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UNDERSTANDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE FALLEN WORLD

Importance of understanding the kingdom of God and the fallen world

As disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, we want to live well and effectively for Him. But how can we do so? Do we know how God wants us to live while we are on this earth? Do we know what perspective and values He wants us to have, and what approach in life He wants us to take? Do we know what is really important to Him?

As followers of Christ, we can gain insight into these issues by considering the life of the Lord Jesus, our perfect example.

However, when we look at the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ, we may be puzzled by His ways, which are often very different from what one would normally associate with greatness and effectiveness. Why did He conduct Himself the way He did? What was His approach in ministry?

To understand these issues, it is helpful for us to appreciate two major areas that God reveals to us in the Scriptures—the kingdom of God and the fallen world. If we understand these two areas and the issues involved, we will be able to better appreciate the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, the kind of values we should have, the approach we should take in life, and what we should concentrate on.

In this message, we shall first consider what kind of a king the Lord Jesus is. We will then consider the major differences in emphasis between the world and the kingdom of God and their major contrasting characteristics.

The Lord Jesus Christ: What kind of a king is He?

It was prophesied in Daniel 7:13-14 and Isaiah 9:6-7 that the Lord Jesus would be a great king. He would be given everlasting “dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him”, and there would be “no end to the increase of His government”. However, what is recorded in the Scriptures of His earthly life is a picture that seems totally at odds with these prophecies.

The Lord Jesus was born in a manger and of poor parents. While He was yet a child, King Herod wanted to kill Him, and His parents had to flee with Him to Egypt. During His earthly life, He experienced much suffering and pain, especially in the

circumstances surrounding the Cross. On His cross were inscribed the words: "This is the King of the Jews" (Luke 23:38). But the only crown He wore on this earth was a crown of thorns. Instead of receiving worship and adoration, He was mocked at, spat on, beaten, scourged and finally crucified like a criminal. It was a very painful, agonising and humiliating way to die.

In Isaiah 53:2-3, 7, the coming Messiah is described as having "no stately form or majesty... despised and forsaken of men... He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter..."

As He hung on the cross, He appeared weak and helpless. He came into the world to be the Saviour of mankind, but He could not even save Himself. How could this be a picture of a great king, one with everlasting dominion and glory?

The Scriptures prophesied that the Lord Jesus would be a great king and indeed He is. In fact, He is the King of kings. But what kind of a king is He?

Evidently, the Lord Jesus is not a king in the worldly sense. When Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?", His reply was: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (John 18:33-36). The Lord Jesus did not deny that He was a King. In fact, His reply was emphatic: "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth" (John 18:37). This shows that He was a King even at that point in time. But, as He had said, His kingdom is not of this world¹.

It was prophesied in Isaiah 52:13 that "He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted". This verse can be appreciated not only from the angle of His future glory, but also of His glory during His ministry and time on earth. The apostle John tells us in John 1:14 that they "saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father".

Although oppressed and afflicted, the Lord Jesus was, in reality, also being highly exalted. But the world was not able to appreciate this spiritual reality. Yes, the people of the world saw Him "lifted up" on the cross, but what they saw was a man who was helpless and forsaken, a lonely figure. However, that is not what "lifted up" means in Isaiah 52:13. In this verse, there is a connotation of glory and exaltation. And indeed, if we truly understand the meaning of what took place at the Cross, we will know that it was a manifestation of the Lord's glory and greatness and an integral part of His exaltation.

John 13 records a remarkable incident of the Lord Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. We may read this with consternation and, like the apostle Peter, strongly

¹ The Scriptures does indicate that the Lord Jesus Christ will return to this earth in glory and will reign on earth during the Millennium. This would constitute another dimension of the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies of the Messianic King.

protest. How could the King of kings, the Master and Lord of the Universe behave like a servant, washing the feet of His disciples?

