

The Peaceable Kingdom of God

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Introduction

The phrase *the kingdom of God* is used many times in the Holy Scriptures. In this booklet we want to explain, from the basis of God's Word, what the nature of this kingdom is. To understand it better, the subject is broken down into four main sections which explain different aspects of God's kingdom. These are (1) the personal nature of the kingdom in the life and heart of each believer; (2) the kingdom as manifested in the local assemblies of believers; (3) the universal kingdom which reaches into all the world; and finally, (4) the heavenly, eternal kingdom.

By *the kingdom of God* we are not talking about a kingdom that defends itself with guns or other weapons. We are talking about the spiritual reign of Jesus Christ, who lives in the hearts and lives of those who believe and follow Him as their Lord and Master. In this spiritual kingdom, they do not learn war anymore.¹ The citizens of this kingdom do not go to court to demand their rights, but rather are willing to suffer loss themselves.²

Publisher's note:

There are many footnotes in this booklet referring the reader to verses in God's Word, the Bible. We suggest that, if possible, you read these verses in the Bible to better understand the basis of the message contained in this booklet about God's peaceable kingdom.

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¹ Micah 4:3; Matthew 26:52; 2 Corinthians 10:4; Luke 3:14

² Matthew 5:25, 40; Luke 12:58; Hebrews 10:34

They live in peaceful subjection to their earthly governments in every way they can, as long as it does not violate the requirements of their heavenly citizenship.¹

If you are not yet part of this kingdom, we hope you will desire to become part of it by being born again. “What a strange statement,” you might be thinking. “How can one be born the second time?” A certain man asked Jesus this question about 2,000 years ago. We desire that your reading this booklet will help you to understand what it means to be born again.

If you are already part of this kingdom through the second birth, may God bless you in your spiritual pilgrimage. May you be inspired to progress in your walk with God, and may you find your place in His kingdom both now and in the future.

“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matthew 6:9–13).

¹ Romans 13:1–7; Acts 4:18–20

1. “The Kingdom of God Is Within You”

Some people think of religion as a political force in the world. And indeed, religion often has been used as a political force. Many fierce wars have been fought in the name of religion. People are always looking for the perfect government system. Sadly, those who have looked for satisfaction in the politics of this world have been sorely disappointed.

When Jesus walked this earth some 2,000 years ago, some people thought that He was going to set up a political kingdom. But Jesus Himself made it clear that this was not His intention. One day some people asked Him when the kingdom of God was coming. He told them, “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”¹

How can God’s kingdom be within a person?

Again, we have the words of Jesus, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”² Jesus was talking to Nicodemus. This man

¹ Luke 17:20, 21

² John 3:3

asked the question that would come to all of our minds. “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?”¹ Jesus answered, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”²

This message corresponds with one that was spoken by a prophet many years before: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”³ In simple words, Jesus and the prophet were speaking of a miraculous change of life and heart.

When a person repents of his sins before God and man, and trusts in the blood of Jesus for his cleansing from sin, he also receives cleansing for his conscience.⁴ He no longer carries the burden of guilt for his sin; it is released. The person is “born” into a spiritual kingdom. Each person who truly believes

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”
(Mark 16:16).

¹ John 3:4

² John 3:5

³ Ezekiel 36:26

⁴ 1 Timothy 3:9; Titus 1:15; Hebrews 9:14; 10:22; 13:18; 1 Peter 3:16

and confesses¹ that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world receives the divine nature² of God, through His Spirit.³ (Jesus is the Son of God in the sense that He was miraculously conceived through the power of God and born of the virgin Mary. This is how the manifestation of God could be walking on earth and still be on the throne of God at the same time).⁴ The transformation that takes place when a person receives the divine nature is so drastic that it is referred to as being “born again.”⁵ Such a person has been delivered from the power of darkness, and has been converted into the kingdom of God’s dear Son.⁶

The powers of darkness and the works of our evil nature have a strong hold on many people. These works include such things as adultery and fornication, as well as all forms of uncleanness and sexual lusts. It includes idolatry and witchcraft. The powers of darkness are in control of envy, anger, hatred, and strife between people. False religious sects and sedition against lawful authorities are under the powers of darkness. Murder, drunkenness, wild parties, and such things are all works

