

The Church as the Kingdom in Ephesians

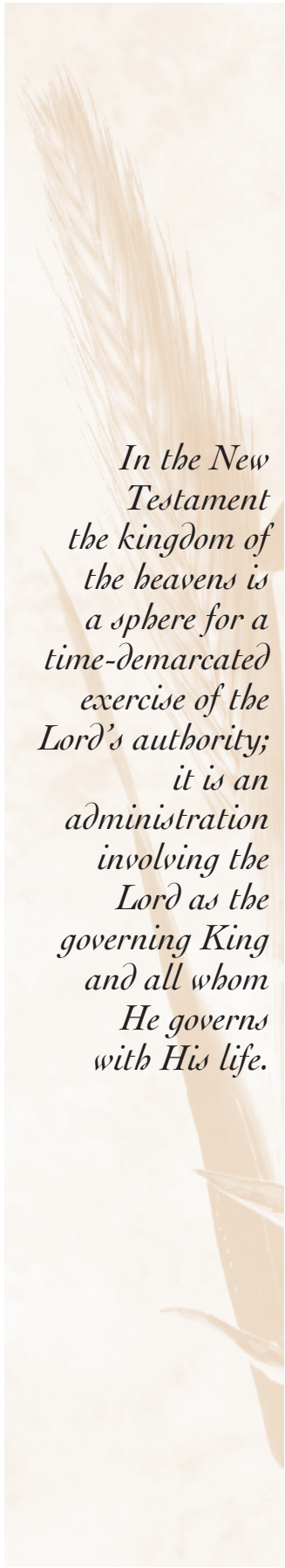
by John Pester

The Epistle to the Ephesians contains deep and detailed revelations concerning the church, including the church as the Body of Christ, the corporate expression of Christ; the church as the one new man, the corporate manifestation of Christ's person; the church as the bride of Christ, the corporate counterpart of Christ; and the church as the corporate fighter engaged in spiritual warfare with Christ. Ephesians also contains brief references to other aspects of the church, including the church as the household of God, the dwelling place of God in spirit, and the kingdom of God. These latter aspects are referenced in just one short passage. The seemingly lesser emphasis on these aspects, at least when considering the number of verses devoted to the other aspects, however, is by no means an indication of lesser significance. On the contrary, the singular reference should be regarded as a confirmation of the actual ubiquitous presence of these aspects throughout the New Testament.

God's household is a spiritual building, and the church is this spiritual building. The New Testament is filled with references to the church as God's building (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:9), one that is being built up (Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 14:4-5, 12; 2 Cor. 12:19; Eph. 2:21; 4:12, 16). The revelation that the church is God's dwelling place is also confirmed by numerous references to the indwelling Spirit (John 3:6; 7:39; 14:17; 20:22; Rom. 8:9, 11, 16; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:22; 2 Tim. 1:14). As the Spirit, God indwells the regenerated human spirit of a believer; this indwelling is both personal and corporate (4:22; Eph. 2:22; 1 Cor. 5:4), making the church God's corporate dwelling place. The extensive New Testament focus on the kingdom also underscores the primacy of its revelation. As such, there is no need for a lengthy emphasis on these aspects in Ephesians. There is only a need to tie these aspects to the church with a brief reference to them. This is in contrast to the need for a greater emphasis on the other four aspects: the revelation of the church as the Body of Christ is stressed only in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians; the revelation of the church as the one new man is mentioned only in Ephesians and Colossians; the revelation of the church as the bride is referenced only in Ephesians and Revelation; and the revelation of the church as a spiritual warrior is stressed only in Ephesians and Revelation. Hence, there is a need for a more detailed presentation of these aspects, both for emphasis and explanation. But this is not so with the aspect of the church as the kingdom.

The Kingdom in the New Testament

The kingdom is stressed throughout the New Testament because it is the principal means through which God works out His desire for unchallenged dominion, which is a paramount focus in the creation of humanity in God's image and likeness: "Let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26). The kingdom has two principal expressions: the kingdom of God, which spans from eternity to eternity across the bridge of time, and the kingdom of the heavens, which encompasses, within the bridge of time, the invisible reality of the kingdom in the dispensation of grace, the church age, and the visible manifestation of the kingdom in the millennium.



In the New Testament the kingdom of the heavens is a sphere for a time-demarcated exercise of the Lord's authority; it is an administration involving the Lord as the governing King and all whom He governs with His life.

