

# MY KINGDOM

By

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“Do you know what is wrong with the church?” asked a businessman the other day. “I’ll tell you,” he continued, answering his own question. “The churches are too commercial.”

“How do you mean,” I asked.

“They rely upon their material power, going farther and farther into debt for bigger and bigger buildings. Soon the main interest is paying off the mortgage. Their preachers have become managers and their evangelists are public entertainers. The real work of God hardly enters the picture.”

Since parting from this business man I’ve been thinking about his analysis of the church situation. Here was a man, not particularly religious, apparently not well versed in the Bible, but who could see that the Kingdom of God was getting confused with another kingdom.

When Jesus prayed “Thy kingdom come,” He was in all seriousness talking about a distinct kingdom in which the citizens are to be totally loyal to the King and His purposes. It is called the “kingdom of heaven” because the King Himself is now in heaven. It is called an “everlasting kingdom” because the “world passes away” (I John 2:77) with its kingdoms, “then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father” (Matt 13:43) in a new world, that shall never pass away. It is called the “Kingdom of God” because it is made up of the children of God and in the end Christ “shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father. ... that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:24-28). No one shall live in the eternal kingdom who does not want God’s control and who does not subject himself completely to God’s will.

Jesus said “My kingdom is not of this world.” He was not referring to an “unearthly” kingdom, but to the fact that this world is largely under Satan’s control. John writes that “the whole world lies in the evil one” (1John 5:19). Paul writes of Christ’s purpose to “deliver us out of this present evil world” (Galatians 1:4) and Jesus spoke of Satan as the ruler (or prince) of this world (John 12:31, 14:30).

The world kingdoms, whether republics, dictatorships or socialist systems, are all a part of the “world” system over which Satan has great control. This is due to the fact that the general public that makes up these governments is people who have not become subject to God through faith in His Son, and are thus subject to whatever powers and influences arise. As the nations seek to produce peace through world government and centralized power they will give less and less power to the minority group which trusts in God, thus increasing the power of Satan. The Bible speaks of the leader of this world government as the “anti-Christ” and the “beast.” When it has run its course, it will be destroyed by the

coming of Christ, who will be King of Kings. Then the “kingdom of the world (will have) become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

The church which Christ founded is supposed to be nothing more nor less than the citizenry which is to make up His eternal Kingdom. The Bible says that God has “made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love” (Colossians 1:12-13).

Originally these citizens of the kingdom were banded together in fellowship groups to worship, to encourage one another in their unique destiny and to cooperate in the campaign to tell others of God’s purpose for the kingdom. But the campaign simply did not move fast enough to suit some misguided and ambitious leaders. It failed to receive the world’s recognition they felt it deserved. Instead it met with persecution, as Jesus had predicted.

In our day this problem is solved. The church is big business. It boasts of the most influential people, the finest buildings and the most entertaining programs. It has adopted the very nature of the world. It is no longer a kingdom “not of this world” but rather an organization highly dependent upon “this world.”

In the Bible the Kingdom of God is set forth in contrast to world kingdoms. Jesus taught that we are not to seek the things of this world, but to “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,” promising that the necessities of life will be provided by God. This doctrine is reversed by the modern church. It says, “seek first the applause and favor of the world. Show the world that you are successful in acquiring it’s ‘things’ and the kingdom will follow.”

Jesus said, “That which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” (Luke 16:15) But the modern church has sought out the world’s acclaim as its criteria of success. If it can demonstrate material wealth; if it is in style with the world’s fashion and if its roster contains the names of those approved by the world, then it is successful.

Confusion of the purpose of the Kingdom of God is so thorough that it is now considered a mark of achievement for a church to be so like the pagan community in which it is located that it no longer disturbs anyone with its doctrine and sets no one ill at ease with the light it sheds on the evil around it. Jesus said that “every one that doeth evil hates the light, and cometh not to the light lest his works should be reprov’d” (John 3:20). It is a rare thing for a minister or church to be despised for the light they throw upon the refined evils of the community.

As the churches extol their plush sanctuaries and educational plants and increase their rolls, the nation made up of its members accelerates in crime. While banding together to build organizations for the expansion of God’s Kingdom, the members go forth individually to expend their lives and energies in the purposeless kingdom of this world.

So what have we? The Kingdom of our Lord has become the Kingdom of this world! The material and organizational assets of today's church are largely unrelated to the eternal purpose of God in restoring man to a relationship of faith and love toward the Creator. When the end comes and all the temporal things pass away one wonders just what of the success-church will be carried into the everlasting Kingdom of God.

What is the solution? For many churches, there is none. Much of what is called "the church" is maintained in total disregard for God's purpose and in ignorance of the final consummation of all things. Whatever such organizations amount to in their material worth and prestige as a social group, they are part of the kingdoms of the world which "passes away." For the rest, who desire a citizenship in the kingdom "not of this world," but which is to come in fullness with the coming of Christ, there needs to be a fresh look at what is called the church and a restudy of the purpose and nature of the Kingdom over which Jesus reigns.

Jesus said that a man cannot serve two masters. Neither can one be a loyal citizen of two kingdoms. It is time for all who claim the name of Christ to realistically consider which kingdom they are serving.

"Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe: for our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28-29).

## **JUST FOR YOU-TH**

I'm working on a "seminar on youth" which I'm to lead just about the time the WITNESS goes to press. It's for a group of youth workers and is supposed to help them in their Youth programs.

Here is what I'm going to tell them:

The things that bother youth are things like sin, temptation, frustration, loneliness, and, in short, the same kind of things that bother adults, only more so. To meet these difficulties the youth need a foundation and some very solid armor, the same as the older Christian.

What he needs is to **know** the truths of Christianity. If there is any person that really is in need of some theological understanding it is the young person who must decide where to stand in relation to God and the things God is saying. What the church needs to do is not water down the doctrines of Christianity for youth, but to explain and teach them more thoroughly. If the "gospel" is the power of God unto salvation, who needs to understand this gospel any more than those who are making decisions concerning their salvation?

Most youth programs emphasize interesting diversions to appeal to the energy and curiosity of youth. But these diversions do not solve the deeper problems. In fact they

often only complicate them. Many a teenager has felt the obligation to attend his church's picnic or skating party when such attendance only added to his problems and misery. Many a youth who is bothered with some burning temptation is taken by the church on recreational activities where the temptation is multiplied four-fold.

Recreation has a part in church youth fellowship, but only as the mutual and natural out-growth of the fellowship among the Christian youth. It not only cannot "build" the genuine body of Christian youth, it fails also as a true expression of youth-needs when it is the core of attraction and the main diet of the church youth program.

Youth want to know! The other night I preached a sermon to a houseful, only a few of which were teenagers. But the person who came to me at the close of the service to discuss the theology of the sermon was a high school girl.

So the focus of the church needs to be on learning the things of God. It needs not discussion on politics, but on the person and mind of God. It needs not debate on the Peace Corps and integration, but an understanding of the peace God gives and the meaning of reconciliation to Him.

So, I'm saying to the youth workers, quit spending the precious time worrying over the "youth program" and instead get thoroughly acquainted with what God is saying in the Bible. Get yourself involved with the youth in understanding the mind of God, the meaning of His revelation, His purpose in history, the meaning of sin and its penalty, the solution offered in the cross, and other related Bible teachings. And do not leave out the exciting unfolding of the final events, which are even now shaping up all about us.

It is time for the church to take youth seriously, and for the youth to face up to the real challenge of growing „in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.,,

This is what I'll tell the youth leaders. But they can't do anything about it without your help.

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