¹ Luke 12:8

² 2 Peter 1:4

³ 1 Corinthians 6:9–11

⁴ Luke 1:28–35

⁵ John 3:3, 7; 1 Peter 1:23

⁶ Colossians 1:13

of the flesh and are controlled by the kingdom of this world, which is the kingdom of the evil one, Satan. People who do such things cannot enter the kingdom of God without first being born again, or transformed by the Spirit of God.¹ (The Spirit is the manifestation of God that is at work in the world today since Jesus left the earth and ascended to heaven).² Even the love of money³ and the love of power have no place in God's kingdom.⁴ Every person on the earth has violated God's laws in one way or another. Not one of us is righteous by ourselves. We have all sinned.⁵

The fruit of the Spirit is in great contrast to the works of the flesh. This fruit is found in the lives of believers who, in Jesus Christ, have become dead⁶ to the works of the flesh in their own lives, and who have been transformed by the Spirit of God. This fruit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. There is no law against such things in the kingdom of God! These people no longer glory in their own accomplishments. They no longer provoke each

¹ Galatians 5:19–21

² John 14:16–18, 26; John 15:26, 27; John 16:7, 8

³ 1 Timothy 6:10

⁴ 3 John 9; Matthew 20:25–28; Mark 10:42–45; Luke 22:24–27

⁵ Romans 3:10

⁶ John 12:24, 25

other and envy each other.¹ The kingdom of God is a kingdom where there is righteousness, and peace, and joy.²

God's kingdom is a kingdom of peace.

The peaceable kingdom of Christ is unlike any kingdom or nation in the world. There can be only two spiritual kingdoms in this world, the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God.³ There is a great contrast between the two, and we cannot be part of both at the same time. In fact, the contrast is so great that the people of this world often think of Jesus' followers as being very strange. They think it is strange that they do not join them in their politics, their social customs, or even their wild parties. Many times they say evil things about Jesus' followers.⁴ But the people of Christ's kingdom know that even their Leader was falsely accused. When He was reviled, He did not retaliate. When He suffered, He did not threaten those who were hurting Him. He committed Himself to His heavenly Father, to God, who will be the final Judge of all people.⁵

Jesus allowed Himself to be nailed to a cross

¹ Galatians 5:22–26

² Romans 14:17

³ Matthew 12:24–28; Luke 11:14–20

⁴ 1 Peter 4:4

⁵ 1 Peter 2:23

and was cruelly crucified.¹ He loved the people of the world so much that He was willing to shed His blood on the cross at Calvary to wash away the sin of the flesh. His perfect blood can redeem the hearts of men and women. We are healed by His wounds.² He has risen from the dead,³ is ascended

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”

(1 Timothy 2:5).

to His Father,⁴ and is now the Shepherd, the Leader of the flock of those who have humbled themselves before Him and have come to trust in Him.⁵ He dwells in their hearts through His Spirit.⁶

“There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”⁷ Jesus’ followers pray to God, through Jesus as the mediator. Jesus taught His disciples to pray to God, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”⁸ When Jesus reigns in the hearts and lives of His followers, in this sense the kingdom of God has already begun on the earth.

Every kingdom has a king or ruler, as well as a system of government. What kind of government does God’s kingdom have? This brings us to the kingdom of God in the . . .

¹ Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19

² 1 Peter 2:24

³ Matthew 28:6

⁴ Acts 1:9

⁵ 1 Peter 2:22–25

⁶ Galatians 4:6

⁷ 1 Timothy 2:5

⁸ Matthew 6:10

2. Local Assemblies of Believers

A person who has been born again will desire the fellowship of other believers. He will desire to meet with them to read the Bible,¹ pray,² and sing³ together in worship to his Saviour and Lord.⁴ Just as a newborn baby desires milk, he will desire to read the Bible, which is God's Word, so that he can learn more about God and so he can progress in his walk with God.⁵ Being in the presence of other believers for fellowship and teaching is a great help for every believer to remain steadfast in the faith.⁶

