

The Kingdom or the *Kosmos*

The Clash of Two Kingdoms

By George Davis and Michael Clark

When we hear the word kingdom, do images of courts and castles, kings and jesters fill our minds? Do we think of the glory of ancient kingdoms, such as Babylon, with its hanging gardens and majestic gates? Do our thoughts return to the Pharaohs of Egypt and the architectural wonders of the pyramids? Do we think of the grandeur of Greece or perhaps the military might of Rome?

The visible traces of these great empires of antiquity are still seen throughout the world. They have left their mark on society not only with the ruins of their civilizations, but the hangovers of their religions and governments that still permeate our thinking. They have also left their mark upon Christendom and though we may not know it, they have become the measure for defining the kingdom of God.

Being asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, Jesus answered,

"The Kingdom of God doesn't come with observation; neither will they say, 'Look, here!' or, 'Look, there!' for behold, the Kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

Hannah Whitall Smith defined the kingdom of God as,

". . .the place or condition where God rules, and where His will is done. . . an interior kingdom, not an exterior one. . . its reign is not in outward show, but in inward power."

The kingdom of God is the area or sphere in which God holds a preeminent position. The Kingdom of God is His divine nature being revealed in us. This treasure is in earthen vessels.

Paul defined the Kingdom of God as "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17). It is not an earthly regime.

The kingdom of God is a heavenly kingdom, GOVERNED FROM HEAVEN. Hence it is also called "the kingdom of heaven."

The word for heaven is derived from the Greek *ouranous*, referring to the eternal dwelling place of God, a dimension existing beyond the natural order of the physical, earthly or mortal realm. (Matthew 5:16; 12:50, Revelation 3:12, 11:13, 16:11, 20:9). The Son of God descended from heaven to become flesh. John was referring to Jesus when he said, "He who comes from heaven is above all" (John 3:31).

After His resurrection and ascension Christ "sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." (Hebrews 8:1, 1 Peter 3:22). Heaven is the place of Christ's present life and Ministry. (Romans 8:34, Hebrews 9:24). Christ is now the high priest of the heavenly sanctuary "of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." (Hebrews 8:2). Because of His unchangeable priesthood, He ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). It was from heaven that Christ sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Heaven is to be the final dwelling place of the saints. Christ will descend from heaven, to receive His saints. (1 Thessalonians 4:16, Philippians 3:20, 21).

To walk in the kingdom of God is to live in the heavens, seated with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). It is to live by the power of heaven, for the kingdom of God comes with power (see Mark 9:1). It is to set our affections on those things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God (see Colossians 3:1-3).

The kingdom of God is a heavenly kingdom, governed from heaven, as opposed to the kingdoms of the world, *kosmos*, which are governed by the god of this world.

These two kingdoms are pitted against each other, in competition for the highest prize ever, the souls of mortal men. The kingdom of the Prince of Peace suffers violence as the vanquished prince of the principalities, powers and world rulers of the *kosmos* system vainly seeks to conquer the kingdom of heaven by force.

Jesus spoke of this prince in John 14:30. "I don't have much more time to talk to you, because the prince of this world approaches. He has no power over me." (NLT)

Satan is the prince/ruler of this world and it is the prerogative of rulers (Greek *arche*) to set up the perimeters and style of their kingdom as it pleases them. The prince of this world has ordered his kingdom in a manner that serves his interests "The course of this world (is) according to the prince of the powers of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience." (See Ephesians 2:2-3)

The word *world* in these passages is a translation from the Greek word *kosmos*, which means system, order or arrangement. W.E. Vine defines *kosmos* as the "present condition of human affairs, in alienation from and opposition to God." Hence, the world Jesus was referring to is not the creation of God but the vanity creation has been subjected to, a system of government that all creation, including mankind, groans under to this very day (see Romans 8:20-22).

The primary goal of the prince of this world is to get people to reject God's rule and embrace the course of this world, which functions according to Satan's governing principles. The more godless a people are the more likely that they will assume an abusive, hierarchical, and totalitarian form of government. Where God's Spirit does not reign, there is tyranny, but where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. History fails to yield even one exception to this rule. Where the church has failed to demonstrate this freedom and liberty, it has instead manifested the governing principle of the antichrist.

Since Nebuchadnezzar, there have been only four world empires (see Daniel 2:31-45), and all of them have been corrupt. If you look at the kings of Israel you will find that there were only a few, three at most, who did right in the sight of God. Even David, who had a heart after God, could not withstand the corrupting influences of the type of government that the people of Israel bequeathed him. They wanted a king like the kings of the idolatrous pagan nations around them and rejected the King of the universe to get him (see 1 Samuel 8:5). What they did not know was that the style of government they asked for was very much a part of that idolatry. Its denial of God and His rightful reign as the only true and sovereign King is fundamental to its makeup. Because of Israel's unfortunate choice, Yahweh said to Samuel, ". . . they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, in that they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also to you" (see 1 Samuel 8:7-8).

The rejection of God's sovereignty is at the heart of all idolatry.

Our warfare is not against flesh and blood, but against the wiles of the devil, a wrestling against "the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly

places" (Ephesians 6:12). Note the language of hierarchy here. The system described in the passage above is diametrically opposed to what Jesus came to establish as a lowly, suffering Servant. It depends on the strength of the arm of the flesh, while the true followers of Jesus abide in weakness and depend on the strength of God to act through them.

The Greek word for principalities in the above passage is *arche* [746] meaning "beginning, origin . . . the person or thing that commences, the first person or thing in a series, the leader. . . that by which anything begins to be, the origin, the active cause. . . ." (Strong)

The word *principalities* points to a progenitor or originator/founder, the prince and architect of this system of government. Satan is truly the prince of the world.

Paul spoke of our warfare against this demonic hierarchy that exalts itself against the knowledge of the lowly Christ. Paul wrote:

". . .for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Note the words *imaginations* and *every high thing*. The word *high* speaks of imminence and loftiness. How are the kingdoms of the prince of this world different from the kingdom of God? All that is not Lamb-like and lowly is a high thing patterned after the Prince of this world, who seeks to exalt himself above the stars of heaven, above the mount of the congregation.

The hierarchical governments of the nations are inspired by this satanic ambition. They are not the creation of God. While it is true that one day the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ (see Revelation 11:15), this in no way implies that they proceed from Him or found their origin in Him.