The importance of the kingdom in the New Testament can be seen in John the Baptist's call to repent for the kingdom of the heavens that has drawn near; this call was later repeated by the Lord and the twelve apostles (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7). The gospel that the Lord and the disciples proclaimed is the gospel of the kingdom (4:23; 9:35; Luke 4:43; 8:1). In His prayer in Matthew 6, the Lord prayed for our needs in this way—daily bread, forgiveness of debts, not being brought into temptation, and deliverance from the evil one (vv. 11-13)—but for God's need, He prayed for the coming of the kingdom (v. 10; Luke 11:2). The first charge to the disciples is to seek the kingdom (Matt. 6:33). Such a seeking requires a determined effort and an enlightened understanding because the mysteries of the kingdom were spoken in parables (13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44-45, 47; Mark 4:30; Luke 8:10; 13:18, 20). After training the disciples by His example of preaching, the Lord sent the disciples to proclaim the kingdom (9:2), and He later charged them to preach the gospel of the kingdom to the whole inhabited earth (Matt. 24:14). After His resurrection the Lord continued to speak to the disciples concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3), and the disciples and Paul announced the gospel of the kingdom (8:12; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

Paul announced the kingdom in his public speaking and ministry, and he wrote of it in his Epistles. His writing encompasses both the invisible presence of the kingdom in the age of grace and the visible presence of the kingdom in the coming millennium. In speaking of the age of grace, Paul says that the kingdom of God is not in eloquent speech but in the power of the Spirit (1 Cor. 4:20); it is a realm of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit—whether a believer is in this realm is tested by his receiving of the believers (Rom. 14:17); and it is composed of saints who are fellow citizens in the church as the kingdom (Eph. 2:19). In the coming millennium the inheritance of the kingdom will be barred to those who are fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, or homosexuals (1 Cor. 6:9). Similarly, those who are covetous, drunkards, revilers, or rapacious will not inherit the millennial kingdom of God (v. 10). Flesh and blood cannot inherit the millennial kingdom of God (15:50). Those who practice bouts of drunkenness, carousings, and things like these also will not inherit the millennial kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21). Furthermore, every fornicator or unclean person or greedy person has no inheritance in the coming kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph. 5:5). A believer's calling into God's kingdom and glory depends on a walk in a manner that is worthy of God (1 Thes. 2:12). The Lord's judgment will occur at His appearing and be based on whether or not the demands of His kingdom have been met (2 Tim. 4:1). As believers, we can meet these demands because we have a Lord who can deliver us from every evil work and save us into His heavenly kingdom (v. 18).

The Church as the Kingdom in Ephesians

In the Bible the kingdom of God is a sphere for the eternal exercise of God's authority; it is an administration involving God as the governing Ruler and all that He governs from eternity to eternity, including creation and all humanity. In the New Testament the kingdom of the heavens is a sphere for a time-demarcated exercise of the Lord's authority; it is an administration involving the Lord as the governing King and all whom He governs with His life—the church as fellow citizens in the age of grace with the addition of the saved Israelites and the restored nations in the millennial kingdom. In Ephesians Paul identifies the kingdom in the age of grace as the church: "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (2:19). Paul's brief reference¹ to "*fellow citizens with the saints* indicates the kingdom of God. All the believers, Jewish and Gentile, are citizens in God's kingdom. God's kingdom is the sphere in which He exercises His authority" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, note 3). In the *Life-study of Ephesians*, Witness Lee further states, "Now that we are no longer strangers and sojourners, we are fellow citizens of the saints. The term *fellow citizens* indicates the kingdom of God. All the believers, both Jewish and Gentile, are citizens of God's kingdom, which is a sphere wherein God exercises His authority. As long as anyone is a believer, he is a citizen of the kingdom of God" (230).

Paul's stress on the kingdom in this verse is confirmed by Peter T. O'Brien in *The Letter*

to the Ephesians: “Although Paul does not develop the metaphor, he appears to be alluding to citizenship in God’s kingdom...In becoming full members of the believing community these Gentile Christians have become fellow citizens with those who had ‘first hoped in Christ’ (Eph. 1:12)” (211). O’Brien speaks of the believers, both Jewish and Gentile, as being “attached to a heavenly commonwealth (cf. 1:27), that is, a heavenly kingdom. They belong to a heavenly city, the Jerusalem that is above (Gal. 4:26). Already in Ephesians mention has been made of their participation in the heavenly realm (Eph. 2:6)” (211). It is not clear from his statement, however, whether O’Brien relegates the kingdom to a “heavenly commonwealth” in the future or if he allows for a practical expression of the kingdom through the church during the age of grace. In *Ephesians*, Charles Hodge seemingly gives place to both understandings:

In this spiritual kingdom the Gentiles now have the right of citizenship. They are on terms of perfect equality with all other members of that kingdom. And that kingdom is the kingdom of heaven. The same terms of admission are required, and neither more nor less, for membership in that kingdom and for admission into heaven;^[2] all who enter the one enter the other; one leads to the other; we are now, says Paul, the **citizens** of heaven. It is not, therefore, the participation in the privileges of the old, external, visible theocracy, nor simply the pale of the visible Christian church, to which the apostle here welcomes his Gentile brothers, but to the spiritual Israel, the communion of **saints**—to citizenship in that kingdom of which Christ is King, and membership in that body of which he is the head. (94)

