

## SUBJECTS OF GOD'S KINGDOM

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SCRIPTURE: I John 3:6-10, Inspired Version

Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; whosoever continueth in sin hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that continueth in sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not continue in sin; for the Spirit of God remaineth in him, and he cannot continue in sin, because he is born of God, having received that Holy Spirit of promise. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother ..... We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

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Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

Through many ages philosophers have debated as to the nature of man. Some say that in every man there is inherent worth and goodness. Others say that in every man there is inherent sin and wickedness. Both views are right. Man is a queer combination of good and evil. He was made at first in the spiritual image of God; he was made to dwell in the presence of God, to have communion with God, to be like God, to be a subject of God's kingdom. Then came the experience known as the fall of man, by which he became separated from God's presence, and subject to death. Death is the invention of Satan, not of God. By reason of death, all mankind became subjects of Satan's kingdom, and would have continued to be forever, unless God had provided a plan of redemption from death through the atonement of his Son.

Death is a part of the physical heritage of every man, inherent in our bodies as soon as they are born. Inherent in those bodies is also the tendency to sin. The natural or physical man is carnal, sensual, devilish -- an enemy of God, a subject of the devil because of the inevitability of his death. Man is therefore a lost and fallen creature, a stranger to God's kingdom and a rebel against his power and authority.

On the other hand, there is also in man an infinite capacity for good. Man was created for fellowship with God; he was made a little lower than the angels. Along with the evil of man's lost and fallen nature, there is something God-like in every man, a spark of divinity, which if given a chance and developed can grow into a warming, life-giving flame.

Man must choose between these two natures. Some men hold to the idea that man is naturally so good that if left to his own devices and allowed to drift as he pleases he will eventually and inevitably evolve into perfection. History disproves this theory. Not just once, but again and again in history, men have climbed to the heights of culture, of learning, of civilization, of progress; but when left to their own devices the men of these great civilizations have always reverted to savagery, moral corruption, degradation, and destruction. There is every indication that unless we root out the natural depravity and tendency to hatred and destruction which exists in our modern civilization, we shall go the way of many other almost forgotten civilizations, with only this difference: that we shall go to destruction much more quickly because of our more efficient weapons of destruction.

Before mankind, individually or collectively, can see the kingdom of God, there must be a change of heart, a change of allegiance and loyalty. There must be a

process of re-birth, or naturalization from the kingdom of the devil to the kingdom of God, or man cannot be a citizen of the kingdom of God, even though he was designed in the beginning to be a citizen of that kingdom and finds only unhappiness, frustration, and destruction in any other kingdom.

What is necessary to bring about this naturalization process? Much more than a mere change of heart, of change of mind, although that certainly is necessary. If an alien visits the United States and decides that he would like to become an American citizen, his change of heart does not make him a citizen. An infant might be brought into the United States from the foreign country of his birth -- might grow up to manhood here -- might even live here all his life -- might think and act like here all his life -- might think and act like an American -- and yet never be a citizen if he did not go before proper authority and comply with those legal requirements, those legal forms and ceremonies which are prescribed by law to complete the naturalization process. Some people think that they can simply move into the kingdom of God, and automatically become citizens of that kingdom, and subjects of the King. Latter Day Saints believe that it is necessary to comply with the legal requirements before one can become a naturalized citizen of the kingdom of God -- that he must make formal and public acknowledgement of his change of allegiance, before the proper officers of the kingdom to which he is transferring his allegiance.

He who would become a citizen of God's kingdom must first have faith in and love for and allegiance to the King, who is Jesus Christ. He must have faith in the power of the King to give him a better life -- a completely new and different life. Because of this faith, he will desire to repent of his old ways and to renounce his old allegiance. Thus far, the changes of naturalization occur within you; the first two steps you can take alone. But the next step you cannot do alone. Baptism is the open, public, formal avowal of your new allegiance. It is symbolic of the death and burial of the old citizen of Satan's kingdom, and the birth of a new citizen in the kingdom of God. This rite or ordinance of naturalization must be administered by one who has authority to represent the King -- who can commit the King by his actions. In a kingdom, no group of citizens can confer citizenship -- only the king himself, or his duly authorized representatives. You cannot become a subject of the King and a citizen of the kingdom by joining yourself to a group of people who would like to belong to the kingdom, but only by conforming with the King's requirements for citizenship.

After baptism, men with the authority of the King lay hands on the head of the new citizen of the kingdom, and confer upon him the gift of the Holy Spirit, which transmits the new life of the kingdom, and certifies to his new allegiance, his new citizenship.

Perhaps one reason why Christian people have not realized more of the kingdom is that few men today recognize the need for authority in the processes of naturalization and regeneration. Many have half-heartedly laid down their arms and ceased to fight against the King; many have half-heartedly declared their independence from sin and the devil, but then have been content to drift, to do nothing, to live more or less within the territory of God's kingdom, but unwilling to make open, formal, authoritative, and decisive commitment to the King and his purposes.

Naturalization in God's kingdom cannot be complete without God's authority. Authority is important, if we wish to enjoy full citizenship in the kingdom of God. It is the humble belief of Latter Day Saints that this vital authority, which was lost to the original church through apostasy, was restored to earth again by the hands of angels sent of God to Joseph Smith, and that authority to induct citizens into the kingdom now exists again upon the earth by reason of this restoration.

Citizens of the kingdom demonstrate their citizenship by their deeds. When truly naturalized or born again, they do not continue in sin. Though they may fall into temporary error, they never swerve from their allegiance to the King. And because of their undivided allegiance, and their obedience to all the ordinances of God, outward as well as inward, they are qualified to receive the material and spiritual blessings which God reserves for those who can be trusted to use them because of their changed lives and unswerving allegiance to him. We invite you to make formal, authoritative, and binding your covenant of allegiance to him, and to enter into the joys of his kingdom.