

Rediscovering the Kingdom of God

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Now after that John was put into prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. Mark 1:14-15

To think biblically is to adopt and maintain a biblical world-view. Having a biblical world-view does not just mean viewing the Bible as relevant, or profitable, or even as the inspired Word of God. All of these are true statements. The primary aspect of having a biblical world-view is to understand that the Bible states, and reflects, truth. The Bible is true. All of it.

Truth is that which reflects reality. Statements and facts that are, and have been, and always will be the way things “actually are” constitute the body of knowledge we call truth.

When the Lord Jesus was being interrogated by Pilate, the Lord stated that He had come to “bear witness unto the truth.” Pilate dismissively replied, “What is truth?” John 18:37-38. At that moment, Pilate was more interested in expediency than truth; he had an angry set of Jewish leaders to placate. In his world-view, truth was not relevant. This is a cynical view all too often shared by many in this world.

The enemies of God in this world often boast of “speaking truth to power.” In reality, they are “speaking power to truth” in an effort to use force to overturn truth (reality). Consider for a moment how futile it is to fight against reality. Yet people do it every single day. As Jesus said to Paul, “it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” Acts 9:5.

Fashion is not truth. Fashion represents those things of a transient nature that become widely popular among men. If perchance fashion mirrors truth that is a good thing, but what is popular has no bearing, in and of itself, upon truth. If a million people think one thing and a solitary man thinks the opposite, who is right? On this basis alone, we cannot tell; there is no correlation between fashion and truth. We need more data to determine in that situation whether that solitary man is a brave soul standing against an evil mob, or he is a madman. Both the mob and the man may be wrong, but both cannot be right. Placing too much emphasis upon that which is fashionable can distort our world-view and take us away from God’s Kingdom.

In this paper I will address the kingdom of God with a view toward what the Bible has to say about rediscovering the kingdom. I use the term “rediscovering” because it describes our kingdom experience in numerous ways as we are constantly reminded of and brought to a deeper understanding of the Lord Jesus and His mighty works. Rediscovering the kingdom can apply to our experience in life as we go through times of sorrow or sin and are brought, by God’s grace, back to a realization of His goodness. Rediscovering is also something that happens from one generation to the next as we pass our knowledge and experience to those who are younger. Rediscovering yet occurs again when we realize what God is actually teaching us by His Word, and we come to view Christianity as a kingdom rather than as a religion. As Peter wrote, “I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.” 2 Peter 1:12.

Section I - The Multiple Kingdoms in this World and the Next, both Visible and Invisible

For by him [the Lord Jesus Christ] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: Col 1:16

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. Rom 14:17-19.

A kingdom is a domain or realm where a sovereign exercises dominion, power and rule. The term “kingdom” comes from an Old English contraction of the phrase “king’s domain.” Just as it is impossible to have a kingdom without a king, a king is not a king unless he has a kingdom over which he exercises his kingship. The term “monarchy” is also sometimes used to describe a kingdom in which a monarch (king) rules.

There are many kingdoms described in the Bible. These kingdoms are affirmatively established by God, or are allowed by God through His lenience to exist for a time. Here are some examples. Heaven, the realm of the angels and God’s throne, is an invisible spiritual kingdom created by God. Isa 66:1. The universe, including the earth, sun, moon, planets and stars, is a visible natural kingdom created by God. Gen 1:26. The garden that God planted for Adam to keep and dress can be viewed as a kingdom. Gen 2:8, 15.

Babel was an early earthly kingdom set up by Nimrod in opposition to God. Gen 11:9. The nation of Israel was set up in the Old Testament days as a kingdom of priests unto God. Exod 19:6. The New Testament Church is a militant, or visible spiritual kingdom of saints called out from the world. Matt 16:18. The nations of this world are established by God as civil kingdoms (higher powers) for the good of His people. Dan 4:32, Rom 13:1.

There is an eternal kingdom that was prepared by God for His elect family from the foundation of the world. Matt 25:34. This kingdom will be fully revealed at the Lord Jesus’ second coming, when we will dwell with Him in the new heavens and the new earth in resurrected, glorified bodies forever. 2 Pet 3:13. There is also a kingdom of darkness in this world, led by Satan, that stands in opposition to God in all things and all ways. Dan 7:23-26; Rev 13:1-9; etc. etc. Regardless of the form, type and scope of these kingdoms, Jesus Christ has preeminence over all. Matt 28:18; Col 1:18.

We in America are blessed to live under a federal government that is organized as a representative republic. The term “democracy” is often used in a shorthand fashion to describe our form of government, but this is a misnomer, and a bad one at that. Strictly speaking, a democracy represents majority (mob) rule and is the opposite of a republic. In a democracy, 51% of the people could vote to take away the rights of the remaining 49%. In a republic, the citizens have certain inalienable rights that cannot be taken away no matter how large a majority votes otherwise. Mobs are part of the kingdom of this world and are directly opposed to the everlasting kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because our American forefathers gained our independence from the King of England, it is sometimes easy for Americans to conclude that a monarchy is an intrinsically evil form of government. This is a mistake. A careful study of the Declaration of Independence shows that the King of England (George III) was usurping his powers as king and was acting as a tyrant, and Parliament was not stepping in to put a stop to it. The American Revolution was not carried out to reject the form of government known as monarchy, but rather, the revolution took place because the abuses of that particular government had become intolerable, and God, by His providence, allowed and directed this nation to be established. A moment's reflection shows that a monarchy is not an inherently evil type of government based simply on its form; God the Father is described as the "King of Heaven"; Jesus is the "King of Kings"; and the terms "Christ" and "Messiah" mean king (more particularly, one anointed to be king).

This provides important insight into the idea of a kingdom, particularly as taught by the Bible. A Biblical kingdom, which is to say a righteous or properly established kingdom, has a righteous king who rules over and protects his people, who are referred to as citizens of the kingdom. The citizens are subject to the authority of the king, and have rights and responsibilities that aliens to the kingdom do not.

Kingdoms are a major theme of the Bible. Ever since the Garden of Eden, human history has largely centered around the conflict between two primary kingdoms in this world: the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of Satan. Gen 3:15. Both of these kingdoms are expansive and should be viewed broadly from a conceptual standpoint.

The kingdom of God, also referred to as the kingdom of heaven, has various aspects or phases: heaven, creation, ancient Israel, the NT church, the heart of the born-again believer, the new heavens and new earth in the resurrection, etc. All of these are part and parcel of the one true kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is wherever God reigns. King Jesus rules and reigns over all these areas, so these constitute different aspects of His one unified kingdom.

Similarly, the kingdom of Satan or the kingdom of this world has various manifestations: Babel, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Tyre, Sidon, the corrupt heart of natural man, etc. All of these represent different aspects or phases of the kingdom of this world. Prophecies such as found in Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Revelation and elsewhere describe these as a consolidated beast kingdom having many different forms, heads, horns, etc. Whatever its form, the kingdom of Satan stands in opposition to God.

The Lord Jesus taught many things about the kingdom of God. Matthew chapter 13 is sometimes referred to as the seven parables of the kingdom. In this section of Scripture, the Lord sets forth seven different, albeit related, parables that teach us about different aspects of the kingdom. These parables include the parable of the sower, the parable of the wheat and tares, the parable of the grain of mustard seed, the parable of the leaven hidden in the meal, the parable of the hidden treasure in the field, the parable of the pearl of great price, and the parable of the net that catches both good and bad fishes.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with each of these parables in detail, but a careful examination of each parable is encouraged as this is highly relevant to the present topic. Suffice it to say that the parable of the sower is identified by Jesus as being a particularly important, indeed the most important, parable that He gives; He asks his disciples, “Know ye not this parable? And how then will ye know all parables?” Mark 4:13. I take this to mean that if we do not properly discern the parable of the sower (through the help of our guide, the Holy Spirit), we will not be able to understand it or any of the other parables that our Lord has given.

