

What Should We Know About the Kingdom?

*Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: **the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.** Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ. **This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.***
Ephesians 4:11, 12 NLT: (Emphasis added is mine).

This study is one of a five part series of teachings regarding the foundational work of the fivefold ministry as given in the Ephesians reference presented above. It is the work of the five-fold ministry, as executed by the various members of the body of **Jesus**, to build up the other believers into a complete maturity in **Christ**. Each of these ministries is related to a foundational area of study for the disciple. This third study will introduce the disciple to some important concepts and ideas that they will find helpful when considering the study of the Kingdom of **GOD** as the portion of the five-fold ministry concerning pastors and their impact on our lives.

The Kingdom of **GOD** was the message of preparation that was spoken of by John the Baptist as he prepared the way for the **Messiah**. **Jesus** immediately preached the message of the Kingdom after His temptation in the wilderness and the Kingdom became the central emphasis of the ministry of **Jesus**. **Jesus** was somewhat cryptic when He mentioned the Kingdom, so it can be hard to define; but **Jesus** gave us clues to the nature of the Kingdom when he stood up to read the following portion of Scripture out of Isaiah, Luke 4:18-21 NLT:

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, for He has anointed Me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come. ” He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at Him intently. Then He began to speak to them. “The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!”

So we know that the Kingdom is a place where the poor people will be relieved; the people bound in captivities will be set free, blindness and other infirmities will be healed, and the oppressed of the world will be set free from their burdens. In other words, the people of the Kingdom will receive the full favor of the **LORD**.

It will be like the year of Jubilee when the captives were set free and the land reverted back to its original owners. All that had been lost would have been restored. This is in fact, the very plan of restoration that our **Father** has planned since before the world was created.

We need to look back to the Garden of Eden when the Kingdom of **GOD** was in full force. Adam and Eve had the full blessings of **GOD** and they lived in a paradise created just for them. They had communion with **GOD** and they joyfully went about their 'work' for **GOD**. The problem came when they chose to disobey **GOD** and to go their own way. Mankind has been going their own way ever since.

The emergence of the Kingdom of **GOD** is the return of mankind to the authority of **GOD**. We saw a partial restoration with the people of Israel, as they entered into covenant with **GOD**, and they agreed to follow the Torah instructions. These instructions that brought submission to the will of the **Father**, were to be a light that attracted the Gentile people to **GOD**. The problem came when the people chose to go their own way and to resist the theocracy of **GOD**.

The nation of Israel was created to be run by **GOD** for the good of the people but the people did not want to submit to **GOD's** authority, so they demanded a king. **GOD** tried to warn them regarding their wanting a king, but the people would not listen, 1 Samuel 8:10-19 NLT, emphasis added is mine:

*So Samuel passed on the LORD's warning to the people who were asking him for a king. "This is how a king will reign over you," Samuel said. **"The king will draft your sons and assign them to his chariots and his charioteers, making them run before his chariots. Some will be generals and captains in his army, some will be forced to plow in his fields and harvest his crops, and some will make his weapons and chariot equipment. The king will take your daughters from you and force them to cook and bake and make perfumes for him. He will take away the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his own officials. He will take a tenth of your grain and your grape harvest and distribute it among his officers and attendants. He will take your male and female slaves and demand the finest of your cattle and donkeys for his own use. He will demand a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his slaves. When that day comes, you will beg for relief from this king you are demanding, but then the LORD will not help you."** But the people refused to listen to Samuel's warning. "Even so, we still want a king," they said.*

The people traded the benevolent provisions and blessings of **GOD** for a human leader that would take from them and eventually oppress them. It didn't make any sense back then and it doesn't make sense today. Many people are making the same mistake today when they seek provision from the government rather than trusting in our **Father**. The Government just keeps taking our money, regulating our lives, and telling us how to live. The Kingdom of **GOD** is about living in freedom from human oppression. This was the aspect of government that the founding fathers of the USA had in mind when they drafted the Constitution. There was a need for government but it was to be limited government. The people were to trust in **GOD** and be a moral people. But in the absence of that trust in **GOD** and the moral character, the government has been allowed to grow to oppressive levels. It reminds me of a saying by the wise King Solomon, 'there is nothing new under the sun.'

