship, of forgiveness, of the Kingdom of Love in this present age constituted of sinful men.<sup>28</sup> By displaying the Kingdom of the age to come—the consummated Kingdom in this age, particularly through forgiveness and humble servitude (Mark 10:35ff), of love and joy, of fellowship and celebration, the church actively bears witness to a Kingdom fulfilled, a Kingdom present, in an age unconsummated.

Fourth, the church is *the instrument* of the Kingdom. Both in the sending out of the disciples (Matthew 10:8; Luke 10:17), where the same power (though delegated) of the Kingdom which worked through Jesus worked through them; and particularly in Jesus' proclamation to Peter in Matthew 16:18, the church was to be an instrument of the power, authority, and mission of the Kingdom. “Before the power of the Kingdom of God, working through the church, death has lost its power over men and is unable to claim final victory.”<sup>29</sup> With the Resurrection and Pentecost events, this intrusting of authority and utilization for/by the Kingdom as instruments of its purpose and mission became an unbridled, unfettered, active pursuit of the very Kingdom they experienced in Jesus—the very Kingdom they were told they'd bear witness to, the very Kingdom they were made an active participant in both its present fulfillment in this age, and its consummation in the age to come.

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<sup>28</sup>George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: the Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.,: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 268f.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid*, 270.

Lastly, Ladd identifies the church to be *the custodian* of the Kingdom.<sup>30</sup> While Israel was conceived in this role due to its role as *custodian of the law*—the only means in which the rule of God, that is *the Kingdom*, could be experienced, *in Jesus*, the rule and reign of God was made manifest in a wholly new redemptive event: the mystery of the Kingdom. And because Israel (as a whole) rejected this new revelation of the Kingdom, the custodianship was taken from them and entrusted to those who both bore witness and wholeheartedly welcomed it.<sup>31</sup>

So if the church is *not* the Kingdom, are they still considered *subjects*? Yes.

Yet to conclude here—to consider the answer resolved, without any further thought would fail not only in establishing a complete definition, but in going forward in constitution of dogma and doctrine based on incomplete formulation.

If the church are subjects of the Kingdom, but not the Kingdom itself, are there other subjects? Again, a rudimentary understanding of medieval kingdoms serves beneficial here and would likely posit *one* question which clarifies and negates the necessity for further questions (much like Jesus to Simeon in Luke 7), namely: Would subjects of a kingdom who are wholly ignorant of that kingdom *they are subject to*—its magnitude, its depth, and its presence, would they still be considered *subjects*?

The answer, of course, is yes.

For a kingdom isn't identified with and by its subjects.

The Kingdom of Love is God's reign. It's the realm in which the blessings of His reign are experienced and enjoyed. The church, then, is the drawing together *in this age* of those who *have* experienced in some manner *the end of this world*; who have both *bore witness to*, and

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid, 273.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid, 274ff.

*personally come to know* the mystery of the Kingdom—the *person of Jesus*. And this mystery *creates* the church, works *through* the church, and is proclaimed, *bore witness of*, to a world full of its subjects—wholly ignorant to the reality of the Kingdom of Love, of the person of Jesus.

#### IV. Of Ethics

*“Ethics, like the Kingdom itself, stand in the tension between present realization and future eschatological perfection.”<sup>32</sup>*

The ethical teaching of Jesus is not “an ethics for those who expect the end of the world, but for those who have experienced the end and the coming of the Kingdom.”<sup>33</sup> To understand what has been labeled as “Jesus' *expectations* for how his followers *should* live” as a sort of definition for Kingdom ethics, requires a full—if not conclusive, understanding of Jesus' message and ministry itself. As explicated previously, the very heart of Jesus' ministry was the Kingdom, that is—as concluded, *Himself*. With this understood, any rudimentary interpretation of His ethical teaching *other than* an understanding that they were an exposition of *the very ethics of the Kingdom* should be pushed aside. For to say that His ethical teaching will in any way be inconsistent when the Kingdom has been consummated, is to say that the will of God for men presently will not be the very same will upon the consummation of the Kingdom (note that a consummated, completed will of God, is not the same as a different will). The ethics of Jesus, then, are Kingdom ethics—they are the very same in both the present fulfilled Kingdom, as they are in the coming consummated Kingdom. They are the “spiritual realities and values of the

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid, 292.