In the parable of the sower, a man goes forth to sow seed on various types of ground, and each form of ground produces a different response. As Jesus explains, the seed is the gospel of the kingdom as preached by men, and it is only those who both hear and receive the word, as represented by the good ground, who will bring forth fruit. The parable of the sower describes the preaching of the glad tidings of the gospel in the New Testament church by men sent for this purpose (gospel ministers), and the response of the good ground shows forth conversion to the kingdom by God’s saints.

The second parable, the parable of the wheat and tares, also involves the sowing of seed. However, in this parable Jesus speaks about His work in the world to bring forth His people who, at the end of the world, will be gathered into the fullness of His Father’s house in the resurrection. The wheat in this parable represent all of God’s elect family, and the parable is talking about the world in its totality rather than focusing upon the local church. The parable of the sower deals with conversion (discipleship – becoming disciples of Jesus Christ), while the parable of the wheat and tares deals with regeneration (sonship – being made children of God).

Hear the parable of the wheat and the tares:

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. Matt 13:24-30

The Lord explained the parable to his disciples as follows:

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one: The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As

therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. Matt 13:36-43.

Several important points can be gleaned from this parable and the Lord's explanation.

First, it is the Lord Jesus who plants His wheat. In the parable, the Lord describes Himself as the one who soweth the good seed, which are His children of the kingdom of God. The Lord does not use men to plant the wheat; He does it Himself. Men do nothing to place the wheat into the ground or bring forth the wheat from the ground. The wheat are all of God's children chosen by God in Christ before the world ever began. Eph 1:3; Rom 8:29-30. The wheat are all those given to Jesus by the Father to save. John 6:36-39; John 10:28-29.

Second, it is the enemy, the devil, who plants the tares among the wheat. The tares are the children of the world, the ones who are not a part of God's kingdom. John 8:43-44. The tares do not belong to God in a relational sense, nor is it God's fault that these people exist as tares. God is the creator of all, but He is not responsible for the fact that there is evil in the world. Jesus will fix this situation at His second coming. 2 Thes 1:7-10.

Third, it is instructive that Satan has no power over the wheat. Satan does not dig up the wheat, nor does he spread poison (salt, herbicide, etc.) onto the field. All he can do is intermingle his children among God's children. Satan cannot harm us. He can frighten us and discourage us and cause us to fight among ourselves, but he has no power over God's saints without God's permission to intervene in a limited way for a limited time. Job 1:10-12. Satan has no power to take any of God's children away from God's hands. John 10:28-29.

Fourth, once the servants discover the tares among the wheat as both spring forth, the Lord informs them that an enemy sowed the tares while (presumably they) slept. The Lord Jesus knew the tares would be sown and was not surprised by this event. He did not stop it, either. A lot of people like to stress the importance of man's "free will" and assert that it is a positive thing that God allows man to freely act. I'm not certain they understand the ramifications of this idea; whatever "free will" a natural man may have, the Bible tells us that such a man will inevitably use his natural will to follow his own corrupt nature. Ps 53:2-3. This will necessarily result in eternal ruin for that man unless God intervenes to freely extend His grace to give that man a new will through the new birth. Ps 110:3. Stated another way, wheat is wheat and tares are tares. The tares may look like the wheat, but will never be wheat, and the wheat may act like tares, but will never become tares. The wheat are not tares that decided to become wheat, any more than sheep are goats that decided to become sheep. This is absurd from a natural standpoint, and it is absurd from a spiritual standpoint. As Jesus said, "by their fruits ye shall know them." Matt 7:15-20. At the same time, we as wheat should not rejoice overmuch; the only reason we are wheat is because of God's electing grace. We are tares by nature, made wheat solely by the grace of God and His eternal covenant.

Fifth, the servants ask whether they should root out the tares, but the Master forbids it. God teaches His angels about His wisdom in the way he graciously deals with His people. Eph 3:10. Since in this parable the field is the world and all of mankind is represented by either the wheat or the tares, it appears the servants who ask this question are angels. It is true that men have often asked God why there are sinful people in the world, as Habakkuk did (Hab 1:13). Men have often attempted to do something about the sin in this world, to disastrous results; consider Peter with the sword in the garden of Gethsemane (John 18:10-11) and Levi and Simeon in the slaughter of Shechem (Gen 34). Nevertheless, I conclude that the men, the servants and the reapers in the parable are all meant to describe angels observing the manner in which God deals with mankind. I submit that after the fall of man the good angels in heaven specifically asked God whether they should come down and destroy all of the wicked, and God prevented it.

Sixth, the reason given by the Lord Jesus to not uproot the tares before the harvest is that in doing so, the wheat, that is, God's children, might be harmed. This shows amazing care on the part of our Lord toward us. Not a single child of God, chosen in Christ before the world began, will ever be lost. Eph 1:4; John 6:39. One might wonder how destroying the tares before the end of the world might harm the wheat. We must leave things to the wisdom and providence of God, but I can think of at least one example. Suppose you had a distant ancestor who was a Satan worshipper and hellion. What if God had (justly) destroyed that ancestor in place, as he struck down Uzzah, the son of Abinadab, for touching the Ark of the Covenant? 2 Sam 6:7. I submit that in this situation it is better that this imaginary ancestor of yours was not immediately blown up by God, if for no other reason to ensure you eventually came into the world. I know this is a great mystery, and perhaps in such matters we should echo the words of David: "LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." Ps 131:1. Suffice it to say that the Lord protects His wheat.

Seventh, the Lord Jesus told the angels to wait and let both the wheat and the tares come forth until harvest, which is the end of the world and His second coming. Mark 13:24-27. Sometimes we might ask, in frustration or sorrow, why God allows evil to continue in this world. Men often do. This parable provides the clearest answer in Scripture to that question. It is true that now, from time to time God executes judgment both upon the church and upon the world (one in love, the other in wrath). 1 Pet 4:17. Nevertheless, God will not eradicate evil from the earth fully until the end, that His purposes through election might stand. 2 Pet 3:7-9. As David wrote, "Surely the wrath [of sinful] man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath [of such sinful men] shall thou restrain." Ps 76:10. I take from this that God uses the wrath of man to praise His name, which it does: the unjustified hatred of God by the wicked only affirms God's goodness. At the same time, God will allow men to be sinful up to the point where their sinfulness upon the earth might interfere with His purposes, at which point God intervenes. How pathetic are the enemies of God! Every time Satan seems to have an advantage, the wisdom of God pokes him in the eye. Think about it: Satan thought his greatest triumph was the cross of Christ: but that only led to his destruction. Don't feel sorry for Satan and his minions. Just enjoy the show.

Eighth, the tares are gathered at the time of harvest and burned, and the Lord Jesus expressly states that these are the wicked who offend and do iniquity, and will receive everlasting burning punishment in the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Matt

25:41; Rev 20:15. There is nothing unjust in this action by the Lord; the tares were planted by the devil, they follow and worship him, and they will share his well-deserved fate. They may gnash their teeth at hell, but have no taste or desire for heaven. 1 Cor 2:14; Rom 8:5-8.

Ninth, it is notable that the tares are cast into the furnace before the wheat are gathered into the barn. It would seem more logical to harvest the wheat out of the field first, then deal with the tares and whatever is left over. Gathering and burning the tares first indicates that the righteous will observe and approve of the everlasting punishment of the wicked. Isa 66:23-24. To be clear, I do not believe this sequence implies that the wicked are resurrected before the just, but simply that the wicked are removed before we enter into our final, happy state with God. God will shake out of His kingdom all things that offend.