There are various things pertaining to the life and conduct of the Lord Jesus recorded in the Scriptures that may seem rather puzzling. And indeed, it is difficult to comprehend them from a worldly perspective. How then can we reconcile the prophecies of His glory and the reality of His life on earth? How can we appreciate the different aspects of His life and their implications for our lives?

Understanding the differences in values, perspective, approach and characteristics of the world and the kingdom of God can help us unravel many of these puzzling events and help us appreciate the beauty, greatness and effectiveness of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we grow in our appreciation of the Lord Jesus, we will be able to gain deeper insight into the meaning of our being in the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God and the fallen world

A major area of truth revealed in the Scriptures is that we are living in a fallen world, which is under the influence and power of the evil one.

The Scriptures reveals that Satan rebelled against God (Ezek. 28:12-17; Isa. 14:12-15). Subsequently, in cunning and deceit, he tempted Eve (Gen. 3:1-5)². Adam and Eve yielded to Satan's temptation and sinned against God. As a result, they came under the judgement of God and the influence of the evil one.

The fall of Adam and Eve has far-reaching adverse consequences, not only for themselves, but also for the whole world. Since then, the fallen world has been under Satan's power. The apostle John categorically states this in 1 John 5:19: "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one". Man now has a tendency to live according to the course of this world, indulging in the desires of the flesh. This is a universal problem.

The apostle Paul describes the sobering reality of the lives of those outside the kingdom of God in this way:

Ephesians 2:1-3

- 1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,
- 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.
- 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

² How Satan tempted Eve and the issues involved are covered in detail in messages 2TS01-15 posted on the website www.godandtruth.com.

The "course of this world" in verse 2 refers to the trends, values, ways and perspective of the fallen world under the influence of the evil one, who is referred to as "the prince of the power of the air".

2 Peter 3:10 teaches that the heavens and the earth together with its works are destined for destruction.

2 Peter 3:10

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

1 John 2:15 and 17 caution us not to love the world nor the things in the world.

1 John 2:15, 17

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

What is of the fallen world will not endure (v. 17); it will ultimately perish, and we must not be preoccupied with it.

What then will endure? The kingdom the Lord is building. He is not rebuilding or restoring the fallen world. He is building a different kingdom whose values and emphases are opposed to those of the fallen world. He is building an everlasting kingdom in which righteousness dwells. This is the kingdom of God.

Major differences in emphasis

Romans 14:17 describes the kingdom of God as one that is not primarily "eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit". "Eating and drinking" represents the preoccupation of the fallen world with the visible, the carnal and the temporal. This reminds us of the warning of the Lord Jesus concerning His Coming again. The conditions then will be like those in the days of Noah and the days of Lot. People will be preoccupied with eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting and building (Luke 17:26-28).

The fallen world, under the influence of the evil one, is materialistic and seeks, as its primary goal, earthly riches, success, power, recognition, status and authority. The majority of people in this world channel much of their time and energy in a relentless pursuit of these things, some even risking their lives in doing so. But all these are merely outward achievements that have no eternal value in themselves and will pass away.

The kingdom of God, on the other hand, is “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”. It is, in essence, a moral and spiritual kingdom and its emphasis is on the spiritual realm rather than on the material and visible realm. “Righteousness” speaks of positive moral values and qualities. True “peace and joy” is the result of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts when we have a healthy relationship with God and are walking in the truth. “In the Holy Spirit” communicates to us a very important aspect of the kingdom of God—the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The emphasis of the world is distinctly and vastly different from that of the kingdom of God. We can see this clearly in the light of what is revealed in the Scriptures and as we look at the world around us. We shall turn to a few passages in the Scriptures for the biblical position and perspective. Let me first summarise the differences in emphasis as follows:

The world	The kingdom of God
<i>is preoccupied with</i>	<i>concentrates on</i>
the visible	the invisible
the carnal, materialistic	the spiritual
the temporal	the eternal
outward show and achievements	inner reality, what is of the heart, the development of the inner man
earthly power, status and authority	spiritual power and authority

The kingdom of God concentrates on the eternal, spiritual, and invisible

The kingdom of God emphasises that which is invisible, spiritual and eternal, while the world is preoccupied with that which is visible, carnal and temporal.

