

The Gospel Standard



“Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people,” Isa. 62:10

Articles In The January/February, 2013 Issue

Editorial-----	2
Church Religion or Kingdom Rule -----	5
Consent, or Seek? -----	14
The Big Problem -----	19
The Parting Word -----	20

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Editorial

This issue is about seeking first the kingdom of God. What is said in this issue shall be lost on many ears. However, many shall rejoice in the good news of the kingdom. Seeking first has three basic essentials. To seek means first to look for diligently; to search for; to pursue after. First has to do with priority; the rate of importance one has attached to something. First has to do with the place one has assigned to the importance of something. The kingdom of God has to do with the rule of God in the heart. It matters not what anyone says, he who defines kingdom in any way except “the rule of God in the heart,” or a consequential definition has mis-defined the kingdom of God. This issue shall deal primarily with the practical matters relative to seeking first the kingdom of God.

I know of no subject about which more false information and misguided conclusions have been advanced, than has the subject of the kingdom of God. There are those who believe and teach that the kingdom of God is still out yonder in the future and is to come. Some think that the kingdom began in the days of Abraham. There are those who believe that the kingdom of God was formed on the day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. I was once in that number. Then there are those of us who believe that the kingdom of God is eternal, and that its nature will not allow any other conclusion than that it has always existed just as God is eternal and IS. In this connection, the word “come” is vastly misused and misunderstood. If something is going to come, then it must already exist. The word come may be modified to mean something else, but with nothing to modify it, just choose any of its more than seventy definitions, and you must have something already existing to fulfill the meaning of the word.

As a result of misunderstanding the kingdom, its nature and its function, then many false conclusions are drawn from passages dealing with the kingdom of God. Different things are called the kingdom. I have a book in which a Premillennialist (one who believes there shall be a golden age/millennium on earth followed by the establishment of the kingdom on earth) teaches that the

church is used by God to prepare for a fuller awareness and enjoyment of the kingdom which is yet to come. That is just a sophisticated way of saying that God substituted the church for the kingdom which he intended to establish on earth but the Jews killed the Christ and prevented that fulfillment. This would lead to the conclusion, either that God lied in his prophecies of the exaltation of his eternal kingdom, or else he did not know what was going to happen and at the last moment substituted the church for the kingdom. Neither conclusion is flattering to God.

The kingdom is on earth in that the rule of God exists in the heart of man. So long as it has ruled in the hearts of men and women, it has existed on earth. It has existed eternally in heaven in that the will of God has always been the primary and ruling will of the universe. It ruled the Eternal Word and the Holy Spirit. It ruled angels when they were created. And when God created man, he created one with the freedom of will just as God has a free will to choose and execute his choices. When men choose to allow God to rule their heart, the kingdom of God is within them, Luke 17:20-21. But this issue is neither about what, nor when the kingdom came, but rather about the practical matter of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Regardless of the understanding or misunderstanding about what and where the kingdom is, if we fail in this practical matter of placing it first in our priorities, then we have failed to seek and to please God. We must understand and come to grips with this particular regarding the kingdom.

It is our observation and sad conclusion that the vast majority of religious people whom we know live in a manner, and manifest a disposition which is far from seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Whether it is in ignorance, or in rebellion we do not at this moment judge. We believe that in some cases it is probably ignorance and a dependence upon human traditionalism, while in other instances it is likely rebellion against God himself. God knows and our knowledge in individual cases neither hinders nor makes the case of the subject of this issue. That laid aside, we shall devote our attention to the facts as they are demonstrated in the lives of the multitudes in the religious world.

In using the term, religious world, we include all religious groups. We shall deal in this issue only with those who profess to believe that Jesus is the Christ of God. After all, he is the one born to be king over all the world. If one rejects that fact, then that one is outside the scope of this subject. In including all who profess to believe that Jesus is the Christ of God we include all churches, cults, and sects which believe that. This should ease the mind about whom we include and shall discuss. In case any should argue that our experience is too limited to include the majority, we reply that the news media reports daily on religious activities of religion and those reports coupled with what we have observed, and have heard from multiple competent, and true witnesses is sufficient to give this issue credibility.

