

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

P. O. Box 93 ~ Nampa, Idaho 83653 www.gentleshepherd.com February 2010

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

REDEMPTION Part 2 - LORDSHIP By Rayola Kelley

The consistent theme that runs through the Bible is redemption. But, how many of us understand the significance of this work. We sing songs about it and know that Jesus completed it on the cross, but it appears that some, or possibly many of us do not understand the real implications behind this incredible work. The reason I say this is because it appears that there are those in the Christian realm who do not live as if they are redeemed.



Perhaps it is because these individuals do not understand what it means to be redeemed. They may have some appreciation behind being delivered from a bad or hopeless state, but they do not realize that Jesus did not come to “simply” save us from a bad situation; rather, He came to save us from ourselves. Granted, our master was sin, but sin finds its inroads into our lives through our selfish, unregenerate disposition. In such a state, we are not only enemies of God, but we often become our own worst enemy.

This brings us to the one aspect people struggle with in regard to salvation, and that is the concept that they cannot be as bad as the Bible states. Surely, there has to be something good or beneficial in them that is redeemable or salvageable. The world’s philosophy that we must look for the “good” in all men confirms these people’s particular take on the matter. Although some of these individuals may maintain that they believe the Bible, they quickly separate themselves from Scriptures that would declare there is no “good” in them. They console themselves in their worldly, psychological view about possessing personal

“goodness” by applying such negative or hard Scriptures about the depravity of man to others who would clearly fit such criteria.

The Bible is clear. These Scriptures are not just applicable to those who are bad or rough around the edges, but to each and every one of us. Unlike merchandise at a store, we were not purchased because we had value, worth or were needed, but we needed to be ransomed because there was no worth outside of what God was willing to put on us. For example, you would not ransom someone you did not know or liked (*Romans 5:7*). It was God who chose to ransom us because He was the one who was willing to do so.

Scripture has made this clear even in regard to the children of Israel. Through the Old Testament you can see where the people of Israel started out insignificant. Their identity to Jehovah God was based on a covenant that He had made with men who were long dead. The people had become slaves, foreigners in a land that had no regard for them. Plans were devised to even destroy their identity as a nation by killing all the male children upon their birth. However, Jehovah God would not forget His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It did not matter that there were none to hold Him accountable to it. He could not forget because of who He was and is and always will be.

Jehovah God knew the stiff-necked ways of the descendants of Israel. He recognized that they were not only slaves to Egypt, but they were enslaved to the idolatrous and pagan practices of the society they had become subservient in. They had no rights as a people, they had no privileges as servants, and they had no value or future as slaves. They were poor and had nothing to offer except to be slaves.

It was Jehovah God who put a price on the people of Israel. He made them valuable by making them the apple of His eye. He was the one who

redeemed them and lifted them out of the status of slaves to deliver them as a people, a nation that would serve as a light in the midst of great darkness. He talked about this deliverance by using this analogy in *Exodus 19:4*: “*Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle’s wings and brought you unto myself.*”

The people of Israel had nothing to offer God. Yet, He chose to become their Lord God. “Lord” points to owner. He took ownership of them in order to deliver them. You cannot redeem something unless you are willing to take full ownership of it. You cannot pay a partial payment and maintain ownership of something. You must make full payment or restitution if redemption is to take place.

Did God’s redemption of the people of Israel imply they would remain as slaves? Ownership means exactly what it is. You own what you have purchased or redeemed. That which was purchased has no right to determine its use or status. A purchase becomes the property of that person who redeemed it. However, something that is used or valued after the purchase will rest with the character of the owner.

God is not a tyrant. He does not oversee a tyrannical government or kingdom. He did not redeem the people of Israel because He wanted slaves. He redeemed the people of Israel because He made a promise to Abraham that out of His descendants the Promised One would emerge to prove to be a blessing to all people of all nations. He redeemed the people because He chose to love them, take them as His espoused wife in a relationship that pointed to the excellent desire and plan He had for them as a people (*Hosea 2*).

