

MESSIAH THE PRINCE,
Or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ.
By William Symington.
Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 7.

CHAPTER 5.
THE SPIRITUALITY OF CHRIST'S
MEDIATORIAL DOMINION.
(Continued.)

But when we speak of the dominion of the Mediator as spiritual, it is necessary to guard against supposing that it can have no sort of connexion with the world, or with things that are secular. Such an idea it is not at all our intention to convey. From not sufficiently attending to certain distinctions proper to be observed on this subject, mistaken and pernicious conclusions have been drawn. Because the dominion of Christ is spiritual in its nature, to conclude that everything connected with his kingdom must be spiritual also, and that nothing earthly or secular can have any relation to it, is an inference alike illogical in reasoning, and unsupported by fact. The subjects of this spiritual kingdom, after being separated by grace from the world lying in wickedness, continue for a length of time in this lower region of human existence, before they are prepared for being transferred to that brighter, and higher, and more spiritual sphere in which they are to exist for ever. ► Although not *of* this world as to their character, they are *in* this world as respects their place of abode. While, as *saints*, they number among the ranks of Christ's spiritual subjects, as *men* and as *citizens* they occupy their places and act their parts in the offices and institutions of civil society. While here, they have bodies which require to be fed, and clothed, and protected; and, even when their souls at death are taken to heaven, their material frames, redeemed by Christ and destined to undergo a remarkable change at the last day, sleep till then in the lower parts of the earth, where they are ever contemplated with interest, watched over with ceaseless care, and faithfully preserved by that Saviour-king, who claims dominion over their persons in both their constituent parts, material and immaterial. So long as the saints have bodies, this kingdom can never be so strictly spiritual as to exclude all sort of connexion with matter.

Besides, the kingdom of Christ has a visible as well as an invisible form. This distinction is founded in fact, and is, we believe, universally admitted. Now, a visible church must have visible laws, visible ordinances, visible subjects, and visible office-bearers. And what but this world is the sphere where these laws are promulgated, [*promulgated*,] these ordinances observed, these subjects located, and these office-bearers find room for their labours? While God has a

visible church in the world, there will be required outward erections for the ordinances of worship, and temporal emoluments for the support of its ministers and institutions.

Nay, more; we may venture to affirm, that, connected with the spiritual kingdom of the Mediator, there are some things which are in themselves strictly and literally worldly or secular. The dominion of Christ, as we shall have occasion afterwards more fully to explain, is universal. It includes ALL creatures without exception; not merely the church, visible and invisible, but—all things, animate and inanimate, rational and irrational, moral and immoral, individual and social, ecclesiastical and political. ► It may suffice, at present, to remind the reader of one or two Scripture passages by which the assertion is fully borne out. ‘All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth—He hath put all things under his feet—And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.’¹ If, according to these expressions, the mediatorial rule extends over all things, many things strictly secular and worldly must be somehow or other connected with Christ’s kingdom; and such a view of its spirituality as is incompatible with any sort of connexion with the things of this world, is thus shown to be manifestly erroneous and untenable.

The kingdom of Christ is truly spiritual; yet, connected with this kingdom, it seems there may be many things which are properly secular. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world; yet many worldly things are connected with Christ’s kingdom. These statements are not inconsistent. We may find it difficult to reconcile them; we may feel ourselves at a loss to find out a harmonising principle; but we must neither, on the one hand, deny the fact, nor, on the other, impute contradiction to the words of Christ or the language of Scripture. We must not think ourselves warranted, to avoid the difficulty in question, in substituting a quibble for a sober interpretation, or in proceeding to restrict the mediatorial rule agreeably to our own partial and limited views, by cutting off from his economical prerogative whatever is not strictly of a spiritual character. Such would be to use an unwarrantable liberty with the word of God, to interpret the Bible as no other composition will admit of being interpreted, and to take an ungenerous advantage of the mere sound of words. ► The two ideas are capable of being perfectly reconciled. All that is required for this purpose, is, that whatever is connected with Christ’s kingdom be understood to be somehow or other *subservient* to spiritual objects,—objects not terminating with, but superior to, and out-living in duration, the present world. Although every thing connected with it may not be in itself spiritual, every thing connected with it may be subservient to what is spiritual. The grand aim and purpose of the whole may be of this description, while many things of a different nature may be subordinate to this end. The dominion of the Messiah may extend over many things besides the church, and may comprehend many creatures besides the saints, and yet embrace nothing but what is somehow or another fitted to be of service to these. The Father has given him to be head over *all* things; but the reason of this does not terminate in these things themselves; it points to a higher and more spiritual object; He has given him to be head over all things TO THE CHURCH which is his