The assemblies of those who have been called out from this evil world and separated unto God are called churches.⁷ These churches have been in existence ever since the day of Pentecost, soon after Jesus ascended into heaven. They exist to this present day, and they will exist until the end of time. Jesus said, "I will build my church; and the

¹ Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27

² Acts 1:14; Acts 12:5–12

³ 1 Corinthians 14:15

⁴ Acts 20:7

⁵ 1 Peter 2:2

⁶ Acts 2:42

⁷ Acts 16:5; Hebrews 12:22–24

gates of hell shall not prevail against it."¹

On this subject, a certain writer many years ago wrote the following:

"As the moon, notwithstanding her substance and body never perish, is not always seen in her full light by the human eye, either because she sinks beneath the horizon, or, being too close to the sun, is obscured by him, or, being far from the sun, is darkened by the shadow of the earth, which is called an eclipse; even so it is with the substance and appearance of the church of God on earth. The latter, though never perishing entirely, does not always show herself in her full form; yea, at times she seems to have vanished altogether, yet not in all, but only in some places, either through the slothfulness of some people, who, from want of regard or for some other reason, neglect the external, manifest commandments of God, or on account of some misconceptions or errors that have arisen, and whereby sometimes many of the true believers have been perverted, and seduced from the true worship of God; or in consequence of persecution, violence, and tyranny, exercised against the faith and the practice of it, on account of which the pious are compelled to hide and, as outcasts from mankind, seclude themselves in forests, wildernesses, and solitary places; so that

¹ Matthew 16:18

its characteristics, light, and virtue could not be seen, much less known, by the common world.”¹

What are some characteristics of these churches?

Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep (the church),² has said, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”³ The little flock, the true followers of Jesus, have always been relatively few in number. Jesus said that the road which leads to heaven is narrow and there are few people who walk on it. The way to destruction is wide and broad; there are many people walking on it. There are only two ways.⁴

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”
(Matthew 7:13, 14).

The people of these churches live lives that stand in contrast to ungodly sinners. In this sense

¹ Thielemann J. van Braght, *Martyrs’ Mirror*, pages 24, 25

² Hebrews 13:20

³ Luke 12:32

⁴ Matthew 7:13, 14

they are separate from the world.¹ They unitedly reject the works of our evil nature. Because their minds have been transformed to harmonize with the will of God, they do not conform to the ungodly practices of the world.² They keep marriage relationships in purity, maintaining God’s original plan of one man and one woman being faithful to each other until death.³ They avoid the outward adorning of their bodies.⁴ They adorn themselves with modest clothing⁵ and with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is of great value in God’s sight.⁶ They are honest⁷ and avoid telling lies.⁸ They love each other,⁹ and they love even their enemies and do good to those who hate them.¹⁰ They consider that any material possessions they have are a gift from God,¹¹ and so they freely share them with each other when there are needs.¹² Because of their love for their Shepherd and King, they are concerned about obey-

¹ 2 Corinthians 6:17

² Romans 12:2

³ Matthew 19:3–6

⁴ 1 Peter 3:3

⁵ 1 Timothy 2:9

⁶ 1 Peter 3:4

⁷ Romans 12:17

⁸ Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8

⁹ John 13:35

¹⁰ Matthew 5:44

¹¹ 1 Timothy 6:17

¹² Acts 4:32; Romans 15:26

ing all of His commandments, because Jesus said, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”¹ The little flock believes that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for teaching and instructing us in the way of righteousness.² Because of their earnest desire to be part of the eternal, heavenly kingdom, they willingly obey the teachings of God’s Word.³

Those who walk in this narrow road are often misunderstood and persecuted.⁴ Yet there is

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”
(2 Timothy 3:12).

a special blessing in this persecution, for Jesus said, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”⁵ One believing

mother who was imprisoned for her faith wrote a letter to her son while she was in prison. She knew she would soon be put to death and wanted to give her son some instruction before she died. She wanted him to be part of God’s kingdom and to be able to identify a true church, so she wrote:

¹ Luke 6:46

² 2 Timothy 3:16

³ Revelation 22:14

⁴ 2 Timothy 3:12

⁵ Matthew 5:10

“If you, therefore, desire to enter into the regions of the holy world, and into the inheritance of the saints, gird your loins,¹ and follow after them; search the Scriptures, and it shall show you their ways. . . . See, my son, this way has no retreats; there are no roundabout or crooked little paths; whosoever departs to the right or to the left inherits death. Behold, this is the way which is found by so few, and walked by a still far smaller number; for there are some who well perceive that this is the way to life; but it is too severe for them; it pains their flesh.