Tenth, the wheat (God's children) are described as shining like the sun in their Father's house after the harvest has come. This speaks of the resurrection and eternal life with God in the new heavens and new earth. We will enjoy this forever. Just as wheat growing in a field is not yet ready to be put into a barn, we too must wait until the Lord of the Harvest comes to gather us home. 1 Cor 15:20-24.

In view of the above, the parable of the wheat and the tares teaches us about two main kingdoms that will persist side-by-side in this world until the second coming of the Lord Jesus. These kingdoms are the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of this world. These two kingdoms are diametrically opposed to one another. God has not left us alone, but cares for us and has provided us a kingdom into which to press as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ as we sojourn on the earth. Luke 16:16. Ultimately, the Lord Jesus at His return will finally vanquish all His enemies in the kingdom of this world and we will enjoy the fullness of the kingdom of God forever. 1 Cor 15:26.

Section 2 - The Nature and Tactics of the Kingdom of this World

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 1 Pet 5:8

The kingdom of this world, described as the tares in the parable of the wheat and tares, belongs to Satan and is in rebellion against God and His children. This kingdom of the world extends all the way back to the first pair of brothers in the world, Cain and Abel. Cain murdered Abel because Cain was evil. 1 John 3:12. Cain hated God, wanted to harm God, and since Cain could not reach God directly, Cain did what he could to destroy that which was precious to God. It has been this way ever since. John 3:19; Jude 11. The signifying characteristics of the kingdom of this world include arrogant hatred, murder, lying and unspeakable evil. John 8:44.

The kingdom of the world takes many forms, but is described by the Bible as one continuous kingdom of darkness that has been on the earth since the garden. See Col 1:13: “Who [God the Father] hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” That verse demonstrates the two kingdoms in this world: the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God. The kingdom of the world runs through Babel, Egypt, Canaan, Phoenicia, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. It is present on the earth today. Its adherents occupy the highest positions of power in government, academia and commerce. Ultimately, the kingdom of the world constitutes all that which is in opposition to God the Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes tender-hearted Christians are bothered by the ruthless destruction that God commanded the nation of Israel to visit upon the Canaanites when the nation took the land under the leadership of Joshua. Deut 7:1-5; Deut 20:16-18. This destruction was to be absolute: God commanded that those of the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites be utterly destroyed: men, women, children and animals. This was because Satan, through the form of Baal, Molech, Ashteroth and other demonic spirits, demanded and received worship from these wicked people through human sacrifices and perverse sexual practices. Ps 106:34-39. God abhorred these nations because they were part of the kingdom of the tares. Lev 20:23.

This command by God to utterly destroy was not against the world at large (as is the case with Islam), but was specifically limited to those specific seven abominable kingdoms of Satan. Members of other nations who sojourned among the nation of Israel were to be treated the same way the Jews treated each other (e.g., “love thy neighbor as thyself”). Lev 19:34. That is not to say that all descendants of these nations were tares; God clearly had sheep among these nations, and some became Jewish converts and/or otherwise honored the God of Israel (think about, for example, Uriah the Hittite and Araunah the Jebusite) 1 Chron 11:41; 2 Sam 24:20-25.

Nevertheless, Israel failed to keep this commandment of God to destroy these seven abominable nations, and instead adopted their heathen practices as God foresaw they would. 2 Kings 16:3.

I cannot stress how absolutely wicked the Canaanites were. The Canaanites performed unspeakable evil: human sacrifice, cannibalism, sexual abuse and destruction of children, etc. Lev 20:2; 1 Kings 11:7; Ps 106:37-39. The Bible says it is a shame to speak of those things that are done by these evil ones in secret. Eph 5:12. Because Israel failed to root out this manifest evil among the Canaanites, which represents the worst excesses of the kingdom of this world, such practices remained and spread throughout the earth, and are practiced today, even in our country at this present time. If you are at all paying attention and have a kingdom mindset, look around at all of the human trafficking and child molestation taking place today in our land. Consider how many millions of helpless babies have been aborted in the past few decades. These and other evils are only the tip of the iceberg of what is to be revealed. The horrors of the worship of Moloch and Baal from 3500 years ago continues to this day with abandonment and glee by the children of this world, if you have eyes to see it.

It is no surprise that so many fairy tales from the middle ages involve stories of horrific deeds by monsters: witches, ogres, wolves, etc. who engage in cannibalism of children and worse. Consider such well known stories as Hansel and Gretel (the wicked witch wishes to cook and eat the children); Little Red Riding Hood (the wolf, a symbol for Satan, desires to eat the young girl); Snow White (the evil step-mother queen demands the huntsman return with Snow White's heart so she can eat it). This idea of absolute evil is so pervasive that few fairy tales do not involve the threat of some sort of ritual torture or slaughter by the enemy. While fairy tales are not themselves accounts of things that actually happened, the tales represent archetypes of things that do happen, and were intended to be instructive to adults as well as children about the true evil that is in this world kingdom.

The children of the kingdom of God seldom realize the depth of evil that is actually present in this world, and always seem to be surprised with the ferocity of the hatred directed their way by the children of the kingdom of this world. This is amazing even though this is amply illustrated in the Bible, such as the express warnings given by the Lord Jesus (if they hated me, they will hate you) and the relationship that existed between Jacob and Esau (these are two different nations or types of people). John 15:18-21; Gen 25:23.

We are fighting a very old, a very wicked, and a very cunning enemy. We must never be a friend of the world system, or think that those who worship Satan, knowingly or ignorantly, are harmless, mean well or in any way have our interests at heart. 1 John 2:15. They seek our destruction, and it is only the providence of God that prevents it.

There are a number of tactics that the kingdom of this world employs in an effort to sow discord and wear down the saints. Our Lord Jesus warned us to be "wise as serpents" when dealing with the kingdom of this world. Matt 10:16. This means having spiritual discernment. If we do not have spiritual eyes to see, we might conclude that all of the things going on in the world are unrelated and remain perplexed about the inexplicable corruption of our society. Having a kingdom mindset allows us to see what our enemy is doing. 2 Cor 2:11.

The tactics of the kingdom of this world in attempting to overcome the kingdom of God can be described as including the following:

1. Assimilation at the Top
2. Conversion of the Females and Eradication or Emasculation of the Males
3. Replacement of the Population through Genocide, Relocation and/or Dilution
4. Ochlocracy, or Mob Rule/Violence
5. Humiliation of the Majority in Place

By recognizing these tactics, the man of God can be prepared to withstand in the evil day.

1. Assimilation at the Top

Assimilation at the top is carried out when the enemy ingratiates himself into an existing order. This occurs when the respective cultures are very similar, and the infiltrators pretend to belong to the main group. Because the changes happen at the top, ordinary people do not always notice.

Throughout history, it has been common for a conquering king to adopt the customs of the conquered people, and to intermarry into the family of the previous king of the conquered nation. These sorts of confederacies of convenience were enacted to send the message that “we are all one people.” Intermarriage among European dynastic families was so common in the 19th century that by the time World War I rolled around, the heads of government of every major European nation involved in the conflict (including Russia, France, Germany, England, Hungary-Austria, etc.) were cousins! Similar infiltration of various societal institutions such as academia, government, media, entertainment, etc. has taken place in recent decades. This infiltration began in the 1920’s by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian communist, who proposed a “long march through the institutions” of the church, government, universities and public schools to destroy the influence of Christianity upon western culture.

This type of infiltration and consolidation is presented throughout the Bible. Cyrus, the great leader of the Medo-Persian Empire prophetically identified by name in Isaiah 44-45, married the daughter of Darius the Mede, king of the Median Empire to join the Medes and the Persians into one people. This confederacy resulted in the formation of the great Medo-Persian Empire that proceeded to conquer the known world. Darius the Mede, the King of Babylon and central ruler in the story of Daniel and the lion’s den in Daniel chapter 6, was Cyrus’ father-in-law. He was also the last king of the Medes. Dan 11:1-4.