The kingdoms of this world were not founded by the Prince of Peace but by a different prince. World rulers and their kingdoms are patterned after the image of a different father/creator. Kingdoms of rulers like Cain and Nimrod spoken of in Genesis are the earthly, physical personification of the invisible principalities and powers in heavenly

places. For instance, Cain established the first city government and was responsible for the violence and corruption that spoiled the antediluvian race. Nimrod was the first emperor whose kingdom, Babylon, still stands as a symbol of resistance against God and His people.

King David also noted this ongoing enmity of the nations of the world toward God and His anointed.

"Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth take a stand, and the rulers take counsel together, against Yahweh, and against his anointed, saying, 'Let's break their bonds apart, and cast away their cords from us.'" (Psalms 2:1-3 - WEB)

In order to comprehend the enmity between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God, we must understand that they are essentially different and antagonistically opposed, not just in outward style (kings, princes, legions, etc) but also in essence. Monarchy (the rule of the dominant one) and democracy (mob rule) are both spiritually opposed to Theocracy (the direct rule of God), and, as history bears out, are inclined to yield more than a passive resistance to the kingdom of God. Although the governments of this world are constantly at war against each other, they are united in one thing. They stand together in their efforts, like Scribe and Pharisee, to break the bonds and cast away the cords of the kingdom of God and its Anointed One.

In these last days, the kingdoms of the world will once again unite in a one-world-government, and true to their nature, they will seek to systematically cast off the rule of God. They will rage against it! Look around you! It is already happening even in our beloved America. Why? This is the nature of worldly governments. Whether we want to admit it or not, our founding fathers framed the constitution for the express purpose of protecting the people from the government, making the government subservient to the people. Recent events have certainly proven that this is no longer the case.

We know this is hard for many to hear, because, in the civilized world, we are prone to view the rule of law (Lex Rex - law is king) as essential to our survival. Sadly we feel that the opposite is true. We are not alone in this opinion.

After World War II one of the questions psychologists and sociologists asked was, "How was Hitler able to commit the horrendous crimes that were done daily in Nazi Germany and throughout their occupied countries, with so little resistance or public outcry?" What power did he hold over the people of Germany, that they would not only keep silent but would even take part in the most unthinkable atrocities? Fear was certainly a factor, but it was only a facet of the overall problem.

A psychologist named Stanley Milgram came up with an experiment that showed that people have an amazing tendency toward blind obedience to authority. You may read his findings in his article titled "The Perils of Obedience."

Mr. Milgram informed the subjects of his experiment that they would be taking part in a study on "punishment and learning." In each test case, he brought the experimental subject, called "the teacher," into a room where another man, the learner, was strapped into a chair with electrodes attached to his wrists. The teacher sat in front of a console with 30 switches labeled from 15 volts to 450 volts. The switches were also identified as "Slight Shock, Moderate Shock, Strong Shock, Very Strong Shock, Intense Shock, Extreme Intensity Shock, Danger: Severe Shock." The teachers were instructed by the experimenters to ask the learner a series of questions and to administer a 15-volt shock for the first wrong answer and then to increase the voltage for each wrong answer after that. Each teacher was given a 45 volt shock at the beginning to give them some idea what it felt like.

The teachers were the focus of the experiment. The learners were hired actors who were only pretending to be shocked. There was no electricity involved. Regardless of the learners' theatrical screams of pain and their incessant pleading that the experiment be stopped, 65% of the teachers administered the maximum shock. In some variations of the experiment over 90 percent of the teachers administered the maximum shock at the authority's instructions. Not one subject stopped before reaching 300 volts! The degree of obedience to authority was much higher than anyone anticipated. This is why many refer to Milgram's experiment as "the experiment that shocked the world."

These results were completely unexpected, considering that before beginning his experiment, Milgram interviewed a number of judges and psychiatrists, asking them to predict the extent of conformity in this situation. They estimated only two percent!

In 1966 a follow-up experiment was conducted. Twenty-two nurses were ordered by doctors to administer excessive dosages of medication to patients. Twenty-one nurses obeyed but were stopped by the experimenters.

Mr. Milgram concluded from his findings that obedience to authority structures is a danger to human survival. Quoting Milgram,

"The capacity for man to abandon his humanity, indeed the inevitability that he does so, as he merges his unique personality into larger institutional structures. This is a fatal flaw nature has designed into us, and which in the long run gives our species only a modest chance of survival. . .

"Each individual possesses a conscience which to a greater or lesser degree serves to restrain the unimpeded flow of impulses destructive to others. But when he merges his person into an organizational structure, a new creature replaces autonomous man, unhindered by the limitations of individual morality, freed of humane inhibition, mindful only of the sanctions of authority. . .

"The disappearance of a sense of responsibility is the most far-reaching consequence of submission to authority." (Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*)

It is interesting that during the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals, almost all the defendants blamed their actions and atrocities on the authorities above them who gave them orders.

Authority structures that are fashioned after the kingdoms of this world are instruments against the Kingdom of God by their very nature. They tend to render people obedient by the sheer power of their bureaucracy. Bureaucracies legitimize themselves by their group-think or group consensus. They exert external pressures that war against the inner leading of God's Spirit and can even lead people to sin against their own conscience. This creates a climate of fear rather than love. Fear makes people deaf to the voice of God or conscience and finally they become perpetual babies, needing a man to tell them what to do and how to act, what is good and what is evil.

One of the most glaring cases of this inhumanity of bureaucracy in the church has been the treatment of accused heretics. The most horrendous imprisonment, torture and death have been inflicted in the name of Christ and His church while the faithful stood by in agreement. Church organizations or ecclesiastical bureaucracies have the same effect as the earthly authority structures. They also foster irresponsibility, relegating

the priesthood of believers to the pew or to some trite exercise in religion while demanding strict obedience. Most tragic is the fact that many believers who enter these institutions check their conscience at the door. In succumbing to the vision and whims of one dominant leader they are mindful only of the sanctions of authority. They become entangled in bureaucratic red tape and can no longer sense the impulses of the Head, Jesus Christ. Loyalty to denominational bureaucracies always supersedes loyalty to the Spirit of God, just as loyalty to the traditions of men makes the commandments of God of no effect.

