

CHRIST'S KINGDOM: Foundational Principles



“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom...” Matthew 4:23

Dual Citizenship

If you ever travelled to another country- or would like to or need to- a passport would typically be an important travel document that you would take with you. It declares from what country you are a citizen. Citizenship of a country is given at birth. It can also be gained through a legal process to add or change your citizenship to another country. Some people have citizenship in two countries, or dual citizenship. Citizenship of a country provides you with the legal rights and protections of that country. It also comes with expectations of behavior as expressed through its laws (and informally, its culture.) Because the human mind prefers efficiency, people will often stereotype people who hold passports or are citizens of a different country.

“The center of God’s purpose is not our salvation, but His kingdom.”
Stephen McDowell

I remember being at a conference in Malaysia with people from all over the world. Another American and I were walking together after a session and one of the Asians from behind us called out in friendly banter, “there go those hard-charging Americans.” People have a picture in their mind of how citizens

Baton Exchange

from other places behave and think. So it should be for Christians. If you are a Christian who has spent even a little time in a secular workplace or college campus, you probably came to quickly realize it's as if you were a stranger in a foreign land, with your call to follow Jesus conflicting with those of coworkers or classmates. We'll revisit this idea of dual citizenship later and why it's important for understanding our workplace and culture.

Christ and the Kingdom

Jesus started his ministry by proclaiming the Kingdom, demonstrating its power, and calling people to become its citizens. "Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum...to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: "... the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."" (Matthew 4:12-17)

And in Matthew 4:23-25, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him."

Jesus taught people to pray about the kingdom in Matthew 6:5-14, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your *kingdom* come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." In Matthew 13 he spoke several parables about the kingdom, comparing it to a sower (13:3-23), wheat and weeds (13:24-30,36-43), a mustard seed (13:31-32), yeast (13:33), a hidden treasure and pearl (13:44-46), and a fishing net (13:47-50).

Christ sent out the twelve disciples to proclaim the kingdom in Matthew 10, telling them "Go and announce to them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure those with leprosy, and cast out demons. Give as freely as you have received." (10:7-8)

AN EPIC KINGDOM STORY

The gospel accounts of Jesus talking about the Kingdom is actually dropping into the middle of the bigger, overarching story of the Kingdom unfolded over the course of the Bible. This part of the story really has two preceding chapters and one that follows. Understanding all four chapters and how they tie together gives us a better understanding of the bible and how it answers the big questions about our life purpose, why things are so messed up, and the solution to the mess. And it informs how we think about work and culture. The four chapters of this narrative are: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration (some theologians instead use the word "consummation".)

CREATION: Kingdom Created

The first chapter begins with the creation of the Kingdom by God. God worked and created people for a purpose- no one is an accident. When we are considering things related to the human life experience (marriage and family, work, sexuality, creation, etc..), we need to pause and go the Creator's purpose or designed intent for that to better understand how to flourish. He created us in His image and made us very good! When God created people and the earth, all relationships with God, others, creation, and within themselves were good and right. Our identity comes from Him, answering the questions, "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" (Genesis 1:1-31) Because God created everyone and everything in Creation, it belongs to Him. He is its life giver and sustainer. We are accountable to Him for how we treat ourselves, others, and His Creation. Humans are to glorify him, represent him, work, steward, and

cultivate creation. This answers an overarching question of “What am I to do?” (Genesis 2:18-24) In Creation, everything was as it ought to be. The Kingdom was established. (Psalm 8)

FALL: Kingdom Invaded

But everything in the kingdom didn't stay as it ought. When given the choice to decide between ruling God's creation in relationship and partnership with Him or separate from Him, Adam and Eve chose separate from Him (Genesis 3.) Satan, an angelic being created by God and who had been one of His chief angelic beings, had previously rebelled against God and taken a third of the other angelic beings with him in the rebellion. When he saw the opportunity to seize control of God's new creation and drive a wedge between God and His beloved image-bearing partners (humankind), he used deception to appeal to their God-given hard-wiring to rule, to reign, and to know. Satan used half-lies, half-truth to cast doubt in their minds on God's character and intent toward humans. Once the doubt took root in their minds, Satan invited them to disobey or rebel against God, to choose to reign over themselves rather than under their Creator's rule. They chose to rebel against God. With their rebellion, they drove a wedge of separation in their relationship with their Creator. Though they were still God's appointed stewards of creation, and bore His image, they were no longer in harmony with its Creator, sustainer, and life-giver. They had rejected God's rule of the Kingdom. Satan seized the opportunity and invaded God's creation through the gap that was created by the wedge. Earth became enemy-occupied territory. It now had two kingdoms in conflict. It is into this enemy occupied, broken world of two kingdoms at conflict that we are born. (Matthew 12:26-27)

“...there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'”

Abraham Kuyper
Dutch Theologian & Statesman

Satan: Who is this invader?

