

Lesson 30

The Kingdom in The Epistles

When students of the Word fail to make proper discriminations between how words are used, many errors and much confusion results. One such case in point is what happens when the Church is made a synonym for the Kingdom in the epistles. If these two words refer to the same thing what should we expect to find?

I. Introduction

- a. The confusion among students of the Bible about the nature and timing of the establishment of the Kingdom stems from the lack of careful **discrimination** between the primary NT words relating to the “Church” and the “Kingdom”.
- b. When cataloged, it becomes clear that the distinctions of each of these words used in the epistles do in fact reveal to us some differences that make a difference in our understanding of the relationship between the “EKKLESIA” and the “**BASILEIA**”
- c. As one understands the general character of each of these terms and how they are related, one is able to make a reasonable **judgment** about the real presence or absence of the established Mediatorial Kingdom on the earth today.

II. The Church in the Epistles

- a. One argument which aligns with the notion of a future kingdom is that, of the 21 Epistles in the NT, there is **none** that is addressed to the saints “in the kingdom”.
- b. While this constitutes an argument from **silence**, it is none-the-less an argument worth examining because it helps one to see the distinctions more clearly between the Church and the Kingdom.
- c. The epistles were sent to **churches** or to members of churches, under various forms of address.
 1. To a **church** 1 Cor 1:2 *Unto the church of God which is at Corinth KJV*
 2. To a **group** of churches Gal 1:2 *unto the churches of Galatia:KJV*
 3. To the whole **body** of saints in one church Rom 1:7 *To all that be in Rome, KJV*
 4. To **all** believers in every church Jude 1 *to them that are sanctified by God the Father, KJV*
 5. To believers in Christ of the twelve tribes (James 1:1) and sojourners of the **dispersion** 1 Peter 1:1 *to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, KJV*
 6. The frequent occurrence of the term ekklesia in the epistles suggests that the writers are concerned **chiefly** with this particular body of the saved.
- d. This term is used only 3 times in the Gospels, primarily in a prophetic sense (Matt 16:18; 18:17); 19 times in Acts; **67** times in the epistles and 20 times in the Book of the Revelation. Matt 16:18 *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. KJV*
- e. The content of the epistles deals primarily with living the Christian life in the Church on earth. The epistles bracket the life of the Church between Pentecost and terminate it with the completion of the Church at the **second coming** of Christ. 1 Thess 4:17 *After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. NIV*
- f. Between the beginning of the Church and its **completion**, the life of the Church is regarded as an interim and a pilgrimage, “until the Lord come” 1 Cor 4:5 *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. NIV*

III. The Composite Picture of The Church on Earth

- a. Plainly, the epistles reveal that the Christian experience as the Church during this interim period is anything but the **golden age** of rest and blessing promised for the Kingdom on earth by OT prophets and the teaching of our Lord.
- b. For the Church, this interim period is a time of **humiliation** Phil 3:3 *we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh NIV*
- c. It is a time of **testing** James 1:12 *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, NIV*
- d. A time of trouble and **persecution** 2 Cor 4:8-9 *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; KJV*
- e. A time of suffering and **groaning** Rom 8:22-23 *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. NIV*
- f. A time of patient **endurance** James 5:7 *Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. KJV*
- g. A time of agonizing **conflict** 1 Tim 6:12 *Fight the good fight of the faith. NIV*
- h. A time of unceasing **labor** 1 Cor 3:9 *For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. KJV*
- i. A time of unrelenting struggle toward a goal which lies **outside** this age and world in which we live. Phil 3:14 *I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. NIV*
- j. For the present therefore, the members of the Church must live by **faith** 2 Cor 5:6-7 *We live by faith, not by sight. NIV*
- k. We must live with a future expectation (**hope**) Rom 8:24-25 *Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. NIV*
- l. We must live as good **soldiers** of Christ 2 Tim 2:3 *Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. KJV*
- m. We must not look at the seen things but the things that are **not seen**. 2 Cor 4:18 *While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. KJV*

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- n. No reasonable understanding of this composite picture of the Church in the present interim period could possibly be **confused** with that which is promised during the age of the Mediatorial Kingdom on earth in the presence of a reigning King Jesus.

IV. The Kingdom in the Epistles

- a. The word “kingdom” (basileia) is used 18 times in the epistles and refers to the **divine rule**.
- b. In 8 of those references the expression is “kingdom of God” and 7 times the kingdom is specifically assigned to our Lord. The 3 other references are **non-specific**.
- c. Some of those passages assert specifically that the kingdom is future. Paul brackets together the future **appearing** of Christ with His kingdom. 2 Tim 4:1 *I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; KJV*
- d. Paul also expresses his firm assurance that the Lord will preserve him unto his “heavenly kingdom”. This is not a synonym for **heaven**, but rather indicates that the long awaited Messianic Kingdom will be heavenly in origin and character. 2 Tim 4:18 *And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: KJV*
- e. The idea of futurity is also present in a number of passages which speak of the kingdom as something which the members of the church **shall** inherit. 1 Cor 6:9 *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? KJV*
- f. Paul not only sees this inheritance of the kingdom as future, but definitely **excludes** it from the present age by placing it after the bodily resurrection of believers. 1 Cor 15:50 *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. KJV*
- g. This view accords with the teaching of our Lord who presented the fact that His kingdom would be at the time in which He is seated on the “throne of His **glory**”. This can only be realized in experience when He is literally seated in Jerusalem. Matt 25:31 *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: KJV*
- h. The theory that Christ and the saints are now reigning in a present kingdom of God on earth, is **refuted** specifically by Paul who longs for that glorious prospect and who also teaches that believers must undergo a period of preparation to reign. 2 Tim 2:12 *If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: KJV*

V. The Kingdom During the Present Church Age

- a. There is a sense in which Christ rules the Church today, but this rule is very different from that of the Mediatorial Kingdom. As our head, He is **our life**, not our legal and external king. Col 3:4 *When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. KJV*
- b. Our Lord also rules today in the Universal Kingdom which He administers providentially. But this rule must also be distinguished from that of the immediate and **direct rule** which shall characterize the future Mediatorial Kingdom. Ps 75:7 *But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another. KJV*
- c. The reign of Christ will be sharply **different** from both His control over the Church and His providential rule of the Universe. Then the nations will not be ignorant of His rule and His perfected agents, vested with His authority to act will serve with Him.
- d. The errors of those who confuse the Church with the Kingdom on earth today have led to attempts by the Church to **politically** control the state. This is always disastrous and always produces evil.
- e. A second error assumes that since we are the present Kingdom on earth, the business of the Church ought to be to **produce** the Kingdom of God among men.
- f. This results in a blunting of our witness so as not to offend or put off those we are trying to draw into the Kingdom. In effect, in order to remain acceptable to those we are trying to reach, the Church becomes **indistinguishable** from the world.
- g. Finally, Biblical writers often refer to a future thing as though it is a fait accompli. While the Church is in fact, now **judicially** entered into the Kingdom, it is not accurate to suggest that entering in is the same as the established Kingdom here and now. Col 1:13 *Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: KJV*

VI. Application

- a. Given the fact that the whole purpose of our being on the earth as the Church is to fulfill the Great Commission and to undergo the sanctification process, what ought to be our attitude toward:
1. Personal evangelism?
 2. Temporal testing and suffering?
- b. How are you doing in those areas?