What I shall now say is intended only to make my point for the necessity of a practical approach to this subject. When my wife and I moved to this county (McNairy County, TN) in 2003, we came because we thought we had several friends here and could continue the work we were doing and also do some additional good here. Soon after we were here I observed announcements and information from many, that children much too young to be married were frequently having babies. This in itself was discouraging. However, it was soon obvious that many parents were encouraging and enabling their children in that, by making it possible for young people to live together without marriage. That, and in many other ways, adults claiming to be God's children were encouraging and enabling young people to commit fornication without feeling guilty. I was told by many in other parts of the country that this was a fairly common thing in their part of the world. We expect those who reject God and Christ to live any way they please and think nothing of it. But it is more than shocking to observe those who profess to be followers of Christ; those who often are in prominent places of leadership in their religious communities, to be involved in these practices. It flies in the face of the God and the Savior whom they profess to believe in. It is diametrically contradictory to the kingdom of God.

We are not saying that a child of God can not sin, or will not sin. We are saying that a faithful child of God will not continue in the

practice of sin. We are saying that the kingdom of God within one does not permit the practice of continuing in sin. This point is critical to understanding what we shall say in this issue about seeking first the kingdom of God. We are not looking for witch doctors. We are trying to discourage the use of witch doctors who preach that only a misunderstood, and misapplied grace and a false sentiment some call love is sufficient to guide one in pleasing God. The point we wish to make is a simple point.

The only way to an acceptable life of conduct, belief and disposition is for one to really seek, find, and apply the kingdom of God within the heart. The only way to do this is to lay the ruling factor of God's written word in the deepest recesses of the heart to guide and protect one. David said that he did this to prevent him from sinning against God, Psalm 119:11. Does anyone have anything to rest his claim on which contradicts this, that he can prove is better? If so, let him step forth and proclaim it. Please read the following articles with these thoughts in mind.

Do We Desire Church Religion or the Rule of God's Kingdom?

Melvin Elliott

We begin this article by making it clear that it has always been the purpose of God to establish his rule in the hearts of men and that his rule will stand. Further, refusing to live by it brings disaster. Space forces us to trace these facts with a few verses but we challenge you to read the many verses to this end. We read, Deuteronomy 8:2: "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, *and* to prove thee, to know what *was* in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no." Proverbs 19:21; "*There are* many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."

Some of the kings of Judah refused to follow God's word given through the prophets but God's counsel always stood and his promises came to pass. This is brought into focus during the reign of Zedekiah in II Chronicles 36:12; "And he did *that which was*

evil in the sight of the Lord his God, *and* humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet *speaking* from the mouth of the Lord.” Jeremiah spoke God’s words but Zedekiah refused to follow God’s counsel; his rule given through the prophet. According to Jeremiah 18:1-12; the people also refused to follow God’s rule and were guilty of sin. As they refused to follow God’s word, they were not his kingdom in heart and so ceased to be his people.

God speaks to us through his apostles and gives us assurance that they speak his word. He does this in that he required at least two witnesses to the truthfulness of any proposition. Deuteronomy 19:15; “One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.” Jesus applied this rule in the New Testament. In Matthew 18:19-20; “Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” For most of my life, I have heard this explained that if only two or three gathered for worship, God would be with them. Although that may be true, it is a total misapplication of these passages. This passage discusses truth, authority, rule and how we can know whether it is from God or not. This was spoken in reference to the apostles that the unity of their teaching would confirm it is God’s rule. Verse 18 teaches that when two or three apostles are agreed, that it is proof of heavens rule. Paul said; “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” (I Corinthians 14:37) Neither you nor I, nor any other person/s have anything to do with the origination of truth. That is God’s exclusive role and we must submit to it.

Without this understanding we miss the main point. Jesus was in the midst or middle of the apostles, showing his approval that they were speaking his words. He confirms this in Matthew 19:28; “And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones,

judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Thrones are seats of authority and judging can be either to approve or condemn. This is explained in John 20:23; “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained.”

How did they remit or retain the sins of the people? It is clear in the scriptures that it was dependant on how people responded to the rule of God that they preached. In Acts 13:46; “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.” Their sins were retained because they put (literally to thrust or push away) the sayings of God from them. It was their action that put God’s rule or God’s kingdom out of their life. This is in the middle voice showing it was their rebellious actions toward the word of God. Luke said they “...[J]udge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life...” Yourselves is a reflexive pronoun showing that the subject acts upon or for itself referring the action of the verb upon self. Thus their own actions of refusing to receive God’s word, judged them unworthy of everlasting life, putting themselves outside the benefits of the kingdom of God.