“Therefore, my child, do not regard the great number, nor walk in their ways. Remove thy foot far from their paths, for they go to hell, as sheep unto death. . . . But where you hear of a poor, simple, cast off little flock (Luke 12:32), which is despised and rejected by the world, join them; for where you hear of the cross, there is Christ; from there do not depart. Flee the shadow of this world; become united with God; fear Him alone, keep

Behold, this is the way which is found by so few, and walked by a still far smaller number; for there are some who well perceive that this is the way to life; but it is too severe for them; it pains their flesh.

¹ Luke 12:35

His commandments, observe all His words, to do them. . . . Observe that which the Lord commands you, and sanctify your body to His service, that His name may be sanctified, praised, and made glorious and great in you. Be not ashamed to confess Him before men; do not fear men; rather give up your life than to depart from the truth. If you lose your body, which is earthly, the Lord your God has prepared you a better one in heaven.”¹

What kind of leadership does such a group of people have?

Jesus is both the Shepherd² and King³ of the believers. The government rests upon His shoulders.⁴ Jesus is the head of the body of believers, that is, the church.⁵ When Jesus returned to heaven, He gave gifts to men. This means that He gave His servants who were left behind on the earth the ability to serve in the church as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. He did this for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ.⁶ During Jesus’ absence, while He

¹ *Martyrs’ Mirror*, pages 453, 454. Excerpts from a letter written in 1539 by Anna of Rotterdam to her son Isaiah.

² John 10:11

³ John 18:37

⁴ Isaiah 9:6

⁵ Colossians 1:18

⁶ Ephesians 4:11, 12

is in heaven with the Father, those who are now citizens of Christ’s kingdom on earth serve as His ambassadors. They call other people to be reconciled to God.¹

Concerning leadership in the church today,

we have the example of the apostolic church.² During His life on earth, Jesus had chosen twelve men who were to go with Him to preach.³ When one of the twelve, Judas, became an apostate and even took his own life, the church chose another man to take his place.⁴ When there were widows in the church who were not being cared for, the church ordained deacons to take care of the needs of the poor among them.⁵ These men were chosen from among the local church. As the church grew and more leadership was needed, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit they chose and ordained more leaders. There were to be elders ordained in

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God”
(2 Corinthians 5:20).

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:20

² By “apostolic church,” we mean that era of the church during which the apostles who had seen Jesus were still alive.

³ Mark 3:14

⁴ Acts 1:16–26

⁵ Acts 6:1–6

every city.¹ In this way there were enough leaders to care for the needs of each church and also to preach the Gospel in places where it had not been preached before.² With these examples, we have an idea of how churches are to be provided with leaders today.

Leaders are to be good examples to the flock. They are not to function as lords³ or to exercise authority in a carnal way. They are rather to function as servants and ministers. It is clear that leaders do not campaign for this responsibility.⁴ Only men (not women) are to be ordained to these places of responsibility. Women have a beautiful place to fill in the church by participating in such things as congregational singing and teaching children. But when there are men present, they are not to preach in the collective worship service, or be in a position of authority over men.⁵

“Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant”
(Acts 20:27).

¹ Titus 1:5

² Acts 13:1–4

³ 1 Peter 5:3

⁴ Matthew 20:20–28

⁵ 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35; 1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 11:1–3

Where do these people meet?

In the time of the apostolic church the believers often met in houses.¹ Today believers still meet in homes, or in meeting houses built for that purpose. An elaborate, expensive building is not needed for collective worship of God. God does not dwell in temples made with hands. Neither is He worshiped with the works of men’s hands, such as images or other artwork, and not even by crosses or candles.² In times of severe persecution, the church has needed to meet to worship God in forests, in caves, or in deserts. The place for worship is not the most important thing. Jesus said, “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”³ He also said, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”⁴

What are their services like?

