

Called into God's Kingdom

In 1 Thessalonians 2:12 the believers are encouraged to “walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” Our calling into God's kingdom is more than an objective calling into an outward manifestation of God's rule and authority that comes into being following the fulfillment of apocalyptic events in the future. Instead, the kingdom into which we have been called reflects a much broader experience of the divine life with its corporate expression of the divine life.

The kingdom of God involves not only God's reign in a general way over the universe by His power and authority but also His reign in a particular, organic way in the realm of the divine life. The kingdom of God is God's reign by Himself as life over those, in those, among those, and through those who have been born of God in spirit to receive the divine, eternal life. Those who have been born of God to be in the kingdom of God have received the life of God in order to live in the kingdom of God as the totality of the divine life with all its activities. These activities of the kingdom are the focus of our calling.

We have been called into God's kingdom to be under His rule with power and authority. We have been called into God's kingdom as the realm of the divine life to live according to the consciousness of the divine life in our regenerated spirit. We have been called into God's kingdom by receiving the Son of God as a seed of life. We have been called into God's kingdom as the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love to enjoy the divine life under the shining of the divine light with the sweetness of the divine love. We have been called into God's kingdom as the power to subdue rebellion to live in subjection to God's authority and in obedience to His will. We have been called into God's kingdom through the gospel of the kingdom to enter into and live in the realm of God's rule in life and in authority. We have been called into God's kingdom as the genuine church in this age to be built up together as God's house and, by prayer and spiritual warfare, to bring in the kingdom with Christ's millennial rule. We have been called also to live in the kingdom of God a

life of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit and to experience and enjoy the eternal life as a gift of God's grace. We have been called into God's kingdom with the hope of inheriting the kingdom of God as a reward in the coming age, and for this we need the growth and development of the divine life unto maturity. Ultimately, we have been called into God's kingdom as the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem as its center for God's eternal governmental administration.

By the grace of God, all believers will experience and enjoy the manifest reality of the kingdom life for eternity in the New Jerusalem, and some will experience and enjoy the manifestation of the kingdom life in the coming millennial age, based on their faithful participation in and enjoyment of the divine life, which will produce a kingdom expression through the Body of Christ. This expression will testify to the fulfillment of God's divine desire for an enlarged expression of His image and His dominion.

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God's image is the basis for God's dominion; it is the source of the power that is displayed in the exercise of His dominion. Image produces dominion, and dominion substantiates image. The nexus of image and dominion in the divine economy is the kingdom, and in the kingdom both image and dominion are realized and manifested. The kingdom is more than a physical realm involving the ruling and reigning of God. It is also a heavenly realm that derives its power from the divine life inherent in the image of God in order to express the dominion of God. As such, the kingdom is a matter of crucial focus in the divine economy.

The centrality of the kingdom in the divine economy is emphasized with great clarity in the New Testament. The coming of the kingdom was declared in the ministry of John the Baptist. It was demonstrated in the ministry and teachings of Jesus. And it was developed and continued through the ministry and teaching of the apostles so that it could be realized through the church in this age and manifested in the coming millennium. The kingdom has a

heavenly and spiritual component that corresponds to the inner essence of God's being, God's image, and a practical and earthly component that corresponds to the practical representation and exercise of God's dominion. The heavenly and spiritual component is directly related to the life of the Triune God, which is imparted through regeneration and which grows like a seed to reproduce the divine image through its power to transform, renew, and conform the believers to the image of the Son. This progressive manifestation of the image of Christ through the transformation, renewing, and conformation of the members of the Body of Christ is the coming of the kingdom.

Although this aspect of the kingdom does not come with observation, there is a heavenly and earthly exercise of God's divine authority to bring in a spiritual and practical expression of God's divine image to subdue the authority of darkness. This subduing power was evident in the human living and ministry of Christ, and it will be manifested in the building up of the church in this age and in the joint ruling of Christ and the overcomers in the coming millennium. In order for God's kingdom to come, the church must marshal the divine authority to bind Satan, the strong man, by engaging in spiritual warfare.

The church, in its position, work, thought, and speaking, has often forgotten that its unique enemy is Satan. It does not realize that God has chosen the church for the purpose of opposing Satan and bringing in the kingdom of God. The gospel of the kingdom of the heavens is aimed particularly toward the power of darkness. When the Lord Jesus first preached the gospel of the kingdom of the heavens, all His works were aimed at dealing with the power of darkness.

In order for God's rule to be manifested in this world and for the devil and his kingdom to be cast out, the church must stand up to testify for the gospel of the kingdom of the heavens. We should preach the gospel of the kingdom of the heavens, the gospel of the casting out of the demons, the gospel of the defeat of Satan, and the gospel of the destruction of Hades. This kind of testimony will bring this age to a close. This is not a new gospel but one that has been neglected by the church. The church has forgotten about the victory, majesty, and kingship of Christ. God needs to gain a group of people who will sympathize with Him, who will work with Him, who will bring this age to a close, and who will bring in God's kingdom. As Christians, we must realize that we have a greater responsibility in this world than saving souls; we have the responsibility to bring this age to an end and to usher in God's kingdom.

Those who are willing to participate in such a great work and, thereby, live in the reality of the kingdom of God must be poor in spirit and pure in heart in order for His heavenly rule to be expressed in all its blessedness.

Matthew 5:3-11 reveals the outflow of the kingdom people's inner being, the expression of what they are within, the expression of their being blessed with the person of Christ as the presence of the Triune God. The most crucial part of this blessing is the blessing of being poor in spirit and pure in heart.

To be poor in spirit is to be emptied, unloaded, in our human spirit so that we may realize and possess Christ as the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. If we are truly poor in spirit, our inner being will be empty, open, and ready to receive and be renewed with the new thoughts of Christ's mind from His Word. If we are truly poor in spirit, we will be able to receive the help that we need from God our Father, from Christ our Head, from the Spirit our Comforter, and from the members of His Body, our fellow believers.

To be poor in spirit means that we inwardly acknowledge that we have nothing, know nothing, can do nothing, and are nothing. To be poor in spirit means to forget the things that are behind, even our past experiences of Christ, and to press forward to gain more of Christ day by day. In order for there to be room in our being for more of Christ, God causes all persons, matters, and things in our environment to empty us of every preoccupation that is within us so that we can have an increased capacity to be filled with Him, transformed by Him, and conformed to His image. Whenever we become empty, the Lord will fill us up. Spiritual progress is a matter of being continually emptied and being continually filled. In our Christian life we need to be those who are always hungry for the Lord yet continually satisfied by Him.

The kingdom people are not only poor in spirit but also pure in heart. A pure heart is a heart that loves God, wants God, and is fixed on God alone. Besides God, it has no other love, inclination, or desire. Our heart should be single for God so that we are fearful of nothing except offending Him and losing His presence. For us to be pure in heart means that our heart is fully turned toward God. Our spiritual progress depends on the degree to which our heart is turned toward God. This is the reason that the first word related to the gospel of the kingdom in the book of Matthew is for men to repent. To repent is to turn from all things other than God to God Himself.

By being poor in spirit, we keep our spirit in a living condition in our continual receiving of God. By being pure in heart, we keep our heart in a loving condition in our continual seeing of God. Our eternal reward for this is the real, pure, unalloyed joy and blessedness of living in Christ, by Christ, and with Christ as the reality of the kingdom of God for the glory and good pleasure of God. **AFC**

by the Editors