

The Kingdom of God

How it Will Be

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Well, here we are, prefiguring the soon coming 1000-year millennial reign of Jesus Christ on the earth; or as someone once said, we are pre-memorializing it. That is a pretty good way to describe this.

At the beginning of this period, we know that one of the Messiah's first acts will be to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth. In reality, it is the re-establishment of God's government—a restoration, a restitution of what was—before Satan's rebellion. If you want to look that up, it is in Acts 3: 19-21. We are looking forward to the restitution of all things.

What do we know about the Kingdom of God? It is our goal. But, how much do we really understand about that?

What is it? Who comprises it? Where is it? Why is it? How is it? What is its history? Is there any history? What is its future?

We may not answer all of those questions today, because I am going to be giving a rather basic sermon about the Kingdom of God that we can review. We will hit the highlights of this subject getting it all clear again in our minds.

Most of you who have heard my sermons on Matthew 13 and the parables will know that I went into something that was somewhat controversial to some of you in which I quickly explained Jesus' use of the term, "Kingdom of heaven." I surprised some people by talking about it in the present tense form, rather than future tense. I hope to explain a bit more of that also, and expand upon it so that we are all clear on what I meant so that there will not be any confusion.

The Kingdom of God—right away, we should be able to learn something about it just by saying the words, "Kingdom," "of," "God." It should first strike us that the Kingdom is God's. He is its owner. He is its creator. He is its ruler. He possesses it in every sense of the word. He can admit anyone He wants into it, or bar anyone from it. He is absolutely sovereign over His Kingdom. No one comes between Him and it.

We can see in the model prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples to teach them how to pray, that He mentions this a number of times. He addresses,

Matthew 6: 9-10 . . . Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come. . . .

"Your Kingdom come!" Obviously, He puts it in a future tense in this passage. It is definitely something that we are looking forward to.

Matthew 6: 10 . . . Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.

Matthew 6:13 . . . For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Twice in these few scriptures, He really nails it down—it is God's Kingdom. He is its possessor. This is very important because the Kingdom of God focuses on God. He is everything to the Kingdom of God. And just like any other kingdom, the chief aim of this kingdom is to promote, to enhance the power of, and to glorify the King!

Think about the king of England, who throughout history has promoted his royal family. And the Kingdom of God is no different. God is the central point—the focal point—of this kingdom. The second thing that just jumps out at us about this Kingdom of God is that it is a kingdom.

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong taught us very early, and very often, that a kingdom has four elements. Do you remember them?

It has a King.

It has a territory or place.

It has citizens—the people who comprise it.

It has a code of law by which the King rules.

Now, we are going to nail these down before going on through this topic this morning, because they are the foundation—the bedrock—for this sermon. They might be obvious to most, but it is always good to review.

Who is the King?

Psalm 47 pretty much shouts out who the King really is. We know it already, but we seldom read Psalm 47.

Psalm 47:1-4 Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples! Shout to God with the voice of triumph! For the Lord Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth. He will subdue the peoples under us, and the nations under our feet. He will choose our inheritance for us, the excellence of Jacob whom He loves. Selah

God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with understanding. God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne. The princes of the people have gathered together, the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted.

We could go to dozens of other scriptures that say basically the same thing, that God is a Great King; that God is the Great King; or that He reigns, or rules. But we need not go any further. This was very clear.

What is the territory?

Daniel chapter 2 is about Nebuchadnezzar's image. He has a dream and demands of his astrologers to tell him not only the interpretation, but the actual dream too. And only Daniel could do it.

Daniel 2:34-35 You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

And, in the midst of the interpretation is this:

Daniel 2:44 And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.

So, this stone that was cut out without hands, which crushed the other nations, is the Kingdom of God. And, it filled the entire earth. That is its place.

Revelation 5:10 reminds us that, "We shall be kings and priests to our God, and we shall reign on the earth." This is very clear.

Now, while the earth is the central focus of the kingdom as far as we are concerned, we know that God designed, made, sustains, and rules the entire universe.

Psalms 103:19 The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.

So, He will rule from the earth, and establish His kingdom on the earth, but the scope of the Kingdom of God covers everything that exists and comes under the dominion of God.

We heard this morning about what may happen after the Millennium, and what our jobs will be after we help establish the Kingdom of God on the earth. Some have speculated that once the Father renews the heavens and the earth after the Great White Throne Judgment, the Kingdom will expand to other planets, and then out to the other galaxies. There is a scripture in Isaiah 9 that hints at this.