Regarding this human tendency toward irresponsibility Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote,

"I am ashamed to think how easily we capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions." (*Self-Reliance*)

The Victory of the Lamb - "I have overcome the world"

Something new was in the air! The thundering tones of a lone voice echoed throughout the hills and valleys of the wilderness regions of Judea, "Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:1) The appearance of John the Baptist marked a new era in God's economy. From that time onward the kingdom of God suffered increasing resistance from violent people. This forerunner of the King declared the nearness of the kingdom. The King of glory was about to come to Zion. But not as some supposed. He came to His own but His own did not receive Him. He was not at all what they expected. They waited for a conquering Messiah who would come in military might to break the yoke of the Roman occupation. To their great disappointment, Jesus came as a Lamb who showed little interest in the conquest of Rome or in the physical salvation of the nation of Israel. Yes! He came to wage war and deliver captives but few knew the true nature of that warfare or were even aware of their captivity. Few knew the battleground where that war would be fought. It was not the Roman Empire that resisted the coming kingdom of God but another enemy altogether. Jesus came to lead captivity captive by the strangest means the world had ever seen. He did not come to conquer and subjugate but to spoil principalities and set the captives free.

Violent people resisted Jesus at every turn. When He preached from the scroll of Isaiah in His own hometown, violent people from the synagogue tried to kill Him. When He fed the multitudes they tried to make Him their king by force, but there is no access to the kingdom of God by carnal and worldly means. They had no power over Jesus. Jesus

was rejected of men because he took power over this fallen world in weakness, refusing to adopt its means of power. For this reason the world hated Him. For this reason the nations rage.

Jesus was Emanuel, "God with us," God come in the flesh. He came in the flesh to be tempted (Matthew 4:1, Hebrews 2:18) and overcome sin in the flesh. Consequently, ". . .we don't have a high priest who can't be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus said, ". . .he [the prince of this world] has no power over me" (John 14:30). These words deserve our attention. The New King James Version reads, ". . .and he has nothing in Me."

The prince of this world had no power over Christ because he had nothing he could effectively tempt Christ with. The martial art of Judo depends on the forward motion or aggression of the opponent, and so it is with the works of the devil. Satan had come to Jesus in the wilderness of temptation and could find nothing IN Him. He could find no lust IN Christ. For "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (see James 1:14). It was there, in the heat of this battle, that Satan presented his greatest prize to Christ in an attempt to throw Him and cause Him to fall.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." (Matthew 4:8-9 RSV)

This encounter of heaven and hell reveals the master strategy of Satan. His greatest allurements are the glitter, glamour and glory of his worldly kingdoms. By this means he seeks to counter the kingdom of God and tempt its adherents.

Satan found the key to taking dominion over God's prize creation, mankind, in the temptation in the garden. He has not changed the formula since. Eve was tempted by the lust of her eyes, the lust of her flesh and the pride of life (see 1 John 2:16).

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food [the lust of her flesh], that it was pleasant to the eyes [the lust of her eyes], and a tree desirable to make one wise [the pride of her life], she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Genesis 3:6, NKJV).

Satan also tempted Jesus with food, an offering of power and an appeal to act in pride against the Father. None of these attempts were successful. Anyone who falls for Satan's deception enters into the domain of corrupt principalities and powers and can no longer say, "He (Satan) has no power over me." Instead, these misguided souls find that everything within this worldly kingdom seeks to glorify the prince of this world. He receives worship in the kingdom he has fashioned. Even when he is not directly worshiped, he gains worship indirectly when men worship at the feet of this *kosmos* (world system) that he has created.

In every way Jesus stands in antithesis to the kingdoms of this world. He is essentially different; He is otherworldly, from above rather than beneath. And so it is with His kingdom (See John 8:23). Christ's victory was first and foremost a rejection of the *kosmos* system, a stripping of its ambition and control.

The Heavenly Contrast of God's Kingdom among Us

Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, came preaching and modeling the kingdom of God. From an earthly perspective, His example of leadership was an anomaly, defying comprehension, and was looked upon with disdain as a result. Unlike the kings of the earth, Jesus was lowly and meek (see Matthew 11:29). He did not conquer by might and domination, but instead made himself vulnerable and was ". . . crucified through weakness" (See 2 Corinthians 13:4).

Christ disarmed principalities and powers! He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them! How did he do this? Through the cross!

[Christ] having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. (Colossians 2:14-15, NKJV).

The Greek word translated *disarmed* in the above verse is [554] *apekduomai*. It means to "wholly put off from one's self. . . denoting separation from what is put off. . .wholly to strip off for one's self (for one's own advantage)."

". . . *apekduomai* is used in the middle voice in the NT, Col. 2:15, rv, 'having put off from Himself,'" (W.E.Vine). Christ's victory over the principalities and powers was first

realized on a personal level, beginning with His rejection of the kingdoms of the world. He laid down the very things that other kings and kingdoms seek to elevate and preserve. He laid down His life, and in doing so He conquered. Now he is exalted and seated above principalities and powers at the right hand of God. Christ conquered through weakness, through lowliness, through meekness, through obedience unto death. He conquered Satan, the world and the grave without once lifting the temporal sword. He had no armies, no horses or chariots.

In Roman times, prisoners of war were stripped naked and paraded before the populace behind the conquering general. In the cross Satan and his *kosmos* are made an open spectacle and are fully exposed and wholly striped off from those who are ruled by the kingdom of God.

Paul uses the same word *apekduomai* to describe this stripping.

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off [apekduomia] the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new [man], which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond [nor] free: but Christ [is] all, and in all. (Colossians 3:9-11, NKJV)

Those who will follow the Lamb will continue to make an open spectacle of principalities and powers. They will be tempted, just as their Lord was, to rise up and rule over other men as their king. They also will be tempted with the glitter, glamour and glory of the kingdoms of the prince of this world. They also will resist this demonic hierarchy. These are the true overcomers, for, like their Savior, they too "have overcome the world."

We all must ask ourselves, do I know such a victory? Has the world been stripped from me? Does my life make an open spectacle of the prince of this *kosmos*? When he comes, does he find anything in me?

In Revelation chapter five John saw this conquering Lamb.

But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in

the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. (Revelation 5:5-9, NKJV)

Although the elders of heaven see Jesus as a lion, powerful and fearful, the elder of the church that abides on earth saw Him as a Lamb that had been slain, meek and lowly. What kind of up-side-down Kingdom is it where lambs conquer and lead, where strength is perfected in weakness, meekness, lowliness, and death? (See John 16:33 and Revelation 17:14).