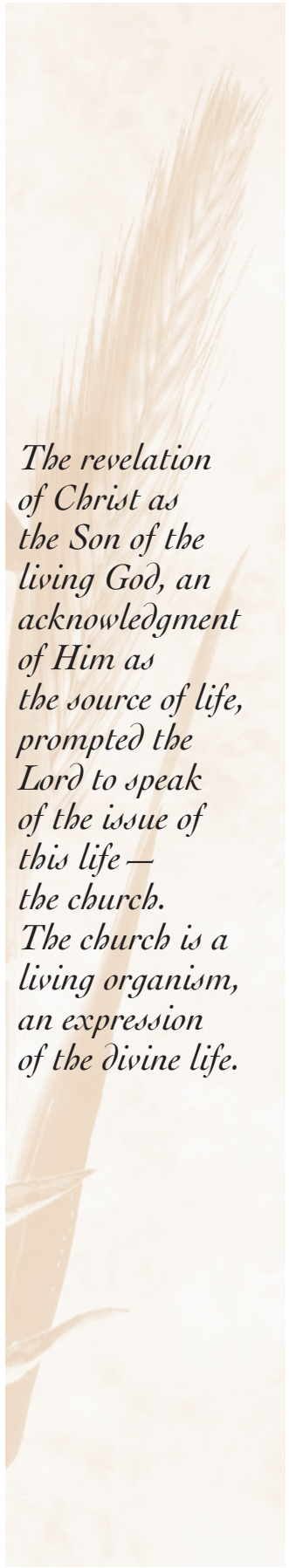
In his reference to the saints as fellow citizens in 2:19, Paul speaks also of strangers and sojourners and the household of God: “So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” Concerning these items, Witness Lee asks,

Why does the apostle Paul refer to the kingdom of God before the house of God? Paul’s thought here concerns our former status as strangers and sojourners. Strangers and sojourners are related to a kingdom, not to a household. Those who are aliens in this country are not aliens in relation to a family, but in relation to the nation. Because strangers and sojourners are aliens to kingdoms, not to families, Paul mentions the kingdom first. In this verse Paul’s main concept is that of citizenship in God’s kingdom. The kingdom, however, is composed of families. For this reason, Paul also mentions the household of God, that is, the family of God. (*Life-study* 231)

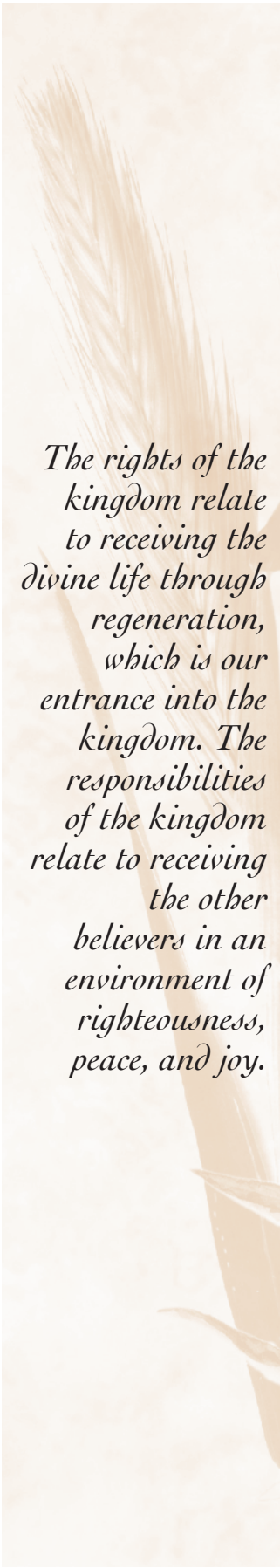
According to Paul, the current status of the believers is one of no longer being strangers and sojourners, implying that the kingdom of God is a present reality. As the church today, the believers not only are in the kingdom of God but also are the kingdom of God. “The saints are individuals, but the house of God is corporate and results in the kingdom of God. If there were no house, there could be no kingdom. Firstly we are saints, individuals. Then, corporately, we are the house of God resulting in the kingdom of God” (Lee, *Life-study* 231). The church is composed of individual believers regenerated with the divine life of God, and these individual members corporately make up the household of God because each member shares the same one life and nature of God in Christ as the Spirit. As such, this household is manifested as the kingdom of God.

The Church as the Kingdom in the New Testament

The first association of the church with the kingdom occurs in Matthew 16:18, following Peter’s uttering the revelation that the Lord is the Son of the living God. The Lord responded to this revelation, saying, “Upon this rock I will build My church.” The revelation of Christ as the Son of the living God, an acknowledgment of Him as the source of life, prompted the Lord to speak of the issue of this life—the church. The church is not an organization but a living organism, an expression of the divine life. Following His reference to the church, the Lord immediately spoke of the kingdom of the heavens, saying, “I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens” (v. 19). “*Kingdom of the*



The revelation of Christ as the Son of the living God, an acknowledgment of Him as the source of life, prompted the Lord to speak of the issue of this life—the church. The church is a living organism, an expression of the divine life.