The apostle Paul puts across clearly in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 the correct perspective that believers in the kingdom of God should have.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

18 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.

Paul said these words in the context of a faithful and fruitful ministry, one fraught with many dangers, trials and difficulties.

In verse 18, the apostle Paul says, "We look not at the things which are seen." His emphasis and concentration is not on the visible, but on the invisible realm. He continues, "The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." This does not mean that everything that is unseen is positive and eternal, because the powers of darkness are also at work in the realm of the unseen. But it tells us the kingdom of God and what really matters are in the realm of the unseen—the invisible, spiritual and eternal.

And Paul could say, "We do not lose heart... our inner man is being renewed day by day" (v. 16), despite all the trials and afflictions that came upon him, because his concentration was on the invisible, spiritual and eternal realm. He was not disheartened because his focus was neither on the outward circumstances nor on what was happening to his physical body, but on the daily renewal of the inner man. He was more concerned with the positive inward transformation being brought about by these trials.

Paul regarded the severe afflictions that he and his co-workers had to endure as "momentary, light afflictions". They were momentary and light when compared to the "eternal weight of glory" that these trials were producing. An important aspect of the eternal weight of glory is the renewal of the inner man Paul refers to in verse 16. The other important aspect, which helps us appreciate Paul's perspective and posture, was his consciousness that these afflictions were taking place in the context of a fruitful ministry. The principle of death was at work in Paul and his co-workers, bringing about life in others. He mentions this in verses 11 and 12.

So we see in this passage that Paul is exhorting us to concentrate on the realities in the spiritual realm that are eternal and unseen, rather than on the things in the physical realm that are visible and temporal and will pass away. As we seek to serve God faithfully, let us not be discouraged by the trials and difficulties that may appear to be adverse from the temporal perspective. Instead, let us learn to view life from the eternal perspective of God's kingdom and rejoice in the development of our inner man and in the enduring fruit of a faithful ministry.

The kingdom of God concentrates on inner reality

The world is also preoccupied with outward show and achievements whereas the kingdom of God emphasises the inward reality. A key passage in 1 Samuel 16 highlights to us God's concern with the reality in the heart of man rather than the outward appearance. This is the approach that God wants us to adopt in life.

1 Samuel 16:6-7

6 When they entered, he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him."

7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as

man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

The Lord had given instructions to the prophet Samuel to anoint the one He had chosen to replace Saul as king of Israel. When Samuel looked at Eliab and saw that he appeared impressive, he thought that Eliab must surely be the Lord's chosen one.

Such is the tendency of man to be taken in by outward appearance. Even Samuel, a godly man, faltered in this area. The Lord corrected him, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him" (v. 7).

Why did God reject Eliab? He rejected Eliab because of the lack of quality in his heart. Samuel looked at the outward appearance of Eliab, but God looked at his heart. It was on this basis that God chose David instead of Eliab or any of his other brothers. God chose David because he was a man after His own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22).

The Lord is concerned about the reality and inward quality of the heart and not the outward appearance. We should, likewise, have the same concern.

The kingdom of God concentrates on spiritual power and authority

We can also see the contrast in emphasis in the area of power and authority. In the world, power and authority are built upon the worldly status and position that one has attained to and the wealth that one has acquired. In the kingdom of God, the emphasis is on spiritual power and authority that is God-given.

Consider Paul's life. God called him to be an apostle and equipped him with power and authority for spiritual service. His power and authority are therefore spiritual and divine; they are from God and not from man. Paul was very conscious of this and often highlighted it in the opening words of his epistles. For example, 1 Corinthians opens with: "Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God". In his second epistle to the Corinthians, he referred to the authority that the Lord gave him for building up believers (2 Cor. 13:10).

