

THE COMING KINGDOM, PART XXXX

by Andy Woods

In this series, the biblical teaching on the kingdom of God has been surveyed from Genesis to Revelation to demonstrate that the whole counsel of God's Word conveys the idea that the kingdom is a future reality. In addition, this series has examined the isolated New Testament texts and miscellaneous arguments that "kingdom now" theologians rely upon, and it has demonstrated how each is insufficient to convey "kingdom now" theology. As we move on to the final leg in our journey, we began noting why this trend of equating God's present work in the church with the Messianic kingdom is a matter believers should be concerned about, since this theology not only radically alters God's design for the church but is also the seedbed of many major false doctrines that have sadly entered Christ's church.

LARKIN'S WARNINGS

In the last two installments, we called attention to Alva J. McClain's warning concerning the impact of how "kingdom now" negatively impacts the church's calling, purpose, and mission. It is interesting to observe similar warnings given nearly a century ago in the writings of Clarence Larkin:

...the Church is not an "Organization" but an "Organism." Therefore it is not a "Social Club," organized and supported solely for the benefit of its members. Neither is it a "Place of Amusement" to pander to the carnal nature of man. Nor is it a "House of Merchandise" for the sale of "Indulgences," or other commodities, whereby the money of the ungodly can be secured to save the penurious church member a little self-sacrifice. Neither is it a "Reform Bureau" to save the "bodies" of men. The reformation of men is very commendable, as are all forms of "Social Service," but that is not the work or mission of the Church. The world was just as full, if not fuller, of the evils that afflict society today, in the

days of Christ, but He never, nor did the Apostles, organize any reform agencies. All the great philanthropic and civilizing agencies of the world are “By-Products” of Christianity. We are told in Acts 5:15, that the people laid their sick in the streets that the “Shadow of Peter” might fall upon them and heal them. But if Peter had spent his time “casting shadows,” and neglected his Apostolic work of trying to save the “SOULS” of men, his shadow would have lost its power. Jesus knew that the source of all the evils in the world is SIN, and that the only way to eradicate sin is to Regenerate the Human Heart, and so He gave the GOSPEL, and the “Mission” of the Church is to carry this Gospel to the world. “EVANGELISM,” not “Social Service,” is the “Mission” of the Church. Mark 16:15-16. The great mistake the Church has made is in appropriating to herself in this Dispensation the promises of earthly conquest and glory which belong exclusively to Israel in the “Millennial Age.” As soon as the Church enters into an “Alliance with the World,” and seeks the help of Parliaments, Congresses, Legislatures, Federations and Reform Societies, largely made up of ungodly men and women, she loses her spiritual power and becomes helpless as a redeeming force.¹

Larkin further notes:

...but the "Mission" of the Church is her "COMMISSON" to "Evangelize" the world. Mark 16: 15-16. Acts 1:7-8. The "Kingdom Idea" has robbed the Church of her "UPWARD LOOK," and of the "BLESSED HOPE." There cannot be any "Imminent Coming" to those who are seeking to "Set up the Kingdom." The "Kingdom Idea" has robbed the Church of the "Pilgrim" and "Martyr Spirit," and caused it to go down into Egypt for help. When the Church enters into an "Alliance with the World," and seeks the help of Parliaments, Congresses, Legislatures, Federations and Reform Societies, largely made up of ungodly men and women, she loses her "SPIRITUAL POWER" and becomes helpless as a redeeming force. The end of such an "Alliance" will be a "Religious Political Regime" that wilt-pave the way for the revelation of Satan's great "Religious Political Leader" and "Superman" – the ANTICHRIST.²

Here, Larkin notes at least *five* consequences that "kingdom now" theology has upon Ecclesiology, or the doctrine of the church. *First*, "kingdom now" theology causes the church to drift into a Social Gospel agenda favoring holistic redemption of societal structures in lieu of fulfilling the Great Commission. When the church becomes something that God never intended

¹ Clarence Larkin, *Rightly Dividing the Word* (Glenside, PA: Clarence Larkin Estate, 1920), 48.

² Clarence Larkin, *The Second Coming of Christ* (Glenside, PA: Clarence Larkin Estate, 1918), 51.

nor called her to be, she cannot expect, and in fact will be emptied of, His divine resources and empowerment. *Second*, viewing itself as the kingdom of God upon the earth causes the church to become at home in the world in contradistinction to the New Testament portrayal of the church as a mere pilgrim passing through both temporary and alien territory en-route to her ultimate eternal destination. Both of these points were covered in the prior installment. However, let us now take note of *three* equally important points that Larkin's above comments surface.