1 Matt. 28.18; 1 Cor. 15.27; Eph. 1.22.

body. ► Whatever power the Mediator possesses is for the good of the church; is given and exercised for this purpose. But what, we ask, is there that is not for the good of the church? But for the church would the sun continue to shine, the rain to fall, the earth to vegetate? Would the wheels of providence continue to revolve, or the pillars of the universe to be upheld? No. The church is the great conservative element of the world and all that is in it; nor is there any thing which is not capable of being rendered, by infinite wisdom and power, subservient to the interests of God's covenant society. Here, then, we are furnished with a solution of the difficulty. ► Every system derives its character and designation from that which constitutes its ultimate end or aim, and not from any inferior or subordinate appendage. We call that an enlightened and virtuous kingdom, whose constitution and administration have for their direct object the promotion of knowledge and morality, notwithstanding that some of the subjects may be wicked, ignorant, or even insane. We call that person spiritual, who gives evidence, from the obvious tendency of his general demeanour, that he is born from above and destined for glory, although many of his thoughts and pursuits may have a relation to this world, and even some of his actions be sinful. Thus it is with the kingdom of Christ. We call it a spiritual kingdom, inasmuch as the great design of its existence is spiritual, notwithstanding that, among the things connected with it, there may be many that are material, and perhaps even worldly.

Christ said of the church, 'My kingdom is not of this world.' But, if this means that his kingdom is so absolutely spiritual as to have no connexion whatever with what is secular or earthly, then when he said of his disciples 'ye are not of the world,' he meant that Christians could lawfully hold no worldly property, engage in no worldly enterprise, nor enter into any political connexion whatever. The phrases are in both cases precisely similar; and as, in the latter instance, it would be absurd, and contradictory both to Scripture and common sense, to contend for the exclusive interpretation in question, so must it be in the former.

Thus much to prevent misconception, and to obviate a common mistake. It will now be understood that when we speak of the dominion of the Mediator as spiritual, we mean that its nature and design are wholly celestial, that it is of a character different from the kingdoms of this world, and destined to higher and more glorious purposes.

The view now given of the kingly office of Christ is one of great importance. The tendency to take a carnal view of his kingdom is deeply seated in the human heart, and has appeared in various forms.

It was the radical error of the unbelieving Jews. The prophecies respecting the glory of the Messiah they interpreted literally. They expected him to appear as a temporal prince, to put himself at the head of his countrymen, to rescue them from the yoke of Romish subjection, and to restore the kingdom to its original and rightful possessors. Because Jesus of Nazareth did not fulfil these expectations, they could not look upon him as the true Messiah. To them he appeared as a root out of a dry ground, having no form nor comeliness; they saw no beauty in him for which they should desire him. ► Blinded by their carnal prejudices, they could not bring themselves to believe, that the prediction that the Messiah should wield a sceptre was

fulfilled in one who held only a reed—that the prophecy that the Messiah should wear a diadem, was fulfilled in one who was crowned only with thorns—or that the statement that the Messiah should occupy a throne, was fulfilled in one who occupied only a cross. The event, instead of correcting their error and suggesting to them the true interpretation, instead of leading them to spiritual ideas of his character and reign, only drove them to the mad extreme of contemptuous rejection. ► Their descendants to the present day adhere to their opinion and follow their example, solely from the influence of the same carnal views. It becomes those to whom God has given more scriptural and spiritual ideas, to pity their mistake; to pray for their illumination; and to do everything in their power to reclaim them from so fatal an error. Ye sons of Abraham! ye wandering tribes of Israel!—still beloved for the fathers' sakes—be entreated to abandon the prejudices by which you are held in mental bondage; burst your ignoble thralldom; and, giving a spiritual interpretation to the glowing imagery of your prophets, behold the fulfilment of their predictions in the despised Nazarene!