It must be continually stressed that we all serve something. We are born into some type of slavery (*Romans 6:16-20*). We are either born into the oppressive slavery of sin, or we are born again into the kingdom of God to become servants and instruments of the Most High God. The truth is we do not belong to ourselves. In America, we can

purport our freedom as a people, but we are indeed enslaved to systems of the world, whether it be financial, governmental or religious, we are clearly enslaved to something.

God came to deliver us from this present world's systems to give us a choice as to whom or what we will serve. Like the children of Israel, He had to take responsibility for each of us in our desperate lost state. Because of our slavery to sin, we had nothing to offer Him. Due to the curse of our corruptible flesh, we were held captive, and because of our ongoing debt to God's Law and the world's systems, we had no means to change our status. The fact that we were born under a death sentence revealed that we had no hope of ever changing our state. Clearly, sin was our master, the flesh our prison, the world our prisoner chains, and death our executioner.

God chose to pay the price for our redemption. The price was not only high, but it was precious. He paid for our release with the very life of His only begotten Son. Since He paid for our redemption, He owns us. The Apostle Paul makes clear reference to this in *1 Corinthians 6:20*: "For ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

Our bodies are considered the temples of God. We must not come into agreement with the unholy by fornicating or prostituting ourselves with that which is contrary to the holy nature and ways of God (*1 Corinthians 6:13-19*). We should be bringing glory to God by our lives, not a reproach to Him.

In *1 Corinthians 7:22-23*, the Apostle Paul said this: "For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman; likewise, also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men." We are not here to live unto ourselves, heap the things of the world upon our flesh to feed its lust, or do as we please in matters. We have not been redeemed for ourselves, but redeemed for God's purpose. He has set us apart as a special people, designated to be presented to Him as His bride in the future.

We may be freemen, but such

freedom allots us the opportunity to love and serve our Lord with everything in us. Granted, we are free to serve Him in the ways we choose to serve Him, but we also risk hearing these words: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father, who is in heaven" (*Matthew 7:21*).

The word "Lord" points to owner. I have often made this distinction between Jesus serving as Israel's King, but as blood bought saints, He is referred to as our Lord. Israel understood the term "Lord." The people knew that the LORD God was their owner. However, as a nation, they wanted a physical king. For us, we are placed in the unseen kingdom of God, which brings us under the reign of our blessed King, Jesus Christ. We understand citizenship, and to some extent as to what it means for Jesus to be sovereign king over His unseen kingdom.

However, the one term we have a hard time understanding is "Lord." Kings have subjects, but lords have servants. Subjects are to be ruled over as a collective body, because the King must maintain and protect the integrity of his kingdom. Lords oversee servants for they are responsible for their personal welfare. Kings do not own their subjects, but lords own their servants. Kings are to protect the kingdom to ensure its function for the benefit of their subjects, but lords are to personally take care of the needs of their servants to ensure the function of their household. Subjects must be loyal to the king, while good servants should and must be personally committed and attentive to their Lord's will.

As you can see, kings hold the position of authority, but lords have secured the right to have their position. They own the servant. It has cost them in some way to secure this particular place of ownership in the servant's life.

This brings us to the term "Lord." Consider what the Apostle Paul stated "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (*Romans 10:9-10*). The apostle states that we must confess with our

mouth the Lord Jesus to ensure salvation. What relationship is established up front? That Jesus is our owner. He has taken full responsibility for our spiritual welfare with the intent to save us. Since we cannot save ourselves, He had to take personal ownership of us as a means to redeem us. However, this ownership means we belong to the one who has purchased us. From this point, we have become His servant with no rights other than what He allots us. We actually need to confess that without His ownership there would be no personal identification proving that we have been redeemed or purchased by Him.

