

Episode #426 Kingdom Problem Passages 2 – The Spiritual Kingdom?

I. We have established our belief that the Kingdom of God is the theme of the Bible. The Greek word *basilea*, usually translated “kingdom,” means “government,” and the kingdom of God is nothing more nor less than God’s government over this earth and all people living upon it. Yet there are some passages that would seem to contradict that conclusion that many point to. We will now examine these passages and see if they really point to another meaning of the kingdom.

II. Luke 17:20-21. The Kingdom of God is Within You!

A. Verse 20. The Pharisees asked specifically when the government of God would come.

1. Notice that Christ does not answer the Pharisees’ question, at least not directly. Instead, He uses their question as a springboard for teaching about the Kingdom.
2. The kingdom of God does not come just because men are looking for it. The United States government, for example, would never have come if men had not looked for it. But God’s Kingdom coming, or not coming, has nothing to do with whether or not men are seeking it.

B. Verse 21. Some would like to use this verse to settle the question “What is the Kingdom?” They claim this means that the kingdom of God is not a “physical” kingdom, but a “spiritual” kingdom in your heart. Let us examine this view.

1. What is something that is “spiritual”? Some would say the opposite of physical. But the opposite of spiritual is unspiritual, and the opposite of physical is immaterial. Others would say spiritual means invisible, but that is not the case. Our English word “spiritual” often does not really reveal any truth! What do people really mean when they use it? Often little or nothing.
2. I Corinthians 10:1-4. How were the bread and water spiritual? In Scripture, the adjective “spiritual” is used of things that come directly from God, and not by the usual, natural processes by which such things are normally made. This was true of the bread, and of the water. This is the basic idea of “spiritual.”
3. The Kingdom of God is a spiritual government, brought about by the power of God, not by the normal processes of a government arising. One does not see an army marching down Main Street. But it is also a physical government.

C. What did Christ mean when He said that the Kingdom is within you?

1. He did not mean that the kingdom was just the kind of work that God does in the hearts of believers today, for He was addressing the Pharisees, who generally rejected His message! How could Christ have meant that the Kingdom of God was what goes on in our hearts today, if He told the rebellious and unbelieving Pharisees that it was something within THEM?
2. Christ was referring to what the Kingdom of God is all about, which is not things like palaces or ornamental chairs called thrones or other, material things. Not that the Kingdom cannot have these things, but this is not really what the Kingdom is all about. Instead, the Kingdom of God is all-present and all-pervasive, actively present and alive in the hearts of its citizens. Its punishments likewise are internal, and its directives are not on paper, but by the voice of God Himself speaking to every citizen of the Kingdom directly through His Spirit. Thus, it is basically within people, and the externals of it are not the most important.

III. Romans 14:17. The Kingdom is Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Spirit.

A. We will examine the background of this verse.

1. Romans 14:14. The Holy Spirit sets forth truth regarding clean and unclean laws. Things are not inherently unclean, just ceremonially unclean because God declared them so. If one considers anything unclean, his conscience makes it unclean for him. Whether or not eating that thing is actually a problem, for him to eat this is an act of sin and rebellion in his heart.
2. Romans 14:15. For one who realized that unclean laws did not apply to him, it might be fine to eat. Yet he might be surrounded by those who do not have this same understanding. For him to eat would tempt them to breach their consciences before God. This is not what a believer should do.
3. Romans 14:16. To eat rightfully would be good, but if that good is spoken of as evil among those who do not understand, one is better off not eating.
4. Romans 14:17. Many would like us to believe that this defines the Kingdom of God. Yet the topic of this passage is not the kingdom, but foods, clean and unclean, and when it is appropriate to eat them. It is not right to define the kingdom by a passage that does not even have the kingdom as its main topic.

B. Are we to think that some thought their lunch was the kingdom of God, and Paul is saying, “No, no, people. Your lunch is not the kingdom of God! Actually, the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit”?

C. The people who were arguing about foods were causing this issue to become extremely important, far more important than it actually was. Paul is reminding them that, in the grand scheme of the kingdom, what you eat is not so important. Things like righteousness, things like peace, and things like joy are much more crucial.

D. It is as if a visitor to the U.S. was consumed by learning about our system of giving food stamps, seeming to think this is what our government is all about, and I said, “The U.S. government isn’t about food stamps. It’s about freedom and equality and justice.” In saying this, I have not defined the U.S. government. But I have explained what I believe to be of crucial importance to the government of this country, of far more importance, at least, than food stamps. This is what Paul does in Romans 14:17!

E. Romans 14:18-22. There is nothing in this context to indicate that Paul is here setting forth exactly what the kingdom of God is. To make this a definition of the kingdom of God is foreign to the passage, and it is foreign to the truth.

IV. To try to define the kingdom of God at all by passages in the New Testament is to miss much

A. In the New Testament, no explanation of what the kingdom of God is and what this phrase means is given. The New Testament assumes that the reader will already know what the Kingdom is before It begins talking about it. This was completely true of the hearers of these things in the first century, for they had learned this from the Old Testament, most prominently from the Psalms and the prophets.

B. The opposite of this situation is generally true today, when the psalms and prophets are among the least known parts of the Bible to the average believer. It is no wonder that, when we come upon the idea of the kingdom of God in the New Testament, we have no idea what the Bible is talking about.

V. Conclusion: To learn about the kingdom of God, we should go back to the Old Testament.

Instead, many turn to orthodoxy, or to passages in the New Testament like the ones I discussed above. This is not the way it should be. The Scriptures will teach us what the kingdom is.