

LESSON 9

The Kingdom

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The Visibility of the Church or Kingdom.

The Visibility of the Kingdom. — "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the Kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it," Luke 16:16.

This text of itself is sufficient to establish the visibility of the Kingdom of God. It is admitted by all parties that Jesus Christ has a kingdom on earth. I believe there are three theories concerning the government of Christ on earth: The first is, that God has two kingdoms on earth; the one a visible organization, and the other the invisible reign of grace in the hearts of men. The tendency of this view is to the neglect of, and contempt for, the positive ordinances and requirements of Jesus Christ. The individual is made to believe that he has been baptized with the Holy Spirit, and is a member of the "invisible" church; and he therefore regards the positive laws of the King in Zion as only types and shadows, of little or no consequence.

A second theory is, that there is no visible Kingdom of Christ on earth; that the real Kingdom of God is in the hearts of His subjects, and those who embrace this position feel themselves at liberty to institute, change, or abolish laws and customs. They

persuade themselves that God has made no laws to govern His Kingdom; and hence they come to the rescue and enact laws for the control of the people of God. This view has been the mother of the vast variety of church organizations in the land.

But the third theory is, that Jesus Christ established a visible Church, or Kingdom, during His ministry on earth; and that the invisible Kingdom is composed of that part of the Church of the first born that have entered heaven.

This last position we adopt. We do not believe that Jesus Christ organized an "invisible" church, or kingdom, on earth. We freely admit, however, that there are some of God's visible children in Babylon, who are commanded to come out of her. For John said: "And heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sin, and that ye receive not of her plagues," Rev. 18:4. Were these people of God in Babylon and in the Kingdom of Christ at the same time?

The following scriptures are often urged in opposition to the visibility of the Kingdom:

1. "And when He was demanded of the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said, The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for, behold, the Kingdom of God is within you," Luke 17:20-21.

The translation of this passage is evidently defective. For the words, " the Kingdom of God is within you," were addressed,

not to the disciples of Christ, but to the wicked Pharisees. It is certain that the Kingdom of God was not in their murderous hearts. Some translate the Greek preposition entos in this passage "among"; and this would make the Saviour say, "the Kingdom of God is among you," or, "in your midst". That is, the members of the Kingdom were then in the presence of, and among, the Jews. It came not with observation; that is, it was not established with carnal weapons amidst the confusion of battles and victories over conquered armies.

2. "For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," Rom. 14:17.

How this passage can be tortured to prove the invisibility of the Kingdom on earth, I am unable to see. The apostle, no doubt, was talking in this chapter of the meats offered in sacrifice to idols; and he thought it best not to eat such meat, lest the weak brother be made to offend. Does anyone who holds the visibility of the Kingdom teach that the Kingdom consists in meat and drink? Verily not. But what does the apostle mean when he says the Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost? Does he teach the invisibility of the Kingdom? No; for the very first element of the Kingdom, named by the apostle, is RIGHTEOUSNESS which certainly includes visible obedience to the ordinances of the Kingdom. The baptism of Jesus was a part of the righteousness of the Kingdom for He said, "thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness," Matt. 3:15.

3. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit," 1 Cor. 12:13.

This passage is relied on by some to support the notion that persons are now baptized by the Holy Spirit into the invisible church! They talk very confidently of their baptism by the Holy Spirit and membership in the Church of Christ, independent of all church organizations.

Such persons have certainly forgotten that the real baptism of the Holy Spirit always endowed the possessor with the gift of tongues or inspiration. And they have overlooked the fact, that regeneration is one thing, and baptism of the Holy Spirit quite another. But to the passage: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body," etc.

A better rendering of this passage would be, "In one spirit are we all baptized into one body." It is the primary meaning of the Greek preposition "en" - rendered in our version "by". The meaning of the passage is, "in one Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, we have all been baptized into one body" i. e., the visible Kingdom or Church of Christ.

It is certain that Holy Spirit baptism is not referred to in this passage. If so, we would have the Holy Spirit both the administrator and element. It should be remembered, that the Scriptures nowhere represent the Holy Spirit as the administrator

of baptism of any kind. Jesus Christ was the only administrator of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

We now proceed to introduce the scriptures which teach the visibility of the Kingdom or Church of Jesus Christ.

It is freely admitted that the term Church is usually applied in the New Testament to local bodies; as, the Church at Jerusalem, the Church at Antioch, the Church at Rome, etc.

1. But I am satisfied that the term church, or ecclesia, is also used by inspiration in the sense of Kingdom. And such an example we have in Matt. 16:18, where the Savior said: "Upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

I take this declaration of the Messiah as my first proof of the visibility of the Church or Kingdom. For if the Savior alluded to the reign of grace in the heart when He said, "I will build My Church," this would contradict facts; for the reign of grace had already been built in the hearts of men from the time of Abel. Therefore, if that something which men are pleased to call the invisible kingdom, had been set up about four thousand years in the past, it is certain that Jesus Christ did not allude to the reign of grace in the heart when He said, "I will build My church." And as the Scriptures teach that none but men and women, believers, are eligible to Church membership, therefore it would be as appropriate to speak of invisible men and women on earth as to

speak of an invisible church on earth composed of men and women!

2. "And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force," Matt. 11:12.

Will it be said that violent men take the invisible kingdom by force? This is too absurd. But how could an invisible kingdom suffer violence? The Kingdom of Christ, as a visible body, has suffered violence from the days of John the Baptist even until now.

3. "Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be liken unto ten virgins which took their lamps and went forth to meet the Bridegroom. And five of them were wise and five were foolish," etc., Matt 25:1-13.

It is generally conceded that the foolish virgins represent false professors in the Kingdom. But if it refers to the invisible kingdom of grace in the heart, then the doctrine of final apostasy is true. But the very fact that false professors, foolish virgins, are in the Kingdom, it shows that the Kingdom must be a visible organization.

4. The Savior said, at the institution of the supper, "I appoint unto you a Kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; That ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom," etc., Luke 22:29-30.

Here the Savior has fixed the Lord's Table in the Kingdom. Did He place the visible communion in an invisible Kingdom? The very fact that He instituted the supper, a visible ordinance, in the Kingdom, is positive proof that that Kingdom is visible. Jesus Christ has but one Kingdom on earth and that is a visible organization, especially to those who have been born again. It has visible subjects; those who have exercised repentance and faith, and have been buried with Christ in baptism, and are walking in the ordinances of the Lord's house. It has visible laws which are contained in the Word of God. And it has visible ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Therefore, we conclude that the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is a visible organization.

Once more, it is certain that Jesus Christ set up a visible Kingdom from the following prediction of Daniel: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a Kingdom, which shall never be destroyed, and the Kingdom shall not be left to other people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever," Dan 2:44. The reign of grace had been up in the hearts of men long before this prophecy was uttered; but the Kingdom to be set up was still future; therefore, this prediction could not refer to the reign of grace in the hearts of men.

It is admitted that the term Church is applied in the scriptures to denote all the saints in heaven and on earth and that many of the children of God on earth do not belong to His true Church, and it may be that the term Kingdom is used in the same

way. But, I contend that when the term Kingdom is used in the New Testament, with reference to this earth alone, it always refers to what is known as the visible Kingdom.