This is further confirmed by the opposite actions of the Gentiles. In Acts 13:48; “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” So the Gentiles on the contrary rejoiced that they were privileged to hear the word of God. Further, they glorified, honored and praised, the word of God, i.e., they accepted the words of Paul to be the word of God and in so doing they honored God. As the word ordained has gathered a lot of religious baggage that it did not have in 1611, we must look at its original usage. The term is used of military positions. The original word meant: “To put in order, arrange, make ready, prepare.” Also, “To arrange in rows or ranks, or other regular order; esp. to draw up in order of battle; to set in array; to array, marshal, order. Obs.” “To set in proper order or position; to arrange; to keep in due order; to regulate, govern, direct, manage, conduct. Obs.”

(Oxford English Dictionary) Obsolete means this was the old or original meaning of the word at the time the King James was translated. The same word is translated “addicted” in the King James translation and “set themselves” in the American Standard Version of 1901.

It is interesting to note that Berry’s literal translation of the Greek reads thusly: “And hearing [it] the Gentiles rejoiced, and glorified the word of the Lord, and believed as many as were appointed to life eternal.” So the Gentiles by believing the word of the Lord honored and glorified God in that they addicted themselves to it and thereby set themselves in order to be governed by the word of God. So they set themselves in step with the rule of God. God has appointed all who do so to eternal life. Calvin’s Unconditional Election, God’s arbitrary for unknown reasons, choosing some to be saved and passing over others, is not in this verse or in any verse. What is in Scripture is that man chooses his own fate by how he receives the word of God. It is the revealed will of God, the rule of God that has the ability to lead men in a righteous and an acceptable life to the glory of God the Father.

We have established that man must accept, believe and yield in heart to the word of God, the rule of the kingdom in order to serve God and to be acceptable to him. We will sum the matter with a few passages of Scripture. Romans 1:16-17; “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” Paul affirmed that it is the gospel that has the power to save. Another is I Thessalonians 2:13; “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

On the opposite, for those who refuse the rule of God, are these statements of Paul. In Romans 1:18; “For the wrath of God is

revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;" Also, in II Thessalonians 1:6-12; "Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of *his* goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

We have shown a number of things. **1)** The kingdom of God is the royal rule of God in the hearts of men. **2)** It is not a physical or worldly entity but the rule of God over the spirit of man. **3)** So, for one to have the blessings of God they must yield from the heart to his rules and live in harmony with them. **4)** By yielding from the heart to the rule of God, the mold of doctrine, Romans 6:17-18, we are forgiven of sin and become a servant of righteousness. **5)** The above passages also show that citizens of the kingdom are called by the gospel, the rule of God and by submission thereto are forgiven of sins and transferred into the kingdom. (Colossians 1:13-14) **6)** These passages also prove the characteristics or nature of the kingdom is spiritual. This is confirmed by the fact that we must welcome the word and submit to all of God's rules from a heart that will hear his word. **7)** All the scriptures related to submission to God, our warfare against evil, the work we are to do, the calling and the benefits of it prove it to be spiritual in nature. In approximately nineteen different scriptures, it is stated that it is in this way that God calls us to turn from the allurements of the world or flesh, yield to his rule and so become his servants the fruit of which results in everlasting life.

Now we must show the difference in being ruled by God or man's teaching in modern religion. It matters not by what religious names they call themselves, we have shown by holy scriptures that all men must desire to know and to submit to the rule of God in order to be called into his kingdom. By modern church religion we mean those church organizations that make up what they will teach and practice. They do this by making rules not found in the Scripture and ignore some that are there. For example, in the last few years, some have debated whether they will allow homosexuals to preach or be recognized as acceptable members. While it may be more informal with others who ignore the sin and say nothing about it, all such refuse to follow the rule of God: specifically, Romans 1:24-28; I Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21 and Colossians 3:5-6. Also, a number of other sins are included in these passages that are, with rare exceptions, practiced by some in all churches regardless by what name they call themselves. In all of these situations, this shows those who call themselves believers have not yielded in heart to the rule of God. To please men, they will make and/or neglect the rule of God. Such are obviously not servants of God.

Apparently, by their irresponsible neglect, they think they have the right to exempt themselves and others from the will of God. Note these passages which show what happens when we fail to comply with all God requires or refrain from what he forbids. Galatians 1:8-9; "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: (*heteros*, another of a different kind) Which is not another; (*Allos*, another of the same kind) but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert (transform into something of the opposite character) the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." This specifically shows when one alters God's word in any way that it transforms the gospel into something of a different character. Further, the curse of heaven rests upon all who do so. Now, we call special attention to verse 10, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men?"

for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.” This is a statement of fact and it clearly shows whom we serve.