A ruling Lion is not what Jesus wanted John to see. The elders of the church are not to rule over the flock of God like the princes of Ezekiel 22:25, who are described "as lions [who] stalk their prey. They devour innocent people, seizing treasures and extorting wealth." Instead, elders must follow the example of the Lamb. Mark His words well.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45, NKJV)

Those who walk in the footsteps of Christ will be hated by the *kosmos*, just as Christ was and become as lambs that have been slain.

"The world hated them"

The prayer of Jesus recorded in John 17 reveals the hostility between the world and all those whom He has called out of the world.

"I have given them your word. The world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John 17:14)

The disciples had been set aside, sanctified, by the Word that Jesus spoke to them and so the world hated them. Jesus said to his own family in Nazareth who did not believe

in Him, "The world can't hate you, but it hates me, because I testify about it, that its works are evil" (John 7:7). These were His own flesh and blood brothers He was speaking to. Later some of them would believe and to the degree that they had been separated from the world, they also became a testimony against its evil works and were hated accordingly. If the world does not hate us, we should be concerned.

In Luke 6:26 Jesus gave this warning: "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets." If the world loves you, beware, because the world only recognizes and loves its own. If the world and its worldly church love us, it means the prince of this world has come and found kinship in us. John wrote:

"You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." (1 John 4:4-6, NKJV).

A Hatred Unto Death

The world's hatred for Christ was seen very clearly in the events leading up to His death on the cross.

After His mock trial by the high priests, Jesus was led to the Praetorium to be sentenced by Pilate. Pilate asked Christ's accusers, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man weren't an evildoer, we wouldn't have delivered him up to you." (John 18:29-30) This answer did not satisfy Pilate. He turned to Jesus and asked, "What have you done?"

To this question Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not of this world (*kosmos*). If my kingdom were of this world (*kosmos*), then my servants would fight, that I wouldn't be delivered to the Jews. But now my kingdom is not from here." (John 18:36 WEB)

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What was Jesus guilty of? He was guilty of being different and the world hated Him. They hated Him without a cause just as the law had foretold (See John 15: 25, Psalms

35:19, 69: 4, 109:3-5). He was of the kingdom of God, and those who did not embrace it took counsel together against God's anointed. Christ's kingdom is not OF or FROM this *kosmos*, promoted militaristically by violent people. The servants of the kings of this world take up arms for their kings, but this is not the way of Jesus' kingdom.

In saying that His kingdom was NOT of this world, Christ implied that His accusers were of the world system and its prince. They were the religious leaders of Judaism, a system of religion that had apostatized and taken on the character of the prince of this world. In every sense of the word, religion is Satan's brainchild. A father is someone who begets and nurtures. In a systematic sense, a father is anyone who creates, originates, and founds something. When Jesus said to the Pharisees "you are of your father the devil," He was saying that Satan was the begetter of their power base. Christ's words and life were a constant witness against them. This explains the underlying enmity between religion and Christ today. Those who are of the kingdom of God have been persecuted for the last 2000 years, mostly by organized religions of men. This persecution continues to this day. Religion is of the *kosmos* system and religious people have a perfect hatred for the children of the kingdom of God who walk in the Spirit of Christ.

Religion and the *kosmos*

Another facet of the *kosmos* system is religion. By definition it is a system that concerns itself with form, ceremony rite and ritual, rather than life. ["Holding a form of godliness but having denied the power thereof"](#) (2 Timothy 3:5). We find this clearly borne out in the writings of Paul, who referred to the religion of his fathers as "the elements of the world" (*kosmos*), and to all who ascribe to it as "children. . .in bondage, under guardians and stewards" (see Galatians 4:1-3).

The Galatian believers were turning back to the old religious order. Paul asked them, ["Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? How can you want to be enslaved to them again?"](#) (Galatians 4:9 RSV)

Paul summed up, ["May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world \(*kosmos*\) has been crucified to me, and I to the world"](#) (Galatians 6:14).

If you read this verse in context you will find that it is sandwiched between two verses dealing with the old religious observances of circumcision and keeping the law. Although Judaism and the law originated with God, in the hands of the enemy it was perverted and distracted mankind from God's eternal purpose. This old religious system was abolished in Christ and is now of the *kosmos*, weak and beggarly. Paul warned that returning to the old religious system is rejecting the cross and embracing the world.

Clearly much of the Christian system today has sunk to the level of mere religion, no longer producing the fruit of living union with Christ. Religious man's chief weakness is his singular drive to impose the earthly upon the heavenly. He presumes to advance the kingdom of heaven or the rule of heaven by outer, earthly methods. He mistakes uniformity for unity, and ambitiously seeks to reach this lofty state of divine concord by imposing a rigid system of conformity upon the people of God. This is serious business, because it means rejecting the headship of Christ.

"As (praying other) men's prayers are a disease of the will, so are their creeds a disease of the intellect. They say with those foolish Israelites, 'Let not God speak to us, lest we die. Speak thou, speak any man with us, and we will obey.' Everywhere I am hindered of meeting God in my brother, because he has shut his own temple doors, and recites fables merely of his brother's, or his brother's brother's God." (Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self Reliance*)

The Religious *Kosmos* or The Headship of Christ

Paul wrote to the Colossian believers regarding those who were attempting to lead them back into bondage to the elemental spirits of the world,

". . .and not holding firmly to the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and ligaments, grows with God's growth. If you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to ordinances, "Don't handle, nor taste, nor touch" (all of which perish with use), according to the precepts and doctrines of men? Which things indeed appear like wisdom in self-imposed worship, and humility, and severity to the body; but aren't of any value against the indulgence of the flesh." (Colossians 2:19-23 RSV)

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In this passage Paul gives us a classic example of the religious *kosmos* that promotes external religious disciplines in hopes of keeping the flesh in check, but to no avail. In contrast to this self-imposed worship, Paul sets forth the headship of Christ. He accused those who promoted touch not, taste not, handle not religion of refusing to hold firmly to the Head. In short, any religious institution that is not supplied and knit together by the HEAD, but instead tries to unite around some other center or source, cannot rightly be called Christian. If Christ is not the Guiding Agent, or Head of a body, it is not HIS body. It is a headless cadaver. We know this sounds rather narrow but it is true nonetheless. We are convinced that the reason so many gatherings fail is because they do not hold fast to ". . .the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increases with the increase of God" (Colossians 2:19). No Head means no ministry, no knitting together, and definitely no increase.

One Head or Many Heads?

