

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

Vol. XI, No. 6

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Nov./Dec., 1987

POSITIVE FEEDBACK AND KINGDOM VICTORY

by Gary North

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:31-35; New King James Version).

Many people have interpreted such verses as Matthew 25:31-35 as referring exclusively to individual salvation, but the language of the text indicates God's judgment of collectives, not just individual souls. The text indicates institutional salvation, meaning national restoration. To restrict the meaning of salvation of the human soul is to misread Scripture.

The passage is clear: the sheep and the goats are symbolic terms for saved and lost **nations**. "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left." He will separate nations, one from another. People will enter the resurrected kingdom of Christ as members of nations, just as they enter it as members of racial and cultural groups. History does have meaning in eternity.

And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:22-27).

This has to refer to the post-resurrection kingdom, though it may also refer to the present preliminary manifestation of the new heaven and new earth.¹ There are only saints in the city. But these saints are referred to as members of nations: "And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light."

Those who confess Christ at judgment day make up one group of nations. Those who refuse to confess Him as savior make up the other group. Note that there are only two possible confessions ("lip" = confession of faith: Gen. 11:1)—Christ or Satan—but there are numerous nations. There is one kingdom of God, but numerous national representatives of His kingdom.

This points to God's covenantal dealing with mankind as members of nations. The division of tongues (languages) at the Tower of Babel is a permanent phenomenon in history. Mankind remains divided into recognizable cultural groups even after the resurrection. Most of us accept this implicitly. We expect to meet relatives beyond the grave. We expect them to resemble whoever they had been on earth. When families are reunited, the children of white caucasians will not be orientals, and the children of blacks will not be eskimos.

This means that some elements of our historical experience are permanent, just as God's rewards to us for our earthly performance are permanent (I Corinthians 3:11-14). It means that some aspects of nationhood persist beyond the grave—not geographical boundaries, but common cultural experiences and presumably also common memories.

Nations slowly change, borders change, but nations will always be part of history. While some humanists emphasize the need for internationalism—the ideology of the Tower—and other humanists emphasize nationalism—a development of the last two centuries—both internationalism and nationalism are biblically legitimate.

What we have lost in the modern world is the commitment to localism—psychologically, judicially, and economically. The growing mobility of capital and people within nations has overcome geographical localism, just as localism will presumably not be a major factor in the resurrection. In a world characterized by high per capita income, freedom of movement, freedom of trade, and international peace based on one public "lip"—a confession of public faith—we can expect to see nationalism go the way of clannism (tribalism) and localism. It will not disappear, but its hold on people's minds will decrease.

If all men have one public "lip," how will there be any anti-Christian nations to divide? How will there be goats? Because some members of the covenanted community will lie about their faith and commitment. There will be a final falling away at the last day.² The public confessions of some groups will change.

He Shall Overcome

We know there is only one kingdom of God, and it has many enemies in history:

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death (I Corinthians 15:24-26).

The final overcoming of all rival authorities by Jesus

1. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 21.

2. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

Christ comes at the last judgment, when He triumphs over His enemies and delivers His kingdom to God the Father. Christ's kingdom at last absorbs all other kingdoms. But the word "absorbs" is metaphorical, related to some organic process. The expansion process of Christ's triumphant kingdom in history is neither mechanical nor organic. It is covenantal.

The kingdom of God is real. It is a factor in human history. It is something that Christ literally delivers to God. Such a transfer of authority is covenantal. Christ subdues the earth; then He transfers this subdued earth to God the Father. This transfer is a kind of dowry which Christ pays to the "Father of the Bride," His church. His inheritance from God becomes the "bride price" for His church, a visible payment at the end of history that in principle was paid for covenantally at Calvary. This payment is **definitive, progressive, and final**.

There is of necessity a disinheritance at that time. Like the inheritance concept, and also like the bride price concept, this disinheritance is also definitive (Calvary), progressive (historical), and final. "Let both [wheat and tares] grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn'" (Matthew 13:30). The tares are finally and eternally disinherited at the final judgment. The nations will be divided at that time (Matthew 25:31-35).