A confederacy between the nations of Judah and Israel was formed when Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab king of Israel (and granddaughter of Omri, father of Ahab). 2 Chr 22:2. This marriage was intended to unite the respective kingdoms of Judah and Israel. But Jehoshaphat was a righteous king favored by God (a representative of the kingdom of God) while Ahab was the most evil king that Israel ever suffered under (a representative of the kingdom of Satan). King Ahab received a well-deserved death by an arrow shot at a venture as prophesied by the prophet Elijah. 1 Kings 21:19 and 22:34-35. King Jehoshaphat was rebuked by the prophet Jehu son of Hanani for Jehoshaphat’s misguided attempt to do good unto the wicked house of Ahab by making an alliance with the kingdom of this world. 2 Chr 19:2. Nevertheless, God showed good unto Jehoshaphat after he had repented of such foolishness. 2 Chr 20:30.

The early church was subjected to many false teachers who came among the churches, pretending to be saints and gospel ministers but in fact were, as the Lord Jesus warned, wolves in sheep's clothing. Matt 7:15. As John wrote:

They [false teachers] went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. 1 John 2:19.

The Apostle Paul often dealt with the issue of false teachers infiltrating the ministry, including as set forth in detail in 1-2 Corinthians. As children of God, we should beware those who would infiltrate and make alliances with the institutions to which we belong in order to change these institutions and move them, and us, away from the principles of God's kingdom.

2. Conversion of the Females and Eradication or Emasculation of the Males

Another way in which the kingdom of this world attempts to subvert God's kingdom is through the subversion of females. In this case, the enemy attempts to cut off the influence of men and suborn the women to his will. The best example of this was the temptation of Eve. The Scriptures make it clear that Eve was deceived whereas her husband Adam was not, yet he also partook of the forbidden fruit based on her influence. 1 Tim 2:14.

I do not take the position that women are inferior to men, but I do take the position, as taught by the Bible, that men and women are different, and have different strengths and weaknesses. By nature, women are more inclusive and more desirous of cooperation as compared to men. By playing upon the natural nurturing instincts of the woman, the enemy has perpetrated much evil upon the world.

Some conquerors in history have taken steps to kill the men, but save the women alive to incorporate them into the conquering group. This is the tactic that was taken up by the new Pharaoh of Egypt who did not know Joseph, and instructed the midwives of the house of Jacob to kill the male Hebrew newborns, but save the female newborns alive. Exod 1:15-17. Moses was saved by the providence of God to grow up in the household of that same Pharaoh, once again showing the overriding sovereignty of the King of Heaven over the designs of the kingdom of this world.

The early church was similarly affected by this tactic:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden

with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 2 Tim 3:1-7

The assimilation and suborning of women is rampant in our society today. The modern feminist movement is an ill-disguised attempt to tell women to avoid those things that would fulfill them most, such as getting married, being keepers at home and raising children. There are many bitter older women today who bought into the siren song of women's superiority in their younger years, and who now find themselves middle aged, childless and alone. Related to this is the religious fervor for the continuance of abortions, which are nothing other than modern blood offerings to Moloch. It is unnecessary and tragic.

Numerous institutions have been taken over by women, which by itself is not bad unless the women are convinced that they can change the focus of the organization to some sort of feelings-based utopian (read, kingdom of the world) ideal. If you see a tech company being overtaken by women who state that the company is now going to make its primary focus on some social justice cause rather than on competition, innovation and profits, my advice is to sell that stock as quickly as you can.

In all this I do not blame the women. I blame the men for not standing up and protecting us against this onslaught. It is us men who have failed, acting as either tyrants or wimps. Masculinity today is discouraged, and emo-feminine male behavior, including homosexuality, is encouraged. These are attacks by the kingdom of this world that the man of God must acknowledge and resist.

3. Replacement of the People

As the enemy becomes more emboldened, the attacks become more overt. The next form of attack makes no pretense at assimilation, but rather attempts to replace the existing population with a new population through dilution, replacement and/or outright genocide.

The book of Esther provides the historical background for the festival of Purim, which is the Jewish Thanksgiving Holiday celebrated every Spring. In the story of Esther, God by His providence saves the nation from the genocide planned by wicked Haman. Modern day attempted genocides include the Christian Armenians in Central Turkey in the mid-1910's, the Holocaust during World War II, and the various recent racial genocides in Rwanda, Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and South Africa.

The ancient kingdom of Assyria was notorious for forcibly migrating and mixing conquered people in new lands. The northern kingdom of Israel was removed from the land of Israel by the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III in around the year 720 BC. 2 Kings 15:29. The Assyrians attempted to do this with the southern kingdom of Judah as well, but failed. Around 700 BC, the Assyrian king Sennacherib, through his spokesman Rabshakeh, demanded the surrender of Jerusalem with an offer to carry them away to another land just as good as the land of Judah. Is 36:15-17. In this latter case, Hezekiah king of Judah implored God to save them. God did so by sending an angel that killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night, leaving only a

handful left alive. Sennacherib went home where he was subsequently murdered by his sons. Is 37:33-38.

The Babylonians conquered the Assyrians and carried out the same policy of relocating and intermixing conquered people in new lands. Daniel and his friends were carried away captive as youths when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon conquered Jerusalem in around the year 605 BC. Dan 1:1-2. The Persian king Cyrus, as a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, was chosen of God by name beforehand and restored the people of Judah to their land in around 538 BC. Isa 44:28; Ezra 1:1-4.

Multiculturalism is nothing new. The Babylonians and Assyrians knew then, just as our politically correct masters know today, that forcing people of different cultures and backgrounds to live together in close proximity weakens the natural bonds of kinship, destroys a people's heritage, and promotes tribalism and infighting among different ethnic groups. Promoting multiculturalism ensures that the people become easier to manage. Diversity, at least as promoted by the world, is not a country's greatest strength, but its greatest weakness.

Since 2015, Western Europe has endured large scale immigration of millions of Asian and African immigrants, most of whom are Muslim. Formerly safe and peaceful cities from Rome to Oslo now have zones where it is not safe for even the authorities to venture without fear of attack or worse. Despite the pleas and opposition of the common people to end this madness, the rulers of these countries continue to encourage and push for this to happen. This is no accident. The millions of barbarians that have been imported into Europe are an intentional act to dilute, and ultimately kill off, historical Christianity and Western culture in these countries.

Similar open borders movements are taking place along the southern extent of the United States; while immigrants from Mexico and Central/South America are nominally Catholic, the same idea is in play, to weaken traditional Western mores and culture in the United States. It is notable that only those countries who make up what used to be referred to as "Christendom" are subjected to these movements. No one, for example, is encouraging or forcing mass migration into Islamic countries, into China, etc. It is all one-way, into the realm of Christendom. Eastern-bloc European countries such as Hungary and Poland are thankfully resisting this.

As an American Christian and Primitive Baptist I do not care about the color or background of my fellow citizens in the kingdom of God. Still, I recognize that it is Christianity, and more particularly Baptist theology and thought, that has impacted and established the cultural and governmental institutions of the United States. Elder John Leland was a Primitive Baptist Minister who worked tirelessly during the American Revolutionary War to pursue the ideal of religious liberty among all citizens, and was, arguably more than any other man, responsible for the enactment of our treasured Bill of Rights to the U.S. Constitution. It is that heritage that is directly under attack today by the kingdom of this world.