It is upon confession of our Redeemer that we are able to believe in our heart that Jesus is alive. The grave could not hold Him after He had paid the complete price of His life for our redemption. He was raised from the dead to live evermore as our Lord, our Redeemer in the courts of heaven. He is not dead, but alive! If He is alive, we as believers have the responsibility of recognizing our vocations as His servants and coming into His household to serve Him according to His instructions and commands. The apostle summarized it by saying that with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

As I meditated on why God's people do not act as if they are redeemed, I realized the key was that they have never really come into the Lord's household as His consecrated servants. They have never really made it a point to belong to Him. If they did, they would have to deny themselves to live as they please, do as they will, and be whatever they desire. Due to such a state, they have not ceased to live like a slave to sin, serve the whims of the idolatrous flesh, and bow down to the foolish ways of the pagan world. Once again, we must remember we are going to serve something. As Joshua clearly stated to the children of Israel when he put forth this challenge to them: "Now, therefore, fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the Euphrates, and in Egypt, and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the

FROM PLEASURE TO DELIGHT

By Jeannette Haley



Of all the people who have ever lived only two experienced paradise on this earth. The name of this paradise was Eden, which means pleasure. God prepared this beautiful, perfect “park” for His most special creation—man. *Genesis 2:8* tells us, “*And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.*” As we meditate on this verse, many soul-stirring thoughts come to mind. First, God did all the work to plant this perfect garden in which to place man. If you have ever put a yard in from scratch, as we have, (with the help of friends) about now you are thinking, “*What would THAT be like, the lucky duck!*” It had to be beautiful beyond comprehension and far more glorious than any earthly garden or park today, regardless of how grand they may be. How awesome to consider the closeness and personal love and tender care of God as He personally put the man into this incredible paradise.

We cannot begin to imagine such a wonderful environment. It was never too hot, never too cold. Adam’s body was perfect. He had no aches and “owies,” no indigestion or constipation, no disease or pain of any kind. He would never lose his hair, develop a potbelly, and grow old and cranky. There was no need of doctors, chiropractors, dentists, proctologists and the like, or morticians. Just imagine! There were no annoying or blood-sucking insects to spoil his pleasure. All of the creatures were tame and harmless, and without a doubt created for the ultimate enjoyment of never-ending entertainment and discovery. There was no such thing as hunger, thirst, flood or famine. War was unknown. Nevertheless, to the chagrin of some, God gave him work to do. Yep, Adam was given a JOB. God not only “*took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden*” but He put him

there “*to dress it and to keep it*” *Genesis 2:15*. “Dress” means “work.” “Keep it” means (according to Strong’s), “to hedge about (as with thorns), i.e. guard; to protect, attend to, beware, be circumspect, take heed (to self), keep (-er, self), mark, look narrowly, observe, preserve, regard, reserve, save (self), sure, (that lay) wait (for), watch (-man).”

Therefore, we see that God gave Adam two main responsibilities. Does that throw a damper on your enthusiasm for paradise? Keep in mind, Adam still had a perfect environment in which to live. Therefore, work was still a part of his “pleasure” which resulted in meaningful interaction, involvement, and participation with God’s creation as we see in his naming of the animals. Adam’s scope of involvement and discovery of the creation is incomprehensible in its endless nature and complexity. All of this was for the purpose of adoration and worship to Creator God. In spite of this staggering reality, Adam’s ultimate pleasure, or state of bliss should have been the fact that the Lord God Himself came every evening to fellowship with him.

Besides working, or being active in Eden, God gave Adam the charge to protect it, along with the warning concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was after this that we read, “*And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him*” *Genesis 2:18*. Remember, up to this point God “saw that it was good.” Why was it suddenly “not good?” A clue to this may be *Job 31:33* which gives us a startling insight into Adam’s disposition. It says, “*If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom.*” *Hosea 6:7* sheds more light on this subject. It reads, “*But they like Adam have transgressed the covenant; there have they dealt treacherously against me.*” We know from *Romans 5* and other Scriptures too numerous to mention, that it is through Adam (not Eve) that all die. (See *1 Corinthians 15:22*).

