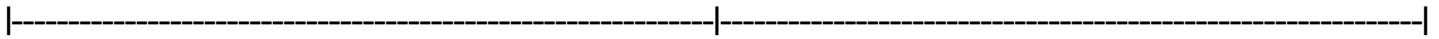




# Kingdom Priorities

There is a spectrum of belief concerning kingdom priorities. Allow me to describe the options:



**Dominionism**

**Now/Not yet**

**Cessationism**

On the right we have **cessationism**, which believes the gifts of healing, etc. have ceased, though they believe God could still heal if asked. Practical cessationists would be next to them. This is a group that would not say the gifts have ceased, but they live their lives as if the gifts are ceased and are skeptical of stories of healing. On the far left we have **dominionists** and health/wealth advocates. Dominionists believe that the church is supposed to institute a government governed by Christian law. Theonomists believe the Old Testament law along with its judicial rules should be enforced on all. Other dominionists believe only the New Testament law along with Old Testament principles should be enforced. Within the Pentecostal movement there is the Kingdom **now** theology and the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), who believe the kingdom is fully here and Christians should act as such, believing God always wants to heal and take over the rule of the enemy, even in political structures. The NAR, with the restored fivefold ministry seeks a theocracy with Christians ruling over seven areas: religion, family, education, government, media, arts and entertainment, and business. Typically, this group advocates individual salvation, but it believes the church is called to go further, retaking the structures Satan has usurped. In the middle of this spectrum is the Now/not yet theology popularized by George Eldon Ladd and embraced by the third wave of the Spirit movement best seen in Vineyard and Calvary Chapel churches. This group believes that the gifts are for today, and Christians should expect to see healing, casting out of demons, and individual salvations that lead to revival and awakenings, because the kingdom of God is here, at least in part. But they don't believe God always wants to heal, because the kingdom of God is not yet; its full manifestation comes when Jesus comes back. They believe that the book of Acts is our key, which promotes individual salvation, not structural takeover as the modus operandi. Another group that needs to be mentioned, though it is hard to put it on the spectrum, is the social justice movement within the church. They are similar to NAR in wanting to take over

structures, but social justice issues are most important to them rather than spiritual issues like healing, casting out of demons, etc. Which group is right and are there potential dangers in the other groups?

I would argue that the now/not yet third wave movement is the most Biblical and best option for the needs of the church and world today. I would also argue that the other groups do have potential dangers. First, the now/not yet fits the Bible's description of the Kingdom of God. It is here in some sense (Lk 11:20; 17:20-21), and it is future in some sense (Lk 19:11ff; Rev 11:15). The kingdom will not be here fully until the King returns, but the power of the kingdom is available now as seen in Hebrews 6:5, where it says we can taste the powers of the age to come; they are a taste, not a full banquet meal, but a taste is not just a promise; it is a real experience of the kingdom. I would argue that we are not supposed to take over structures, because that is not the battle plan outlined in the book of Acts or the commission of Jesus in Luke 4:18-19. In the New Testament, the primary mission of the church is to make disciples through evangelism and discipleship as commissioned by Jesus in Mt 28. Acts gives us no indication that we are supposed to take over governments, or any other institutions besides the local church, or that we are supposed to be heavily involved in social justice issues. As a society we should seek justice as much as possible, and since Christians are a part of a nation/society they should do their part, but it should never be seen as the primary focus of the church. Our primary focus as the church is to make disciples through evangelism, baptizing them and then training them to become mature disciples; this is how we advance the kingdom the best. Jesus' commission gives us "the main and the plain" on how to reach the lost, through preaching the good news, healing, and freedom from demonic oppression. Jesus did this, and he sent out his apostles to do this, and he sent out 70 to do this, and then He commissioned the church to do this in Acts. Acts 1:8 gives us the main reason for the baptism of the Holy Spirit - to be witnesses. The rest of Acts reveals that through the word and the works, which include healing, exorcisms, etc., the church is to evangelize, disciple and plant churches that evangelize and make disciples. Notice the emphasis on evangelism, which adds people to the church in Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 8:12; 9:31; 11:24; 12:24; 13:49; 14:27; 16:5; 17:34; 19:10,20; 28:24,31. The church was at its worst when it tried to take over political structures in the Middle Ages. In the founding of our country, we made sure we were not supposed to allow the church to usurp the government or vice versa. We had a proper separation of powers. Today, we have seen an encroachment of the government on the church, which is not good, but the opposite is also not good. As citizens we know God's ways are best for society, so we seek to influence society through truth and love, but we are not supposed to take over. I believe the Sermon on the Mount is the constitution of the citizens of the kingdom, not the world. We live out the Sermon on the Mount, but we don't force its laws and principles on the unbelieving world. We are supposed to be a sweet-smelling savor (2 Cor 2:14-16), not a bully forcing the world to capitulate. We long for the return of the King, because this world is not our home (Php 3:20; 1 Pe 1:17; 2:11; Heb 11:13; 13:14).

Let's go back to the spectrum. Cessationism and practical cessationism are harmful, because they don't make use of the power of God available to the church, seeking all too often to advance the kingdom by strategy and human effort rather than God's power. I do admit that their emphasis on the Bible has been helpful to the church. All forms of dominionism and the social justice movement are dangerous, because they sidetrack the church from its primary calling. They build false hopes into the church, because they knowingly or unknowingly embrace a form of postmillennialism. Postmillennialism is the belief that the millennium is taking place now and the kingdom will grow and grow until the church takes over the world. Revelation makes this belief untenable. The church will grow, and evil will grow side by side until the final showdown. The millennium takes place after Jesus returns (Rev 20:1-15). Some people think that eschatology doesn't matter, but as we can see, it does matter in determining the strategy and priority of the church. NAR and kingdom now do encourage us to believe more, which is a good thing, but they overemphasize the now, giving a false hope and lack of care for the suffering at times. Cessationists are good at helping people who are suffering, and the Pentecostals are good at encouraging to believe our God is an awesome God, but a balance is needed as seen in Scripture. The social justice rightly reminds us of the injustices in the world that we should care about, but wrongly puts the emphasis on focusing on political means rather than gospel means for change.

At Harvest I want to direct the church towards the true priorities of the kingdom. I want to focus on the main and the plain to advance the kingdom of God, primarily by reaching the lost and discipling the saved, especially focusing on family ministry, equipping families to do their part in this mission. I believe "everyone gets to play," which is a modern way of declaring the true intent of the priesthood of all believers. I want to see everyone actively using their gifts in ministry to help people follow Jesus and share Him with others. I strongly believe that by actively praying for the sick, casting out demons and sharing the good news, we will see people saved and maturing in Christ at such a level that revival and awakening break out in our lifetime.