ALLIANCES WITH NON-BIBLICAL GROUPS

Third, because there are not presently and numerically enough Christians necessary to establish God's kingdom upon the earth, it becomes necessary for the church to find common ground with those who do not share its biblical convictions in order to build the political coalition needed to implement a "kingdom now" social agenda. As noted above, Larkin well explains:

The great mistake the Church has made is in appropriating to herself in this Dispensation the promises of earthly conquest and glory which belong exclusively to Israel in the "Millennial Age." As soon as the Church enters into an "Alliance with the World," and seeks the help of Parliaments, Congresses, Legislatures, Federations and Reform Societies, largely made up of ungodly men and women, she loses her spiritual power and becomes helpless as a redeeming force.³

In the prior installment, we noted the "kingdom now" agenda behind popular pastor Rick Warren's "PEACE" plan. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that Warren has become one of the leading advocates of ecumenism in our day. Recently, the "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" mantra has been given new life by mega-church pastor and bestselling author Rick Warren. In a recent interview with Catholic News Service, he noted:

³ Larkin, *Rightly Dividing the Word*, 48.

We have far more in common than what divides us. When you talk about Pentecostals, charismatics, evangelicals, fundamentalists, Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, on and on and on and on. Well they would all say we believe in the trinity, we believe in the Bible, we believe in the resurrection, we believe salvation is through Jesus Christ. *These are the big issues. Sometimes Protestants think that Catholics worship Mary like she's another god. But that's not exactly catholic doctrine...and people say well what are the saints all about? Why are you praying to the saints? And when you understand what they mean by what they're saying there's a whole lot more commonality.* Now there are still real differences, no doubt about that. *But the most important thing is if you love Jesus, we're on the same team.* The unity that I think we would see realistically is not a structural unity but *a unity of mission.* And so, when it comes to the family we are co-workers in the field on this for the protection of what we call the sanctity of life, the sanctity of sex, and the sanctity of marriage. *So there's a great commonality and there's no division* on any of those three. Many times people have been beaten down for taking a Biblical stance. And they start to feel, "well maybe I'm out here all by yourself." No you're not (italics added).⁴

Has Warren forgotten that we, as Protestants, broke away from the Roman Catholic Church during the days of Martin Luther and John Calvin? Why the existence of this historical rupture between Protestants and Catholics? The answer to this question lies in the fact that we as Protestants saw things in Roman Catholicism that we could not find in Scripture. There are vast and insurmountable theological divisions between Bible-believing Evangelicals and the Roman Catholic Church. The rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation involved the five "*solas*." "*Sola*" is a Latin expression meaning "alone." These five solas are *Sola Fide* (faith alone), *Sola Gratia* (grace alone), *Solus Christus* (Christ alone), *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), and *Soli Deo Gloria* (to the glory of God alone). While Protestants embrace these five theological realities or *solas*, Roman Catholic theology rejects them.⁵ Yet, the "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" mindset erases all of those theological barriers and puts Evangelicals and Catholics on the same theological footing.

⁴ Matt Slick, "Rick Warren's Comments on Roman Catholicism," online:www.carm.org, accessed 20 July 2015.

⁵ For more differences, see James McCarthy, *The Gospel According to Rome* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 1995).

Apparently not content to build a bridge to Catholicism only, Warren also seems to be building a similar bridge into Islam. Such advocacy of interfaith cooperation across vastly divergent belief systems is revealed through many of Warren's public statements. Note Warren's words from a recent World Economic Forum panel discussion

To my Islamic brother here from Italy, I would say I'm not really interested in inter-faith dialogue, I'm interested in inter-faith projects. We've got enough talk. So... a few weeks ago, at Georgetown University, we brought in three imams, we brought in three Catholic priests, we brought in three evangelical pastors, and we brought in three Rabbis and we said 'what can we do about AIDS?' And we started on some common ground on those issues; what can we do that we all care about?⁶

Note how Rick Warren, with Tony Blair present at this World Economic Forum panel discussion, publicly referring to an Islamic cleric as “My Islamic brother.” The New Testament, on the other hand, teaches that our brothers are only those who believe in Christ and do the will of God (Matt. 12:46-50). Thus, in no sense can an Islamic cleric be viewed as a brother of a born-again believer.

(To Be Continued...)

⁶ http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=nu7_rtUQiE0