God’s solution to Adam’s “not good” situation was to make a “help meet” for him. What does “help meet” really mean? For some it means God created woman to be man’s personal slave. You know the popular concept: “Get me another beer, Dear, and while

you’re at it, could you whip up something tasty for me and the boys?” After all, many of the world’s cultures relegate women to an inferior and somewhat “less-than-human” status where their sole purpose is to please the man. Sadly, in the majority of Christian denominations we find the same sentiment. Women are to remain silent, serve the men, bear children and cook for church potlucks. Is this really what God had in mind for Adam? Did Adam need “help” with manual labor in the Garden? *Of course not! God didn’t create man in His image to be a big worthless boob.*

Let us look at the Hebrew root for “help”—ezer which comes from the root azar which means to surround, i.e. protect or aid:--help, succour. If you look up the next word, “meet” you will discover that it is the same word, azar. Therefore, what God gave Adam was not a sub-standard human partner whom Adam called “Woman” but an equal in every way who was created for the express purpose of giving aid in the area of protection. Protection from what? It certainly could not have been physical protection because there was nothing in Eden to physically threaten Adam. Further study into this subject indicates that she was created by God to lead him back into a relationship with God. Her role was not just to be Adam’s physical “joy toy” who plucked and prepared fruit for his dining pleasure, but to compliment the highest attribute of Adam’s being; that is, his spiritual state.

We know from chapter 3 of *Genesis* that Eve had not been properly informed or prepared by Adam for her encounter with the serpent that he was initially responsible to keep out of the Garden, nor did she force the forbidden fruit down his throat. Verse 6 makes it clear that Adam was “*with her*” and did eat. She was beguiled and deceived while Adam stood by and made a deliberate choice to sacrifice (not protect) her, and rebel. We all know the tragic consequences, and their expulsion from this perfect paradise.

I believe that deep within the heart of every person is a longing for this lost paradise—a place to live that is free from human suffering, misery and death. Most do not recognize that

this longing for the “perfect life” traces back to “paradise lost” but it reveals itself in various ways, depending on the culture. For example, in America, it manifests itself as the “American Dream,” which often spills over into excesses because of the insatiable quest for pleasure. Tragically, because of sin, pleasure seeking in our modern world is becoming increasingly grotesque, perverted and wicked. An insatiable quest for sensual pleasure is the highway to hell.

Concerning Adam, his decision to disobey God reveals a state of discontent. Why was he dissatisfied? After all, he had everything a man could ask for in the way of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual pleasure. He had creation to explore; he had provision for every need. He had a purpose and a partner with which to share this perfect life. Above all, he had the opportunity for intimate communion with His Creator. Therefore, could it be that behind Adam’s failure to obey God was a failure to *delight* in God? He may have experienced “pleasure” but pleasure generally originates externally to produce a self-indulgent experience. For example, what we generally take pleasure in is something that pleases us because in some way we gain from it physically, mentally or emotionally. It is all about us. The pleasure we normally seek does not originate from within, extending outward from our innermost being, but rather exists in our environment to “make us happy” as we partake of it. The perfect pleasures of Eden were not adequate in and of themselves to prevent Adam from falling. His deliberate choice (in spite of the good and perfect pleasures he possessed) resulted in termination from his relationship with God, and expulsion from Paradise.

Therefore, does it not seem rather obvious that if we, in our fallen state, were somehow to gain “the whole world,” or even the “best of the best” with every luxury and pleasure that it would fail to be fulfilling in every way? Why then, do so many people, including professing Christians, live for worldly pleasures that can never satisfy? I believe the answer, or at least part of the answer, to this question is three-fold: Rebellion against God and His authority as God, rebellion against loving God above all else, and rebel-

lion against His laws, and the consequences of breaking those laws. In essence, it comes down to, “I resent authority, I resist disciplining and directing my affections, and I refuse to obey laws in spite of the consequences. One can see at a glance that this three-fold rebellion sets the stage for the breakdown of the family unit, society and nations. It is a recipe for disaster because the underlying premise is lack of faith towards God, self-love, and pride.

