

ENTERING THE KINGDOM

The Kingdom is thought of in various ways by different people. Some equate the Kingdom with heaven. Others feel that all that is of the Kingdom has come into their possession at the time of salvation. Others believe there is nothing further to do but to die or be raptured in order for the Kingdom to be realized. And there is also a seemingly growing number of people who understand the manifestation of the Kingdom to be a byproduct of their faith. As they name their privileges and rights and claim God's promises they enter the realm of the Kingdom.

In this article we will be talking about conditions for entering the Kingdom of God. It is presented from the perspective that although the *Kingdom is at hand*, (within the grasp of each of us), it has not as yet been manifested in the earth in its fullness. It will not come via some hyper act of faith or as a consequence of a rapture but as a result of the people of God ordering themselves in the plan of God to complete the will of God. When we speak of entering the Kingdom we are not speaking about initial salvation.

There are seven scriptural conditions for entering the Kingdom of God. These are laid down in the Bible through the teachings of Jesus and the acts of His disciples. We will deal with each one briefly in this article.

1. Righteousness is a condition of entering the Kingdom:

(Mat 5:20 KJV) For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The righteousness that is required to enter the Kingdom is a righteousness that must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. The scribes and Pharisees represent the religious leaders and a religious lifestyle. This religious lifestyle is a byproduct of all religious systems. Although it may not be necessarily bad, it cannot excel to the place of the Kingdom.

The righteousness of the scribes was the righteousness that came from "book knowledge". If our knowledge of the Bible causes separation or elevation of self, or our position or ministry it hinders entrance into the Kingdom.

The righteousness of the Pharisees came from appearance and the image they had of themselves. They viewed themselves as the expression of godliness and in so doing blinded themselves from understanding the Kingdom. They were looked up to by the people and in their weakness made themselves and not God the pattern to follow. Jesus warns us to beware of their leaven, (their teaching). In seeking the Kingdom He is clear to tell us to also seek His righteousness; (Mt 6:33).

There is a vast difference between the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees and that of Jesus. Righteousness as Jesus explained comes through a process of spiritual hungering and thirsting. Our righteousness is as filthy rags but His is the source of our salvation. Only in Him can we and do we have a righteousness acceptable to God.

2. Doing God's Will is a requirement of entering the Kingdom:

(Mat 7:21 KJV) 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 which is in heaven.

It's not what we say but what we do that demonstrates our compliance with His will. Now in order to do His will we must first understand what His will is. *(Eph 5: 1 7 KJV) Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.* Wisdom is based on understanding the will of God. If we don't understand His will we show a lack of wisdom.

Many Christians do not understand the Lord's will. We often make statements which declare our desire for His will. What we are in reality often saying is "won't you Lord please change your will to conform with ours"? God's will does not change. It is we who have to move our position and align it with His. Frustration and immaturity are the result of failing to align with His will. We rationalize why something must be the will of God. 'It seems so right'. 'It will do so much good'. 'Certainly it is what God would want.'

God's ways are not necessarily our ways. His will is the product of process in our lives. The only way to ever establish with certainty the will of God is to submit to the often painful process, (painful in the flesh), of sanctification. Through suffering our minds are made new to see in higher dimensions and to progressively do the will of God. The process causes a separation (sanctification), from that which is fleshly and that which is spiritual thus renewing the mind in Christ and ordering it after His image. *(1 Th 4:3a KJV) For this is the will of God, even your sanctification; (1 Pet 4: 19 KJV) Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*

The will of God, like all spiritual progression, prayer, salvation, etc. comes to us in three dimensions. Only the highest dimension of His will afford entrance to the Kingdom. (*Rom 12:2 KJV*) *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* The good will of God. 1 Tim 1:8; Eph 4:28,29; Rm 12:9,13:3,16:9; Gal 4: 18; 3 In 1:11; etc. The acceptable will of God. Rm 12:1; Eph 5:8-11; Phil 4:15-18; 1 pt 2:5,20; Etc. The Perfect will of God. 1 pt 5: 10; 1 In 4: 18; Rev 3:2; Ja 3:2; 2 Cor 12:9; Acts 24:22; Isa 26:23; Heb 12:23; etc.

Without understanding and doing the will of God there is no entrance into the Kingdom. (*Col4:12 KJV*) *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.* The perfect will of God is an attainable goal in the Christian life.

3. Entering the Kingdom requires a conversion (metamorphous), of the attitude of the mind.

(*Mat 18:3 KJV*) *And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be convened, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

Conversion in this passage involves the changing of the mind. Unless we become ~ little children we shall not enter the Kingdom. Notice Jesus doesn't tell us to become little children but to become ~ as little children. (*1 Cor 14:20 KJV*) *Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.* He is not encouraging our immaturity as little children but our innocence and attitude.