Isaiah 9:6-7 For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[And listen to this] Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

Does this hint that the Kingdom of God will expand throughout the entire universe? Possibly. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong seemed to think so. This is a kingdom that we have a hard time understanding sometimes.

Here, on puny little earth, an "M" class planet [a little Star Trek lingo there] around a minor star—from this central point the entire universe will be ruled for eternity by God Himself.

What a privilege this is to be on the first tier!

Who are the citizens of this kingdom?

In some scriptures I gave in the sermons on the parables,

I Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood [Revelation 5:10 referenced above, being kings and priests on the earth], a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Who are these citizens of the Kingdom of God? You are! You are the citizens of the Kingdom of God. If you want to a bit broader understanding, we can also call them, "The Elect," and "The Chosen."

Revelation 11:15 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

Revelation 11:18 The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the [spiritually] dead [the nations], that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great. . . .

The ones who become kings, and priests of the great God—the elect—includes all the prophets, and the saints—the holy ones. All are part of that Kingdom. And also, those who fear God's name are a part of that Kingdom.

Really, all these different terms are the same group of people. But, this is a broader overview of what sort of people comprise the Kingdom of God. Those who fear God's name, both small and great, will be there as citizens of the Kingdom. God is no respecter of persons in that regard.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

More descriptors of those in the Kingdom of God are, "Those who received Him," and, "Those who believe in His name."

Romans 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

This very famous memory scripture describes just a bit more about the citizens of the Kingdom.

What is its code of law?

Revelation 22:14 Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city [speaking of the capitol city of New Jerusalem].

Revelation 14:12 Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Revelation 12:17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 19:16-17 Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life [may enter the kingdom]?" So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

Therefore, what is that code of law for the Kingdom of God? The Ten Commandments! That is pretty simple. We saw a few of those—the testimony of Jesus was added to that. And so was the Old and New Testaments—the Bible. If you want to, we can expand it all the way out and say that the code of law for the Kingdom of God is the very character of God Himself. That is what God rules by—Himself!

What He is is what we will be. And that is how we will live—as He is, so will we be.

Okay, we have gotten the foundation down. We know who the King is. We know what the territory is. We know who the citizens of the Kingdom are. And, we know the code of law whereby the Kingdom will function.

But, what about this word, "kingdom?" What is a kingdom, beyond all of this?

The New Testament was written in Greek, and they used their word, "basileia." [basil-ay-ee-uh]

This word has confounded Greek scholars. I read that in several commentaries and word

studies. One of them said, "The New Testament sayings using the word, 'basileia,' are anything but uniform." They are of such wide definitions, and usages, that they do not know which one should apply. And these definitions seem to be somewhat contradictory to them. They do not quite know what to make of this word, 'basileia.'

And so, some line up behind one usage, and others behind the other. Most of them give you all of their usages, and then let you decide. They are just covering their rear ends. To be honest, they all fit in one form or another. And so, we will go into this just a bit.

There are two main definitions. And we can also see that without God's Spirit, these lexicographers and other scholars really do not understand what the Kingdom is, and the way that basileia is used in the Greek text. And it follows with what Jesus said in Matthew 13:11, "It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."

I think that the hardest thing to understand about "basileia" is that first of all, it is an abstract noun. It is not a concrete noun. [Pounds on lectern]—"lectern." [Pounds on table]—"table." [Stomps on the stage]—"stage." [silence]—"kingdom."

Nothing was heard before I mentioned the term, "kingdom." It is not a concrete noun. It is an idea or a concept in its primary sense.

We usually think of a kingdom (in English) as a place or land where a king rules over a nation—the Kingdom of Great Britain. The Netherlands also has a king or queen. Brunei has a sultan; that, too, is a kingdom. But, basileia means, "rule," "reign," "royal power," or "sovereignty" more than it means to be ruled by a monarch.

See? First of all, it is that concept of power in one individual, and by that power, he rules over others, whether rules, reign, royal power, or sovereignty.

And in the Church of the Great God we learned much about the sovereignty of God in a major way. The sovereignty of God is a synonym for the Kingdom of God. Whatever God rules over is His Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is more of an idea or concept than a place, really. However, when Christ returns, the Kingdom of God will be an idea *and* a place. We can really never divorce the two.

This is what confounds the lexicographers. They see this interdependence of the concepts, and the reality; and then there is also the idea of a present, past, and future. And these scholars have a hard time juggling all these ideas, because they do not understand the plan of God. It has not been given to them to know.