Everyone must answer this question, “For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? It cannot be evaded. All answer it by their teaching and actions. Whether you follow God or man, it shows who you desire to please. Since a person does what he wants to do, his teaching and actions reveals the intent, the purpose or design of his heart. Note this passage, Hebrews 4:12; “For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Paul declares the word of God is a discerner of what the heart is thinking and intends to do. The word discern means: “To separate (things, or one thing from another) as distinct; to distinguish and divide.” (OED) How then does the word discern, judge the thoughts and intents of the heart?

It is very simple. Jesus said in Luke 12:8; “Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God:” But what did some do? In John 9:22; “These *words* spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man confessed that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.” Jesus commanded that we confess him and the Jews forbid it. Now we will see how the command of Jesus to confess him discerned the intents of the heart. In John 12:42-43; “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” Therefore, their refusing to confess revealed that in heart they desired the praise of men rather than the approval and praise of God.

We need to look closely at the word confess. It literally means to speak the same thing, to assent or agree with. The word is further defined by how it is used in the context. So it conveys the idea of confessing allegiance to Jesus as ones Master and Lord and that

we are his loyal followers. Therefore, to confess Jesus as Lord includes more than simply mouthing the words that one believes that Jesus is the Christ. Those who say they believe in Jesus but refuses to be a loyal follower of his word are hypocrites of the first order. They say they believe in Jesus but as they refuse to accept his word and rebel against it, so their confession is deceptive.

Jesus uses the practice of the Scribes and Pharisees as a perfect example to prove this point. In Matthew 15:6-9; "... Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. *Ye* hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men." God had said, "For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death." (Matthew 15:4) This is God's command but what did the Scribes and Pharisees teach and practice? "But ye say, Whosoever shall say to *his* father or *his* mother, *It is* a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; honour not his father or his mother, *he shall be free...*" (Matthew 15:5) So what was the result? "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition." To knowingly and deliberately go beyond or fail to measure up to God's rule is transgression of his law and that is sin. They nullified the law of God by their tradition. With what result: their worship was vain, therefore, it was folly and useless. May I call your attention to the fact that although caring for parents is not a command dealing directly with worship, their disregarding of it non-the less made their worship worthless.

What is the difference in principle of this case and the situation of today? In Galatians 5:19-21; "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." These things are all works of the

flesh and those who practice such will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Further, In Ephesians. 5:3-7; “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.”

Yet, today, men in modern church religions, those claiming to be followers of God, openly and routinely practice such and others fellowship them. In this way, they become a co-participant with them. It is not uncommon for so-called followers of Jesus to even defend those who practice such wickedness. By their teaching and actions, they also make these commandments of God of none effect and in many cases array themselves in defiance of them. Does it not follow that their worship is also vain, folly and useless? What is the difference in principle between these modern church religionists and those Jews in Jerusalem? The words and deeds of both prove they refuse to follow the rule of Jesus preferring their own rules or those of other men. What does it matter by what religious name they call themselves, their teaching and actions negate the commands of God? How does their church name give them the right to suspend, set aside or make useless the rules of king Jesus? In all such cases, they show that they are as rebellious as those Jews in Antioch who pushed the word of God from them. They are also one with those who negated God’s commands in Matthew 15. They all make themselves hypocrites when they say they believe Jesus is the Christ.

To knowingly and deliberately go beyond or fail to measure up to God’s rule is transgression of his law and that is sin. Thus the ones described above by Jesus and all who follow and participate with them are sinners and not part of God’s kingdom. They may be acceptable in man’s modern churches but they are no part of the kingdom of God. Therefore, as the characteristics of God’s

kingdom and modern churches, regardless by what name they designate themselves, are opposites in nature, they have rejected the rule of God and are no part of his kingdom.

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Do We Consent With Sinners, Or Do We Seek First The Kingdom Of God?

Charles A. Pledge

The Psalmist wrote, “When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partakers with adulterers,” Psalm 50:18. God was simply saying to His people through the Psalmist: “You have been disposed to agree with thieves and adulterers rather than to agree with me.” Now read the rest of the story in the remaining part of the chapter. He states in verse 19: “Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit.” Vs. 20-22: “Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slenderest thine own mother’s son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver thee.”