4. Mob Rule/Violence

The use of unruly mobs is a favored tactic of the kingdom of this world in attacking the children of the kingdom of God. Throughout the New Testament, mobs were generated and

raised by unscrupulous men opposed to the preaching of the gospel. The Jewish leaders stirred up a mob as Jesus stood before Pilate (Mark 15:11-13); Stephen was mobbed and stoned to death by those cut to their heart by his message (Acts 7:54-58); and Paul was accosted by mobs almost everywhere he went, often beaten and once stoned and left for dead. Acts 15:30; Acts 14:5-6; Acts 14:19; Acts 16:22; Acts 17:5-7; Acts 17:13; Acts 18:12-16; Acts 19:28-32; Acts 21:27-31; Acts 23:21; 2 Cor 11:23-27; Gal 6:17.

The use of a mob is an exercise of raw, anarchistic force. It is the unleashing of the deepest depravity and violence of men against anyone standing in its way. There are few things more Satanic on this earth than a violent mob, filled with hatred and rage, desirous to destroy all in its path.

Individuals will do things in a mob that they would never do alone. The 19th century French Christian Philosopher Claude-Frédéric Bastiat wrote of how powerful and deadly mobs can be, as unbridled human passions are unleashed without control. His point was that God, through His providence, establishes the civil authority (the civil law) to protect our lives and property. It is morally wrong to use a mob to force through changes to the law by appealing to the selfish desires of the people and accomplishing through force that which cannot be accomplished through reasoned debate.

It is increasingly common in our society for the enemy to brazenly call for mob violence against the enemy, that is, normal Americans holding to traditional Christian values and mores. Unhinged politicians and community leaders are calling for such violence today. Again, this is nothing new.

In 1st Thessalonians, Paul writes to the Church at Thessalonica, commending the believers there because they received the gospel as it was preached to them and they readily accepted it as it truly is: the Word of God, and not the word of men. 1 Thes 2:13-16. Paul and Silas had been chased out of Thessalonica by a mob that had been engineered by recruiting “men of a baser sort” who were more than happy to have an excuse to participate in a show of violence and force. Acts 17:5-10. Paul reminds the church that, just as their fellow believers in Jerusalem had been violently persecuted by non-believing Jews, they were partakers of the same persecution by their own countrymen. Nevertheless, Paul assures the Thessalonians that the wrath of God is upon those who oppose Him and His Cause, and that all of God’s people will ultimately be delivered to the eternal kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ at His appearing.

Having a kingdom mindset equips us to deal with the increased pressures that are being brought upon us by the mobs of this world. Make no mistake, Paul bore scars on his body that were marks of his service toward Christ. Gal 6:17. It may or may not come to that for us, but many millions have suffered and even died for their testimony and faith in Jesus, and if the time comes, we should be gladly willing to do so as well.

Jesus Christ equips us to defeat mobs by loving them and praying for them, rather than meeting blow for blow and violence with violence. He suffered and submitted to the mob by the cross, and showed us the way to walk without fear in this world. Matt 10:28. It is one thing for a man to protect his own life or the life of his wife, family or those around him, which is

appropriate. It is quite another thing to use the tactics of this world in an effort to advance the interests of the kingdom of God. It simply will not work, and we must not do it.

As Jesus told Peter, “Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” Matt 26:52-54.

5. Humiliation of the Majority

The fifth and final tactic of the kingdom of the world that I would like to discuss is humiliation of the majority. This is closely related to the use of mob violence, but in some ways is even more evil because of its insidiousness. The humiliation of the majority, as I refer to it, involves efforts to degrade and debase people for their views. It is often carried out by a vocal minority against a larger majority, and the larger majority cowers in shame and silence rather than speaking up.

While raising a mob takes at least some organizational effort to gather and inflame the bodies of people needed for the mob, humiliation of the majority can be carried out by a single shrew-like individual, with the threat that, if the majority does not cower, a mob is at hand and can be produced. All of this is illusion, but it does not diminish the power this technique can have if we let it. This form of action is often carried out using social media, where individuals can virtue signal and attack others from behind a computer screen.

Because this is a subtle tactic, examples abound in Scripture, but these examples are not always immediately obvious. The Babylonians taunted the children of Judah in their captivity, telling them to sing songs of Zion on the banks of the river of Babylon. Ps 137:3. The meaning is, why don't you break out and sing the triumphant songs of your homeland? It is clear this was not for entertainment purposes for the Babylonians, but rather to humiliate and discourage God's children in their distress.

The words of Rabshakeh, the spokesman for the King of Assyria, were mocking in nature as he called to the people of God hiding behind the walls of Jerusalem and claimed that God Himself had sent Rabshakeh to conquer the city. 2 Kings 18:25. The evil mob called for Jesus to come down from the cross and save Himself and them so they could believe in Him. Mark 15:29-32. There are many other examples of wicked people mocking God and His people throughout Scripture. As Solomon wrote, “the lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh forwardness (that is, perverse things).” Prov 10:32.

Hysteresis is a physical phenomenon in nature where the value of a physical property lags behind changes in the effect causing it. If an electrical current is applied to a coil of wire, there is a small time lag before the coil begins to generate a magnetic field. Similarly, once the electrical current is removed, the magnetic field will continue to persist for a short time before it diminishes in strength. This is just one example: hysteresis effects are present in many physical systems.

This physical principle of hysteresis in the natural world can be used as an analogy to the spiritual world. Evil thrives in hysteresis; that is, evil takes advantage of that zone that is made available by good.

Consider this thought experiment: some crazed social justice warrior young female is standing on the corner of a college campus. As she stands there she screams at passersby, accusing them of racism, sexism and/or intolerance for maintaining their normal traditional values and not celebrating whatever progressive ideal is now being forced upon the public (homosexuality, transgenderism, pedophilia, etc.).

Most of the time, the people who walk by hearing her insult them will simply ignore her, rather than punching her in the throat or taking some other violent action against her. This is because they have good manners, respect our first amendment rights to express ourselves publicly, and are tolerant of foolishness as has been taught to us by Christ. Someone may stop and try to engage with her reasonably, but this is a fool's errand; she is not interested in provoking debate. She wants instant agreement with the most outrageous statements she can come up with which allows her justify herself, or she wants vocal opposition so she can, again, be justified in herself as a martyr. The worst thing to do, from her perspective, is ignore her.

Notice that she relies on this hysteresis effect to protect her against assault; she can brazenly speak wickedness with no serious fear from those she is bullying. Indeed, she may intentionally try to provoke someone to react violently so that she can claim victim status and further her cause and justify her position. And this is okay, at least as far as we are concerned. As God teaches us, we are to not avenge ourselves, but give place unto wrath since vengeance belongs to God and He will repay. Rom 12:19-21. The correct response is kindness without agreement or passion. A dismissive shrug would heap coals of fire upon her head.

I remember a few years ago when Bruce Jenner came out publicly and announced he was a transgendered female. This former Olympic champion and "man's man" wanted to be identified as a woman on the basis that he felt that way. What surprised me was the depth of the support for him that was played out on social media. This campaign of support was carefully orchestrated and arranged. It was immediately made clear that if you were not absolutely celebrating this new "reality" (that this sad pathetic man was really a woman because he wanted it to be so), you were a Nazi, a hater, and unfit for human company. How sad. The correct response was, and is, to pray for him as well as for all those who are caught up in this sort of tragic mental illness. We should be encouraging these people to seek help rather than congratulating them for their delusions.

This is why this tactic of Satan always eventually backfires. The more brazen Satan's servants become, the more likely it is that God's children will eventually rise up against it, leading to renewal and advancement of the kingdom of God and His righteousness. A good example of this type of overreach is something that occurred in 19th century Britain referred to today as the "Welsh Not."

Back in the day, the English decided that it was time to assimilate the Welsh people into mainstream British society. The Welsh had maintained their own customs, traditions and

language for centuries. Some progressive do-gooders among the English elite decided it was time for these deplorables to get with the program.

The English proceeded to implement a cultural integration scheme in the Welsh government schools. This scheme used something referred to as the Welsh Not, which was a small wooden board with a hole drilled in one end through which was passed a loop of rope.