<sup>33</sup>C.A. Anderson Scott, *New Testament Ethics: An Introduction* (Madison, WI: University Press, 1930), 63.

consummated Kingdom which is the age to come, realized in the fulfilled Kingdom of the present age,”<sup>34</sup> “the way in which men inevitably behave when the actualization of their subjection to the rule of God is realized.”<sup>35</sup>

Because the church is *not* the Kingdom, it is charged with a code of conduct adherent both to the Kingdom and its specific relation to the Kingdom, but *not* some new form of Old Conventional law. The very Kingdom which it was called into **does not change**, nor impose something different once you have “entered it.” For if it did so, it would not only entail inconsistency in Jesus' own teaching, but inconsistency in *the very Kingdom itself*, which is *Jesus himself*. And any inconsistency would mean that Jesus is not one, and therefore God is not one. Which would mean He isn't God.

For the very truths and attributes of God to remain consistent: for God to be One, and True, and Love, and Jesus, and the Kingdom, the ethical teachings of Jesus have to remain as true in this age as in the age to come. Or, at least, the truth of the consummated Kingdom that's the age to come *must be*—in both expression and existence *in this age*, the same truth; however its expression and existence may appear or seem to differ due to the very nature of this age.

And if there *were* to be *any* of Jesus' teachings where this truth—this ethic, that what was taught remains true in both this age of the fulfilled Kingdom and the age to come of the consummated Kingdom; if there were any of Jesus' teachings which would summarize the ethics of the Kingdom—both present and to come, it would be these:

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord,” (Mark 12:28) “'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' *This* is the great

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid, 67.

<sup>35</sup>George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: the Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.,: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 280.

and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (*italics mine*; Matthew 22: 37-40 cf Luke 10:25-28)

And truly, “Seek first *the Kingdom*.” (*italics mine*; Matthew 6:33)

God is One.

God is Love.

God is Jesus.

And Jesus is the mystery of the Kingdom.

Seek the Kingdom above all else, and you seek Jesus (and you are promised that you *will* find).

Seek Jesus and you love God.

Love God and you'll love your neighbor (for he who loves much, forgives much; and he who has been forgiven much, loves much).

Enter the Kingdom and you enter life.

Life to the fullest. For it is God, it is Jesus, it is the Spirit.

Three persons, one substance, and that substance is Love; the substance of the Kingdom.

## V. Conclusion

I began speaking of the gifts bestowed to me by my father and how—in the case of two in particular, the Kingdom has been dramatically impacted in my existence. I said that I recognize, inherent to my being is an insatiable desire which spurs me to seek—to seek the presence of God in all things, the Kingdom, Jesus. I spoke of how the bookshelf—or rather, the crafting of the bookshelf, also crafted a pure emotion of which to associate the concept of the Kingdom *with*. What I did not state was that during each day, over the span of time, initial thoughts of what was

*expected* of me, drifted away. I initially thought that I *should* share everything that was going on in my life, that now—in the presence of my father, with time on our hands, this was what he expected of me. Even on following days when there was nothing to share, I felt I had to come up with *something*.

But I didn't.

For there *was nothing expected* of me.

I wasn't expected to be a certain way.

I wasn't expected to build this bookcase, I *desired* to.

I was purely and simply, ***about my father's business***. Because it was what I wanted. To build a bookcase, like my father had done. To spend time with him, to be present with him. And it didn't matter how long it took, or what was said or not said, it didn't matter how I was (on any particular day) or he was.

And that's when it hit. This is what it feels like in the Kingdom. The desire to simply be present with the Father. The desire to be about the Father's business because I *want* to, not because it's demanded of me. Because I *can*; because as my Father's heir, I have not the authority and power to do so, but the freedom; not because I'm *expected* to, for then it wouldn't be freedom.

And so I realized that the Kingdom is not one of *demand*, of *expectation*—of what *should* be done, but what ***can*** be done. Because of who the Father is, because of what the Kingdom is—Love.

Because I **know** my Father, and He **knows** me.



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