Besides a created angelic being living in rebellion against God, his creation invasion positioned him as an enslaver and ruler. (2 Timothy 2:25-26; Ephesians 6:10-13) He is known as a counterfeiter, adversary, deceiver, destroyer, and tempter. (1 Timothy 3:6-7; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Peter 5:8-9; John 8:31-36) Satan's methods in leading his rebellion against God now include using corrupted humankind against God and His creation. (Ephesians 2:1-2; 2 Corinthians 4:4; John 8:42-47; Acts 10:38) He continues twisting God's good through and by collaboration with compromised humans: through education, music, storytelling (movies, books, plays, media, etc.), religion, philosophers, etc... (2 Corinthians 2:10-11; 11:14-15; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; Colossians 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:9) He tells different stories than God's about humanity's purpose and identity. This affects why and how people work and lead.

Creation corrupted

With Adam and Eve's rebellion came death, spreading throughout all creation like black charred remains left behind by a fire. Complete flourishing was replaced with physical, relational, and spiritual poverty. The good life was replaced with death, distortion, and corruption. Work, given to humans by God as a gift and means to steward His creation, suddenly became more difficult and futile. (Genesis 3:1-19) Influence and leadership became susceptible to misuse. People are now born with a default toward rebellion, toward sin- a sinful nature. (Romans 3:9-20; Romans 5:12-21; Romans 6)

Relational brokenness

In the rebellion, relationships were broken and at war with God, humans within themselves, with others, and with creation. Relationships became clouded, distorted, and disharmonious. The good, whole relationships were tainted by shame, guilt, dishonor, fear, and blame. In their own disobedience, Adam and Eve shifted blame and avoided owning it. Many worldviews still do this, using blame-shifting to avoid ownership of their sinfulness and its contribution to “*Why things are messed up.*” Brokenness in relationships continues and permeates personal life and work life. (Romans 7:14-25; 1 Corinthians 7:5;

Baton Exchange

Romans 3:9-20; Ephesians 4:26-27; Jeremiah 17:9; Isaiah 45:8-13; 1 John 3:11-12; Genesis 3:7-13; 2 Corinthians 2:10-11)

This rebellion and consequential corruption answer the question, “*Why are things messed up in this world?*” (Genesis 3:1-13; Romans 5:12)

Dual Citizen Dilemma

By birth, you are a citizen of this broken world. Satan, the ruler of the spiritual Kingdom of Darkness in this broken landscape has authority over those who have not pledged their spiritual citizen allegiance to God, though his evil rule affects all humans. (2 Corinthians 2:2, 4:4; John 12:31) He appeals to and leverages our innate sinful nature. The reign of the Kingdom of Darkness brings despair, conflict, hate, unrighteousness, discontentment, emptiness, disharmony, bondage, and death to its citizens. Some of its citizens, out of rebellious pride or unfounded fear, choose to remain under the reign and slavery of the Kingdom of Darkness. (John 8:31-36) Those who desire to leave, cannot transfer citizenship without a process. This involves denouncing their spiritual citizenship in the Kingdom of Darkness and paying the price to transfer it. But they are spiritually bankrupt and can't pay the price to transfer citizenship. Neither can they work to earn the price required to transfer citizenship: the sum is infinitely vast. They're in a mess. (Romans 7:24) How can the mess be fixed?

REDEMPTION: Ransomed by the King

God foretold a redemption rescue plan during the judgement of humanity following their rebellion. (Genesis 3:15) Through Christ God paid in full the price for all citizens of this world to change their spiritual citizenship from Satan's to His. He bought back the citizenship that humanity forfeited when they rebelled against God and transferred their citizenship rights to the Kingdom of Darkness. (Colossians 2:13-15) Through this purchase, and subsequent conquering of death, the spiritual Kingdom of Light was re-established on earth. (Galatians 1:3-4; 1 Peter 2:9-10) Those who choose to change their citizenship to Christ's Kingdom are no longer under the spiritual citizenship rule of Satan. (1 John 5:18; John 8:31-36) “*He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*” (Colossians 1:13-14) The Kingdom of Light is opposite the Kingdom of Darkness, and its reign brings joy, peace, love, righteous living, contentment, fulfillment, harmony, freedom, and life. (John 3:16; John 8:32; John 5:24; Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:14; Colossians 2:13-23)

Citizen Profile of the Kingdom of Light

Citizens of a particular country or kingdom generally reflect the predominate culture, mindset, and behaviors of that kingdom. At the heart of Satan's kingdom is the desire to live separately from God. Acted upon, the outcome is defiance and rebellion. This is the profile of a Kingdom of Darkness citizen.

The King of Light in His grace appeals to us, even though we're innately sinful, to become the person we were meant to be, not the broken person we are (Romans 7:21-25.) He calls us to union with God our Creator, not to rebellion against Him. As a citizen of His Kingdom, we are given spiritual rights, freedom, and authority to represent His kingdom (Luke 10:19.) Broken relationships with God, within, and with others can be restored, but are still imperfect.