These services usually consist of singing,⁵ reading and explaining portions of the Bible

¹ Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19

² Acts 17:24–29

³ John 4:23, 24

⁴ Matthew 18:20

⁵ Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16

(preaching),¹ and praying.² It may include simple Bible teaching on a child's level. Others may give testimony to the truth of what was preached. The brethren discuss the Scriptures and how they apply to our daily lives. All is done in reverence, not with excessive display of emotion but in decency and in order.³

Who may attend these assemblies?

Everyone desiring to hear the Word of God being preached is welcome to visit such an assembly. God has designed to bring the teaching of salvation to people through the preaching of His Word.⁴ It is through this method that many people have been convicted of sin, and have come to know Jesus Christ.

“It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe”
(1 Corinthians 1:21).

How does one become a member of the local church?

God has designed that born-again people are initiated into the church by being baptized with water.⁵ Baptism is a testimony before God and

¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:27; 2 Timothy 4:2

² 1 Timothy 2:8

³ 1 Corinthians 14:40

⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:21

⁵ Acts 2:41

man that a person is finished with his past life of sin and is committed to living a new life.¹ It signifies that he is now a new creature in Christ Jesus. Old things are passed away and all things have become new.² He is now choosing to identify with and to suffer affliction with God's people, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin, which last only for a while.³ Baptism is the response of a good conscience before God,⁴ and symbolizes the outpouring (baptism) of the Holy Spirit.⁵

What are these people called?

In the time of the apostolic church there was an evangelist by the name of Barnabas. He was a good man who was full of the Holy Spirit. He preached to the believers who assembled at Antioch and exhorted them that they should hold fast to the

“And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch”
(Acts 11:26).

Lord with purpose of heart. Many people became believers in Jesus Christ through his preaching. After awhile Saul (later called Apostle Paul) came and joined Barnabas. For a whole year both of

¹ Romans 6:4

² 2 Corinthians 5:17

³ Hebrews 11:25

⁴ 1 Peter 3:21

⁵ Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 2:17, 18, 38; 10:47

them assembled together with the church and taught many people. It was here at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.¹

The word *Christian* means to be a follower of Christ, or to be Christ-like. A person should be cautious about using this name to describe himself. It can only rightly be applied to one who has been born again, has committed his life to the Lord Jesus Christ, and is following Him in daily life. The attributes of Christ should be evident in such a person's life. Jesus is our example.² He suffered for us, so that we would follow His steps.³ He is our example in doing good.⁴

Within the church, the members often simply refer to each other as brothers and sisters.⁵ They are part of God's family.⁶

In the Scriptures, local churches were often identified according to whose house the meetings were held in.⁷ There were times when they were slanderously given derogatory names by their opponents. In the apostolic church they were

¹ Acts 11:20–27

² John 13:15

³ 1 Peter 2:21

⁴ Acts 10:38

⁵ James 2:15

⁶ Ephesians 3:14, 15

⁷ Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2

once referred to as “the sect of the Nazarenes.”¹ Sometimes they have been identified by the geographical area in which they lived, or even by the name of one of their leaders. The name by which they are called is not as important as whether or not they follow the faith that was once delivered unto the saints.²

Does everyone who uses the name *Christian* follow these teachings?

Sadly, there are many today who use the name *Christian* who do not have the characteristics of a true follower of Jesus Christ. There are many who have supposed that the grace of God gives them a license to sin,³ and have thereby given a false impression to other people of the true nature of Christianity. Today some political movements and whole nations call themselves *Christian*. This cannot be correct. Jesus Christ refused to be an earthly ruler,⁴ and those who claim His name ought to follow His example.

There are some sincere followers of Jesus who, through lack of opportunity or for some other reason, have not yet fully understood God's plan for

¹ Acts 24:5

² Jude 3

³ Jude 4; Romans 6:1, 2

⁴ John 6:15

believers, and so may be erring in some point or another.¹ It is nevertheless God's desire that believers would be led into all truth through His Spirit.²

How does the church defend itself?