For us, it may be pretty simple to understand, but for them, they just scratch their heads and say, "Well, it seems like this writer understood it to mean now, but this other writer writes about Jesus in a future tense all the time; and Matthew almost always writes kingdom of heaven, instead of Kingdom of God; was he confused, because all the others say Kingdom of God?" They just end up confusing themselves because they do not know, and they do not understand. It has not been given to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. But, to us it has been given.

So, even though I have said that it is more of an idea than a place, the place is never totally absent from the term—even now. Matthew most often uses kingdom of heaven. The reason why he did that is because he wants to direct our attention to the kingdom's origins. It does not originate on the earth. The kingdom is of heaven. Heaven is its place. That is its origination. Its genesis is in heaven. And right now, the Kingdom is in heaven, not on this earth.

That is why Jesus Christ is coming back to this earth, to reestablish this Kingdom of God on the earth, because Satan made a pretty bad botch of it. This was and is his domain. He was God's representative on the earth, putting God's government over this earth, and he messed up royally.

So, God must restore—restitute, re-institute—the Kingdom of God to this earth. And, it will stay in heaven until Christ returns to put it back in its place, because this is the rightful place for the Kingdom of God. That is why God created this earth in the first place, to establish His Kingdom. It has got to be that way, because this is where He intends to stay for all time!

Now, Pilate questioned Jesus, "Why have your people condemned you like this?" And you know that oftentimes when Jesus was asked a straight question, His reply seems to come out of left field; but it does answer the question. Christ said,

John 18:36 "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Matthew calls it the kingdom of heaven. And it needs to be restored to this earth. But, it will stay in heaven until the time for it to be restored. And then, His servants will fight! And, had the Kingdom of God been on this earth at that time, no such thing would have happened to the King! But, at that point, it was not here. There were other things that needed to be done first, but it will soon be on this earth.

Yesterday Dr. Maas mentioned the passage that shows the fulfillment of this.

Zechariah 14:1-5 Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You.

Zechariah 14:9 And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—"The Lord is one," and His name one.

That time is coming, and we all pray that it comes soon.

So, here we have in the definition of basileia a double meaning that the scholars find hard to comprehend.

First, the Kingdom is the rule, dominion, or sovereignty of God. And, anything that God rules, or anyone who submits to that rule is part of that Kingdom. So, whenever someone submits to the rule of God, he comes under the Kingdom of God in spirit because the Kingdom is not from here, yet. He is already a part of the kingdom of heaven in spirit because he is under God's rule.

Second, the Kingdom of God is a real, literal government that exists now in heaven, and will soon exist here on the earth when Christ re-establishes God's rule.

Here is a definition of "basileia" from *Vine's Expository Dictionary of the New Testament*. I think that this succinctly sums up what the Kingdom of God is so far as the scholars go.

Basileia, Strong's # 932, is primarily an abstract noun denoting sovereignty, royal power, dominion, reign, or realm. And then, by an achorism, (something that is part of a whole, that stands for the whole [like Jerusalem for the whole of Israel]), basileia is a concrete noun denoting the territory and people over which the king rules. It is used especially of the Kingdom of God and of Christ. The Kingdom of God is a) the sphere of God's rule. Since, however, this earth is the scene of universal rebellion against God, the Kingdom of God is b) the sphere in which at any given time His rule is acknowledged. Thus, the Kingdom is said to be in mystery now (Matthew 13, Mark 4:11). That is, it does not come within the reigns of the natural powers of observation.

(Human minds cannot understand the mystery of the Kingdom of God. They cannot see it. Luke 17:20. The Kingdom is spiritually discerned.)

When, hereafter, God asserts His rule universally, then the Kingdom will be in glory; that is, it will be manifest to all. Then, it will be something we can observe with our natural eye, and other senses. Thus, speaking generally, references to the kingdom fall into two classes. The first, in which it is viewed as present, and involving suffering for those who enter it; and the second, in which it is viewed as future, and is associated with reward, and glory.

Now, what is interesting about all this is that if you would look up the English word "kingdom," it has a very similar history like the word basileia has. Its original, and somewhat obsolete definition is the position, rank, and power of the king.

King-dom; domis = power; the power of the king.

In modern times, though, we have dropped this definition in favor of a nation, and land governed by a monarch. So, what we have to do is train ourselves to think of God's rule, reign, or power when we see the term, Kingdom of God, and then attach the concrete definition to it, if it fits.

Now, we will take a look at a brief history of the Kingdom of God.

