

A Study of “The Church”: Lesson 3

Kingdom and Fellowship: Love and Friendship

By Bob Young

Two more metaphors must be explored: church as kingdom, and church as koinonia (fellowship).

Church and Kingdom

This biblical metaphor gives us yet another view of the relationship between Christ and his church. The king/kingdom relationship signifies that the power is always from Christ.

The church is on a pilgrimage, in a process of becoming, which means that the church is dynamic and never static. The church is always moving in its response to the king. Yet that response never reaches the ideal.

The kingdom metaphor shows us that we have both present reality to experience and future events to anticipate.

There is a sense in which the reality of the kingdom is both present and future. The reign of Christ as king was inaugurated at his resurrection. But the consummation of his reign is at the end of time, Phil. 2:11.

The biblical word for the full reign of Christ is *parousia*, appearing, literally = presence. We must study this word theologically. Biblically, Christ has never gone away, but is merely invisible (Matt. 28:20). We must declare that the reign of Christ has already broken into history. It is possible to claim him as our Lord now. He is gone with regard to physical presence, but is present through his Holy Spirit.

What then is the relationship between the church and the kingdom?

The church and the kingdom are not strictly synonymous—Gal. 5:19ff

The church is not exactly the kingdom, Gal. 5:19, 1 Cor. 6:9, Matt. 8:12.

In Christ, God’s reign breaks into the world, Matt. 12:28; and has an imperfect display in the church, Col. 1:13-14.

Kingdom denotes the reign of God. Divine sovereignty, rule. *Basileia*. The kingdom fully comes when God’s will is done on earth, Matt. 6.

God adds redeemed people to the church, then the question is can we allow God to reign? Can I surrender pride, emotion, attitudes? Will I pursue the eternal kingdom, the spiritual kingdom or the earthly kingdom, Col. 1:13-14. God rescues us from the sphere of the influence of darkness. He moves us to the sphere of the influence of his son. The issue is our allegiance, loyalty, and his sovereignty.

In the church a not people become people, an assembly of kingdom citizens in a hostile environment, darkness becomes light. This kingdom has no geographical boundaries. You can go to ecclesia, but you cannot go to *basileia*. God progressively causes kingdom to happen within us, even when I do not appear to be a kingdom person.

God’s will is not perfected in my life, only in Christ, John 17:4.

One way to say this is that it is the job of the church to point people to the kingdom, and we do in fact live between the times—between the death, burial and resurrection and the appearing of

Christ one and for all. To pursue the kingdom is to embark on a pilgrimage and to adopt a kingdom agenda. We are to be heralds of the king and the kingdom. Herald is not only about the past history and the decrees of the king, but is also about the future plans of the king, his arrival, his appearing, and his presence.

This idea of king and kingdom is essential if the church is to participate in kingdom activities, for this is the foundation for all activity and ministry in the church. The church must hear the call of God, and that call is to follow the king in kingdom things. The test for the ministry of the church is this: does this make me look like Jesus? The church can never bring the kingdom to reality and fullness, only God does that by his power.

Church as a fellowship of the Spirit

This topic looks at the church as community, koinonia.

This concept is important as we strive to understand the culture of the church, uniquely belonging to the church and never imported from the world around us.

The church is spiritual family, colony, community, counter-culture.

This means the church and Christ are intimately connected, 1 Pet. 2:9, metaphors of connections. The church is about establishing meaningful connections, 1 John 3:16-21. This is the dynamic of belonging and acceptance.

Koinonia signifies that the church is more than a social association. That which we share in common is the commitment to king and kingdom. The spirit makes us koinonia. 1 Cor. 12:12-13, we are in koinonia together through the Holy Spirit.

Fellowship is a person's active involvement with another as a child of God for the purpose of encouraging growth in spiritual things.

1. Recognize others in Christ, put there by God
2. Active, positive involvement in others' lives.
3. Encouraging growth in spiritual things.

The church is community through commonality

The common threat is sin

The common gift is eternal life

The common entrance is baptism

The common ceremony is the Lord's supper

The common distinctiveness is to be like Christ

The common salvation is the death of Christ

The common goal is heaven

The common agent is the Holy Spirit

The common purpose is the glory of God

What are the tasks of the church which we are to facilitate? These are the "one another" tasks of the church.

