

THE DOCTRINE OF THE KINGDOM

Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
 Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ
 of Latter Day Saints
 Independence, Missouri

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SCRIPTURE: II John 1:6-10

This is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed; For he that biddeth him God-speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.

If we want to live in any kingdom, we must live according to the laws of that kingdom. If we ignore or disobey those laws, we must either get out of that kingdom, or perish. For example, the state of Missouri is a political "kingdom" in one sense of the word. If I break the criminal law of the State of Missouri, I am taken out of the company of people who are keeping the law, and placed in a jail to await trial. If I am convicted, I am sent to the penitentiary, where I am deprived of most of the privileges and freedoms which belong to citizenship. Conviction of certain kinds of felony result in a complete loss of citizenship. He who cannot keep the laws of the state is denied the privileges and rights and freedoms which rightfully belong to the citizens of the state who do keep its laws. And so it is in any kingdom. If I refuse to live in obedience to the laws of that kingdom, I must get out or perish.

How foolish it is to suppose, then, that we can attain to life in the kingdom of God, by following any sort of rule or law we choose -- or none at all! He who would abide in the kingdom of God must abide by the laws of that kingdom, or be banished to the kingdom whose laws he is willing to obey.

One duty of those who proclaim the kingdom of God is to teach the doctrine of the kingdom. Too often in our day, however, both common men, and ecclesiastical leaders tend to disparage and belittle doctrine -- to say that doctrine doesn't matter so long as you believe in Jesus Christ and obey the golden rule. Because the denominations have divided on doctrinal differences so many times and in so many different directions, and because many people are now becoming convinced that denominational division is wrong, we have tended to gloss over and evade even essential and important doctrine in the interests of unity. We have said that unity is more important than correct doctrine.

Not long ago I heard a man discussing the nature of Jesus Christ -- the question of whether or not he was the Son of God in a unique, peculiar, and miraculous sense. He took the position that it was right for me to believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, because that was the tradition in which I had been reared; but that it was right for him to believe that Jesus was just a man -- a great prophet, a great teacher, a great leader, but just a man -- because that was the tradition in which he was reared. I could not follow that philosophy. I believe that regardless of men's opinions, truth is absolute. Jesus either was or was not the Son of God. If he was, then my belief about him is right. If he was not, the belief of this other man is right. We can't both be right. And although we may respect each other's opinions, and work together for the common good of our nation and our world, there can never be any true unity

between us so long as we are divided by this fundamental doctrine. And this division exists even between the various denominations of the so-called Christian church.

"But" I hear someone say, "that doctrine is a fundamental. We must agree on fundamentals, but there need not be perfect agreement on incidentals." All right, but who is to decide what are fundamentals and what are incidentals? Can any law of the kingdom be relegated to the "incidental" class, even if a majority of men agree to put it there? Who has the right to rescind a law of the kingdom, or to say that it shall no longer be taught? If several groups with conflicting ideas on the law of gravity agree that they ought to be unified in the interests of scientific research, and so come together as one, agreeing to ignore the law of gravity in the interests of unity, does that repeal the law of gravity?

The doctrine of the kingdom is the teaching of kingdom laws -- the laws ordained by God, and taught by men by his Son, Jesus Christ -- the laws which it is absolutely necessary to obey if we would be full-fledged citizens of the kingdom of God and recipients of all its benefits and blessings. We must pay heed to the doctrine or the teaching of the kingdom, or we cannot know or understand or obey these laws of the kingdom; and as we have already seen, we must obey the laws of the kingdom, or lose the privileges of that kingdom and be banished to some other kingdom -- the kingdom whose laws we are willing to keep.

Unless those who proclaim the kingdom of God teach the doctrine of the kingdom with fearless zeal and strict adherence to truth, and unless those who hear are willing to give implicit obedience to that kingdom's laws, both they who teach and they who follow their teaching will never see the kingdom of God, but must be content to dwell in some other kingdom.

Perhaps that is the reason why so many people who claim that the kingdom of God is within their hearts have utterly failed to find the kingdom in such everyday practical affairs as business, economics, politics, and the relationships of social, racial, ecclesiastical, and international life. Perhaps that is why capitalism, in spite of all its virtue and all its efficiency, has not brought us the kingdom of God. Capitalism is the only economic system in existence today that fully recognizes man's right to manage that property under his God-given free moral will and agency. Because of these merits it has great possibilities for good. It has built us a great prosperit in this nation. We could not have Christian stewardship without it -- without private ownership and control of property. But capitalism, in too many instances, has given lip service to the kingdom while refusing to place in practice the spiritual laws of the kingdom which are supposedly believed with the heart. And so today, many of the underprivileged peoples of earth who know capitalism only as a bogey man and a scape-goat for their own poverty, are turning to a deceptive, enslaving, and godless communism in a pathetically futile attempt to find the kingdom of God.

Does the doctrine of the kingdom matter? Jesus told his disciples to beware of the leaven, or the doctrine, of the Pharisees. Paul warned Timothy that the time would come when men would not endure sound doctrine, but would find a multitude of teachers to tickle their ears and turn them away unto fables. He warned the Galatians: "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto .. let him be accursed." He warned the Hebrews: "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines." He exhorted the Ephesians to be no more carried about with every wind of doctrine. He warned the Romans to mark those who cause divisions contrary to that which they had learned, and avoid them.

Is the doctrine of the kingdom important? In the words of our scripture reading "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed; For he that biddeth him God-speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

Then "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine. Continue in them; for by doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."