What did God have in mind for Adam before his fall? Was Adam created to wander around in a perfect paradise so he could be happy? To understand more about Adam, allow me to quote from Oswald Chambers. “God did not create Adam holy. He created him innocent, without self-consciousness (as we understand the word) before God; the one thing Adam was conscious of was God and only of himself in relation to the Being Whose commands he was to fulfil; the main trend of his spirit was towards God. Adam was intended by God to take part in his own development by a series of moral choices whereby he would transform innocence into holiness. Adam failed to do this, Jesus Christ came on the same platform as Adam and did not fail. Supposing Adam had transformed the natural life into the spiritual by obedience, what would have happened? Transfiguration; he would have “spiritualized” the natural life and made it all that God wanted it to be. The natural life is neither good nor bad, moral nor immoral; it is the principle within that makes it good or bad, moral or immoral.”

Concerning transfiguration, Chambers wrote: “When holy character was fully matured in Our Lord, earth lost its hold on Him and He was transfigured. In all probability if Adam had transformed his innocence into holy character by obeying God’s voice, transfiguration would have been the way out of this order of things, there would have been no death. The entering in of sin made this possible.” (See Romans 5:12, 6:23)

Instead of preaching and teaching that God’s will for His people is to seek first His kingdom through faith and obedience in order for this transfiguration to take place, the emphasis

is on the humanistic and wicked deception that God wants us to be “happy.” This is the evil overshadowing of humanism. Jesus did not die to make men happy; He died to make men holy. The lust for “happiness” has become so great that it has paved the way for hirelings to build their “seeker-friendly,” “happy-clappy” mega churches, and for liberal, “progressive” politicians to establish a socialistic, “progressive” evil government. There really isn’t much difference between the two, except Jesus is “tacked” on to the former.

Coupled with obedience, the journey from innocence to transfiguration must be one of love from beginning to end. As Rayola points out, there is a difference between love for God, and love of God. Adam may have begun with love for God, but this love never developed into the love of God. Love for God may be pleasant on the surface, but the love of God is abiding, inward delight. Consider delight (as opposed to pleasure) in *Psalm 1:1-3*. “*Blessed (happy, state of bliss) is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*” [Emphasis added.]

Consider *Psalm 37:4*, “*Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.*” Delight in this verse means soft or pliable. How soft or pliable are you in the hands of God? “*I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart*” *Psalm 40:8*. Delight in this verse means inclined to, or pleased. How inclined, or pleased, are you to do God’s will according to His law written on your heart? The Apostle Paul wrote in *Romans 7:22*, “*For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.*” Delight in this verse means to rejoice in with oneself, feel satisfaction concerning. Is this the state of your heart? We can have love for God, yet fail in truly delighting in obedience to Him as in the case of

gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:14-15).

Most Christians simply quote the last part of verse 15, while failing to elaborate on the fact that a great river or gulf separates the different masters. God is on one side of the river or gulf, while all other taskmasters reside on the other side. As servants in the household of God, we will learn what it means to be His children who are truly being raised up as heirs to an eternal inheritance. We will know what it means to serve a just, fair, and loving master. We will know what it means to live as redeemed people who were once dangling on the abyss of destruction, but were borne up as if on the wings of an eagle by a loving God.

When was the last time you meditated on redemption? When was the last time you realized that you had no value to offer God for His intervention and deliverance? Yet, because of who He is, He chose to commend His love towards you by allowing His Son to become the ultimate sacrifice on the brutal instrument of the cross. He did it not because you held any real worth or value, but because out of His holiness, love, mercy, and grace He put a price on you that He willingly paid to bring you unto Himself.

Why would He do such an act? Surely, it was not because of any good or righteousness in us. Regardless of how we try to convince ourselves, there is nothing redeemable in us for our holy God considers our best as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Even though we think there might be something worthwhile to salvage in us, there is no good or beneficial thing in our flesh that would ever be desired by Him (Romans 6:18). Although we might try to flatter ourselves that we do possess some winning way, the truth is we are born in a state that deems us lost sinners, utterly separated from Him. We were lost to God, lost in our own form of darkness of delusion, ignorance and corruption. Without embracing His

redemption, an individual remains 100 percent lost to all that is holy, right and good.