Contrasting characteristics

We can see striking contrasts in the characteristics of the kingdom of God and the world because of their differences in emphasis. The trends, values and ways of the world are diametrically opposed to those of the kingdom of God.

The apostle James teaches that "friendship with the world is hostility toward God" (James 4:4). Likewise, the apostle John warns us that if we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us, for "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world" (1 John 2:15-17).

We can summarise the contrasting characteristics of the world and the kingdom of God as follows:

Characteristics of the world	Characteristics of the kingdom of God
aggressive spirit	meekness, gentleness
selfishness, self-centredness, greed, covetousness	true love, generosity, concern for others, spirit of giving
pride	humility
hypocrisy	sincerity
confidence in self, dependence on self, exaltation of self	confidence in God, dependence on God, exaltation of God
focus on appearance	focus on reality
the flesh leading to death	the Spirit leading to life

Aggressive spirit versus meekness

In the fallen world, having an aggressive, self-assertive spirit is often regarded as a means to success and to attaining one's desires. However, in the kingdom of God, meekness and gentleness of spirit are extolled as virtues. They are manifestations of true strength of character within. The Lord Jesus says, "Blessed are the gentle" (Matt. 5:5). The margin of the NASB indicates that "gentle" can also be translated "humble, meek". The Lord Jesus Himself is gentle and humble in heart and He exhorts us to learn from Him and find rest for our souls (Matt. 11:29).

Self-centredness versus true love

The fallen world is driven by greed, covetousness and self-centredness. We often see worldly people grabbing things for themselves. Even when rendering help to others, they often expect something in return.

The kingdom of God, however, stresses true love, generosity, genuine concern for others and a spirit of self-giving. In Matthew 22:37-39, the Lord Jesus emphasises the supreme importance of loving God with all our hearts and loving our neighbours as ourselves and in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul highlights and beautifully expresses what true love means. In Acts 20:35, Paul exhorts us to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive".

Pride versus humility

Pride is very prevalent in the fallen world and is a major hindrance to man's relationship with God. It gives rise to all kinds of wrongdoing and failure. The Scriptures reveals that pride is a primary reason for the fall of Satan (Isa. 14:12-15,

Ezek. 28:11-17). He tempted Eve in this area in the Garden of Eden and since then, he has been actively promoting pride in the hearts of men³.

In contrast, humility is a very precious quality in God's kingdom. The absence or presence of humility, and the degree of its quality in us, have a significant bearing on the depth of our relationship with God. "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Therefore, if we desire to enter into deep fellowship with God and to enjoy His blessings, we need to nurture the spirit of humility in our lives.

Hypocrisy versus sincerity

Hypocrisy is related to pride. The Lord Jesus strongly condemned hypocrisy in the lives of the scribes and Pharisees. They did all their deeds to be noticed by men (Matt. 23:5). For appearance's sake, they offered long prayers (Mark 12:40). Like whitewashed tombs, they appeared beautiful on the outside, but inside they were full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Outwardly they appeared righteous to men, but inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (Matt. 23:27-28).

Hypocrisy was clearly manifested in the lives of the Pharisees, but it is also characteristic of the lives of many people in this fallen world. It exists even in believers, although it is often not obvious.

Hypocrisy should have no place in the lives of believers. Instead, there should be sincerity. In 1 Corinthians 5:8, Paul stresses the need for sincerity and truth when we partake of the Lord's Supper. Sincerity and truth are qualities important to God, and those who belong to His kingdom must possess them. Let us therefore come before the Lord with sincerity of heart and in a spirit of contriteness, mindful that we are frail human beings.

Self-confidence versus dependence on God

Also closely related to pride is the desire to exalt oneself and to project self-confidence. The world exalts self-confidence, which is closely linked to dependence on self. Both self-confidence and dependence on self are contrary to the spirit of God's kingdom.