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight."³

A leader in the early church⁴ wrote:

"I owe no duty to forum, campaign, or senate, I stay awake for no public function, I make no effort to occupy a platform, I am no office seeker, I have no desire to smell out political corruption; I shun the voter's booth, the juryman's bench, I break no laws and push no lawsuits; I will not serve as a magistrate or a judge, I refuse to do military service, I desire to rule over no one—I have withdrawn from worldly politics. Now my only politics is spiritual."⁵

In the sixteenth century, there was a city in Europe taken over by heavily-armed people who claimed to be Christians.⁶ At the same time, in

another part of Europe, there was another community of Christians who were sincerely following Jesus in everything. Because they were called by the same name and had some similarity in teachings, the government wrongly assumed that there was a connection between the two groups, and feared that the followers of Jesus were also planning an uprising. This second, peace-loving group was driven from their homes. Their leader wrote:

"Now we are here in the wilderness, on the wild brush land under the open sky. We take that patiently and praise God who considers us worthy to suffer for Him. . . . We cry to God day and night that He will protect us and keep us from harm. We commend ourselves to His mercy, and He our captain, our guard, will fight for us. . . .

"Here we lie on the open heath, no threat to anyone. We would do no harm even to our worst enemies. . . . All we have done and what we are lies open to all men. And as you know, rather than steal a penny from anyone, we would lose a hundred guilders. We would rather get hurt, we would rather let them take our lives and die, than strike our greatest enemy with the hand—let alone with lances, swords, and halberds, like the world does.

"We carry no physical weapons, no spears, no guns, as you well know. In short, our message, our

¹ Acts 18:25, 26

² John 16:13

³ John 18:36

⁴ By "early church," we mean the period of time between approximately A.D. 90 and A.D. 325.

⁵ Tertullian (A.D. 160–220), DE PALLIO, 5

⁶ Militant Anabaptists in the city of Muenster in the 1530s

words, our life and conduct, is that people should walk in truth and justice, peacefully and in unity one with another, as true followers of Christ. We speak and live openly before all people and are not ashamed to tell anyone what we believe. The fact that many people slander us does not bother us, because Jesus has long prophesied that it will go this way. It has been this way from the beginning of the world, and He and His apostles suffered it too.”¹

The church defends itself with the Word of God. The Word of God is alive and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. The Word of God penetrates into the thoughts and intents of our hearts.² When the suffering and resurrection of Christ is preached, it has such drastic results that preachers have been accused of turning the world upside down.³ So the kingdom of God is sometimes called an “upside down” kingdom.

The world, through the power of Satan, tries by many methods to destroy the church. Sometimes Satan comes as a roaring lion;⁴ at other times he is transformed into an angel of light.⁵ Sometimes the kingdom of the world appears friendly

¹ Jakob Hutter, 1535, *Hutterischen Episteln* V3 1–6

² Hebrews 4:12

³ Acts 17:1–9

⁴ 1 Peter 5:8

⁵ 2 Corinthians 11:14

to the believers. In this case the world does not persecute the believers openly, but allures them with the ungodly things of this world. The world attracts them with sinful pleasures; riches; glamorous shows; fashionable, immodest dress;

“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”

(James 4:4).

and immorality. To be a friend of the world in this way is to be an enemy of God.¹ It is possible for a church to lose its first love to God and the truth, and to slowly be lulled to sleep. If such a church does not repent, it will eventually lose its rightful place as a church in the kingdom of God.²

To avoid this destruction, a church must have sound preaching and teaching to stir up the minds of the believers to remember what has been spoken by the holy prophets, and to remember the commandments given by the apostles.³ If anyone does not obey the teachings of God’s Word and the practical outworking of those teachings in their daily life, the church is to take special notice of that person and put him away from their

¹ James 4:4

² Revelation 2:1–5

³ 2 Peter 3:1–9

company. (But they still should not consider him an enemy, but admonish him as a brother).¹ A little leaven leavens the whole lump. If a little false teaching or a little sin is allowed in the membership of the believers, it will grow and contaminate the whole church.²

The company of believers meets together periodically to partake of communion—that is, to eat of broken bread and to drink the fruit of the vine, in remembrance of the broken body and shed blood of their Saviour and Lord.³ If a person becomes involved in sin, or in other ways refuses to hear the voice of the church,⁴ they must not be permitted to partake of the bread and the cup with the believers. In this way the sinner is warned to repent of his sin, so that he can again be restored to the Lord and to the church. In this way also the church is kept free from known sin, and the church is spared from becoming apostate.⁵

How does the church grow?