We need to get this deep into our spirit. We need to quit buying the world’s humanistic nonsense that leads us back to man, or the world, being the solutions to the matters that ail humanity, causing us to serve harsh, uncaring taskmasters while selling our souls. The very nonsense that we are willing to enslave ourselves to such taskmasters proves that our attempts to believe that there must be some “good” in us is a lie. God’s Word is clear that the only one who is good is God. There is no moral fiber in man that can withstand God’s holiness once such “goodness” is put to the fire. Granted, man may be decent about matters and moral in his conduct, but in and of himself he possesses no inward moral fiber that can stand in light of God’s holiness. God clearly put a price on us and willingly paid it to afford us the luxury of choosing who we are going to ultimately serve.

Which side of glory did you choose to stand on? Is it on the side where the darkness of idolatry and paganism reigns or is it in the household of God where your Redeemer truly is Lord? If Jesus is Lord, it should and will be obvious that you have indeed been redeemed. †

COMMENTS & EMAILS

“It seems to me that there is a pointed attack on discernment and purity of doctrine (sola scriptura); I believe that this is part of the overall strategy to usher in the "Great Falling Away", in which good doctrine is replaced by delusion and lies. My point is this: discernment in the Church must first be weakened in order for the delusions to take hold; we in fact see more and more popular opinions swinging to pantheism and ecumenism: can we keep spiritual discernment alive? “ - Email

“The Lord has called me to renew my study of theology and doctrine, and to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit’s power. You see, I believe that He want us to pursue Him as a person, in order to have spiritual fellowship with Him. As we do, we learn to recognize and cherish Him above all else, so that we can readily tell the difference between

Adam. Many who have love for God serve Him, but only those who possess the love of God serve Him in Spirit and in truth. This love is sacrificial and will stand the test of fire on Judgment Day.

Finally, what did Jesus have to say about man’s happiness? The answer can be found in *Matthew 5:3-12*. Therefore, if you have been seeking happiness through worldly pleasures that have left you empty and void of life, won’t you seek instead the true happiness that can only be found in delighting in the Lord?

May God help us all to be established through Christ upon the straight and narrow path that leads to eternal life in the presence of the Lord forever. †

the voice of our Great Shepherd and the voice of the lawless one. Our God really is awesome, and will renew your joy in His presence.” - Email

“I just adored Rayola's article on redeemed! What a comfort it is to read once again of that realization of all that Jesus Christ has done for us, and continues to do for us. One brother, who has since gone on to Glory, used to say: ‘We act like a people who are on parole, when, in fact, we’ve been PAR-DONED.’ [Jeannette] I could hear your heart bleeding as I read your article. Absolutely, everything you said is truth! I pray that the Spirit of God will minister this truth in the way that only He can, to all who set their eyes upon the article! I continually tell everyone that my missionary field is all of these lost souls on the block where I live. I want them to SMELL THE AROMA of Jesus when I walk by them! The whole NL was a blessing to me, and I thank you all for your continued faithfulness to bring to fruition all that God has called and equipped you to fulfill! - FL

“DISCIPLESHIP—there are lots of people that understand discipleship with their BRAIN, but they don't want to commit themselves to it, because it will take heart-effort on THEIR PART! They are just too lazy to want to be bothered with concentration of what GOD wants, because they're too busy concentrating on what THEY want!” - FL

CHECK OUT RAYOLA’S NEW BLOG:
SPIRITUAL SURVIVAL
<http://lightline-rightlydividing.blogspot.com>

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

What is the Kingdom of God?

Q: *I have heard a lot of emphasis on the kingdom of God that has brought confusion to me as to what I need to understand in relationship to this subject. Even though I am not sure why I am confused, could you clarify what I need to understand about the kingdom of God? Thanks.*

A: I can certainly understand why there is much confusion about this issue. There are various teachings in which the kingdom of God serves as the center focus. There is the "Kingdom Now" teaching which believes that the Church, not Christ, will set up the future kingdom that is yet to come. There is "Replacement Theology" where the Church has supposedly "replaced" national Israel. There is also the teaching about establishing the kingdom of God in a physical sense among Christian groups that will prepare, replace or protect believers from the governmental intrusion that is fast taking center stage. I am sure that I am only touching the surface of these teachings or groups. Regardless of the abuse or misuse of the concept of God's kingdom, the Scriptures hold the key to understanding what the kingdom of God is.