The rights of the kingdom relate to receiving the divine life through regeneration, which is our entrance into the kingdom. The responsibilities of the kingdom relate to receiving the other believers in an environment of righteousness, peace, and joy.

heavens is used here interchangeably for *church*, which is used in the previous verse. This is a strong proof that the genuine church is the kingdom of the heavens in this age. This is confirmed by Rom. 14:17, in which the kingdom of God is mentioned in obvious reference to the proper church life” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Matt. 16:19, note 2).

Our participation in the proper church life as the reality of the kingdom involves both rights and responsibilities. In *The Message of Ephesians: God’s New Society*, John R. W. Stott comments, saying, “The kingdom of God is neither a territorial jurisdiction nor even a spiritual structure. God’s kingdom is God himself ruling his people, and bestowing upon them all the privileges and responsibilities which his rule implies” (105). Witness Lee comments similarly, saying that the church as the kingdom “is not a material kingdom visible to human sight but a kingdom of the divine life. It is the spreading of Christ as life to His believers to form a realm in which God rules in His life” (*Recovery Version*, Acts 1:3, note 4). The proper living of the church is to live according to the authority inherent in the divine life. As the church, “we enjoy the rights of the kingdom, and we bear the responsibilities of the kingdom” (Lee, *Life-study* 230). The rights of the kingdom relate to receiving the divine life through regeneration, which is our entrance into the kingdom. With this life, we have been given the authority, the right, to be children of God (John 1:12). The responsibilities of the kingdom relate to receiving the other believers in an environment of righteousness, peace, and joy (Rom. 14:17).

The Rights of the Kingdom: Receiving the Divine Life for the Divine Sonship

By receiving the Son through faith, in whom there is life (John 1:4), the believers receive the Son with His divine life, and this life brings the authority, the right, to be children of God: “As many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name” (v. 12). The divine life contains an inherent power—the authority of life to beget children with God’s life in reality. The grace that saves is a gift, but regeneration issuing from this gift is a right obtained by seeing and entering into the kingdom (3:3, 5). For believers, the status of being children of God is a right that comes with receiving the divine life. Receiving the life of God to become children of God involves a transfer of authority; we have been transferred from being under the authority of darkness into being under the authority of the kingdom of the Son of God’s love. God has “delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:13). The Father’s love for His Son is declared through the authority of His kingdom, and the Father is pleased to give His children the kingdom in His transference of them into the kingdom of the Son of His love: “Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father has been well pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

The kingdom of God is the Savior...as the seed of life sown into His believers, God’s chosen people (Mark 4:3, 26), and developing into a realm over which God can rule as His kingdom in His divine life. The entrance into the kingdom is regeneration (John 3:5), and the development of the kingdom is the believers’ growth in the divine life (2 Pet. 1:3-11). The kingdom is the church life today, in which the faithful believers live (Rom. 14:17), and it will develop into the coming kingdom as a reward to be inherited (Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5) by the overcoming saints in the millennium (Rev. 20:4, 6). (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Luke 4:43, note 2)

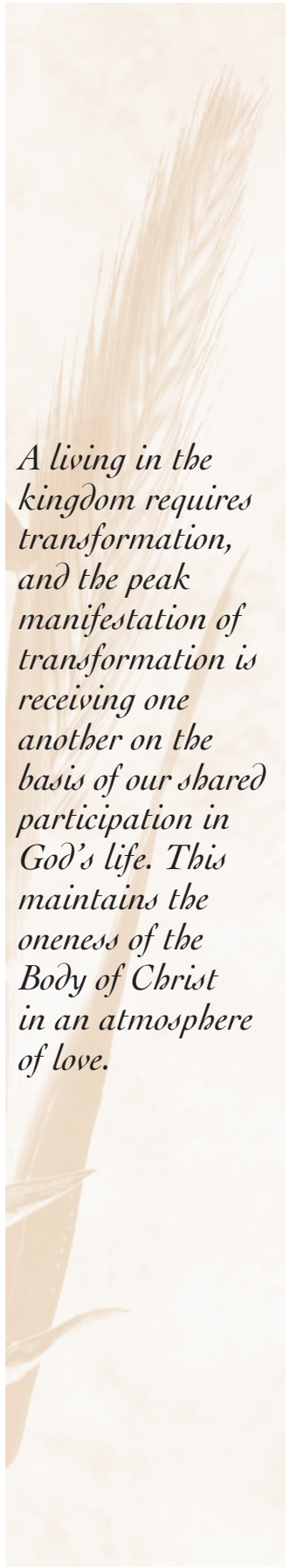
The church has received the Son as a seed of life, which will develop into a ruling realm of life. All the rights of the kingdom derive from the divine life that is sown into the believers. The divine life in the Spirit regenerates (John 3:6), justifies (Rom. 5:18), transforms (12:2; 8:6), conforms (v. 29), and glorifies (vv. 17, 30). The experience and application of these rights involve a diligent exercise that bountifully supplies virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly love, and love (2 Pet. 1:5-7). The progressive growth of these characteristics of the divine life results in an experiential entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in this age and in the next (v. 11).