So one picture of the Kingdom of **GOD** is living a life that is submitted to the rule of **GOD** in our life and our not being submitting to the rule of man. We can look at the life of **Jesus** to see how this type of life is lived. We need to know that **Jesus** not only followed the written Torah instructions but He also followed the oral traditions as well. So did the apostles, including Paul. What they did not follow was the 'legalistic' applications of the Torah instructions. These were additions placed on the Torah instructions by the religious leaders of that day. **Jesus** rebuked the religious leaders for placing these undue burdens on the people in [Luke 11:46 NLT](#):

"Yes," said Jesus, "what sorrow also awaits you experts in religious law! For you crush people with unbearable religious demands, and you never lift a finger to ease the burden."

The solution that **Jesus** offered is found in [Matthew 11:28-30 NLT](#):

Then Jesus said, "Come to Me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you. Let Me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Life in the Kingdom is a life that is free from doctrinal oppression. Some assemblies of believers will impose restrictions or codes of behavior on their people, based on personal interpretations of the Bible. This is exactly the situation that caused **Jesus** to rebuke the religious leaders of His day. We are not to impose man inspired lists of do's and don'ts on the people. Rather we need to study the Torah instructions as a basis for life in the Kingdom. Then we must look at these instructions through the eyes of **Jesus** as He taught on the Earth. Finally, we must allow the **Holy Spirit** to teach us the truth regarding the Kingdom lifestyle, as we discussed in the teaching concerning the Bible.

Jesus expressed this mode of study when He gave the following address in Matthew 5:17-18 NLT, emphasis added is mine:

Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish (misinterpret) the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish (correctly interpret) their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.

It is very important that we understand what **Jesus** is saying here. **Jesus** is not condemning the Torah instructions but rather the misinterpretations that the religious leaders added to the Torah instructions. **Jesus** then cites several examples in the following text where He performed this very important task of proper interpretation:

- ☞ **Matthew 5:21-24 NLT:** *"You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are even angry with someone [without cause], you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell. "So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.*
- ☞ **Matthew 5:27-29 NLT:** *"You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.' But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*
- ☞ **Matthew 5:31, 32 NLT:** *"You have heard the law that says, 'A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a written notice of divorce.' But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery.*
- ☞ **Matthew 5:33-37 NLT:** *"You have also heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the LORD.' But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, 'By heaven!' because heaven is God's throne. And do not say, 'By the earth!' because the earth is His footstool. And do not say, 'By Jerusalem!' for Jerusalem is the city of the great King. Do not even say, 'By my head!' for you can't turn one hair white or black. Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one.*

☞ **Matthew 5:38-42 NLT:** *"You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.*

☞ **Matthew 5:43-48 NLT:** *"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! [Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who hate you.] Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For He gives His sunlight to both the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect (complete in a loving attitude), even as your Father in heaven is perfect (complete in a loving attitude).*

What **Jesus** was offering was *halahic* type renderings of the text that would have been offered by the sages of Israel. It was given on to man to make such applications from the Torah instructions. **Jesus** used His divine authority to correct the errant *halahic* applications. Our life in the Kingdom will be lived by these very *halahic* applications. And these applications will lead to a life of peace, joy, and love in this life, at this time.

What is nice about this type of application is that it can be summed up in a simple expression that was made by Jesus when He was questioned regarding the commandments, in Matthew 22:37-40 NLT, emphasis added is mine:

*Jesus replied, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' **The entire law** (Torah instructions) **and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.**"*

It is important that we understand that **Jesus** was not as concerned that we implement the strict observance of the Torah instructions but rather how we can use the foundation of these instructions to learn how to walk in love to **GOD** and to each other. As referred to above, we can see that love is the most important attribute given in these examples. **Jesus** stressed the importance of love in the follow reference, John 14:15 NLT:

If you love Me, obey My commandments.