There are two terms used interchangeably in Scripture: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. There are those who believe there is a slight difference between these terms. The kingdom of God embraces all that is being done on behalf of His kingdom, while the kingdom of heaven is mainly associated to His work on earth. Whether this slight difference is true or not, at the core of the kingdom of God is that His will is being done, whether in heaven or on earth (*Matthew 6:10*).

To understand what role the kingdom of God is to have in our lives, we must understand what God's will is. This will cut through the various heretical teachings that have flooded Christendom. God's will is simple: He wants people to believe upon His Son to ensure the salvation of their souls. When it comes to man, his very salvation has to do with God's plan and work of re-

demption that took place on the cross of Christ. With this in mind, let us now consider some of the references to the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven, to see if this simple presentation bears out in Scripture.

When John the Baptist came out of the wilderness, he declared in *Matthew 3:2*: "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." John was preparing people to understand that the work of God, redemption, was at hand.

In *Matthew 4:17* Jesus said the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Consider the tense of what John stated about the kingdom, which was in relationship to future tense, while Jesus' statement is in relationship to past and present tense. The kingdom was at hand because Jesus was the one sent forth to do the work of the kingdom so that the plan of redemption could be brought forth in this world.

In *Matthew 4:23*, we read about the Gospel of the kingdom. The gospel is the good news of the kingdom. We know the good news that was established by Christ's death, burial and resurrection was that man could possess eternal life and now partake of the fullness of salvation, as well as the kingdom of God.

In *John 18:36*, Jesus stated that His kingdom was not of this world. In other words, it did not have its source in the world, function as the world, nor did it belong to it. We are told to first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all matters concerning our needs would be taken care of (*Matthew 6:33*). *Matthew 12:38* tells us that believers make up this unseen kingdom, and that the entrance to it comes through, by and because of who Jesus Christ is and what He did for us (*2 Peter 1:9-12*). In *Matthew 25:34*, we are told that we must inherit or possess this kingdom. *Luke 12:32* tells us it is the Father's good pleasure to give us this kingdom. In other words, all that is attached to this unseen, eternal kingdom is what the Father desires to give us by way of promises, while it is Jesus who will preserve us unto His heavenly kingdom for His glory (*2 Timothy 4:18*). *Hebrews 6:12* and *James 2:5* reveals that it is only through faith that we can inherit the promises of the kingdom. Finally, we

have this important bit of information about the kingdom of God in *Romans 14:17*: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Clearly, it is a spiritual kingdom that is not only fruitful, but is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

To me, these Scriptures confirm that the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven has to do with God's will being carried out, especially where it comes to mankind and the necessary work it will take to bring His will about in the lives of His people. Jesus is king of this kingdom that needs to be brought forth in the lives of His people at the place of redemption. The work of the kingdom has to do with the salvation of men's souls, and ensuring that eternal life is brought forth in each of us. Clearly, man cannot bring this realm forth, nor will this spiritual kingdom replace national Israel. It is not meant to be instituted among the people, but in them through the indwelling presence of His Spirit. The emphasis of the kingdom of God is not the kingdom itself; rather, it is His work of redemption to bring forth the life that will identify each believer to an eternal inheritance. This inheritance includes being citizens of an everlasting kingdom.

I do hope this will somewhat clear up the confusion you may be having concerning this matter. †

RECOMMENDED READING

"Tears of Triumph" (The amazing true story of a missionary's life behind the Iron Curtain and beyond) by Richard & Sara Michalski - Impact Ministries, PO Box 2500, Redmond, WA 98073-2500 - www.impactmin.org
\$15.95 + 4.05 S/H

"Establishing Our Life in Christ," Vol.1 (Foundations of the Christian Life) by Rayola Kelley - \$19.95
www.KetchPublishing.com

"Christ as All in All" - Manfred Haller

"The Spirit-Filled Life"- Charles Finney

"God Tells The Man Who Cares" - A. W. Tozer