The apostle Peter tells us in 1 Peter 4:10 that whatever gifts we have are from God and we are to employ them "in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God". In verse 11, he exhorts us to serve "by the strength which God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified". Such an approach to life reflects the spirit of dependence on God and exaltation of God instead of the spirit of self-confidence and self-exaltation so common in this world and even in Christian service. We need to constantly depend on God because we cannot live properly and meaningfully apart from Him. The Lord Jesus illustrates this truth in John 15 with the analogy of the vine and the branches. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch

³ The subject of pride is covered in two messages 2TS05-06 posted on the website.

cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me" (v. 4). Just as the branch will wither if it is separated from the vine, we too will wither spiritually and morally unless we constantly abide in the Lord and depend on Him. This is how God has created us. He wants us to walk in fellowship with Him and in dependence on Him. As we do so, we can face the challenges and difficulties of life with confidence in the Lord. This is true confidence.

In Jeremiah 13, God drives home the need to depend on Him with the striking illustration of the linen waistband. The Lord instructed Jeremiah to get hold of a linen waistband and hide it in the crevice of a rock, and after many days, to take it from where he had hidden it. When Jeremiah did so, he saw that the waistband was ruined and totally worthless (vs. 4-7). In verse 11, we read:

Jeremiah 13:11

'For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me,' declares the Lord, 'that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; but they did not listen'.

God intended Israel to cling to Him just as a waistband is meant to cling to the waist of a man. He desires the same of us. We have been created by God to "cling" to Him. If we depend on God and keep close to Him, we will grow towards full moral and spiritual stature in Him, and will enjoy a life of well-being and fruitfulness. If not, our lives will be ruined and totally worthless, just like the ruined linen waistband.

*Appearance versus reality*⁴

The world is characterised by preoccupation with the outward appearance of things, but the kingdom of God is characterised by ultimate reality. What counts in the kingdom of God is reality. The people of the world devote much time, effort and resources on their outward appearance in order to project a favourable impression. This has no ultimate value or meaning. Even Christians tend to be wrongly impressed by the outward appearance of things, whether it be in trying to understand a person and his conduct, in evaluating the effectiveness of service and contribution to God's kingdom, or in perceiving and responding to situations.

It is vital that we learn to see beyond the outward appearance of things and discern reality as God sees it. This will enable us to respond to people and situations appropriately and effectively.

We also need to concentrate on the reality in our own lives. What is the meaning in our hearts? What is the quality of our relationship with God? What is the true value of our service and contribution to God's kingdom?

⁴ The subject of appearance and reality has been covered in great detail over many messages in the series *Appearance and Reality* and can be found on the website.

The flesh versus the Spirit

The world is basically characterised by various negative traits of the flesh, leading to death, while the kingdom of God is characterised by the Spirit and what is positive, leading to life.

In 1 John 2:15, the apostle John warns us not to love the world nor the things in the world. He then goes on to explain in the next verse that this is because all that is in the world is characterised by "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life". On the other hand, the kingdom of God is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

In Romans 8 and in his epistle to the Galatians, Paul has much to say on this subject of the flesh and the Spirit. He dwells on the subject of walking according to the flesh versus walking according to the Spirit, sowing to the flesh and reaping death and sowing to the Spirit and reaping life.

It is important that we learn to deny the flesh and walk by the Spirit, so that the life of God may dwell in us richly.

God is working in this world and in the hearts of unbelievers

Some Christians may hold this notion: Non-believers, being outside the kingdom of God, do not experience God working in their lives. They are totally preoccupied with the things of the world, and their lives are fully characterised by the negative features of the world.

Such a notion is erroneous. The Scriptures clearly teaches that God is working in this fallen world, for He loves and cares for the people of this world. He lovingly provides for all, both believers and non-believers. The Lord Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5:45 that God causes "His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous". The apostle Paul tells us in Acts 14:17 that God does not leave Himself without witness, in that He does good and gives rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying our hearts with food and gladness.