Citizens of a country are given certain rights, but also have certain responsibilities and expectations (e.g. pay taxes, civic duties, represent their country a specific way, etc...) Citizens of Christ's kingdom are no different. We are called to live and behave differently than others. His citizens are called to lead a life worthy of God, “...who calls us into His own kingdom and glory.” (1 Thessalonians 2:12-13) “I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good

Baton Exchange

lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” (1 Peter 2:11-12) Also see Romans 6.

They live by the power of the Spirit “bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father...” (Colossians 1:9-14; Galatians 5:16-26; Matthew 5; 1 Corinthians 15:55-57; Galatians 2:20)

We are to live as Christ’s ambassadors of reconciliation, salt, and light (2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Matthew 5:13-16; Matthew 28:16-20.) We bring blessing to those around us at work and community, “Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” (Jeremiah 29:7) Though present, aware, and engaged, theirs is an eternal perspective (Philippians 3:12-21.)

“Christians— individually and corporately as the church—are to live and work in a manner that makes God and his kingdom known to the world.” Tim Kight, Stewardship of a Call

Our change in citizenship can *change us* and change our *destiny*, ““And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Other philosophies and worldviews shift blame to avoid ownership of their sinfulness or think that they can pay the price themselves for the cost of transferring citizenship. But denial or insurmountable spiritual bankruptcy can never fix the mess. Only Christ’s redemption can answer the question, *How can the mess be fixed?*

Though Christ has defeated Satan (John 12:31; Colossians 2:13-15), He has not yet fully driven out Satan’s Kingdom and restored His own. His citizens can expect to live in spiritual conflict and should be prepared to (2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6.10-18; Matthew 12:22-28.) We can expect to suffer in the conflict - at work, neighborhood, or nation “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...” (Matthew 5:10-11; Matthew 10:1-41)

Fortunately, this chapter of a King’s ransom but two kingdoms still in conflict is not the last chapter. A final chapter awaits.

RESTORATION: Kingdom restored

What would “fixed” look like? Where are we going?

Satan will make a final assault in the conflict, but Christ the King will return in person. (Matthew 24-25) Satan will be completely driven out and eternally subdued (Revelations 12:9-10; Revelation 20:2-10.) Death, sin, and the suffering they bring will be vanquished. (Revelation 21:4) “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15:20-26)

Christ will restore all things. Creation will be renewed. “...But our *citizenship* is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring Baton Exchange

everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” There will be flourishing without futility. The Kingdom of Light and its citizens will be whole and relationships right again. (Philippians 3:17-21) Finally, they will celebrate with their victorious King. (Revelation 19:6–9)

Ask Your Mentor

1. What do you think your specific role is as a laborer in Christ’s kingdom?
2. How have you experienced the two kingdoms and their citizens in conflict in your work and leadership?
3. How has this concept of citizens of two different spiritual realms influenced how you relate to or perceive coworkers, customers, suppliers, etc..?
4. How do you live as a citizen of Christ’s kingdom at work?
5. How do you trust God in the tension of the conflict?
6. How might God want to use YOU to bring His kingdom to your workplace?

Go Do Ideas

1. Summarize the big idea of this article in a few short sentences.
2. Reflect. Citizenship: which spiritual kingdom do your beliefs and behaviors predominately reflect?
3. Envision: What would it look like for Christ’s kingdom to come to your workplace? To your relationships? Your neighborhood? Perhaps... reconciliation, redemption, renewal, repentance, revitalization, rejuvenation, repair, replenishment, release, re-invention, respect, reliving, relieving, restabilization, revival, reform, reawakening, restoration, rebirth.
4. What might God be asking you to do? What would it look like to trust in Him with that as you obey?

Go Deeper: Further Conversation & Study

Read and discuss 1 Peter 2

Compare and contrast the kingdoms in conflict citizen profiles.

Sources & Resources

Videos

- Video: Overarching story of the Bible. Bible Project: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_CGP-12AE0
- Video: Tim Kight, Baton Exchange interview, <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/148003592>
- Video: Bible Project, Gospel of the Kingdom, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmFPS0f-kzs>
- Video: Bible Project: The Satan and Demons, Kingdoms in Conflict <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CamYtVpoTNk>
- Video: Bible Project: Sin nature. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNOZ7ocLD74>

Articles & Booklets

- Booklet: Stewardship of a Call, Tim Kight
- Article- How is Satan god of this world? <https://www.gotquestions.org/Satan-god-world.html>
- Articles- Q&A <https://www.gotquestions.org/>

Songs

- Song: Consumed By Fire | First Things First, <https://youtu.be/75k5gkrRazQ>
- Song: Build Your Kingdom Here, Rend Collective, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbdJXKqVgtg>
- Song: Rend Collective - Rescuer (Good News), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAg7rn7fH3Q>

Baton Exchange