In the kingdom the church has the authority, the right, to extend God's heavenly authority and will to the earth: "Whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in the heavens" (Matt. 16:19). "The authority to bind and to loose was given not only to Peter, the apostle for the church here, but also to the church itself (18:17-18)" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 19, note 3). Even though something has been bound and loosed in the heavens, there is still a need for these items to be bound and loosed on the earth, and this requires the church to exercise this right through prayer. The church cannot bind or loose something that has not been bound or loosed in the heavens, but what has been bound or loosed in the heavens cannot be realized on the earth without the church's cooperating prayer. "Whatever the church people bind or loose on earth must be something that has already been bound or loosed in the heavens. We can bind or loose only what has already been bound or loosed in the heavens" (Note 4). It is a powerful right to be able to cooperate and coordinate with God in the exercise of His heavenly authority on earth. We can work together with God based on our life union with Him (2 Cor. 6:1; 1 Cor. 6:17), which is a prerequisite for this shared work. In our personal and corporate prayer, we need to ask, but sometimes we need to command based on our right, conviction, and accurate realization of His desire (Isa. 45:11).

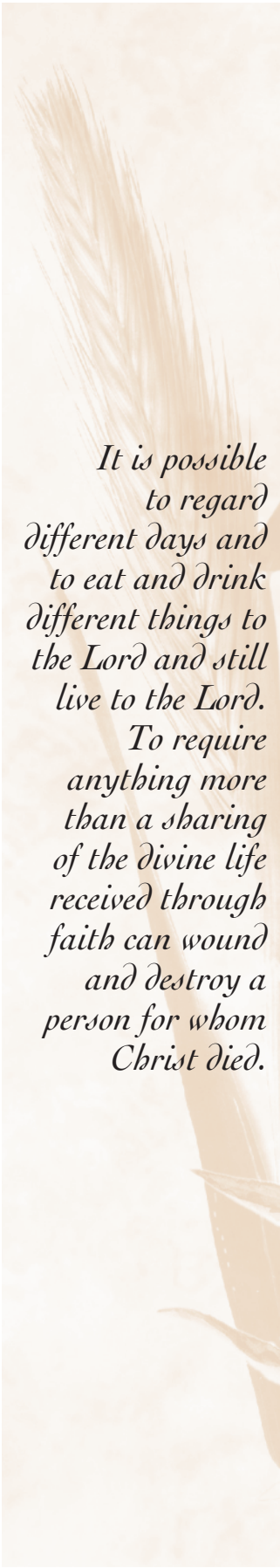
***The Responsibilities of the Kingdom:
Receiving the Believers in Righteousness, Peace, and Joy***

God's desire, God's heart, is focused on the kingdom not only being manifested spiritually but also being practically expressed through the church in this age. For this there is a need for the members of God's household, as the kingdom of God, to bear the responsibilities that come with knowing how to conduct oneself in the house of God, the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15). Paul provides a blueprint in Romans 14 of the main responsibility that practically manifests the kingdom—receiving the believers. The context of chapter 14 is framed by Paul's emphasis on transformation according to the growth of the divine life in a believer, which begins in chapter 12 and extends through verse 13 of chapter 15.³ In chapter 12 Paul begins to speak of transformation through the practice of the Body life (vv. 1-21), which involves presenting our bodies (v. 1), the renewing of the mind (vv. 2-3), exercising differing gifts (vv. 4-8), and living a life of the highest virtues (vv. 9-21). Transformation is also manifested with the believers being subject to authorities (13:1-7), practicing love (vv. 8-10), and waging the warfare (vv. 11-14). Transformation culminates with receiving the believers according to God's receiving (14:1-9) in the light of the judgment seat (vv. 10-12), in the principle of love (vv. 13-15), for the kingdom life (vv. 16-23), and according to Christ (15:1-13). Chapters 13 through 15 contain a short but critical reference to the kingdom life in 14:17, which says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." "This verse is a strong proof that the church in the church age is the kingdom of God, because the context here deals with the church life in the present age. The church is a matter of grace and life, whereas the kingdom is a matter of exercise and discipline" (Lee, *Recovery Version*, note 1). A living in the kingdom requires transformation, and the peak manifestation of transformation is receiving the believers. Receiving is the peak manifestation because the believers' receiving of one another on the basis of their shared participation in God's life, without regard to the relative strength or weakness of their faith, maintains the oneness of the Body of Christ in an atmosphere of love. In such a condition, the Body of Christ grows and builds up itself in love (Eph. 4:16). Receiving the believers manifests a proper living in the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

A proper living of the kingdom life displays righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The expression of these spiritual characteristics is dependent upon a proper receiving of the believers, which comes from a renewed mind that recognizes and appreciates the measure of faith in each member and the diverse functions in the many members (Rom. 12:3-6). This living is sustained with a love that is without hypocrisy (v. 9), that fulfills the law (13:8), and that receives those who are weak in faith without despising or judging, according to the pattern of God's receiving (14:1, 3) and according to Christ (15:1-13).



