

Becoming Functional Citizens of the Kingdom

Introduction

A couple of lessons ago, we looked at the necessity of being a disciple of the Lord and not just a student. The last lesson dealt with the difference between Church and the Kingdom—how the first relates to family and the second relates to the work. The Church is made up of individuals built together as the family of God while the Kingdom is made up of families built together as the society of God under the government of Jesus.

In the family of God we learn who we are; in the Kingdom we learn what we do. The family's focus is on *being* while the Kingdom's focus is on *doing*. We learn who we are before we learn what we do because what we do comes out of who we are. It is the fruit of the seed that was planted in us.

As we said in the last lesson, we are born into the family and grow up in the Church, but we go to work in the Kingdom. Our birth into the household of God makes us citizens of the Kingdom, but in name only, without any real functionality. We learn to do the spiritual chores that are necessary for the proper functioning of our spiritual family. But, as it is with every family member, there comes a time when we go to work—get a job and become a *functioning member of society*, which in this case means to become employed in the work of the Kingdom of God.

From this viewpoint, I see the Church as the family of God and the Kingdom as the work of God—the Church is where we live, the Kingdom is where we are employed. Based on this, it appears to me that the modern church has concentrated on “household chores” and neglected any training for “work”. Doing chores is neither satisfying nor fulfilling—there is a reason we call them 'chores'. We only find fulfillment and satisfaction as we begin to do what we have been called to do—the work of the Kingdom.

As I grow up in the family, I am of little practical value to the society. I am a consumer of the things of society without making any contribution to society. However, as I mature and become employed in the business of society, I move from being a *consumer* to becoming a *producer*. I begin to make a contribution to society as a whole.

This is true of the Church and the Kingdom too. As we are maturing we are consumers of the things of the Kingdom. When we begin to enter maturity, we begin to become a producer and a contributor to the Kingdom, the society of God. One way to measure when one is beginning to mature is when one begins to produce more than one consumes.

We also saw in the last lesson that the work that we are to do has been prepared by God before¹ the foundation of the world. The work is ready; but, He has to prepare the workers—us. We are prepared for work by growing up in the family of God and doing the chores associated with family life.

¹ Ephesians 2:10

The Beginning Point

The way that the modern institutional church has preached salvation has diverted us from the goal of the Gospel. We have substituted the first step for the end goal, which is one of the reasons that many fail to mature in the Lord. If you ask most any evangelical what the goal of the Gospel is, you will get an answer along the lines of “to be born again so that you can go to Heaven”. However, that is not what Jesus said to Nicodemus when he came to Him.

John 3:3-5 NASB

- (3) Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."
- (4) Nicodemus *said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"
- (5) Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

When this is preached the emphasis is on “born again”, but notice that the point or goal is the Kingdom of God—one is born again *in order to see* the Kingdom and *in order to enter* the Kingdom. We have made “kingdom” to mean “heaven” so we have reached the conclusion that one must be born again to go to heaven; however, Jesus wasn't speaking of “heaven”—He was speaking of the Kingdom of God, which is with us now in spiritual format and will come in physical format with Jesus' return. So, if you think that being “born again” is the goal, you have missed the point.

Being “born again” is the *beginning* point not the end. After believing Jesus and receiving the new birth, we begin our journey toward the Kingdom by becoming a disciple of Jesus. The first requirement after you believe is that you continue or abide in His word². To continue in his Word is to both know it and apply it to our lives. We become obedient to the Word and that is what makes us true disciples. As we continue applying the Word to our lives, we come to know the truth. Until we are willing to continue, we are limited in knowing truth. As we come to know the truth, we are set free from the entanglements of the world system and can now become productive in the Kingdom of God.

The First Step—Purifying Ourselves

The *event* of the new birth begins a *process* in us—the process of salvation. This process is driven by obedience, “as you have always obeyed, ... work out your salvation with fear and trembling;” [Philippians 2:12]

Colossians 1:13 NASB

- (13) For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,

We have settled for being “rescued and transferred” and neglected the “continuing” process. The easy grace folks tell us that “God accepts you just as you are.” Sure, He does, but He doesn't leave us there.

² John 8:31-32

He rescues us 'just as we are' and transfers us to His Kingdom. He reconciles us to Himself in order to present us to Himself as a holy people.

Colossians 1:22-23 NASB

- (22) yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach--
- (23) if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

We have to “continue in the faith” and not be moved away from “hope of the gospel” Well, what exactly is the hope of the gospel? The Scriptures tell us that it is tied to the mystery that has been hidden in times past, which is Christ in us—the hope of glory.