Jesus told John that he was being shown "things that must shortly take place" (Revelation 1:1). As we look at this revelation of things which have been unfolding, we notice a lot of symbolism. One of the symbols used there is the head or heads. We start out reading about the seven candlesticks, the seven spirits and the seven churches of Asia Jesus is walking among and ministering to as their Head. They seem to be progressively declining in their holiness and loyalty to Christ as we read down the list (see Revelation chapters 2 and 3). Jesus is showing each of them what they have been doing right and what was in error. Mind you, this was still in the first century, and John was still alive. The great falling away (apostasy) had already begun.

In these three chapters we see only one Head, Jesus, walking among His church. By the end of this portion of scripture we see Jesus locked outside the door of the church, knocking, waiting to be let in. As the next chapter begins, He is seen behind an open door in the heavens (see Revelation 3:20 to 4:1).

By chapter twelve we see a red dragon with seven heads and a woman giving birth to a mature child (man child). This dragon is poised to eat the child as it is born and the woman is offering no resistance and making no attempt to protect the child. We often see this in certain churches today. Converts are born into something that kills the God-given life in them and changed into the image of something other than Christ. The

same thing was true among the Jewish leaders of 2000 years ago. Jesus observed of them, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves."

Further in chapter twelve of Revelation we see that this man-child is caught up unto God in heaven and the woman runs off into the wilderness. Next in Revelation 17 we read, "So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast [which was] full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns." We believe that John is being shown a progressive revelation in this book. The church, or woman, is being gradually seduced and changed into something that no longer rests in Christ, but rather rides around on a beast out of hell with seven heads.

Throughout the scripture, the word head depicts rulers, kings or leadership. Some teachers deduce that the church is raptured out of the earth by chapter four of this book because there is no mention of it again. Although there is no mention of the church as a body with only ONE Head, it is very much alive and shown in its fallen state, associating with MANY HEADS. We believe John is seeing the future state of the fallen church with its multiple heads and what we now know as denominationalism.

Multiple heads, but on one beast! It is all about control, not by God, but by the antichrist spirit. Where the antichrist spirit is in control, the Holy Spirit is not. In fact, He will not even be found there! Notice in Revelation eighteen the following warning is given:

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. (Revelation 18:4, NKJV).

This same woman who rides the seven-headed beast was drunk upon the blood of all the saints of God (see Revelation 17:6 and 18:4). She has been bleeding them for her own pleasure, drunk on power, and yet they abide in her

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Finally, the people of God get the message, for later in Revelation eighteen we read of this Great Whore, "The light of a lamp (same Greek word as lampstand in Revelation

2:5) shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. . ."(Revelation 18:23, NKJV). Now the judgment of God is seen on her and her seven-headed monster.

The Mark of the Beast

One of the greatest examples in the scriptures of antichrist control and the absence of the headship of Christ is in the passage that speaks of "the mark of the beast."

And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six. (Revelation 13:15-18, KJV).

It is all about control. You worship the image of the beast or you die. You take his mark in your right hand and in your forehead or you cannot buy or sell. There has been a lot of speculation about just who this beast is. We have all heard Bible scholars say that it was the Pope, Adolph Hitler or even Henry Kissinger. They all have their interpretations of why this is. Notice that in verse eighteen we read, "Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast. . ."

One time I (Michael) was asking the Lord about this mark, because there are so many contrary teachings about it. The Lord told me to read this sentence again.

So I did and then He said, "Count the number of his name."

So I did. "One six, two sixes, three sixes."

Then He said, "What does three stand for?"

I said, "The three persons in the Godhead. It's your number, Lord."

Then He said, "What does six stand for?"

I said, "Six stands for man in his fallen state. He was created on the sixth day and has not yet entered into your rest of the seventh day."

He said, "Good, put it together." Then the lights came on.

The number of the beast is a symbol of ultimate humanism, man showing himself to be God. "It is the number of a man" standing in the place of God, in league with the antichrist spirit in the son of perdition. He "opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." Where does the New Testament say that the temple of God should be? In the hearts of men. We are living stones being built into a temple fit for His habitation (see 2 Peter 2:4-6).

Whether there will actually be a physical brand on these men or whether the mark is in their foreheads--their mind-sets--and in their hands--their carnal works--either way these have taken the mark of the beast (see 2 Thessalonians 2:1-13, KJV).

One more thing that should be noted about this mark is that it involves merchandising. You cannot buy or sell without it. Yet this scarlet woman in chapters 17 to 19 is doing much marketing and it is so much a part of her that the merchants of the world mourn and wail over her demise. What was her form of trade?

"And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men." (Revelation 18:11-13, NKJV).

Yes, it is all about *control!* She not only bleeds His people, but makes merchandise of them.

And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old

world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.) (2 Peter 2:3-8, KJV).

Be of good cheer dear saints of God. Remember that,

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations [Greek *peirasmos* - an experiment, trial, proving], and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished. (2 Peter 2:9, KJV).

Once you are outside the camp, whether it be the Pentecostal camp, the Methodist camp, or the Baptist camp, etc. (see Hebrews 13:12-14), it all becomes so easy to see. The scriptures all fit together like a huge mosaic from the first word in Genesis to the last one in Revelation. Trying to see it and make sense of it in the context of the *kosmos* systems of men is like the child who is using a hammer to make the puzzle fit together. A child still inside its mother's womb can't begin to imagine what its mother looks like or see the kingdom into which it is being born.

Why Just One Head?

Let us consider for a moment what it means to hold fast to the ONE Head. Any body that is disconnected from its head is dead. The body that does not respond to the impulses of the head is paralyzed. These two conditions describe the state of the church today. Satan comes to rob, kill and destroy. He seeks to separate us from our Head, both physically and spiritually. What function does the head perform? The head is the center of thought, sight, discernment, and communication. It is the center of wisdom, vision, security and communication.

Once, while talking to an old friend about the body of Christ (Head plus body), the subject of where the fivefold ministry fits into the body-scheme arose. The scriptures make it clear there is only one Head. So where do these intermediate hierarchical ministries fit? To my (George's) surprise my friend said, "They are the neck which turns the Head. The dictates of the Head are passed on to the body through them." Although it may sound logical, this theory is not supported by scientific fact. The head does not

say to the neck, "Tell the arm to lift the hand so it can extend the index finger to scratch that itch behind my ear." The neck has nothing to do with it whatsoever. The truth is that the brain communicates directly to each body part through the peripheral nervous system without the aid of intervening agencies. The nervous system controls the various organs of the body directly. The brain also receives information from many organs of the body and sends signals to these organs to maintain proper functioning.