A living in the kingdom requires transformation, and the peak manifestation of transformation is receiving one another on the basis of our shared participation in God's life. This maintains the oneness of the Body of Christ in an atmosphere of love.



*It is possible
to regard
different days and
to eat and drink
different things to
the Lord and still
live to the Lord.
To require
anything more
than a sharing
of the divine life
received through
faith can wound
and destroy a
person for whom
Christ died.*

A proper receiving of the believers for the kingdom life depends on the transforming growth of the divine life that enables the believers to meet the responsibility of receiving the other believers in the church as the kingdom of God. Paul's extended treatment of the matter of receiving, which he illustrates with the matter of eating and drinking, begins with a simple statement that exposes a hidden intention that often lies below the surface of interactions with our fellow citizens—a willingness to receive for the purpose of passing judgments on the considerations of those who are weak in faith (14:1). These judgments are passed in the form of corrections and adjustments to the considerations and living of our fellow members of the household of the faith. Such judgments, even when well-intentioned, are a form of despising that disregards one's present personal stand before the Lord and that usurps the role of the Lord and His enabling ability to make one stand (vv. 3-4).

Paul's words concerning receiving the believers are presented in the context of the believers' eating and drinking and observance of days: "One believes that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables" (v. 2), and "One judges one day above another; another judges every day alike. Let each be fully persuaded in his own mind" (v. 5). The matters of eating and drinking and the observance of days, however, are not the only areas that test our receiving. Many divisions among believers in Christ are the result of passing judgments on considerations related to practices and doctrines. For example, those who practice baptism by sprinkling pass judgments and divide from those who practice immersion and vice versa. Those who hold to the doctrine of a pretribulation rapture pass judgments and divide from those who hold to the doctrine of a posttribulation rapture and vice versa.⁴ In all these disputes, the only matter of significance should be whether or not Christ has received the believers, and Christ's receiving is based solely on whether one has received the life of God through faith in Christ. A new believer, almost by definition, is weak in faith and easily subject to judgments by the saints. A newborn babe needs inward feeding and shepherding, not outward adjustment. Scriptural accuracy related to practices and doctrines is not a prerequisite for receiving one another. It is possible to regard different days and to eat and drink different things to the Lord and still live to the Lord (vv. 6, 8). To require anything more than a sharing of the divine life received through faith places a stumbling block, or cause of falling, before a weak brother, and it can wound and destroy a person for whom Christ died (vv. 13, 15). Without a receiving that comes through transformation, the responsibilities of the kingdom—righteousness and peace and joy—will be abrogated.

The kingdom of God is the sphere in which God exercises His authority so that He may express His glory for the fulfillment of His purpose. In such a kingdom, what matters is not eating and drinking but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Righteousness denotes that which is right and proper. Those who live in the kingdom of God should be right and proper toward others, toward things, and toward God; with them there should be nothing erroneous, improper, crooked, slanted, or biased. This requires that they be strict in dealing with themselves. Peace is the fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11...). It characterizes the relationship that those who live in the kingdom of God should have with others and with God. If we are righteous, right, and proper toward others, toward things, and toward God, we will have a peaceful relationship with others and with God. Thus, we will have joy in the Holy Spirit and, in particular, before God. In this way we will be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52) and will live out righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, which are the reality of the kingdom of God.

According to the context of this chapter, this verse was written for our receiving of the believers. If we receive the believers according to the apostle's instruction in this chapter, we will be right and proper toward those whom we receive and will have peace with them; thus, we will have joy in the Holy Spirit, proving that we are living in the reality of God's kingdom and are under God's rule. Otherwise, we will not be right or proper toward those whom we do not receive and will not have peace with them; thus, we will not have joy in the Holy Spirit before God, proving that we are not subject to God's authority in the kingdom of God. (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Rom. 14:17, note 2)

It is not possible to receive the members of the household of God in the church as the kingdom of God when righteousness, peace, and joy are not present experientially in reality. The ability to fulfill the responsibility of righteousness comes with Christ as wisdom to us from God (1 Cor. 1:30). Christ, as our surpassing righteousness, enables us to enter into the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5:20). With Christ as this wisdom, it is possible to be proper toward others, things, and God, thus fulfilling the righteous requirement of the law (Rom. 8:4). With the gift of righteousness in Christ, it is possible to reign in life in the kingdom (5:17), no longer being enslaved to sin but to righteousness (6:18). With Christ in us, our spirit is the inward source of a righteous life, making us the righteousness of God in Him (8:10; 2 Cor. 5:21). The fruits of this righteous life can increase in us to enable a deeper receiving of the believers; this will be displayed in the putting on of the new man, the church, which was created in righteousness and holiness of the reality (9:10; Phil. 1:11; Eph. 4:24). With Paul's proper bearing of the responsibility of righteousness for the kingdom life, a crown of righteousness was laid up for him in the day of the Lord's appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