The Hebrew and Greek words from which is translated consent in its various forms basically mean in common usage to agree with; to be of the same heart as another, to be willing, or to ignore such. It also implies an action consistent with the disposition. It is difficult to conceive of one professing to be a Christian while consenting with a murderer to murder; or remaining silent when a witness to the same. Yet, many religious persons, while claiming to be God's people, have learned how to peacefully co-exist with sin in nearly every form. One only needs to read the history of ancient Israel to learn that this is not a new art but is as old as man. Adam held his peace while the serpent tempted Eve. Only Noah spoke against the evils of his day. Israel had those who

thought it prudent to hold their tongues while their brethren sinned at will. Jesus was crucified by those whom he spoke against and the mob was moved to cry for his blood. Each who held their peace in the face of that crime was guilty of the crucifixion of Jesus, as much so as those who were the instigators and participants.

God gave an ordinance to Israel by Moses that said: “And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity,” (Lev. 5:1). It was a very simple command. When one was witness to sin and failed to testify against that sin, he was guilty of the same sin. To know and fail to speak against is not only wrong, it is to consent with the sin about which one remains silent. This was the case in the eighth chapter of John when the men brought the woman caught in adultery. Determined to ensnare the Lord, they momentarily overlooked the fact that they became guilty of adultery when they did not testify against the man in the case. The words of Jesus, “...he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7b), brought them back to reality. Each of them knew the law under which they lived. If the woman was to be stoned, so must each of them be stoned for allowing the man to go free. They each took their guilty conscience and stole away like common thieves.

What has that to do with us? First, that law affirmed a principle which has always been man's responsibility. Second, we have an explicit statement in the New Testament to “... have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them,” (Eph. 5:11). This statement, again, merely emphasizes a principle that has always been alive in God's dealing with man. Sin is personified in Romans seven as alive and aggressive. Sin is not a passive principle that is inactive and silent. Sin works through the passions and desires of the flesh (James 1:13-15). It is alive and active, therefore it must be opposed or it will overcome. When one remains silent about sin, that one is consenting to sin. It matters not what the sin may be, whether of the mind (pride, arrogance, etc.) or other works of the flesh such as drunkenness, murder,

adultery, one consents with the sin about which he knows for certain but does not reprove.

Often preachers are forbidden to speak on some biblical subject, such as fornication and other sins, of which some in the congregation are guilty. Two presumptions are made when this occurs: (1) A congregation (its elders or others) have the right to forbid the preaching of the gospel. Why? If one has the right to forbid one passage, or subject, that one, by the same authority may forbid all the gospel and every subject to be preached. The same authority that would allow forbidding the preaching of one passage would allow forbidding preaching any and every passage. There is none for either. (2) A congregation (or individuals) forbidding the preaching of any biblical passage or subject must presume sin is acceptable with God, and that consenting with sin is an option God grants all Christians. Both presumptions are fatal to those making them and all who submit to them. Some sins are allowed to go unchallenged and unreproved until it is too late. But in all this, let us never lose sight of the fact that silence equals consent. Failure to reprove sin amounts to guilt of that sin. There are too many Ahabs ready to accuse preachers of righteousness of being troublers of Israel (I Kings 18:17). But, as with Ahab, these consent with sin and need to be reproved and withstood along with the participants in sin because sin is the real troubler of Israel.

Perverved love and feigned concern for the lost may cause some to hold their tongue in the presence of sin, but in every such case they have become guilty of the sins about which they remain silent. God commands us to "... have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Every person who by practice denies the validity of that command is guilty of the sins witnessed, but unreproved by them. They have consented with sins, and the sinners who perpetrate them.

With "consenting" established as the sorry spectacle of delusion as it is among religious people, let us turn to the second part of our article. Do we seek first the kingdom of God. Disciples are commanded to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, Matthew 6:33. The two go together. They are inseparable. To rip them apart is to deny them both. Yet many attempt this

impossibility. Regardless of what you call the kingdom and how you view it, if you consent with sinners, or practice sin, you can not, in that condition, enter into the kingdom, nor receive the blessings of the kingdom, Galatians 5:19-21. Why? Because sin and the kingdom of God are diametrically opposed. It is impossible for them to coexist. I heard an elder once who believed that the church and the kingdom are one and the same declare, that as long as he was an elder, no one would ever again have fellowship in that congregation withdrawn from them, or be disciplined for their sins. He was presuming to be God to dictate what spiritual matter would or would not be acceptable in the kingdom. I believe we have identified the subject we must deal with.