The head controls all the body's parts instantly and without intermediary help. The head does not filter its impulses down through a diminishing chain-of-command. The essential and determining difference between the body of Christ (Head plus body) and the religious *kosmos* is the immediate and direct control of the HEAD over every member of the body. As Paul put it, "[For \[there is\] one God and one Mediator between God and men, \[the\] Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.](#)" (I Timothy 2:5-6a, NKJV).

We have attended several small gatherings where the sweet Spirit of Christ was prevalent at first. He was knitting together and nourishing His body. The increase was from God. It is the custom of man to despise things that are not big in an outward and worldly way, and inevitably, someone set his mind to the task of church growth. Hoping to grow some large work in his own name and image, he led the group away captive after the commandments and doctrines of men. Soon the supply of the Head was cut off and replaced by the order of men. Multiple heads soon emerge and what was once a perfect body in the sight of God becomes a mythical Hydra with multiple heads. Each time one head is cut off; two take its place, just like the growth of denominationalism.

Carnal Busyness or Simple Abiding in Him?

Whatever is not knit together and orchestrated by the Head, in whom all things consist, is not the Ekklesia. Many people attempt to knit an assembly together by organization, and others by doctrine. Some are knit together around a charismatic leader. Others are knit together by some special, elitist identifying emphasis that has only an appearance of wisdom

In these days of religious complexity, simplicity in Christ is rarely seen. The programs and promotional methods of the *kosmos* system have led today's institutionalized

churches to a state of busyness, shallowness and spiritual bankruptcy. Busyness is not an indicator of spiritual life. In the days of Noah, the people were busy buying, selling, planting and building, but that did not make them spiritual (see Luke 17:26-30). There is only one remedy, and that is the cross of Christ, "whereby the world (religious or otherwise) is crucified unto me and I unto the world." Yes! Through the cross we are crucified to the rudiments of the world (religion) (Galatians 6:14). Only when the cross has done its work can we come together around the Head. Only then are we broken of our own strength and ingenuity can there be any sense of unity in His body. Thank God! Where only two or three crucified ones gather in His name, He is there! Those who gather in His name, in His character, will know the growth of God.

We are convinced that most religious activities are done to compensate for the lack of the Divine supply. Certain missionaries of old sought to "civilize the heathen" by conforming them to the customs of their own western cultures. Though they learned how to sit at table and which spoon and fork to use for each course, in their hearts these converts still wanted to eat with their hands. Regardless of the outer disciplines, their natures remained unchanged.

This is also the case with today's accountability groups that try to inspire obedience by holding the participants accountable for their performance during the previous week. Knowing they will have to give an account for their conduct drives them to try harder. We personally know individuals who attended these meetings regularly. One was a womanizer and adulterer and remains so unto this day. Why? Only the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus can raise us above our natural failings. Only the Spirit of God can subdue the sinful deeds of the body (See Romans 8:13-14). Anything else is mere worship of your own willpower, i. e., "will worship" (see Colossians. 2:23, KJV).

The general proclivity of the religious system (*kosmos*) is away from the supply of the Head, away from God's growth and toward the traditions of men, after the principles of the world. "We don't smoke, and we don't chew, and we don't go with the girls that do!" Although this system may have the appearance of wisdom, it is powerless against the indulgences of the flesh because it is self-worship that denies the supply of the Head. This wisdom is worldly, finding its strength and supply in the flesh.

The world embraces its own, and this beggarly brand of Christianity is loved by the world because it is of the same ilk. These disciplines are embraced by all the worlds'

religions. Some don't eat pork, but do eat beef; others are vegetarians. Some forbid marrying; others have multiple wives. Some beat their bodies, while others indulge in all the worlds' comforts, preaching worldly prosperity.

Trying to control the fleshly nature of man by the power of the flesh is like the woman who did not like her kitchen windows being steamed-up by her pressure-cooker venting as she cooked ham hocks and beans. She solved the problem by plugging the vent! It worked for a season and the windows cleared, but finally that fleshpot blew and the ham hocks and beans were made fully manifest when the windows blew out. Today we see the results of such an explosion in the churches. Many people are walking around with great scars, caused by a foolish cook in control of the kitchen.

The flesh will always seek to manifest. You can cover it up as you will, but in a weak moment it will invariably show its strength. God has one plan for the flesh and its *kosmos* system, and that is death, not some religious straightjacket. Paul wrote:

"Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead..." (2 Corinthians 1:9)

The word translated *sentence*, *apokrima*, should have been translated *answer*. The answer to the problem of trusting in our flesh is death, the death of the cross working in each of us.

Those who are called out of the world by the sanctifying work of Christ are essentially different, and so the world hates them just as it hated Jesus. Let us never forget that it was the religious *kosmos* that betrayed Christ unto death. They were religious voices that cried, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" The religious *kosmos* still hates and crucifies Christ afresh as it holds to a form of religion while denying the power His death has purchased for the body to abide in.

Consider these words of Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt.

"We have sought to explain how Christendom is, so to speak, a secondary world in which Christ is honored as God--although only in the way the world speaks of God. Thus, as the world speaks of God without becoming godly, so the secondary world of Christendom speaks of Christ without following him." (*Thy Kingdom Come*)

A New Day Has Come!

The prophet Jeremiah prophesied of a great shift in God's dealings with mankind.

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jeremiah 31:31-34 (RSV)

The only form of control acceptable in God's kingdom is not really control at all, but the leading of His Spirit. The Spirit leads us by our voluntary yielding of ourselves to Him (see Romans 6:13 and 19). He does this by giving us a new motivator, a new heart that can hear His voice (see Ezekiel 36:26). "The Kingdom of God is within you," Jesus said. The influence and reign of God is in the heart. "Christ in you is the hope of glory." In His high priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus sets forth this new reality. "I in them, and you in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world [*kosmos*] may know that you sent me, and loved them, even as you loved me" (John 17:23).

The external law is not for righteous men who have received the Spirit of God's Son and have truth in the inward parts. It is "for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers. . ." (1 Timothy 1:9 RSV). In short, the law is for those who do not have the kingdom of God within them, who have no inner Spirit control, whose fleshly appetites go unchecked and must be reined in and subdued by the external yokes or rules of men.