When a child was heard speaking Welsh, the schoolmaster would hang the Welsh Not around that child's neck like a necklace. This was intended to be a token of shame and ridicule that the child had to endure, and his fellow students were encouraged to mock and shame him. Some suggest the term "blockhead" came from this and other, earlier practices to associate someone's mental abilities with a block of wood.

Throughout the day, if that child heard one of his classmates speak in Welsh, the child could give the necklace to his fellow. The child who was wearing the Welsh Not at the end of the day received a beating from the schoolmaster. Does this at all sound familiar?

Interestingly enough, history tells us that this effort did nothing to diminish or destroy Welsh culture. Yes, there were some weak folks who gave in to the pressure and adopted the mainstream British culture that was being fostered upon them, but many others bristled and resisted. What ultimately resulted was an awakening among the Welsh, who through this outrageous behavior were able to see what was going on, and affirmatively resist.

Today Welsh is still spoken in Wales and there is a great deal of Welsh nationalism because of this effort. The English downplay the extent to which they did this out of embarrassment, but the Welsh still remember this attempt by the English to destroy their culture. It is clear that the Welsh remain stronger in their language and customs today specifically because they came under attack in this ridiculous manner 150 years ago.

We see similar effects in the Bible. Jesus told his disciples to preach the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and even to the uttermost parts of the earth. Acts 1:8. From a practical standpoint, it was the intense persecution of the saints in Jerusalem by the Jews that led to the disciples being scattered abroad. Satan's attacks upon the church in Jerusalem only served to hasten the spreading of the gospel to other countries.

My point is that, today, there are many who will attack you and attempt to humiliate you for your dependence upon God and your refusal to celebrate the latest depravity offered by Satan. These five different tactics that I discussed are not just used by Satan to gain power in the world *per se*, but are used by him to attack God's children in the church. A kingdom mindset allows us to see what is going on, and not only calmly endure such persecution, but be equipped to stand against it. A kingdom mindset also allows us to know that, even if Satan for a time is given power to wear down the saints, ultimately the kingdom is ours. We win in the end, and God will give us grace day by day until then. Dan 7:25-27.

Section 3 – Rediscovering and Walking in the Everlasting Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ Here on Earth

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:10-11.

When we consider the kingdom of God, we should remember, first and foremost, that it belongs to King Jesus. This is the universal elect kingdom of the wheat from the parable of the wheat and tares. He is the Lord, and we are His: His People, His Brethren, His Sheep, His Wheat, His Sons. He is the Firstborn among many Brethren. All that we have, and all that is His, He gives to us. We will never be lost, but ultimately be delivered to our Father. When Christ returns, He will say to the sheep on His right hand, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Matt 25:34.

Second, we should remember that while we sojourn upon the earth before that great and notable day, we are called to walk in fellowship with the Lord Jesus by the gospel. This is the aspect of the kingdom set forth by the parable of the sower; we should be that good ground that brings forth abundant fruit by the Spirit by joyfully receiving and treasuring the Word of God. In this sense, we should be His Disciples and His Followers. As Paul wrote to the Roman Church: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.” Rom 14:17-18.

In order for us to walk in fellowship with the Lord Jesus in His kingdom in this manner, we need to review several important points taught by the Bible regarding His kingdom. I will address some of these below in turn.

1. Every Road Has Two Ditches

It may seem strange to start with this, but please consider this statement carefully: every road has two ditches. I submit this is a fundamental principle of the kingdom of God. If we do not correctly understand and apply this principle, we may have difficulty walking in the kingdom as we should.

There are many references in the Scriptures to not turning either to the left nor to the right when journeying along a path. See e.g., Exod 14:29; Num 20:17; Deut 5:32; Deut 28:14; 1 Sam 6:12; 2 Kings 22:2; Prov 4:27. When the Lord Jesus tells His disciples that “straight is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads unto life,” He was pronouncing this same idea. Matt 7:14. I also think He had this principle in mind when He said, concerning those blind teachers who did not believe in Him, “If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” Matt 15:14.

When I say that every road has two ditches (that is, two edges, two boundaries), what I mean by this metaphor is that the road represents where we want to be. Journeying along the

road means walking in the kingdom following Jesus as His disciple. To depart from this road to either side will cause us to stumble into a ditch, which is where we do not wish to be.

The problem with our normal way of thinking is that we are usually very good at spotting one ditch. We may identify an issue or a problem that we wish to stay as far away from as possible. However, if we are not careful, we may go so far in our attempt to avoid that first ditch that we wind up going across the road and winding up in a second ditch on the other side of the road.

Aristotle stated it like this: virtue is the mean between two extremes. To the ancient Greeks (and as taught by the Bible), virtue means moral excellence or good character in various areas of life. Proper virtue is finding a middle point between two undesirable extremes.

Consider how a man might manage his money: on the one hand, he should not be so greedy as to be miserly and refuse to use his funds to care for the poor or his family. This is a first ditch. But he could go so far in the other direction to become a spendthrift and give all his money away to anyone and everyone who asks for it, leaving him nothing left to provide for himself or his family. This is a second ditch. The correct approach for the man lies somewhere in the middle (the mean). So, when Aristotle states that virtue is the mean between two extremes, he means that wisdom will inform us to find some virtuous middle ground.

Another example might be the extent to which a man exhibits bravery. At one extreme he could be a craven coward, afraid of his own shadow. At the other end of the spectrum he could be foolhardy, throwing away his life and risking others in an act of abject recklessness. The correct amount of courage is somewhere between these two extremes.

This has important ramifications for us as we attempt to walk in the kingdom of God as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews at the time that Jesus walked the earth had built a wall around the law. They were so intent on avoiding any violation of the commandments given by God to the nation of Israel that they developed hundreds of additional laws to govern their daily conduct. Their thinking was, if we keep these laws, we will not be at risk in any way of violating any of the eternal laws of God. This was, using my present metaphor, an attempt to avoid a first ditch, that of violating the law of God.

But they went so far in their observance of these things that they fell into the other ditch that they did not notice: that of legalism, coldness and self-righteousness. Jesus quoted Hosea in pointing out their hypocrisy: “But go and learn what that meaneth: I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Matt 9:13. The Jews, in attempting to avoid breaking the law, went so far that they lost sight of what God required from them and missed the point entirely. In their attempt to not break the law, they did so anyway in a way that they did not realize.

The Apostle Paul in his letters used this same principle of two ditches or boundaries when considering the proper course of action in various situations. The Corinthian church asked Paul about guidelines with regard to eating meat offered unto idols. This was an edict that the Apostles had agreed upon in the council at Jerusalem in Acts 15. In this counsel, when dealing

with the issue of whether Gentiles (those who were not Jews) should be circumcised or observe other aspects of the law, the disciples agreed that the Gentiles did not need to be circumcised, but should “abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication.” Acts 15:23-25.

Evidently, the Corinthian church had some sincere questions for Paul about how they should observe that first edict, abstaining from meats offered unto idols. See 1 Cor 8-10. They wanted to observe this command, but were not sure how to do so, since it was possible in their day for meat to be sold in the marketplace that might have been unknowingly offered to some idol before it was slaughtered. There were other circumstances that they also might encounter from time to time where meat had been, or might have been, offered to idols.

It would have been easy for Paul to take the same position that the Jews had taken regarding the law: Paul could have said, in order to avoid the possibility of eating meats offered to idols, just don't eat any meat at all. Or, Paul could have said, only eat meat that you absolutely know for sure was not offered to an idol, so if in doubt, throw it out. We like the certainty of bright-line, hard and fast rules like that, because it shows forth a course of conduct that will guarantee us that we don't fall into a ditch (such as in this case, inadvertently eating meat offered unto idols). but if we are not careful, our desire for such certainty may cause us to go so far the other way as to cause us to fall into a different, unforeseen ditch.