The kingdom of God is simply the royal rule of God within one. Jesus told the pharisees in Luke 17:20-21 that the kingdom of God is not something which can be seen, nor observed, because it is within us. God rules in the hearts of men and women. That is the kingdom of God. God rules in a specific way; through his word. This is set forth in Psalm 78:36, 37, Matthew 7:21, and a number of other places. This is why righteousness and kingdom are inseparable. The word of God submitted to, produces righteous justification and righteous conduct following, Romans 6:16-22. Luke sets forth the principle of righteousness in Luke 1:6. If no righteousness exists in practice in one's life, then no kingdom in that life. If no kingdom exists, then no righteousness can exist in practice. One's presence equals the presence of the other in practice. Let us look at just a few examples widely practiced and accepted among men and then conclude this article.

1. The common view of visiting the sick is to make a social visit, spend a few minutes chatting and then saying, "Have to run, hope you are feeling better soon," and take leave. Behind is a house that needs cleaning, dishes needing washing, meals to be cooked, and all the things children need attended to, and a poor mother is wasting away with cancer, or some other terminal illness. Or, we go comfort a poor widow who can't pay her utility bills and eat a healthful meal. We chat about old times and how we miss her husband and tell her to come see us and take our leave. We then claim we have fulfilled our duties as a child of God. In the first place, the word visit in

James 1:27, in the Greek means to minister unto; to serve. What has such a visit done other than to salve a weak conscience of the visitor and perhaps arouse feelings of sorrow in each one visited, or even hinder necessary activity? Read a little further in James into chapter two, especially verses 14-18. I ask you, is such visiting a demonstration of the rule of God within? God rules through his written word, the gospel preached and taught by the apostles, 1 John 4:1-6.

2. Honesty and integrity. A man so lazy and irresponsible that he will hardly mow his own lawn, or clean up messes he has made is appointed a deacon. He immediately thinks that he is being prepped to become an elder and has no time for the mundane tasks of a deacon and pants after an appointment to serve as an elder. Why, when he neither understands nor cares about the work of a deacon? I have known more than one like that who rarely, if ever, practices positive Christianity. Rather he measures his life by the negatives: “Well, I don’t drink, gamble, nor beat my wife, so I must be pretty good.” Where is the integrity necessary for one in such condition to open his eyes and examine himself by God’s word, James 1:21-25; 2 Corinthians 13:5? Yet his brethren will pat him on the back and tell him what a good job he is doing as deacon. Where is the honesty in such a practice?
3. Simple conformity. Many, some who claim to be elders, some preachers, and others teachers, rarely, if ever, seriously study their Bibles and their understanding and actions reflect their ignorance of it. Yet, they claim the positions of leadership over their brethren and often “Lord it over them, 1 Peter 5:1-3.” I have a friend who teaches in a denomination who never studies the word, and can’t even discuss with intelligence the way God saves people from their sins, yet is proud of his “position” among his brethren. I have known preachers of more than forty years experience who devoted their time to other pursuits than study, who could not even discuss simple passages and stay in harmony with scripture. I have known two preachers who used Peter as an example of God supposedly approving lying and other sins in their lives. They have

preached such with the approval of those who financially support them.

4. I have known scores of people claiming to be “Christians,” who do not even claim to study, nor conform their lives to the will of God. They claim to be saved. They claim to be children of God. They claim to be on the way to heaven. They claim to be followers of the Christ of God. Yet, they are completely indifferent toward both God and Christ as demonstrated by the way they live. You can claim that we are judging all you wish but that will not eliminate your ignorance of what judging is, or what it is about. I am merely setting forth what is plainly taught in the holy Scripture. That is God’s judgment revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness, Romans 1:18. What we have done is to set forth practices and ways of life commonly seen and accepted throughout the religious world to get your attention to the question: “Are you seeking God’s rule to apply in your heart and life, that you may live in imitation of the righteousness of the character of Jesus, 1 Peter 1:21-22? Or, do you sin and consent with sinners? We could continue this list indefinitely, but four commonly practiced examples are sufficient to make our point.

To seek first the rule of God in your heart is to have the disposition of Jesus (his mind-set), John 4:34; John 6:38; Philippians 2:5-8. If God rules your heart, then your actions will come out accordingly, Proverbs 6:23. If God rules your heart, then you shall want to do the right thing and will not be looking for “corners to cut, and excuses to make.”