Colossians 1:27 NASB

- (27) to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

1 John 3:2-3 NASB

- (2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.
- (3) And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Christ in us begins to change us—to conform us to His image. This produces in us a hope of glory—that we will be glorified with Him. As we focus on that goal, we purify ourselves. [*Notice that we purify ourselves. The Lord doesn't do it for us.*] This is part of the continuing process but we continue in hope.

The Next Step—Transformation

After being “rescued and transferred” and continuing by purifying ourselves, we are ready to be transformed.

Romans 12:1-2 NASB

- (1) Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.
- (2) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Part of purifying ourselves is that our bodies are presented as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God—this is putting to death the flesh and its desires. Then, our minds, which are a part of our soul, must be changed. Our minds must be renewed—this is so radical a change that it actually transforms us.

Up to this point our minds were conformed to this world. That is, our minds were shaped by the world,

looked like the world, thought like the world, made decisions like the world, and processed information from our senses like this world. However, the mind must be renewed; that is, disengaged from the world, made to look like Christ, think like Christ, make decisions like Christ and process information from the knowledge of the will of God and our spiritual senses.

We cannot come into maturity without undergoing the renewing of the mind. We cannot become productive in the Kingdom of God until our minds are being renewed. The reason for this is that you cannot have a Father's heart without a renewed mind. And the Father does not allow anyone into "His business" that does not have His heart about His business.

Requirement—Lordship of Jesus

In other teachings we said the first requirement for entry into the Ekklesia was the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God, the Christ³. The first requirement for the Kingdom of God is the revelation of Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. God has made Him to be both savior and Lord⁴. If we are content to be "rescued and transferred" then we only know Him as Messiah, Christ, our Savior. To fail to come to revelation of Him as Lord prevents us from coming to maturity and usefulness in the Kingdom.

There is a clear example of this with the Twelve Apostles of Jesus as shown by their response to His comment at the Last Supper about the one who would betray Him.

Matthew 26:21-22 NASB

- (21) As they were eating, He said, "**Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.**"
 (22) Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, "Surely not I, Lord?"

Matthew 26:25 NASB

- (25) And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Jesus *said to him, "**You have said *it* yourself.**"

When the disciples first began to walk with Jesus they all called Him Rabbi, that is, Teacher. As time passed they all began to call Him Lord, that is, all but Judas, who still called Him Rabbi at the end. Each one except Judas had a revelation of Jesus as Lord. That is one of the reasons that Judas was able to betray Jesus so easily. He maintained his own independence by relating to Jesus only as 'teacher' and never as 'Lord'⁵. Once we see Him as Lord, He begins to make demands on our life that require obedience, which is one of the requirements to enter the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 7:21 NASB

- (21) "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter.***"

His Lordship over us has to be real as shown by our obedience to His will. Simply, giving lip service

3 For further study about this see "[Will the Real Church Please Stand Up?](#)" available on the website.

4 Acts 2:36

5 For further study see the June 2008 issue of Present Truth Teaching Letter, "[The Judas Factor](#)" on the website.

to Him as Lord is not enough. So, not everyone who *calls* Him Lord will enter the Kingdom—only those who actually *live* their lives with Him as their Lord.

The Lordship of Jesus exposes our heart. If we are ruling our own heart then Jesus is not our Lord. Practical Lordship requires our *self* to be dethroned. This is where we have the problem. Our institutional churches are not teaching us how to do this. As a matter of fact, the institutional churches actually promote a “sanctified” self as a good thing.

Requirement—Destroying the Kingdom of Self

Earlier we focused on the aspect of “rescued and transferred” that Paul referred to in Colossians. Now let's look at some other aspects.

Colossians 1:13 NASB

(13) For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,

We were born into the domain of darkness and have lived our lives in it until we come to Jesus as our Savior. He rescued us from the domain of darkness—that is the *event* of the new birth. He transferred us to His Kingdom—that is the *process* of coming under His Lordship. We have a clear picture of this with the children of Israel in the Old Testament.

God, through Moses, rescued the Israelites from Egypt—out of darkness, under the blood. They left the domain of darkness through the direction and guidance of the Lord, Himself, in the form of a pillar of fire at night and a cloud by day. They were to be transferred to the promised land to be established as a Kingdom of the people of God. In between their rescue and their occupation of the land was quite a period of time in the wilderness. This is a type and example for us.