Being as little children is the ability to see what you believe rather than believing what you see, a concept put forth by Randall Worley and others. Unless we can begin to see, through eyes of faith, into the unseen, we will forever be bound by the constraints of the natural world. A magician once told me that it is easier to fool adults than children because adults are conditioned to believe what they see whereas children are not bound by what is commonly called reality.

(*2 Cor 4: 18 KJV*) *While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.* Children in their innocence do not allow the natural world and its 'reality' to destroy their belief. If told about wonderful mystical places they can readily believe in or at least entertain there possible

existence. What they believe, like Santa Claus, becomes reality to them. They trust the words of their parents. We like children need to trust and rely on the word of our heavenly Father. He never lies or deals in exaggeration but in truth and honesty with all His children. If we are going to enter the Kingdom, then we need to believe the teachings of the Kingdom and accept the reality of this teaching even when it seemingly goes against what we've been taught by the natural world.

4. Entering the Kingdom requires a freedom from the control of the material world

(Mat 19:23 KJV) Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

(2 Cor 8: 9 KJV) For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich

(Mat 5:3 KJV) Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Riches with men make entering the Kingdom difficult or impossible; but riches with God make entering the Kingdom possible. Jesus spoke a great deal about money. We understand the desire of the Lord for His people to be prosperous, emotionally, spiritually as well as financially. How material things are acquired, valued and spent are of great importance to God.

How we view and administer riches - the material produce of the earth - more than any other thing determines the control of the natural world in our lives and our ability to see beyond the natural into the spiritual. Jesus' statement is true. The deceitfulness of riches will choke the word making it unable to bring forth the Kingdom in our lives. God is not looking for His people to be financially poor but He is looking for a poverty of the spirit. The church world's preoccupation with the acquiring of material wealth and position may be the number one hindrance to it's spiritual prosperity.

5. Entering requires the removal of offense:

(Mark 9:47 KJV) And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:

Whatever causes offense will keep us from entering the Kingdom. We feel offended when our "rights" are infringed upon. Offense always causes us

to turn inward. Lack of forgiveness, bitterness and pride accompany an offended spirit.

Offense is the mark of exalting self rather than Christ. We feel justified by the wrong, real or imaginary, imposed on us by others. Because offense blinds us and causes us to focus on self, we cannot see or walk in the higher realms of God. Only a spirit liberated from offense can enter the Kingdom.

6. Entering the Kingdom requires a new birth:

(John 3:5 KJV) 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.

The term born again is usually associated with initial salvation. To be born again is, in the mind of many a synonym for salvation. Jesus said unless we are born again we cannot enter the Kingdom. This born again process, I believe, goes beyond what is normally termed salvation.

There is a life that must come to us by the Word and through the Spirit. We must become born again of the incorruptible Seed. *(1 John 3:9 KJV) Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.* Entrance to the Kingdom requires entering a place where sin has no dominion over us. Like Jesus there is nothing in us that would respond wrongly to evil. We are liberated from weakness leading to sin.

7. Entering the Kingdom requires tribulation:

(Acts 14:22 KJV) Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

We must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom of God. A period of tribulation or the 'tribulation period'. There is no other way. Tribulation is not an option but a necessary component of the process leading to the Kingdom. Much of Christianity is focused on avoiding tribulation. One of the main elements of the rapture teaching is the avoidance of some great future tribulation.

Without tribulation however, there is no entering of the Kingdom. Tribulation is the vehicle that deals with all the fleshly and worldly hindrances to positioning ourselves for the Kingdom. *(Rom 5:3 KJV) And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; (1 Th 3:4a KJV) For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; (Rev 1.:9a KJV) I John,*

who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom.

Rather than trying to escape tribulation perhaps we should allow tribulation to mold and shape us into His image. All who have matured and grown powerful in the Spirit, without exception, have been subject to tribulation. The early church of Acts recognized what so many seek to avoid.

As seen in these seven conditions to entering the Kingdom, unless we change there is no entrance to the Kingdom. We are to be changed into His image. It is this transformation that liberates us from the confines of the fallen nature and brings us to the place of the Kingdom. All that brings this change brings to us the Kingdom.

Entering the Kingdom then requires the following:

1. A righteousness beyond that of religious righteousness;
2. Knowing and doing the will of God;
3. Becoming as little children by being able to see what we believe rather than believing what we see;
4. By being set free from the bondage of the material world - riches - so as to obtain the treasures of heaven;
5. The necessity of being set free from offense;
6. Being born again by the Word and Spirit into a higher realm;
7. Allowing the process of God through tribulation to open up for us the Kingdom.

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