- Compassion
- Encouragement
- Confession

The Mission of the church

Simply, to demonstrate kingdom values. Our model is Jesus Christ—what are his values? What is his mission?

The church must live transcendentally in the everyday world.

- Demonstrating genuine love
- Acting justly toward all
- Declaring the reality of the kingdom

The church must be evangelistic, seeking to identify and develop kingdom people.

Apart from God, human lives are intellectually misguided, morally ambiguous, spiritually dead (Eph. 4:17ff; Rom. 1:18ff)

Thus, the church must speak, because only the gospel satisfies and addresses the human need for truth grounded in historical reality.

The church must be Christ's presence in the world. The church must speak to the insufficiency of this world to satisfy human kind's deepest needs. The church must proclaim the all-sufficiency of Christ.

The church shares fellowship in its identity as a worshipping community

Isa. 6—reverence, relevance, respect, receiving, responding.

Three things hinder worship—centered in creatures, insensitivity to God in the routines of life, restricting worship with traditions.

Eschatology: the church is a fellowship (community) which anticipates the future

The two continuing marks of the church through the centuries are baptism and the Supper. To change these, ignore these, is to experience great theological loss.

Baptism is a sign and source of unity which overcomes the barriers of the world, because one dies to the world. Baptism is radical. The story of Bob owned by Bob ended at my baptism. Gal. 2:20.

The hope for unity is not reformed character, but dead egos.

In baptism, two aspects of grace unite—forgiveness and transformation. We must carefully journey between simple symbol and sacramentalism. Baptism is an objective occurrence, not only subjective symbol. Baptism symbolizes changed relationships. But the confession and claim under the symbol of baptism is the reality of the new creature which is possible only through the death of the old person. This is why baptism (Rom. 6) is connected to the death and the resurrection of Christ. This connects baptism to eschatology, gives baptism an eschatological dimension. I am changed, 2 Cor. 5:17. The death to sin is real, not merely symbolic, Rom. 6:7.

Baptism is passive, because this is God's word and not man's. It is not meritorious. One submits to baptism, and the focus is on what we will allow God to do to us and through us. Surrender to another's power, put self at risk, hand self to God.

This biblical view of baptism as a part of the life and ministry of the church cannot be changed without theological loss. Baptism is a kingdom symbol. Baptism confesses the central event of faith. I choose to participate—I don't do it. The promise of God is that what he begins in us he will finish, Phil. 1:6ff.

Baptism is not an option; it is an enactment of the promise of the kingdom.

The supper.

Baptism is a rite of entrance, ending the old man, beginning the new man.

The supper is a renewal in faith of what baptism declares.

The supper is communion, thanksgiving (Eucharist), and memorial. Its power is in these three dimensions.

It is an act of unity, 2 Cor. 10-11, esp. 11:20-22, reminding us of the future unity.

It is a memorial, focused on the Past, present, and future, 1 Cor. 11:23ff. The analogy is the Passover.

It is a proclamation. As long as we believe, we observe the supper. It is gratitude for the reality that we will be restored at his appearing and kingdom. The supper is thus a kingdom symbol.

One day, the pilgrim church with its struggles, fears, conflicts, will become the church at rest (Heb. 4:6).

The theological and biblical roots which feed the life of the church and our role as ministers are....

Christ is our model, so we hear the story, we are rooted in the past.

Christ is present and will one day appear (be obvious), as so we have a passion for the future. The early church was obsessed with Christ's appearing as we are not.

The church is a group of people who see kingdom things. The end in Greek is the goal, not the terminus. Christ will bring fulfillment, Eph. 1:9-10.

Thus we are a people of hope and we live as people of hope.

If you believe that he is doing something with your life, how would you live? Col. 1:13-14.

Participate and await the fullness of his reign in his kingdom.

Heb. 12:2-3, look backward, because looking back allows us to look forward without losing heart.

On the darkest day, we have the greatest hope, Rom. 8:24.

This is a sound theology for ministry and for life.