Besides providing for the people of the world, God is graciously and sovereignly working in the fallen world to restrain the full and free expression of evil and carnality. Although we witness many acts of cruelty and terrible deeds of darkness in this world, the situation would have been far worse if God's restraining hand were withdrawn. Satan would then have full freedom to work in this fallen world and feed the flesh and exploit its weaknesses. Fallen men under his pervasive and overpowering influence would then express themselves in ways far more wicked and sinful than we could ever imagine.

Although the evil one is the "ruler of this world" and has great power, God is still the sovereign ruler of the universe. David declares, "The Lord has established His throne

in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all" (Ps. 103:19). Satan cannot do whatever he likes. He can operate only within the boundaries determined by God. This reality is clearly revealed in the Book of Job (Job 1:12; 2:6).

More significantly, God seeks to work in the hearts of all men to draw them into the kingdom of God. John 3:16 tells us: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

The "world" in John 3:16 refers to the people of the world whom God loves and does not have the same meaning as the "world" in James 4:4 and 1 John 2:15-17.

God clearly loves the people of the world and has demonstrated His great love by sending the Lord Jesus into this world to die for the sins of all mankind and opening the way of salvation for all who would repent and believe in the gospel.

God is actively seeking to promote positive values and to draw man to Himself and to the truth. The Lord Jesus declares that by His death on the Cross, He would draw all men to Himself:

John 12:32-33

32 "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."

33 But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.

This area of truth is illustrated by the life of Cornelius before his conversion (Acts 10). Non-believers who respond positively to the Lord's working in their hearts progress towards truth and draw nearer to God and His kingdom. They may manifest some degree of kindness and love in their lives.

Although the Holy Spirit is working in the hearts of non-Christians, they will not benefit if they do not respond positively. In Acts 7:51, Stephen said to the Jews, "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did." This verse shows us that the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of men, and that man can resist the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart.

Hebrews 3:7-11 and 4:2 reinforce this point. The Israelites had the good news preached to them. However, those who hardened their hearts were not helped. They could not enter His rest because of their negative response.

Concluding remarks

Just as the lives of non-believers are not fully characterised by the negative features of the world, it is also true that the lives of believers are not fully characterised by

the values of the kingdom of God. We can be easily drawn into the world and our lives are often tainted by the world system.

If we want to identify with the Lord and deepen in our relationship with Him, we must learn to focus on what He focuses on: the invisible, spiritual, eternal things of God's kingdom and the development of the inner man in true spiritual life and power.

We must not be preoccupied with what the world is preoccupied with: the things that are visible, temporal, carnal and materialistic, such as earthly riches, success, power, status, outward show and achievement.

We must rid our lives of negative traits characteristic of the world and seek to nurture and manifest moral and spiritual qualities characteristic of God's kingdom:

- meekness and gentleness, rather than an aggressive, self-assertive spirit
- love, generosity, a spirit of giving and genuine concern for others, rather than self-centredness, greed, covetousness and grabbing what we desire without consideration for others
- a spirit of humility and sincerity without any trace of pride or hypocrisy
- continual dependence on God, exaltation of God in all things and all situations without any sense of self-confidence or desire to exalt or project ourselves.

We need to respond more deeply to God so that we may experience more fully the meaning of being in His kingdom. Going beyond mental acknowledgement, we need to set our hearts decisively on the eternal kingdom of God. Let us be determined to develop that which is truly important so that, as Paul puts it, "whether by life or by death", God may be exalted. Let us be preoccupied with God's kingdom, with the things of the Spirit that lead to life.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Why is it important to understand the kingdom of God and the fallen world?
2. What kind of a king is the Lord Jesus?
3. What are the major differences in emphasis between the fallen world and the kingdom of God?

4. Share your understanding of the contrasting characteristics of the fallen world and the kingdom of God.
5. Is God at work in this world and in the hearts of unbelievers? Share your thoughts.
6. Reflect on how understanding the issues raised in this message can help you identify with the Lord and deepen your relationship with Him.

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