What Paul told the Corinthians in response to their question was something else: he talked about two primary principles that had to be balanced and taken into consideration. These principles were Love and Knowledge. As set forth in 1st Corinthians chapters 8-10, Paul explains that on the one hand, we know that there are no gods other than God, so eating meats offered unto idols does not actually harm us or defile us in any way. That is where Knowledge comes into play.

On the other hand, for the sake of the conscience of a weak brother, Paul said that it should not be eaten in certain circumstances lest the conscience of the other be defiled. This is where Love comes in. He did finally give the church a few guidelines at the end, but only after having them consider how to address the situation using this overall framework. Paul laid out how both Love and Knowledge should be used together to inform the church of the proper course of action. Paul pointed out the two different ditches to avoid, and commended the church to walk in Love and Knowledge in deciding, in individual cases, the correct course of conduct. If you study Paul's writings carefully, you will realize he uses this same technique when addressing a host of different issues.

The same analysis applies to events occurring in our modern culture. A big issue that has been in the news recently involves children of illegal immigrants being temporarily separated from their parents when apprehended at the southern U.S. border. Many people have objected to this practice, with some of them hysterically overreacting, as if separating children from their parents is the worst thing in the world that could ever possibly happen.

I agree that it is a bad and potentially traumatic thing for a child to be separated from his parents, especially in a strange land. However, using the principle listed above, correctly

thinking about this situation shows that this separation of a child from his parent is only one ditch. There is another ditch that needs to be taken into consideration as well, that of the safety and welfare of the child.

It is a well-documented fact that child smuggling and human trafficking is a very real problem in our country. Many children who show up at the border are with adults who are not their parents at all. The government has established that almost half of the children appearing at the border are not there with their natural parents. In some or even many cases, the children are in the hands of child traffickers who are attempting to smuggle the children into the country for nefarious purposes.

So, the other ditch involves immediately releasing the children back into the custody of whomever brought them, knowing there is a significant and real possibility that harm or even death will come to at least some of these children if this is done. Isolating children is bad, but exposing children to the risk of torture and death is worse. The correct approach to resolving this issue is to take each of these ditches into account and coming up with a way to avoid these unhappy circumstances as best as possible.

We should consider our own walk in the kingdom, and consider what sins we are seeking to avoid in our lives and in the lives of others. That is a good thing; the Scripture tells us to examine ourselves and to ask God to search us and cleanse us. At the same time, be aware that if we go too far in avoiding a particular issue, we may inadvertently fall into a different problem. The most righteous among us is not necessarily the one who takes the most extreme position against a particular sin, lest in avoiding that sin, he commits another. We are to use our own conscience as a guide, and believers can have sincere differences of opinion with regard to the right standard of conduct in many situations. Rom 14:1-10, 22-23. As Paul wrote to the Philippian church: "Let your moderation be known unto all men." Phil 4:5.

2. The Distinction Between Sonship and Discipleship

When considering the kingdom of God, it is necessary to make a distinction between our status as sons, and our status as disciples. A true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ must first be a son, but not every son of God will necessarily be a faithful disciple.

In the Bible, the term that is usually used to describe being a son of God is referred to as regeneration, or being born again. John 3:3; Titus 3:5. The term that is usually used to describe being a disciple of Jesus Christ is referred to as conversion. Acts 3:19; Matt 18:3. Both are operations of the Spirit of God; one to give spiritual birth and make one spiritually alive, the other to give the manifest presence and consolation of the Spirit through obedience. John 3:3-8; Acts 2:37-39; John 16:13-14.

The distinctions between sonship and discipleship are demonstrated in the parable of the prodigal son. I prefer to refer to this parable as that of the two lost sons. As Jesus stated:

And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he

divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found. Luke 15:11-32.

This parable must have shocked those that heard the Master speak. The outrageousness of the younger son would have likely elicited audible gasps from the crowd: imagine a Jewish son showing such disrespect to his father, wishing his father was dead!

I think the crowd was even more astounded at the behavior of the father. How unheard of would it have been for them to consider a patriarch of Israel who abased himself not just once, but three separate times: by granting the younger son's request and dividing unto him one-third of the inheritance (the elder son received a double portion); by running to receive, kiss and honor the younger son upon his return; and then by leaving the place of honor in the banquet to publicly go outside and entreat the older brother to come in. Outrageous!

When we consider this parable, one important aspect for us to recognize is the fact that the younger son was always the son of his father. He was a son when he was at home, he was a

son when he was in the foreign country in the pig pen, and he was a son when he came home and was joyfully received by his father. However, the younger son was disobedient and not walking in his father's will during his sojourn; the younger son broke fellowship with his father when he left. This fellowship was restored by the father when the son repented and confessed his sins before his father, and his father joyfully received him back ("For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.").

In like manner, we are always the sons of God after He gives us the new birth through regeneration, but we do not always enjoy the blessings of the kingdom unless we repent and are converted to walk in His kingdom. How much better to come home to the father's house than stay in the pig pen!

The grace extended to the younger son in the parable represents the grace that God bestows upon us when we repent and seek our Father's forgiveness. Jesus had taught two preceding parables that spoke of something that was lost and then found: the lone sheep out of the 100 sheep that the good shepherd sought and found (Luke 15:3-7), and the lone coin out of the 10 coins that the woman sought and found (Luke 15:8-10). In both cases, the Lord Jesus said that there is likewise joy in heaven in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth. Luke 15:7, 10.

Interestingly enough, as much as we rejoice in the grace extended by the father to the younger son, that is not the point of the parable at all. The resentful older brother is the focus of the story. The Lord Jesus is comparing the reticence and anger of the older brother to the Pharisees, who were objecting to the grace that the Lord was extending to the publicans and sinners (common people) who gladly heard Him. Luke 15:1-2.

The older brother was angry that his younger brother had been received home, that the father was throwing a party to celebrate his return, and that his younger brother had wasted his father's inheritance and brought shame upon the family. The older brother was so haughty and worked up that he enjoyed his self-righteous anger, and was even angrier that his father wasn't angry!

This gives us further insight into the kingdom of God. It was not for naught that Jesus warned us through His disciples to "Take heed therefore and beware the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." Matt 16:6. Note that Jesus did not say, "beware the leaven of the publicans and sinners." I believe this is because the sin of the publicans and sinners is easier to spot than the sin of the Pharisees and Sadducees, but both types of sin are just as deadly with regard to us walking in the joy of God's kingdom. In Luke 15, Jesus is essentially pleading with the Pharisees to not be resentful that so many publicans and sinners were receiving the gospel with joy. He is urging them to rejoice and join the festivities, as the father urged his older son in the parable. The fact that Jesus ends the parable as a cliff-hanger, with the older son neither yet coming in or refusing, further demonstrates this point. Did the elder son go in? Did the Pharisees? Will we?

You see, that is the hardest part about this parable for us to accept. We all like to compare ourselves to the younger son, and rejoice in the grace of God that has been extended to

us. And yes, it is true that we have all done things that, in degree if not actually in kind, correspond to the types of disrespect and willful disobedience exhibited by the younger son.

But in reality, few of us ever consider whether we are acting like the older son. We seldom if ever consider whether we are maintaining a pharisaic heart, resenting those around us, judging others, viewing others as not measuring up, maintaining grudges against those who do not act exactly as we do, and so on. Whether we acknowledge this or not, it is all too easy for us to behave this way. Such behavior, of course, will keep us from the joys of the kingdom. As noted above, Jesus expressly warned us to beware this type of leaven.

I have one more observation regarding this parable. You will note that in each of the first two parables that Jesus gave on this occasion, someone went out and found that which was lost. The shepherd found his sheep, and the woman found her missing coin. By contrast, no one actually went out and sought the lost younger son. We might conclude that it was the Spirit of God that led the young man to repentance, and that is true, the Spirit does operate so in our lives: but I think there is another explanation.