We conclude with this question: “Do you consent with sinners because you are one of them, or do you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness?”

The Big Problem Is the Heart

Charles A. Pledge

We have observed analysis performed on the religious groups in regards to their growth, strength, works, etc. Various conclusions

have been drawn which could have been drawn by secular organizations about secular organizations with slightly different inputs, but related to the same general principles. The point is that we have seen worldly minds form worldly conclusions about spiritual matters. It just does not come out correctly. What has been declared to be the “fix” in religion fixes nothing but the pocketbooks of those who advocate the particular fix. As a result, millions have turned away from religion in general because they see organizations self centered, focused on “growth” and ignoring primary problems focused on the souls of men and women. In short, the religious world which is supposed to be spiritual, exhibits a secular perspective and demonstration.

I recently read an article penned by a preacher who attempted to place all the blame on the turning away upon those who turned from what they considered hypocrisy in religion. That is nothing new. Ancient Israel, in their apostasies, often blamed God, or the circumstances which they in turned blamed God with. When men and women close their eyes to the problems in religious circles, and by consent claim all is well and good, then they are a part of the problem. Several years ago, Broadman did a survey and found some interesting problems defined by many who had concluded that “Church” is irrelevant to life. I do not necessarily agree with the attempted solution most used, I do agree with several of their definitions of the problem. Churches have become increasingly secular in their approaches; preaching, doctrine; practices, etc. All the while, in spite of frenzied efforts and preaching to the contrary, multitudes continue to leave the various churches.

The real problem which has historically been ignored by religious people is the heart. Get the heart right if we want the life right. That was the problem with ancient Israel, God’s chosen people. David said in Psalm 78:36-37: “Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongue. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.” God’s people have always had the heart problem before God. This is not, nor has been, the case with every child of God, but represents the majority of them. Excuses are the vogue among religious people; excuses for not doing what they know to be the right thing to do at the moment. We are not speaking of

deep things. Rather we refer to the simple tell the truth, do the right thing morally, take a stand for Christ when circumstances actually demand a stand, and in general just try to be what God wants his people to be in society: a people who demonstrate their love for him and their fellow man and set forth the example for others to follow.

Today, as always, religious people get caught up in their own little world and ignore all the needs around them. Then when it dawns on them what has really become a way of life, they excuse themselves by thinking that God does not demand them to be fanatics and do nothing other than worship and serve him. Consequently, religious people become more and more worldly/secular and less and less spiritual. As a result, more and more are seeing the hypocrisy which has become a common place thing and have turned their backs on it. All the while churches bemoan their loss of members and turn to the world to discover why. The world, in turn, supplies churches with the answers churches want to hear: more and more secular efforts and less and less spiritual matters which are actually the real heart issues we need to be hearing.

Compassion is the heart of love. Take compassion out and we have a loveless form of pretension. Why are so many religious people more concerned about massive efforts away from home than they are about the poor next door? It is easy to get concerned about some catastrophic event hundreds or thousands of miles away that requires no personal involvement beyond money and “prayers,” than it is to investigate the problems in the neighborhood. The same principle applies to evangelism. I once told a congregation that until they were capable of evangelizing their neighborhood, forget about doing “mission work.” If they were not capable of getting out and making their presence a living force next door, they could not make it felt a thousand or two thousand miles away. The elders did not like that as they were looking for a secular response from me in delivering an easy to digest dose of spiritual pablum. They didn’t get the pablum and I didn’t get any comments from the elders on my efforts that week. Compassion forces us to look at each individual in our sphere of life and try to understand what their real needs are and then make an honest

effort, if we are capable, of supplying, or helping supply those needs.

I have known of a few individuals who have given their all; physically, emotionally, and financially in order to serve the Lord. "What idiots," some have said of them. Others have doled out a little energy and dollars while wasting their best enjoying the world. We leave their judgment to a just God. We are merely pointing out some facts which indicate that the heart is the real problem. Why even speak of love if compassion is absent. Compassion is the spiritual quality which provokes acts of mercy. Many have financial goals but no spiritual goals. Many have goals of reaching a certain point of secular fame, power, or influence, but no goal on reaching the lost soul next door with the saving gospel of Christ, or that neighbor down the way with a little help on their utility bill. I once thought myself poor. Then in correspondence with one about whether they would like some CD'S on spiritual subjects they told me they could not afford electricity but could only afford a battery operated tape player. Needless to say, I offered them all the free tapes they wanted.