The church began in the Middle East, at Jerusalem. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told His disciples to go into all the world and preach

¹ 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15

² Galatians 5:9; 1 Corinthians 5:6

³ 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17

⁴ Matthew 18:15–18

⁵ 1 Corinthians 5

the gospel to all people, teaching them all of His commandments.¹ The Gospel is preached until this day to bring more people into the kingdom. God's people testify of Him wherever they go,² both by word and example.³ Their good works shine as a light to the world.⁴

The church grows by the testimony of its martyrs. An early church leader wrote to the church's opponents, "The more often we are slain by you, the more in number we grow. The blood of Christians is seed."⁵

The church also grows because of Christian parents who properly teach, discipline, and train their children.⁶ When children are brought up with the nurture and admonition of the Lord⁷ in a loving, Christlike home atmosphere, it is quite likely that they will also want to be followers of Jesus when they are grown.

Christian parents are also concerned that their children learn to read, so they can read the Word of God. Parents are so concerned about their children that those who were in prison prior to being

¹ Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19, 20

² Acts 8:1, 4

³ 1 Timothy 4:12

⁴ Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12

⁵ Tertullian, as quoted in *The Pilgrim Road*, © David W. Bercot

⁶ Proverbs 22:6, 15; Hebrews 12:6–10

⁷ Ephesians 6:4

martyred sometimes left instructions with those who would be their caretakers, as follows:

“Care for my young orphan children, as also all other orphans, as you would for myself; bring them up with reproof and correction, to piety; teach them to read, and when the time has come, keep them at work.”⁸

“And now I charge you, Joos and Hansken, that together with Barbertgen, your obedient sister, you will care for your three little sisters, and for Pierken, and teach them to read and to work, so that they may grow up in all righteousness, to the honor of God and the salvation of their souls. Be diligent to work with your hands that which is honorable, remembering the words of the apostle: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive;’⁹ so that you may not be burdensome to any through idleness.”¹⁰

Diligent Christian parents and churches desire that their children be taught godly values at all times and places,¹¹ even as they learn such subjects as reading, math, geography, and history. They value this kind of training more highly than

⁸ Written by Matthias Servaes from prison, to all the brothers and sisters in the church, 1565. *Martyrs' Mirror*, page 697

⁹ Acts 20:35

¹⁰ From a letter written by Joris Wippe to his children. Written from prison in 1558. *Martyrs' Mirror*, page 775

¹¹ Deuteronomy 6:7

any credits or diplomas this world (the earthly kingdom) has to offer; they are not concerned about the honor that comes from men, but about the honor that comes from God only.¹

Because of their godly manner of life, followers of Jesus are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They are like a city which is set on a hill and cannot be hid.² Through the lives and witness of these believers, people are pointed to Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life.³ Jesus draws all men unto Him.⁴

Jesus said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me”
(John 12:32).

Before Jesus came, the law and the prophets were in effect under the old covenant God had with man. But the law was fulfilled by the coming of Jesus.⁵ The New Testament, which is God’s pattern for man today, went into effect when Jesus died.⁶ Since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and people

“He [Jesus] is the mediator of the new testament”
(Hebrews 9:15).

¹ John 5:41–44

² Matthew 5:12–14

³ John 14:6

⁴ John 12:32

⁵ Matthew 5:17

⁶ Hebrews 9:14–17

press into the kingdom of God.¹ In this way the church is perpetuated throughout all generations, and becomes a kingdom that reaches . . .

