

Kingdom or Church?

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A critic of New Testament Christianity has rightly observed: “Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, but it was the Church that came.” This astute observation leaves us with the question of whether Christ truly came to found and institute the “church” or did He truly come to bring forth the kingdom of God among men. This question was on the minds of the disciples after His resurrection:

“Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:6-8)

Though the disciples of that day were not given an understanding of His answer, two thousand years later we can see what Jesus referred to – if our minds are not clouded over with human tradition or demonic “theological” deceptions. What time or season had the Father taken into His own authority? If we were to carefully read the parables about the kingdom of God, we would see that the owner of the field (in which both wheat and tares were sown) unilaterally made the decision to leave the tares inter-planted among the wheat “lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest...” (Mt. 13:29-30)

When Jesus explained this parable, He identified the field as the world, the harvest as occurring at the end of the age and further explained, “The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness.” (Mt. 13:30, 39, 41) When the enemy (the devil –Mt. 13:39) sowed the tares (“the sons of the wicked one”) among the wheat (“the sons of the kingdom” – Mt. 13:38), a worldly and demonic element was introduced into the midst of the people who named the name of Christ. The two thousand years since the writing of the New Testament we commonly call “church history” is simply the story of tares interacting with wheat. Clearly discerning which is which from the written records is often an exercise in futility. But at the end of the age, the worldly, deceptive, lawless elements will be removed from His *kingdom*.

Let us note with great sobriety that there are indeed differences between the “church” and the kingdom of God. In the “church,” there has been left a place where the sons of the wicked one can practice lawlessness (that which is right in one’s own eyes) and offend (stumble, cause to fall away from the faith) others who are foolish enough to listen to and follow them. Paul warned that in the last days such teachers would be heaped up (2 Tim. 4:3-4) and Jesus warned that these men who falsely claim to be “God’s anointed” would deceive *many*. (Mt. 24:5) But when the angels are sent to bring in the harvest, only the kingdom of Christ and God will remain. The son of the kingdom who wishes to remain a son of the kingdom will do well to be certain that he has a true place in the kingdom now.

Jesus had said, “You shall receive power...and you shall be witnesses to Me...” (Acts 1:8) The true son of the kingdom must walk in the power of Christ’s Spirit and bear witness of Christ. The tare, being a son of the wicked one, is quite able to routinely practice deceit, slander, power-mongering, flattery, sophistry and to pour forth all manner of religious and philosophical

information so as to gain followers after himself, followers willing and even eager to pay him handsomely to soothe and stimulate their ears while he does nothing to rescue their souls from their journey down the broad path that leads to destruction. (Mt. 7:13)

The primary evidence that one has truly submitted one's life to Christ's Spirit is love. (Gal. 5:22, Jn. 13:35, 1 Jn. 4:16, etc.) "In this the children of God [the wheat] and the children of the devil [the tares], are revealed: Whoever does not practice righteousness [what is right in God's eyes] is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother." (1 Jn. 3:10) This standard alone makes many things quite clear – if we have eyes that see.

John goes on to tell us that Cain "was of the wicked one and murdered his brother...because [Cain's] works were evil and his brother's righteous." (1 Jn. 3:12) Jude warns of those who would feast "*with us*" without fear, serving only themselves, saying that "they have gone in the way of Cain." (Jude 11-12) The tare, the son of the wicked one in our midst, may not physically rise up against us and literally kill us (though that is precisely what the tare does to us spiritually) but he certainly will not hesitate to lie or slander or gossip about us and cause us great hardship. And, then again, when the situation is lethal, he will certainly abandon or betray us without hesitation when his own self interests (especially his "theological" ones) are at stake.

The last parable Jesus gave about the kingdom of God also speaks of the end of the age.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Mt. 13:47-50)

This is the same picture as in the parable of the wheat and the tares – the Son of Man sends out His angels to separate and remove the wicked ones from His kingdom. But also embedded in this parable is the difference between the kingdom of God and the church.

There are two promises that Jesus made that few have seen or understood exactly how He would fulfill them – and their fulfillment is seen when one views them as intricately linked. "I will build My church [Greek, *ekklesia*]..." (Mt. 16:18) and "I will make you fishers of men..." (Mt. 4:19)

While men have built ornate temples and erected authority and power structures that exactly mirror those of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ was quietly tying together His net with cords of two or three strands, a formula that wise Solomon said could not be easily broken. (Eccl. 4:12) "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Mt. 18:20) Jesus did not say, "...two or *more*..." – He said, "...*two or three*..."

Love cannot be practiced while one sits passively at the feet of an ear-scratching "pastor" or priest. Love – personal, intimate, life changing, sin-, self- and Satan-overcoming agape love – cannot be accomplished in a large meeting but is almost always effortlessly enacted where there are only two or three people present. And love *is* the primary evidence that one truly is a son of the kingdom! Worldly practices and power structures (and their inherent power struggles) are only evidence that one is among tares, no matter what titles these men have taken to themselves – "pastor," "prophet," "elder," "apostle," etc. What one does simply and only gives evidence of who one's father truly is. It really is that simple. That many have been lured away from the simplicity that is found in Christ tells us that we most often make judgments based on

appearances and not according to God's righteous standards (Jn. 7:24), that we have not truly purified ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1) and that the roaring lion who roams around seeking whom among us he may devour is much more well-fed and fatter than many want to believe. (1 Pet. 5:8)

Christ's kingdom – which on earth among men includes what the New Testament calls His body, His temple, His household, His family *and* His ekklesia (Eph. 2:19-22) – is that which will remain. Those false “brothers” who have taken a false place of power, prestige, position and preeminence among the genuine followers of Christ now – though they have prophesied, cast out demons and performed miracles in His name (Mt. 7:21-23) – will find they have no place reserved for them in His kingdom then. There will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth but, like Esau (Heb. 12:16), it will be too late for them to repent. Only the true son of the kingdom who has submitted to the flow of Christ's Spirit and become truly incorporated in Christ's “net” in his personal interactions with others will be the properly attired, genuinely prepared wedding guest who is enabled to also be part of Christ's bride, body, temple, household, family and people.

Let he who has ears hear.

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