Our nation has been characterized by great riches among the masses. Millions have migrated to this country with only one goal: to get rich like all the Americans. But now, the riches of the "Middle Class" American is disappearing and the pinch is being felt by those trying to do works costing beyond their own ability and forced to depend upon their brethren to help. I was talking with a realtor about three years ago who does a lot of sales with a large denominational headquarters who plant churches around the world. He locates property for them and helps them get started. He told me that this denomination had placed a stop on purchase of all property for an indefinite time because of economic necessity. They were concentrating on efforts to not lose much of what they had begun. I have seen many works begin to diminish because of economic reasons. People are trying to preserve what they have and eventually that will bring on a depression and there will be no way to preserve what they have. An old spiritual rule, as well as a physical rule, is that we either use what we have or we lose what we have. In the meantime, spirituality is on the decline and secularism/materialism/worldliness is on the increase. The cycle

will eventually go full circle, but in the meantime, real suffering, both spiritual and material/physical will occur.

But through it all, the real problem; the problem of the heart shall be ignored. About forty five or more years ago, I wrote a little booklet of radio sermons entitled "Love's Dozen." It was based upon the thirteen practical characteristics of love Paul set forth in first Corinthians chapter thirteen. An old "Baker's Dozen." Those characteristics must be present in order for love to function. Take them away and life among people gets more than tedious. Understanding flees and the brutal brute sense /secular/worldly mind, rules, Jude V. 10. We have observed an obvious absence of these characteristics of love which Paul set forth, particularly longsuffering toward brethren, a lack of kindness toward brethren, outright envy, rejoicing in evil works rather than rejoicing in truth, and many other things which declare the absence of a heart shaped by, and in love. Such a heart shall always be lacking in God's sight because it has no basis for honesty and integrity to flourish.

The heart is man's guidance system in which is stored either good or evil and from which come forth the issues of life, Matthew 12:34-35; Proverbs 4:23. Men need to be careful about what they allow to live within the heart because these are what we meditate upon. If what lives in the heart is not the good and the pure, then it shall corrupt the thinker. The kingdom of God is the rule of God in the heart of man. If God rules (and he rules through his written word), then those who are ruled are ruled because they submit to that word which then lives in them. Therefore, it is imperative that men and women learn and apply the word of God to their lives. It is not a matter of legalistic application, but a matter of honest submission of the heart to God through his written will. It is not a matter of making the Bible our God, but a matter of accepting what is written there as what God wants us to be.

The heart shall continue to be the main problem. Religious people shall scramble to attain the latest expert who will dwell on the latest religious fad. More and more people will turn their backs on religion and many of them shall turn completely away from God. This shall be the result of men and women looking for some quick, easy fix of the problem, while ignoring the real problem

and the only solution. When the majority of people in America a few years ago (70%) agreed, churches are not relevant to life, there was a mad rush into emphasizing more the physical fun and games approach, and ignoring the real problem the majority intended to be understood; the heart problem.

It comes down to either the kingdom of God within, or rebellion against the God of the universe, or in ignorance, a lack of faith in the God of the heavens and earth and the Lord Jesus Christ. Is God's kingdom within you?

The Parting Word

It is past time to wake up and see where we are and where we are heading. When sin is tolerated, that is corruption. When sin is defended, that is deep corruption. Solomon had a bit to say in Proverbs about the eye which winks. That is the eye which closes when it should be open to observe the sin it is tolerating. Far too many who profess to be Christians are simply deceiving themselves into thinking they can get heaven for no effort on their part; just make a claim and go ahead enjoying the sins of the world as always. Go along; get along; just be a "good ole boy" and enjoy the pleasures of sin for the season. That is a prevailing philosophy manifested by the conduct of so many in the religious world.

As a result, the biblical concept of the kingdom of God is rejected and hated while the easy way of toleration and a false notion of love prevails in the church scene. People by the hundreds of thousands, are leaving the hypocrisy of such behind and looking for something better. Those who are left behind often sound bitter toward those who left, accusing them of all sorts of things. This in itself is a secular way of self justification by those who are self righteous and bigoted. Most of these march to a familiar drumbeat and if you reject that beat, they reject you. It is just that simple. We hope you will seriously consider the inevitable results of such!