

7 Common Ways Leaders Fail to Expand God's Kingdom

As someone who has been involved in teaching and implementing principles of the kingdom of God since the mid-1990s, I have observed many ways Christian leaders do not expand the kingdom. The following are some of the most common ways we work without kingdom effectiveness.

1. Mere Political Victories

The Christian Right made the mistake of just focusing on politics. Many in this camp were ecstatic when George W. Bush was elected as president in 2000. Consequently, several of Bush's policies (cutting taxes without cutting spending; the Iraqi War) set Christianity and conservative politics back many years.

Elections come and go. Thus, when the church only focuses on politics it is a huge mistake. We have learned that it is very possible to win elections and continue to lose the culture since politics is only one of several major cultural spheres. We need to reach all the spheres if we are truly going to see a biblical reformation that reflects kingdom values.

2. Transfer Growth between Churches

Many churches market themselves and their ministries via Christian media. Thus their target audience is primarily other Christians!

Some new church plants have their services when most other churches don't meet so they can attract other church members with their special events. The result is that several churches have grown in an astonishing rate. But when you examine their demographic you find that the majority of their people come from other churches! This does not expand the kingdom of God;

it merely expands the rolls of that particular church!

3. Megachurch Crowds

Some pastors are glorified event planners who know how to draw and keep a crowd! The test of the effectiveness of a church is not how many attend on a Sunday but how many are committed Christ followers.

All churches should have a strong assimilation process for visitors in which a new person is given the opportunity to become a disciple of Christ with accountable relationships. A gifted program-based church which offers attendees a good experience (great worship, media and oratory) but falls far short of the biblical command to make disciples does not expand the Kingdom of God (Matthew 28:19; 2 Timothy 2:2).

4. Preaching an Individualistic Gospel

Since the late 1800s, the American church separated the gospel from the kingdom (unlike Jesus who preached the gospel of the kingdom; read Mark 1:14-15). The results have been disastrous. Attaching the kingdom to the gospel obligates the corporate body of Christ to steward the earth, while an individual gospel merely offers a way for individual people to escape the earth and go to heaven. Consequently, the majority of sermons today in the global church are self-focused and don't touch systemic sin. This individual focus does not expand the kingdom since it doesn't deal with the restoration of communities and cities (unlike the true gospel as shown in Isaiah 61:1-4).

5. Humanistic Outreaches

Some Christian organizations just focus on bringing quality of life change to a community or village in poverty-stricken areas. There is one famous relief organization that advertises community transformation but when you examine the villages they aid the people are still worshipping idols or false gods.

This is not an expansion of the kingdom because they brought systemic change without bringing salvation to their inhabitants.

6. The Kingdom Becomes a Social Movement without Individual Spirituality

Some church leaders in the 19th century preached the kingdom of God but it amounted only to a progressive socialistic political agenda. This is the opposite problem of most of today's preaching. Today we preach an individualistic gospel without a corporate and systemic component. In past kingdom teachings many preached a social gospel of liberation that neglected individual transformation and salvation! This is more akin to Marxism than to true biblical Christianity in which true transformation always starts from within the hearts of repentant human beings (John 3:1-8). The "social gospel" kingdom message taught that true change comes from changing political and economic systems (like Marxism's dialectical materialism) but history has shown the failure of Marxist utopian goals! True societal change must first start from within the hearts of individual believers. (The kingdom of God is within us; read Luke 17:21.)

7. Leaders Have Kingdom Language without Kingdom Implementation

Finally, many today teach the kingdom but have no track record of ever bringing systemic change to a community! Often Christian leaders are satisfied merely preaching good messages and writing good books on the kingdom without testing their theology in the laboratory of life! In the kingdom the word must become flesh (John 1:14), which means true kingdom teaching must have an incarnation of ideas that results in social systemic change.

While I never underestimate the importance of great anointed preaching, I know I have the most authority when I teach

principles based on real-life models of social change I have witnessed in my own community and city! I am weary of merely going from one conference to another to hear likeminded leaders teach on the kingdom. We need to focus on equipping capable leaders who will implement biblical principles in communities. If we don't, we are just preaching to the choir while staying in a safe zone utilizing language that is acceptable to "do-nothing" saints who merely want a new teaching to stimulate them! Truly faith without works is dead!

Finally, there are many other things that could be added to this list; I am sure there are others who can do a great job of expanding further upon this topic. Nobody I know (including yours truly!) has experienced or seen a biblical model of transformation that perfectly matches the scriptural teaching of the kingdom of God. We are all grappling with this subject and attempting to continue to grow both in teaching and in practice. I pray this brief article aids many who desire to implement principles of the kingdom of God in their communities, cities and nations!