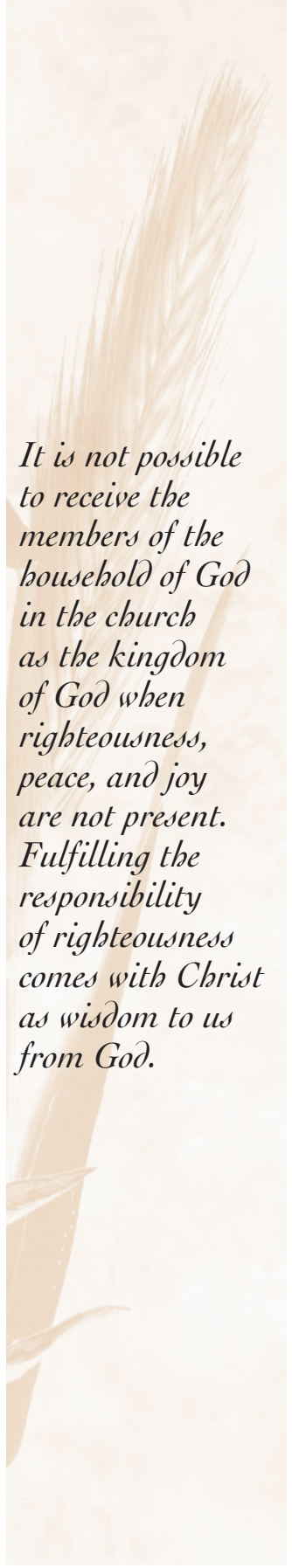
The ability to fulfill the responsibility of peace for the kingdom life can be met by believers because an abiding peace was created by Christ on the cross and announced as the gospel (Eph. 2:15, 17) and because peace was breathed into the disciples on the day of the Lord's resurrection (John 20:21-22). Our Christ is a continuing source of peace, as Paul announces in the introductions to his Epistles (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philem. 3). The peace that is needed to receive the believers is continuously available, and it enables the fellow citizens of the saints to pursue the things of peace and the things for building up the household of God (Rom. 14:19). Our calling is a calling in peace (1 Cor. 7:15). The Christ who broke down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, is Himself our peace (Eph. 2:14-15). In principle, every judgment that results in not receiving the believers is rooted in an ordinance that was abolished on the cross; such judgments represent an ongoing presence of a middle wall of partition, which has no place in the church as the kingdom.

The ability to fulfill the responsibility of joy in the kingdom can be met by us because we have the Lord's joy in us, enabling us to be full of joy (John 15:11; 17:13). As believers, we have been anointed and firmly attached to Christ, who was anointed with the oil of exultant joy (2 Cor. 1:21; Heb. 1:9). In the work of the apostles for the building up of the church as the kingdom of God, joy was a prevalent characteristic. Paul's coming to the believers in Rome was a coming in joy through the will of God (Rom. 15:32). He was a fellow worker for the joy of the church (2 Cor. 1:24). He desired that his joy would be the joy of all (2:3). He referenced the joy of Titus, whose spirit was refreshed by the Corinthians (7:13). In the depth of their poverty, the churches in Macedonia abounded unto the riches of their liberality with an abundance of joy (8:2). Paul's petitions on behalf of the saints were made with joy (Phil. 1:4), and he charged the Philippians to receive Epaphroditus with all joy (2:29). Paul regarded the Thessalonians as his glory and joy (1 Thes. 2:20). In addition to caring for the joy of the saints, he received joy from the saints (Philem. 7). The Lord also spoke of joy—of our entering into His joy in the coming millennial kingdom as a reward for a faithful service that fulfills the responsibilities assigned by Him as the Master, the King (Matt. 25:21, 23).

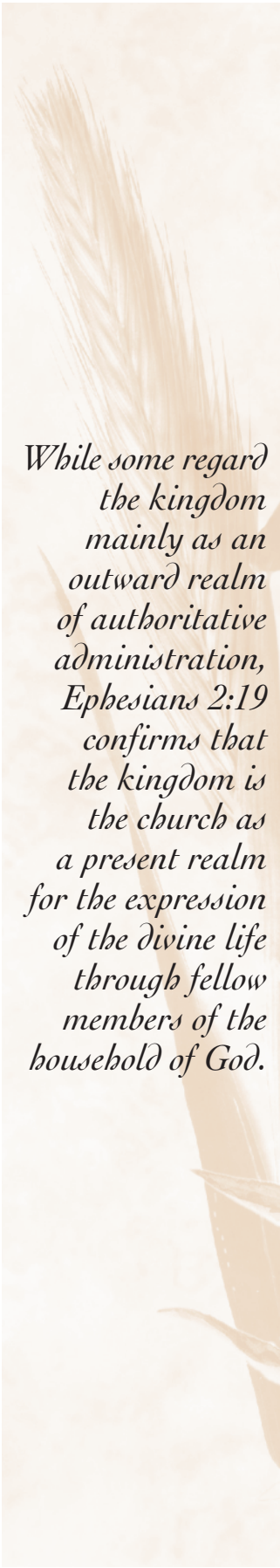
In Christ, the church as the kingdom has the divine life supply to bear the responsibilities of the kingdom. There is nothing narrow or stinted related to His supply of the divine life: "Of His fullness we have all received" (John 1:16). The Christ of righteousness and peace and joy is the allotted portion of the saints in the light⁵ (Col. 1:12), and with Christ as our portion, the church as the kingdom becomes an expressive reality in this age.