The Process of Overcoming

It is obvious that this overcoming of His enemies is progressive over time. The last enemy to be subdued will be death. So His enemies are not subdued all at once. This process of overcoming takes place in history. With respect to the nations, there can be little doubt of how the kingdom of God will be manifested: through confession and covenanting together. Confessing Christ ecclesiastically means confirming the church covenant through baptism and renewing it periodically through the Lord's Supper. Confirming Christ in the realm of civil government means a periodic public affirmation of God's covenant law (Exodus 31:10-13). There is no legitimate escape from the covenant and its ethical requirements. Just as a magistrate or other civil officer in the United States swears with his left hand on the Bible, promising to uphold the U.S. Constitution, so should he swear on the Constitution, promising to uphold the Bible. So should those who elect them (Exodus 19). A civil covenant ratification and renewal process is fundamental for a Christian nation.

As men strive together in national covenant to work out their salvation in fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), they extend Christ's kingdom on earth. As they become covenantally faithful by honoring God's law in word and deed (James 1:19-27), God's visible, external blessings cover the covenanted society. Deuteronomy 28 teaches that these blessings are clearly national and external: military (v. 7), weather (v. 12), and finances (v. 12). The rain will not fall only on the converted, after all. The locus of covenant blessings is the **nation**.

This means that nations as covenantal institutions will

eventually overcome the enemies of Christ. The **positive feedback** of covenantal blessings produce wealth, authority, and influence for covenantally faithful institutions: churches, civil governments, and families. These external, visible blessings are designed to reinforce men's faith in the reliability of God's covenant promises in history: "And you shall remember the **Lord** your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that he may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

The humanist socialists have adopted a slogan, "The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer." This is a lie. The Bible teaches that in the long run, the **covenantally faithful** get richer, and the **covenantally rebellious** get poorer. This is denied by the humanists, who want no visible manifestations of God's covenant in history, and it is also denied by Christian pietists and retreatists, who also want no public, national manifestations of God's covenant in history. God's covenant system of blessings and cursings is designed to produce long-term victory for Christ's people in history. This steady increase in Christians' personal responsibility to extend God's dominion on earth is opposed by both humanists and Christian pietists. The humanists do not want Christians to inherit authority in history, for they want to retain monopoly power over history. Christian pietists also do not want Christians to inherit authority in history, for with authority necessarily comes responsibility.

Men are responsible before God, and this means that we are responsible **in terms of permanent standards**. This means God's law. The more authority Christians inherit from God, the harder they must strive to see God's revealed laws in the legal codes of each nation. A Christian society's legal order should reflect the requirements of revealed Biblical law. So should the international legal order that is established progressively by Christian nations. The implicit covenantal division between sheep and goats—national entities—must be made increasingly visible over time, "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 5:10b).

Conclusion

This is the basis of Christ's progressive overcoming of His enemies in history: the steady expansion of His people's authority on earth. This is the principle of **leaven**. God's holy leaven steadily replaces Satan's unholy leaven in history. "And another parable He spoke to them: 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened'" (Matthew 13:33).

We now come to Paul's statement of God's "footstool theology." God triumphs in history through the expansion of Christ's kingdom. "Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (I Corinthians 15:28). This is not pantheism; it is covenant dominion. God is not infused into His creation; His kingdom in heaven becomes covenantally identified with Christ's kingdom on earth. Our prayer is answered at the end of history: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10, KJV).

Christian Reconstruction is published six times a year, alternating with **Biblical Economics Today**. It is published by the Institute for Christian Economics, a non-profit, tax-exempt educational organization. A free six-month subscription is sent to those who ask to be put on the mailing list. **Subscriptions:** P.O. Box 8000, Tyler, TX 75711. Donations are fully tax deductible. Checks should be made out to **Institute for Christian Economics**.