Those who walk by the law of the Spirit within will only find themselves in conflict with the external legal systems and laws of men (religious or otherwise) when those laws go against the higher order of God. The Jews were constantly accusing Jesus and His disciples of breaking their laws, yet He was without sin. The problem was not in Christ,

the spotless Lamb, but with the legalistic systems of men that were more in tune with the *kosmos* of the Wicked One than the heavenly kingdom of God. As Paul put it,

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23, NKJV).

The Yoke of Love Vs. The Yoke of Bondage

A yoke is an external device of control, used on dumb animals to force them to do what they normally would not do. Jesus invited the weary and heavy laden to come unto him and find rest, saying, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (see Matthew 11:30).

The apostle Paul used the term *yoke* in a different sense, to describe religion as an apparatus of external control and bondage. Paul referred to Judaism, with its emphasis on adherence to the law, as a yoke of bondage (see Galatians 5:1). All forms of outer control that are not the easy and light burden of Christ are instruments of bondage. If taken to its logical conclusion, the religious and nearly godless notion that the impetus for change is external rather than internal and that things will go awry without such external controls legitimizes and excuses even the most meddlesome busybody or tyrant. Anyone who promotes this kind of bondage does not accurately value the kingdom of God within believers. If they truly believed in the sovereignty of God's Spirit they would not treat God's children like babies, needing constant supervision and restraint.

Placing outer control on God's people is a violation of their new natures, and discounts God's work within them. There is only one hope for change and that is "Christ in you the hope of glory." If God is not working in us, "both to will and to do of His good pleasure," there is no hope of change and no hope of glory. The freedom of the Spirit is dependent on the unencumbered rule of the Spirit. Paul wrote, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). From beginning to end, the Christian life is in the Spirit. We were born anew by God's Spirit. His Spirit has given us life! Once born of the Spirit, we are called to walk in the Spirit and that requires the unencumbered freedom to follow Him.

If we are yoked to the expectations and manipulations of men we can never be fully led by the Spirit. External control is rooted in the fear of man, which is a snare, i. e., bondage. If we "obey the Lord" because we fear man, are we truly obeying the Lord?

Fear-based obedience is self-serving and self-preserving in nature, done to avoid unpleasant or embarrassing consequences. If the fear or reverence of man is our motivation, we are certainly not serving God, nor are we serving man. We are serving ourselves. A wife who is married to an austere and demanding husband often serves out of fear, fear of the consequences of not serving. She serves to avoid unpleasantness. She wants to make him happy so he won't make her miserable. Is that a healthy relationship? When we serve others because we love them, we truly serve them. But when we serve others because we fear what they might say, think or do, we are serving ourselves.

Paul had this to say about the difference.

"For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? For if I were still pleasing men, I wouldn't be a servant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10 WEB)

When we impose external control on our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are working against God's rule in their lives. By drawing their attention away from the kingdom to a system of accountability and rules--a system of fear--where their focus is outward rather than on the inner Christ, we are leading them away captive, making them accountable to us. Christians will focus on the one(s) they are accountable to, be it God or man. God wants our eyes to be constantly on Him. He wants us to serve Him out of reverence and love, directly accountable to him. Anyone who yields obedience in fear, due to the external expectations, manipulation and pressure of men, cannot possibly yield and obey through love. Fear of man has torment. Such people are tormented into compliance, afraid of disgrace or punishment. We must be free before our service will ever mean anything.

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more." (1 Corinthians 9:19 RSV)

We must be free from all men if we are to serve them in the love of God. Furthermore, we must set anyone held in the oppressive grasp of our expectations at liberty. The will must be free before love can be expressed. Even God himself will not violate the wills

of men; He is set to win them by love. Forced submission is not submission but subjugation.

Show us one time, while Jesus walked upon the earth, where He insisted that anyone submit to Him. You will find many times where people did submit because He won them by His love. Those who bow as servants of fear cower in subjugation. But those who bow in reciprocating love do so out of respect and gratitude, as sons.

Seeking the Kingdom or the Church

[But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well. \(Matthew 6:33 WEB\)](#)

Jesus instructed His disciples to seek the kingdom of God above all else. Nowhere did He instruct them to seek the church, or even a perfect expression of the church. This may sound shocking considering that the central focus of western Christianity is an institution called the church. Over the centuries the pursuit of the ideal church or an inordinate devotion to the church system has been mistaken for the pursuit of God. The fruit of this enterprise has resulted in the creation of a religious system that is the handiwork of men and not the workmanship of God. But more, these religious institutions are ordered after the manner of the kingdoms of the prince of this world. We cannot find any scripture to justify the current inordinate preoccupation with the church, church growth, church planting, etc. The true church is a byproduct, a result that occurs when God's people seek His kingdom as individuals. A perversion results when all our energies go into seeking the church, making the by-product the supreme goal. The church systems of our day are the fruit of this imbalance.

Is the church important to God? Yes! Is it central to His purposes? A resounding yes! Is the church to be our focus? NO! The building of the church is Christ's responsibility, NOT ours. We are called to seek the kingdom of God, making Christ the king of our lives, not seek the church.

Contrary to popular opinion, the church is not the kingdom of God. The church (ekklesia) is the people of God. The kingdom existed long before the New Testament assembly. The kingdom was given to Israel but was taken away and given to a "nation" that would bring forth the fruit of it (Matthew 21:43).

Jesus taught His disciples that the kingdom would come in a dimension that, before that time, had only existed in heaven. His will could only be accomplished by His Spirit that was poured out at Pentecost. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:9-10 NRSV) This model prayer clearly reveals God's kingdom priorities.

It is really a matter of cause and effect. First the cause - God's kingdom and His will-- then the effect--a glorious church without spot or wrinkle. Many believers have placed the cart before the horse, prioritizing the effect over the cause. This obsession is fueled by the misguided belief that if we just get the church pattern right then the church will experience body life and all our woes will be over. Consequently, the correct pattern becomes the supreme goal, the key to life as it were. Not realizing that they are bypassing the cause and trying to manufacture the effect, they produce what Alan Richardson called "a third kingdom," neither fully of the Kingdom of God nor of the world. It is a mixture, somewhere between--a third kingdom.