The Church as the Kingdom

The kingdom of God is presented generally throughout the Bible, but as the kingdom of



It is not possible to receive the members of the household of God in the church as the kingdom of God when righteousness, peace, and joy are not present. Fulfilling the responsibility of righteousness comes with Christ as wisdom to us from God.



While some regard the kingdom mainly as an outward realm of authoritative administration, Ephesians 2:19 confirms that the kingdom is the church as a present realm for the expression of the divine life through fellow members of the household of God.

the heavens, it is presented particularly in the New Testament. While some regard the kingdom mainly as an outward realm of authoritative administration with a reigning king and subservient subjects, the reference to the kingdom in Ephesians 2:19 confirms that the kingdom is the church as a present realm for the expression of the divine life through fellow members of the household of God. The kingdom of the heavens is a present reality because the household of the faith is a present reality (Gal. 6:10): We are fellow citizens. The kingdom is God's family bonded together through a mutual possession of the divine life, a life that brings both rights and responsibilities. These rights derive from the authority of the divine life with its ongoing operation within a believer individually and within the believers corporately. The responsibilities depend upon a transformed manifestation of the divine life through righteousness, peace, and joy. Paul's presentation of the church as the kingdom is unique to Ephesians, and his presentation of the rights and responsibilities of the church as the kingdom is unique to Romans. May the ubiquitous presence of the kingdom in the Bible become a ubiquitous presence in our inner being through a continual experience of the kingdom life of Christ. **AFC**

Notes

¹The brief reference to the kingdom in Ephesians 2:19 most likely accounts for the paucity of comments on the kingdom in commentaries on the Epistle to the Ephesians. Many commentators make no mention of the kingdom in their explication of Ephesians 2. These include: J. G. Bellet in *Brief Notes on the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Church at Thessalonica* (Bible Truth Publishers, n.d.); Ernest Best in both *Ephesians: A Shorter Commentary* (T & T Clark, 2003) and *Essays on Ephesians* (T & T Clark, 1997); D. A. Carson in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible* (Zondervan, 2018); J. N. Darby in volume 4 (Acts—Philippians) of *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible* (Bible Truth Publishers, 1980); Robert Govett in *Govett on Ephesians* (Conley & Schoettle Publishing, 1981); William Graham in *Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Presbyterian Board of Publication, n.d.); Harold W. Hoehner in *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Baker Academic, 2002); the editors of the *New Geneva Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 1995); Charles Caldwell Ryrie in *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Moody Press, 1976); R. C. Sproul in *The Purpose of God: An Exposition of Ephesians* (Christian Focus Publications, 1994); F. C. Synge in *St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: A Theological Commentary* (SPCK, 1954); Cliff Wilcox in *Rediscovering Ephesians as the Fellowship of the Mystery: An Analysis* (Winepress Publishing, 2000); Kenneth S. Wuest in *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament* (William B. Eerdmans, 1953).

²Even though he speaks of the kingdom as a spiritual kingdom, Hodge's subsequent reference to "admission to heaven" perpetuates the unscriptural notion of going to heaven, presumably one with many mansions. The church is God's spiritual kingdom today, and our entrance into it is a matter of receiving the divine life of God through regeneration in this age. It is not contingent upon "admission" to heaven.

³The section divisions mentioned here in relation to Romans 12 through 15 are taken from Witness Lee's outline of the Epistle to the Romans in the *Recovery Version of the Bible*.

⁴The unwillingness of the Brethren brothers to receive those among them who had differing views of the rapture accounts for their sad history of division.

⁵Before the Lord was transfigured on the mountain, He spoke to the disciples about seeing "the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matt. 16:28), and when He was transfigured, "His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as the light" (17:2).

Works Cited

- Hodge, Charles. *Ephesians*. Crossway Books, 1994.
- Lee, Witness. Footnotes and Outlines. *Recovery Version of the Bible*, Living Stream Ministry, 2003.
- . *Life-study of Ephesians*. Living Stream Ministry, 1984.
- O'Brien, Peter T. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. William B. Eerdmans, 1999.
- Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Ephesians: God's New Society*. Inter-Varsity Press, 1979.