The error of those who look for a *literal advent* of Christ, and a literal reign upon earth during the millenium, must be traced to the same source, namely, to their overlooking the spirituality of the mediatorial dominion. They expect a visible descent of the Redeemer in his glorified human nature, to erect a local court, to sit upon a literal throne, and to conduct a temporal reign for at least a thousand years. If we have been at all successful in proving that the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom, this system must fall to the ground, for its whole tendency is to represent his kingdom as a temporal one, to revive the exploded rites and opinions of carnal Judaism, and to bring back upon the church the yoke of beggarly elements from which Christ has made us free. [Gal. 4.9; 5.1.] ► Let those who are in danger of being seduced by the doctrine in question, ponder well the evidence furnished in support of the spirituality of the kingdom of Christ. Let them be jealous of the tendency there is, in the human heart, to be carried away with what strikes the senses in preference to that which appeals to faith. Let them profit by the case of the unhappy Jews, who, by yielding to this natural tendency, have been plunged into the gulf of unbelief, and are still suffering the just award of their iniquity. 'The letter killeth; the spirit giveth life.' [2 Cor. 3.6.]

It is impossible here to overlook the means with which we are thus furnished, of forming a right estimate of the church of Rome, and of determining the question whether that church be Christian or anti-Christian. It pretends to be Christ's kingdom upon earth, and to be the only church which can lay claim to this distinction. Well, Christ's kingdom is not of this world—it is a spiritual kingdom;—a kingdom of truth, and righteousness, and love, and peace; a kingdom whose office-bearers, ends, administration, and appendages, are all of a spiritual character. How does the state of things in the Romish church accord with this view? ► Look at the Roman pontiff,—the assumed representative on earth of Him who strenuously refused to be made a king by men, who studiously avoided all interference with the civil authorities, who wore a crown of thorns, and expired on a cross. You see on his head a triple crown, glittering with gold and sparkling with diamonds; his vestments are of the most costly and gorgeous materials; at his side hang golden keys; grasping the sword of temporal power, he lays claim to

a universal, civil, as well as ecclesiastical, authority; and adding the imperial diadem to the sacerdotal mitre, he prostrates even monarchs at his feet. Enter the Vatican,—the habitation of the pretended successor of Him whose kingdom is not of this world, and who had not where to lay his head,—and what do you behold but the unequivocal insignia of temporal power, the gaudy paraphernalia of earthly pomp and grandeur? ► Visit a cathedral,—where the highest acts of devotion are professedly engaged in to Him who is a Spirit, and who requires such as worship him to worship him in spirit and in truth, [John 4.24.] There you have lofty domes, massive pillars, pictorial decorations on which the most accomplished artists have expended their skill, splendid vestments, voluptuous music, smoking incense, sparkling lights;—everything, in short, to strike the senses rather than to affect the heart, to glitter in the eye rather than to impress the conscience. These are scandalous departures from the character of that kingdom which is not of this world; they are standing proofs that the church of Rome has no title to be regarded as a church of Christ at all, much less as *the* Church of Christ: they are the unequivocal, ineffaceable marks of anti-Christianism.