Obedience to the will of **GOD** is the foundational attribute for the citizen of the Kingdom. It was the requirement for Adam and Eve and it is the requirement for us. Obedience was the 'nourishment' for the life of Jesus, John 4:34. **Jesus** was always submitted to doing the will of the **Father**. This is exactly how we are to live now and in the age to come. **Jesus** emphasized this point in this instruction found in Matthew 5:19 NLT:

So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Obedience is so important that it becomes the requirement for entry. Everyone that perpetuates disobedience is not considered a citizen of the Kingdom, now or in the age to come. The following references illustrate this point:

- ☞ **Matthew 5:20 NLT:** *"But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!"*
- ☞ **Matthew 7:21-23 NLT:** *"Not everyone who calls out to Me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of My Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to Me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in Your name and cast out demons in Your name and performed many miracles in Your name.' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from Me, you who break God's laws.'"*
- ☞ **Matthew 18:3 NLT:** *Then He said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."*

The Apostle Paul also raised the issue of disobedience that affected entrance into the Kingdom of **GOD**:

- ☞ **1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 NLT:** *Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God.*

☞ **Galatians 5:19-21 NLT:** *When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

☞ **Ephesians 5:5 NLT:** *You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.*

It is clear from these references that entry into the Kingdom of **GOD** is not something to be taken lightly. Neither is it something we need to be fearful of, if we have set our heart on the things of **GOD**. King David was a man whose heart was after **GOD** but yet he did fail at times. Our incidental shortcomings will not disqualify us as long as our hearts are set on **GOD**, thus we are quick to repent. If we fail to repent, then we may fall into a pattern of sin that can negatively affect our life now and our place in the Kingdom to come. What **GOD** is looking for are people that desire to be obedient and He will perfect their obedience in His time and in His way. We just need to be submissive to His leading.

This state of submission is what is referred to as being 'born again.' We are all born with a 'will' that wants to do our thing, but to be 'born again' is to be born of the **Spirit of GOD** so that we want to do His Kingdom oriented will, John 3:3. We will not be perfect at it at first, but as we grow into the likeness of **Christ**, we will become more obedient to His will, just as **Jesus** learned obedience through the things that He suffered, **Hebrews 5:8**.

Now that we have discussed the entry into the Kingdom of **GOD**, we can precede to describe life in the Kingdom. One of the portions of the Scripture that **Jesus** read regarding His anointing, has to do with the healing and release of infirmities. Infirmities are defined as a physical weakness or ailment. We often bring infirmities into our lives by doubting **GOD's** word, thus we fret and worry to the point that stress will rob us of our health. Sometimes we neglect our bodies so that we can pursue pleasurable activities. Sometimes we misappropriate our finances on pleasures rather than on healthy items and activities. Sometimes we can get involved in activities that deal in occultism or mystic practices, thus opening ourselves up to negative spiritual forces. Whatever the cause, infirmities are not a part of the Kingdom.

In fact, health was one of the blessings that was promised to the people of Israel when they agreed to follow the Torah instructions. This blessing is recorded in Deuteronomy 7:14, 15 NLT:

You will be blessed above all the nations of the earth. None of your men or women will be childless, and all your livestock will bear young. And the LORD will protect you from all sickness. He will not let you suffer from the terrible diseases you knew in Egypt, but He will inflict them on all your enemies!

One could point out that our society that rejects the ways of **GOD**, as outlined in the Torah instructions, is certainly not experiencing this blessing. And this situation is occurring in spite of the great medical advances that we have. Our expanding health care problems, caused by our rebellion to **GOD's** instructions, will not be able to be contained by the wisdom of mankind. In fact, the Kingdom of **GOD** is completely the opposite. The Apostle Paul describes the Kingdom in this manner, Romans 14:17 NLT:

For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The Hebrew people have a word for this style of life and that word is *shalom*, which means far more than peace, the absence of conflict. *Shalom* refers to a state of perfect well being where a person can experience the essence of Kingdom living. *Shalom* is a taste of the Garden of Eden when life was pure and holy. We are in the process of having that well being restored, so we when we speak *shalom* over each other we are in fact, praying for the restoration to be complete.