3. Into All the World

As the church has spread out into many parts of the world and into places with many different languages and backgrounds, churches in specific areas often work together and group together more closely for fellowship and accountability to each other as fellow believers in the body of Christ. Church leaders meet together to discuss and discern issues, on the basis of God’s Word, that the church is facing in the present day, as the apostolic church did.¹ Among the different churches and groups of churches

*“For the same Lord
over all is rich unto
all that call upon him”
(Romans 10:12).*

there will be some variation in administration, although they are serving the same Lord.²

It is not unusual that, in spite of their mutual love for the Lord, differences of opinion will arise both within the local church and between the churches, particularly on issues that are not clearly stated in God’s Word. This was already

¹ Luke 16:16

¹ Acts 15:2

² 1 Corinthians 12:4–6

the case in the time of the apostles. When Paul and Barnabas were trying to decide who to take with them on a preaching trip, the contention was so sharp between them that they separated from each other and went on two trips instead!¹ In extreme cases where brethren separate one from another, there still needs to be a mutual respect and honor for each other.² Another time the apostle Paul withstood Peter to the face, because he was to be blamed for the improper way he related to other believers.³ In this way the church was able to address the issues they were facing and resolve them.

Because God's kingdom reaches into the whole world, there are believers existing in one part of the world who are unknown to churches in another part of the world.⁴ Yet if these believers meet with each other, they find that they have much in common because they are following the same Lord and the same Gospel.⁵

One of the prophets wrote in figurative speech about a time when the kingdom of God would become a great mountain and fill the whole

¹ Acts 15:35–41

² 1 Peter 2:17

³ Galatians 2:11, 12

⁴ Galatians 1:21, 22

⁵ Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:28

earth.¹ Jesus likened the kingdom to a tiny seed which grows into a great tree.² It is also compared to leaven, in that it grows and leaves its wholesome influence wherever it goes.³ Jesus said, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”⁴

What is the purpose and ultimate goal of the church?

The purpose of the church is to glorify God. It is also to preach, warning and teaching in love,⁵ so every man may be presented perfect in Christ Jesus.⁶ The goal is that more souls would be redeemed and cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus⁷ and be enabled to live holy lives⁸ so they are prepared to enter . . .

¹ Daniel 2:31–45

² Matthew 13:31, 32

³ Matthew 13:33

⁴ Matthew 24:14

⁵ Ephesians 4:15

⁶ Colossians 1:28

⁷ 1 Peter 1:18–21

⁸ 1 Peter 1:15, 16

4. The Eternal Kingdom in Heaven

The Apostle Paul wrote about *“the whole family in heaven and earth.”*¹ This family includes all the Old Testament believers who died in faith, such as Noah and Abraham;² they acknowledged that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, desiring a better country.³ It includes all the redeemed of all ages who have died and gone to their eternal reward,⁴ along with those who are still living on earth. From God’s perspective, these are all part of His family, His kingdom.

Though the number of those who have chosen to identify with the little flock of believers is relatively small, yet when all the saints of all the

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth”
(Hebrews 11:13).

¹ Ephesians 3:14, 15

² Hebrews 11:7–10

³ Hebrews 11:13–16

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:1

ages are united in heaven it becomes a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.¹

At Jesus’ second coming all who have died in faith will be resurrected from the dead. Jesus will deliver up His kingdom to God the Father.² All the redeemed ones who are alive on the earth will rise to meet Him in the air, and so shall they ever be with the Lord.³ With Him in heaven, the redeemed ones will worship and glorify their Creator for ever and ever, for He is worthy to receive glory and honor and power.⁴

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created”
(Revelation 4:11).

Heaven is a beautiful place. Human words cannot adequately describe the glories that are prepared for those who love and serve God. In heaven there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. The sorrows and trials of our past lives will all pass away.⁵ There is no need of the sun there, for the glory of God

¹ Revelation 7:9

² 1 Corinthians 15:24

³ 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

⁴ Revelation 4:10, 11

⁵ Revelation 21:4

and of the Lamb (God's Son) is the light of heaven. There will be no night there.¹ In sad contrast, it is written of those who have lived for and served the kingdom of this world that the smoke of their torment will go up for ever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night.²

Heaven will be worth all the sorrows and trials Jesus' followers on earth need to face. When the martyr Stephen was dying, he was able to look into heaven and see Jesus, standing at the right hand of God. Jesus was standing there, waiting to receive Stephen's spirit into heaven.³

By God's grace, may we choose to be among those who do His commandments, that we may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city of heaven.⁴

*“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”*⁵

¹ Revelation 21:23

² Revelation 14:8–11

³ Acts 7:54–59

⁴ Revelation 22:14

⁵ Ephesians 3:20, 21