I said earlier that I like to refer to this parable as the parable of the two lost sons. It is easy to see how the younger son was lost and far away from the heart of the father in his rebellion. But the older son was just as far away from his father's heart even though he remained at home. Consider this: the father runs, celebrates and rejoices at his younger son's return. Clearly, the father had suffered and grieved during his absence, much as Jacob grieved the loss of his beloved son Joseph. Gen 37:34.

The older son does not care. Instead of celebrating, even for his father's sake, he is resentful and mad, giving the cold shoulder to his younger brother. Unfortunately, there are many who sometimes behave like this in the church of God. So what should the older son have done instead?

I submit that, had the older brother been attuned to his father's heart, he would have seen the impact this loss of the younger son had upon his father. This would have moved the older brother to approach his father and say something along the lines of, "Father, I know you love your younger son and my younger brother. Send me, and I will go seek him and find him and return him to you." This is reminiscent of the statement made by Judah to his father Jacob when he returned to Egypt in the days of the famine – I will be surety for the boy (Benjamin), and will return him to you safe and sound. See Gen 43:8-9; Gen 44:30-34.

This is, in reality, exactly what our Lord Jesus Christ did for us. Before the world ever began the Lord Jesus agreed with His Father to become surety for us, and to pay whatever debt we owed. Jesus came at the appointed time and died on the cross to place us, God's children, safely back in front of our Heavenly Father, safe and sound. With this example, how can any of us maintain a grudge or look down upon our fellow citizens in the kingdom?

3. Maintaining a Kingdom Mentality

As I noted previously, walking in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ requires that we establish and maintain a kingdom mentality. By this I mean we view the kingdom of God through the lens supplied by God's Word. As Paul wrote, "Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..." Phil 2:5.

We tend to think in terms of Jesus Christ coming to this sin-cursed earth to establish the Christian religion. A better and more biblical view is that Jesus Christ came to the earth to establish and restore His kingdom. There are several important differences between these two statements.

The term "kingdom" is used over 150 times in the New Testament, and almost all of these usages apply to the kingdom of God. The term "religion" only appears five times in the New Testament, and in four of those usages, the term is supplied with a negative connotation. Jesus never used the term "religion," but constantly preached the coming of His kingdom. "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you." Matt 12:28.

A religion can be defined as a system of beliefs and practices associated with worship. This is a fair enough definition, provided that what is worshipped is God. All too often, we corrupt our worship so that it devolves into a list of behaviors and beliefs that we hold to, and based on these, we justify ourselves and become self-righteous based on our ability to show ourselves religious. This is what the Jews did with the Mosaic Law. God intended the Law to teach them of their need for the coming Messiah, and to look for Him. Hab 2:4; Gal 3:24. Instead, the Jews treated the Law as a way for them to justify themselves and earn eternal life. Luke 16:15; John 5:39.

Religion thus often tends to devolve into an external show of piety. Perhaps this is why James wrote, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." James 1:27. This is a very different conception of religion that what is usually understood by the term.

Being a member of a spiritual kingdom, on the other hand, is an internal state in which we commune and fellowship with our King through the Holy Spirit. As the Lord Jesus said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17:20-21. Paul wrote, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Rom 14:17. As Christians, we are the servants of Jesus Christ, just as Jesus Christ was the servant of His Father. But our true status now is that of citizens, children and heirs of God in His kingdom. Rom 8:17; Phil 3:20.

I also prefer to not use the term "Christian religion" on the basis that this suggests that Christianity is simply one of many choices that worshippers can make in selecting a form of devotion. In this vein, one person may identify himself as being a member of the Christian religion; another, the Islamic religion; yet another, the Hindu religion; still another, the Jewish religion, and so on.

But Christianity is not just another religion in the sense of these and other religions. The founder of each of these other religions in the world is dead. Jews look to Moses, Muslims to Mohammed, Shintos to their ancestors. Unlike these, the founder of Christianity, Jesus Christ, is alive. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and has ascended to take His rightful place at the right hand of the Father. He intervenes with us, talks with us and leads us by the Spirit. As Jesus told Pilate, “Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” John 18:37.

I mentioned previously that God has created many kingdoms, both visible and invisible. As taught to us in the Book of Genesis, in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Gen 1:1. Heaven is an invisible kingdom (at least with respect to the vantage point of man) and is populated with the good angels as well as the throne of God. The earth is a visible kingdom that is populated by mankind.

We do not often think of it in these terms, but a careful examination of the creation account demonstrates that God created man to be a race of kings. Mankind, prior to the fall, was to be God’s representative upon the earth. Man was to have dominion over the earth, the fish, the beasts, etc. Gen 1:26. Significantly, the one thing that men were not to have dominion over was each other. Thus, God originally created man in His image and in His likeness to rule as kings over the earth; man was to be the visible representative of, and co-regents with, the invisible God.

God did not establish a religion in the garden in the traditional sense that we consider religions. God did not have Adam wash himself a certain way to purify himself, or pray five times a day, or offer sacrifices, or do any such thing. God did give Adam a single law (do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). By keeping this law, Adam demonstrated his own righteousness and subservience to God. Still, the nature of the interaction between God and Adam was relational; God would walk and talk with Adam in the cool of each evening. This is how co-regents interact.

This privileged position of man was lost when our parents Adam and Eve transgressed and fell. Ever since that time, man in his fallen, corrupted state has attempted to regain that kingdom, or arguably, a more palatable kingdom better suited to his vain fallen nature. Every religion created by man in the history of the world has been, in one form or another, an attempt to figure out those things that men could do to restore themselves to the paradise that was lost. Every religion devolves into a list of things that must be done to establish man’s righteousness.

This is another reason why it is so important to focus on the actual message that Jesus brought: the kingdom of God is at hand. Through Jesus Christ, the kingdom has in fact been restored and expanded, and those of His Sheep (the Wheat) can press into it and be restored to walking with God in His fellowship. The kingdom of God is a relational kingdom where we relate to, walk with, and follow Jesus our King as His disciples.

A kingdom mentality thus involves viewing the finished work of Jesus Christ as having reconciled us to God. Our sins have been washed away by His blood and He has made us right with the Father. We now have the incredible privilege to walk and talk with God, our King,

every day – not just when we gather together for public worship, but constantly and continually. Our kingdom view also causes us to love and care for our fellow citizens, and to talk with one another about what great things our King has done for us in our lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, having a biblical world-view is necessary to properly discern reality. As taught by the Bible, God is a creative God who has established, or permitted, numerous kingdoms. These culminate in two primary kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. The parable of the wheat and tares illustrates several important aspects about these two kingdoms, including the fact that both kingdoms will persist here on earth until such time that Jesus returns, after which all things that offend will be shaken out of God's kingdom for destruction, and the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's house forever.

The kingdom of this world is immensely evil and is constantly in conflict against the kingdom of God. Satan, as the ruler of the kingdom of this world, employs numerous tactics to oppose the interests of the kingdom of God, including infiltration, dilution, violence and humiliation to rob us of our joy. Maintaining a kingdom mentality allows us to understand and counter these efforts by the world by seeking closer communion with our hiding place, Christ Jesus.

Rediscovering the kingdom of God requires us to properly understand that any moral course of action has two opposing extremes, and virtue lies in the middle between these extremes. We also need to firmly keep in mind the differences between our walk in the kingdom of God as sons and our walk in the kingdom as disciples, as illustrated by the parable of the prodigal son (or better, the two lost sons). Finally, we should keep in mind that Christianity is not just another world religion among many, but rather, is a kingdom experience where we walk and commune daily with our risen Savior who is alive and reigns forevermore.

May God bless you as you continue to strive to walk in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peace.