The wilderness began for them when they were baptized in the cloud and the sea⁶. It begins for us when we follow the Lord in obedience with water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Then, begins the journey where we are to learn the ways of the Lord and His care and provision for us. Not too far in, we come to the Mountain of the Lord where we learn His commandments, His law—not written on tablets of stone by the finger of God but written on our hearts by the Spirit of God.

God leads us on this wilderness journey for the same reasons that He led the children of Israel through the wilderness and not by the caravan route.

Deuteronomy 8:2 NASB

(2) "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

Deuteronomy 8:16 NASB

(16) "In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble

⁶ I Corinthians 10:1-2

you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end.

These verses give us four reasons for the wilderness and they apply to us as much as they did to them:

1. to humble you; that is, to bring us to a place of dependence on Him
2. to test you; that is, put us to the test—whether we trust Him or not
3. to know what was in your heart; that is, show us our hearts (God already knows) and
4. to do you good at the end; that is, so that He might bless us and do good for us.

Notice that the blessing, the doing good for us, comes at the end after the other three things are done.

It was repeatedly revealed by the circumstances in the wilderness that the children of Israel still had the desires of Egypt in their hearts. They had been taken out of the domain or rulership of darkness but it was still in their hearts and needed to be removed *before* they reached the promised land.

It was the Lord's desire that they change their heart, their very thought processes. When they left Egypt, they had been slaves for several generations. They thought like slaves and acted like slaves. By the time they were to reach the promised land they were to think like warriors and act like warriors. This would be a radical transformation that could only be accomplished as their minds were renewed in the ways of God. However, this didn't happen with that generation.

Hebrews 3:10 NASB

- (10) "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS';

It is only the ways of the Lord that keeps our hearts from going astray. If we don't learn His ways, we can't enter into His rest⁷—the promised land, the Kingdom of God.

Just like the children of Israel, we still have hearts that are tied to the desires of the world, the domain of darkness. That is where the throne of our kingdom of self is located.

We learned in the world that we have to protect ourselves and provide for ourselves. Then, we take pride in the fact that we have been able to do that by boasting to all through our bigger houses, faster cars, and our powerful positions. All of this is anathema to the Kingdom of God. Our self protection; our self provisions; our boastful pride of life must be torn down.

The world system drives our self interest in our provisions just as Jesus said. We are concerned about what we will eat or drink or wear. Everyone seeks after these things and the Father knows that we need them too just like the rest of the world.

Matthew 6:31-33 NASB

- (31) "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'
 (32) "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need

⁷ Hebrews 3:11-12

all these things.

The solution that Jesus offered was to change our focus from our self interests to the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 6:33 NASB

(33) "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

When we change our focus to the Kingdom, the Lord will add to us the things that are needed. We no longer make our own provision from our own soulish life but depend upon him for His provision.

When we are "born again" our new life doesn't replace our old life. We still have the old life and nature in us; however, new life has been added to us. If we live in our old life and nature, the things of the world are added to us. If we live in our new life and nature by seeking the Kingdom and His righteousness, the things of the King and the Kingdom are added to us.

It is the stronghold of our old life and nature, the kingdom of self, that presents the problems for us. Its desires and ambitions are not compatible with the Kingdom of God.

When the Scriptures speak of tearing down strongholds or fortresses, it is not referring to principalities and powers in the heavenlies but is referring to things in our hearts and minds.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 NASB

- (4) for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.
- (5) *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

This obviously relates to our inner man because it refers to destroying speculations and taking thoughts captive. While there may be some demonically empowered strongholds in us, the primary problem fortress is *self*. The kingdom of self must be torn down not built up. Jesus said that if we would save our life we must lose it. This was said in the context of rebuking Peter.

Matthew 16:21-23 NASB

- (21) From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.
- (22) Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid *it*, Lord! This shall never happen to You."
- (23) But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Peter didn't like what Jesus had just said, so he spoke out of self-interest not out of the purposes of God. From Jesus' response we can see that self-interest is driven by Satan. Then, Jesus told the disciples that to follow Him we must deny our self, that is, our self-interest.

Matthew 16:24-25 NASB

- (24) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself,

and take up his cross and follow Me.

(25) "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

It is our choice. We can live by our self life or we can live by the life of Christ in us. We can seek comfort and plenty in this world or we can seek the Kingdom of God.

Jesus paid the price for our salvation. It cost Him everything, including His life. We pay the price for the Kingdom. It costs us everything, including our life.

Count the cost if you want to be a functional citizen of the Kingdom of God.