

The church is growing and spreading throughout the world, and even when it is persecuted and oppressed it grows remarkably by the power of God. At this point we must make a very significant distinction, however.

Here postmillennialists point to the following: Another parable he put before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” We can also note the following verse: “He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened”” (Matt. 13:33). According to postmillennialists both of these parables indicate that the kingdom will grow in influence until it permeates and in some measure transforms the entire world.

The “millennium” that postmillennialists hold to is *very different* from the “millennium” the premillennialists talk about. In a sense, they are not even discussing the same topic. While *premillennialists* talk about a renewed earth with Jesus Christ physically present and reigning as King, together with glorified believers in resurrection bodies, *postmillennialists* are simply talking about an earth with many, many Christians influencing society. They do not envisage a millennium consisting of a renewed earth or glorified saints or Christ present in bodily form to reign (for they think that **these** things will only occur after Christ returns to inaugurate the eternal state). Therefore the entire discussion of the millennium is more than simply a discussion of the sequence of events surrounding it. It also involves a significant difference over the nature of this period of time itself. Someone could conceivably be a postmillennialist and think that the gospel will grow in influence until the world is largely Christian, and that then Christ will return and set up a literal earthly reign, raising believers from the dead to reign with him in glorified bodies. Or, on the other hand, a very optimistic premillennialist could conceivably adopt many of the postmillennialist teachings about the increasingly Christian nature of this present age.

In response to the postmillennialist arguments, the following points may be made:

1. The Great Commission does indeed speak of the authority that is given into Christ’s hand, but that does not necessarily imply that Christ will use that authority to bring about the conversion of the majority of the population of the world. To say that Christ’s authority is great is simply another way of saying that God’s power is infinite, which no one will deny. But the question is the extent to which Christ will *use* his power to bring about the numerical growth of the church. We may *assume* that he will use it to a very full extent and will bring about worldwide Christianization, but such an assumption is merely that—an assumption. It is not based on any specific evidence in the Great Commission or in other texts that talk about Christ’s authority and power in this present age.
2. The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven do tell us that the kingdom of God will gradually grow from something very small to something very large, but they do not tell us the *extent* to which the kingdom will grow. For example, the parable of the mustard seed does not tell us that the tree grew so that it spread throughout the whole earth. And the parable of the leaven simply talks about gradual growth that permeates society (as the church has already done), but it says nothing about the degree or effect that that influence has (it does not tell us, for example, whether in the end 5 percent of the loaf was leaven and 95 percent bread dough, or 20 percent leaven and 80 percent bread, or 60 percent leaven and 40 percent bread, and so forth). It is simply pressing the parable beyond its intended purpose to attempt to make it

say more than that the kingdom will grow gradually and eventually have an influence on every society in which it is planted.

Similarly, when amillennialists talk about presently “enjoying” the millennium, which they understand on the basis of Rev. 20 to refer to the church age, they are also talking about a very different kind of “millennium” than would be envisaged by either postmillennialists or premillennialists. This is not to say that such a position would be free of internal tensions and difficulties (especially the difficulty of explaining how evil could diminish when Christ was absent from the earth but grow into widespread rebellion when he is physically present and reigning), but it is to say that there would be no absolute inconsistency within this position. 1 Cor. 15:25 says, “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet,” but the immediate context (vv. 24, 26) talks about destroying his enemies (including death in v. 26), not about converting people and bringing them into the church.

3. In response to the argument that the world is becoming more Christian, it must be said that the world is also becoming more evil. No student of history or modern society will argue that mankind has made much progress through the centuries in overcoming the depth of perversity and the extent of immorality that remain in people’s hearts. Indeed, modernization in western societies in the twentieth century has often been accompanied not by moral improvement but by an unprecedented level of drug abuse, marital infidelity, pornography, homosexuality, rebellion against authority, superstition (in astrology and the New Age movement), materialism, greed, theft, and falsehood in speech. Even among professing Christians there is repeated evidence of dismaying imperfection in the Christian life, especially in the realms of personal morality and depth of intimacy with God. In places where Bible-believing Christians comprise large segments of the population, still nothing like an earthly millennial kingdom occurs. It is true that the growth of the church as a percentage of world population has been remarkable in recent decades, and we should be greatly encouraged by this. It is possible that we will someday see a far greater influence of genuine Christianity upon many societies, and if that occurred, it would make the postmillennial position seem more plausible. But such events could also be understood within a premillennial or amillennial framework, so the final decision regarding these competing positions must still be made by interpreting the relevant biblical texts.

4. Finally, we should note that there are several New Testament passages that seem to give explicit denial to the postmillennial position. Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and *those who find it are few*” (Matt. 7:13–14). Rather than teaching that a majority of the world will become Christians, Jesus seems here to be saying that those who are saved will be “few” in contrast to the “many” who travel toward eternal destruction. Similarly, Jesus asks, “*When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?*” (Luke 18:8), a question that suggests that the earth will not be filled with those who believe, but will be dominated rather by those who do not have faith.

Contrary to the view that the world will get better and better as the influence of the church grows, Paul predicts that before Christ returns “the *rebellion*” will come and “the *man of lawlessness*” will be revealed, “the son of perdition” who “takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thess. 2:3–4).