The kingdom is God's first priority. "But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33-WEB). We will never see a pure expression of the ekklesia until God's children seek first His kingdom, not the church

God's will cannot be done unless His kingdom and power come first. First the kingdom, then God's will. Religion is a classic example of the cart trying to pull the horse. Religion is man's attempt to do the will of God without the power of God. The kingdom comes in power. God's will must be accomplished in the individual believer before His kingdom and will can be known corporately in the body of Christ. Our part is to seek the kingdom; the rest is up to Him. He will build the church! He will give the increase.

Regardless of its noble appearance, man's preoccupation with building a pure expression of the church is also religion. God will not commission us nor enable us to usurp the work and purview of Christ. We are to be kingdom seekers, not church builders. And if we seek the kingdom the rest will fall into place. All these other things will be given.

Perhaps you are asking, but didn't Paul and the other apostles focus on the church? Weren't they "church planters"? The early believers were Christocentric; centered on Christ, not churchocentric.

Paul planted (see 1 Corinthians 3:6), but was it churches or individuals one at a time in Christ? We believe the latter. When Paul was not preaching the gospel to the lost he was ". . .confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many afflictions we must enter into the Kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22) Paul planted Christ in the hearts of men and women wherever he traveled, and Jesus built His church. That is why each area took on a different flavor in the freedom of the Spirit that Paul encouraged them to walk in. He refused to clone himself or the church in Antioch that he came from in the churches in each locale, but instead was passionate that Christ should be formed in them (Galatians 4:19). As Paul put it,

Who then is Paul, and who [is] Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, [you are] God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come--all are yours. And you [are] Christ's and Christ [is] God's. (1 Corinthians 3:5-11, 21-23)

Yes, we who have been planted in Christ, upon the One and only True Foundation, are Christ's and ALL things are ours in Him. HE is our source, not mere men. The Spirit is sent to lead us into all Truth. That TRUTH is Christ! He is the way, the TRUTH and the life. The Holy Spirit is sent to glorify Christ, not to teach ecclesiology (the study of the church). Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, "He will glorify me, for he will take from what is mine, and will declare it to you." (John 16:14 WEB) The Holy Spirit will never center us on the church, but on Christ the King and His Kingdom.

A Lesson from Life

We recently attended a meeting that was geared toward house church theology and methodology. The leader told us that house church was the new wineskin, the vessel into which the new wine of God's Spirit would be poured. It did not take us long to realize that the center of the meeting was not Christ but a methodology, not the new wine but the new wineskin. The hope for the future was not Christ but the home church movement. The means God would use to change the world was not His Son, but home meetings.

Home meetings are not the problem. In fact, we love to gather with the saints in their homes. The problem is that an inordinate preoccupation with house church theology has led to the creation of a non-institutional institution that is in danger of becoming an entity unto itself, having a life of its own, separate from the Head. So often the institutions of men become something separate and distinct from what God had intended--a third kingdom. The house-church movement has become like an obsessive and self-absorbed wife spending all her time speaking of herself, defining herself, and beholding herself in a mirror while the lover of her soul goes ignored.

The focus has shifted from Christ the King and His kingdom to the way we do church. What makes us think that the way God moved 2000 years ago is the same way He moves today? Did the early Church believe that the old temple worship system of Solomon's day was the true form for them to copy? Not at all! They looked to the Spirit to lead them into all truth. The things God did in the history of Israel were types and shadows of what God was doing among them.

Where in the scripture are we told to "do church"? Doesn't this imply that we are in control of the doing, the determining, the shaping and the ordering? The slogan of one institutional church is "Doing church as a team." Do we really do church? Are we capable of such a thing? Can you think of one biblical instance where anyone was exhorted to do church? When we DO something don't we exercise restraining or directing influence over it? Can we really use our carnal minds to conceive of and do what Jesus would do, WWJD?

The true *ekklesia* is not a humanly controlled experiment but a divine organism. Here is where the issue of the Kingdom arises. Whatever is not under the direct rule of The King is not of the kingdom. It is really a matter of who is in control. In 1 Corinthians

chapters 12 and 14 we read of the church that is "done" by Christ, where "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man" for the common good (see 1 Corinthians 12:7). The Spirit directs and ministers through each one individually as he chooses (see 1 Corinthians 12:11). We are a body, in which God sets and energizes the members as it pleases Him (see 1 Corinthians 12:18). It is God who tempers the body together (see 1 Corinthians 12:24). It is God who sets the ministry gifts in the body (see 1 Corinthians 12:28). All we DO is yield and respond. God does church! Remember that the kingdom of God IS the rule of God.

We can judge whether a thing is Christian or not by asking ourselves a few searching questions. What does it do with Jesus? Is He central? Is He the single focus? Is He the source, the life and the hope? Is it of Him, through Him and unto Him? Is He all and in all or is He just a part, an errand boy, standing outside the door waiting to be invited in?

The time comes to each one who follows the Spirit to see the idolatry of the *kosmos* systems and seek first the kingdom of God. If we seek church, we will lose the Kingdom. We're not talking here about losing our inheritance in eternity, but the loss of the spiritual dynamic and reality that are present wherever God rules. "Your kingdom come, your will be done" Why? For His is "the kingdom, the power and the glory." It is not about increasing our control but about laying all rule and dominion at Christ's feet. Even Christ, who has been given a name above every name, when all things have been subjected to him, ["will also himself be subjected to him who subjected all things to him, that God may be all in all"](#) (1 Corinthians 15:28).

From a human perspective, the kingdom of God is about giving up power and control, decreasing not increasing. Jesus never called anyone to lead and take dominion. He called everyone to follow. Imagine a church and a world in which everyone is a follower of Christ. He did not say, "Follow me and I will make you leaders of men," but "fishers of men." It is in following the Lamb that we lead. We are called to fix our eyes on the Shepherd, not His sheep.

We do not wish to give the impression that Satan is all-powerful or leave our focus upon his global deception. We do want to encourage you to seek the kingdom of God and to encourage others to do the same. We prayerfully ask the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to open all our eyes to see, with ever increasing clarity, both the

kingdom of God and Satan's counterfeit, so we can fully embrace the one and effectively shun the other.

May God reveal to us and manifest in us the victory of The Lamb that we, "the Lamb's wife" might continue to make an open show of principalities and powers, that the ultimate victory over the *kosmos* system might be fully realized. The day is coming when the Kingdom of God will prevail over all the kingdoms of the prince of this world. God will prevail and bring forth His kingdom.

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15, NKJV).

LORD hasten the day! Amen.