Another aspect of *shalom* includes the freedom from oppression. **GOD** was very concerned regarding the oppression of His people. **GOD** made numerous provisions in the Torah instructions to prevent oppression. The people were forbidden from making a Hebrew citizen a slave. A Hebrew citizen could be sold as a servant to reconcile debts but they could not be used as slaves and they had to be released in the seventh year of their service. Also the master was instructed to provide a financial stake with which the person could start a new life. The kins-people of the prospective servant were to do all that they could to prevent them from being sold as a servant and they were to redeem them from the service, if funds became available later. God continually reminded the children of Israel of their slavery in Egypt and with this memory in place, they were to treat others justly.

There was the provision in the Kingdom of being set free from bondages of the soul. Sometimes when we come to **GOD** we have besetting sins, bad habits, and rebellious desires that have to be dealt with. **GOD** does this healing through the 'born again' experience. God takes our rebellious heart and cuts away the bad parts so that we can become a new creation in Him. This process is known as the circumcision of the heart and it is the essential element of the New Covenant, Jeremiah 31-34. **GOD** gives us the desire to be obedient to His will and in the process, He frees us from our bondages. Paul refers to this situation in Romans 2:28, 29 NLT, emphasis added is mine:

*For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. No, **a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God**. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, **it is a change of heart produced by God's Spirit**. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people.*

Paul also describes this process as becoming a new creation in **Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 NLT**, emphasis added is mine:

*Either way, Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that **we have all died to our old life**. He died for everyone so that **those who receive His new life will no longer live for themselves**. Instead, **they will live for Christ**, who died and was raised for them. So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know Him now! **This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person**. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*

We have explored several aspects of what the Kingdom life will be like, but perhaps one the most vivid depictions of the Kingdom life is found in the following reference, Revelation 21:1-5, emphasis added is mine:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them. **He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain**. All these things are gone forever." And the One sitting on the throne said, "**Look, I am making everything new!**" And then He said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true."*

In conclusion, it is important to understand the role that the pastoral ministry is to play in the Kingdom life. We will discuss the exact nature of the pastoral ministry in the section that is devoted to studying the 'Church.' But for now it is sufficient to understand that the pastoral ministry is involved in nurturing the lives of believers, as they grow into Kingdom citizens. These acts of nurturing are not limited to just professional clergy, but there are required of every believer. Every believer that has a family is part of the nurturing ministry for that family. Every believer that leads a group of other believers in a ministry program or study group is a nurturing shepherd of that group. In other words, every believer has a responsibility to nurture other believers; it is not the sole province of the professionals.

The role of nurturing was established by **Jesus** when He questioned Peter regarding his love for Him, John 21:15-17. When Peter responded that he loved the **LORD**, **Jesus** responded 'feed my sheep.' Some people have taken this reference and justified the building of religious institutions that feature professional clergy. We need to remember that Peter was a simple fisherman that was far from professional, so what did **Jesus** mean when He said this?

I recall the years in my childhood when we raised sheep, the fact that sheep need to be led. You find the lead sheep and direct it, and the rest of the flock will follow. This is exactly what **Jesus** does. He finds people of godly character and ordains them through the **Holy Spirit** to be lead sheep of the flock. How do you know who the **GOD** ordained people are in a group, it will be the ones that people go to most often for help. Sometimes it may be the professional leaders that obediently answered the call to serve. Other times it may be lay leaders that draw the attention of the people.

The key characteristic of the lead sheep is they have no agenda and that they are only concerned about the welfare of the sheep, not building projects or slick programs. **GOD** has a special plan for each and every citizen of the Kingdom and it is important for the lead sheep to submit to **GOD's** plan for that life, rather than promote their own agenda for them. It takes real humility and dedication to **GOD's** will to be a lead sheep, but they are essential for the healthy growth of the body of believers. This is why **GOD** has called all of us to share in the nurturing of believers and to not just dump the responsibility on a few people. **GOD** wants to use all of our collective abilities to grow His body into maturity. It is an exciting adventure to partner with **GOD** in this endeavor.