May not this subject be of use, farther, in enabling us to test the character and claims of even Protestant systems of religion? The diversity of sentiment existing among Protestant churches, is painful and bewildering; and it is desirable to be furnished with some principles by which we may estimate their respective conflicting claims. Here is one—the degree of spirituality they possess. The system which has the least of worldly pomp, which least depends on the smiles of the world, which has fewest attractions for the carnal heart; the system which, at the same time, pays most respect to the spiritual principles, and best subserves the spiritual ends, of Christ's kingdom, is surely that which has the strongest claims on our regard. This is a test that few churches can well stand.—The episcopal church of England, weighed in this balance, will be found wanting. In her present half-reformed state, she retains many of those worldly appendages and outward ceremonies by which the church of Rome is characterised; and a thorough purgation of these, together with a more spiritual system of preaching and administering the sacraments, and a revival of discipline, are required to bring her into even a decent show of conformity to the kingdom which is not of this world—► The Scottish establishment also, though far from being in the same situation with that in England, would do well to subject itself to a searching application of the criterion of which we are now speaking. Although unexceptionable in her doctrinal standards and forms of worship, it may be worthy of being considered, whether there be not things, both in the tone of preaching which extensively prevails, and in the appendages of some of her courts, which will not bear the rigid application of a strictly spiritual test.—► Nor let communities which exist in a state of separation from the national church, think that *they* have no need to try themselves in this way. In all of them, even the purest, will be found, we fear, a measure of the spirit of the world, and departure from the simplicity and spirituality of the primitive model, sufficient to warrant humiliation and call for amendment. In choosing an ecclesiastical profession, perhaps no principle of guidance can be more safe than the degree of spirituality of which a church may be possessed. We cannot be too much on our guard against being deceived by worldly glare, or by the worldly advantages

which connexion with a particular community may offer. Are there not many who deceive themselves in this respect;—many who, in joining a church, are influenced in their choice, by the worldly respectability it possesses, or by the ease with which, in its communion, they can indulge the love and pursuit of the world; while the reasons by which they are determined against other churches, are their poverty, their simplicity, their strictness, or their spirituality?

To persons as well as churches, the principle in question furnishes a means of trial. It is well fitted to aid in examining into our own personal character. Who are the subjects of Christ's kingdom? Such only as are spiritual. Not the vain, the sensual, the passionate, the worldly; but the humble, the meek, the mortified, the self-denied. Such as adopt, not the maxims of the world, but the principles of the gospel. Not such as permit their hearts to be engrossed with the things of earth, and lavish their attentions on its possessions, its grandeur, pomp, and parade; but such as, looking on the world and all things that are in it as transitory, content themselves with little, and cherish a heavenly spirit. ► Not such, in fine, as restrict their views to time; but such as, while they live, look steadfastly forward to an eternal state of being, and expect, when they die, that an entrance shall be ministered to them abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. [2 Pet. 1.11.] Soon shall this world and all that belongs to it be at an end; and it concerns those who have no hope beyond the present, to consider what they shall do when old age arrives, or when death knocks at the door of their chamber, and summons them away. Then, true wisdom will be found with those who have obeyed the command of the Saviour: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' [Matt. 6.33.]

Discussion Questions

1. What wrong conclusion do some persons draw when they hear that the kingdom of Jesus is spiritual?
 - A. They imagine that it must have no sort of connection with the world, or with things which are secular.
2. What distinction about Christians is needful to explain their spiritual nature while in this world?
 - A. Believers are, as saints, spiritual subjects of Christ, but as men and citizens, members of civil society.
3. What kind of laws, ordinances, subjects, and office-bearers must constitute the visible church?
 - A. They must be visible laws, visible ordinances, visible subjects, and visible office-bearers.
4. What extent of power does the Bible tell us has been given to the Lord Jesus?
 - A. To Jesus "All power is given... in heaven and in earth," and "all things" are put under his feet.
5. In what way are secular things understood to be in connection with the kingdom & power of Christ?
 - A. These are under his power as things which are "subservient to spiritual objects": having spiritual ends.
6. How were the Jews the first church to err in disregarding the spiritual nature of Messiah's kingdom?
 - A. They expected the Messiah of prophecy to wield a scepter & save them from the yoke of Romish subjection.
7. What eschatological outlook also undermines a correct view of Christ's kingdom as spiritual?
 - A. That which looks for a literal advent of Christ, usually of a pre-millennial nature.
8. Which churches are found to be at fault in disregarding the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom?
 - A. The anti-Christian church of Rome, the episcopal church of England, the state church in Scotland, etc.