People in the church of God, me included, have thought for a long time of the Kingdom of God as only in its literal future sense. And, I think that we had a good reason for that. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong had a very good reason for stressing that the Kingdom of God was not on the earth right now. It was going to come when Jesus Christ returned. This was because the typical Protestant understanding of the Kingdom of God is that it is in your heart—within you. And they have nothing to look forward to. They really have no hope. They do not understand the plan of God. (Matthew 13: 11) And so you find that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong would stress the future aspect of the Kingdom of God in opposition to their Protestant idea in order to counterbalance their thinking on this.

This was all very understandable. And, it is not wrong. That is the real meaning of the Kingdom of God—the future reality that Jesus Christ will bring with Him when He returns.

Although the Kingdom of God is not within us, as the Protestants think of it, if you search the scriptures, you must admit that Jesus Christ and the apostles used this term—Kingdom of God—in its present tense form. We must explain why they did this, and what they were getting at. They were trying to let us in on the truth so that we can understand better what is going to happen, how we should live now, and why things are proceeding in the manner in which they are.

First of all, we are going to examine the present tense of this.

Colossians 1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed [translated] us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

I used this several times in my series on Matthew 13. The Father has translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. Now, how do you explain that? If you look at the Greek grammar, you will find that this is a present perfect tense form. This means that the action has been completed at some indefinite time before the present.

It says, "has translated." Some grammar books put the present perfect under the present tense. I have one grammar book that puts the present perfect in their section on the past tense, because it functions in many ways as past tense—He has done it. He has translated us. How else can you explain that if it is done?

Philippians 3:20-21 For our citizenship is [present tense] in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will [future] transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

What does this tell us? It tells us that God considers us citizens of the Kingdom. We are in the Kingdom right now, according to God. We are citizens.

But, what did verse 21 add? He will glorify us. So, it is not complete yet.

So, at the very least, God already considers us members of the Kingdom in spirit, as well as His representatives on the earth. You will find that in II Corinthians 5: 20, "We are ambassadors for Christ." We already have positions in that Kingdom. We are already ambassadors. That is also another present tense verb.

This next passage is interesting too, in that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong used it all the time. He quoted this one just about every time he spoke.

Mark 1:14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. . . .

Do you remember that?

What did Christ come to preach? The Kingdom of God! Not the gospel of grace, not the gospel of just love everybody, and that nicey-nice stuff, but He came preaching the Kingdom of God!"

Mark 1:15 . . . and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Do you know what that literally says in the Greek? "The time has been fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has drawn near." It is very interesting the verbs that they used in the New Testament.

He put it as, "Now! The time is here! You had better do something about it. This is your chance. Repent and believe the Gospel."

And, as I mentioned before, I am sure we sent out reams of paper from the Personal Correspondence Department of the Worldwide Church of God for all those many years when people would ask, "Well, is not the Kingdom of God within you?"

Luke 17:20-21 Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within [in your midst, or among] you."

He told the Pharisees that it is right here among you, in your midst, and you have not recognized it. We have always explained this by saying that since the King was in their midst, that as the chief representative of the Kingdom of God, that the Kingdom itself was among them. And that is absolutely true.

However, this does not explain Colossians 1: 13, and Philippians 3: 20-21. When Paul wrote

those, Jesus Christ was already ascended back up into heaven. But, he tells us we are already citizens. So, we need to think about this.

The principle that we need to remember is Romans 4:17

Romans 4:17b God. . .calls those things which do not exist as though they did. . . .

God inhabits eternity! He sees backward all the way. He sees forward all the way. God knows what is going to happen. He has the power to do so, just as we have learned in the "Workmanship Series," that what He starts out to do, He gets done. (Philippians 1:6)

And so, if He has called you out of this world, and says, "I want you in my Kingdom, and I have prepared a place for you," He is going to do it. He looks upon you in whom He has put His Spirit, and He said, "These kids of mine are already my Family. They are going to make it into the Kingdom, if they do not mess it up themselves. If they yield to Me, they are there! In fact, I am going to infer upon each one of them an ambassadorship so that they can represent My Kingdom right now, right where they are. They have all the credentials. My kids will witness to the world for Me, and show the world what the Kingdom of God is like in themselves."

So God, from His eternal perspective can speak of the Kingdom of God and our entrance into it, as an already accomplished fact, even though those processes have not yet been completely finished.

You have the whole world to come to repentance, but He has chosen you, and He is working with you. And what He says He is going to do, He is going to do. What did He say in Isaiah? "That His word goes forth, and does not come back void." We have a God who finishes what He starts.

What is the past of the Kingdom of God?

We will not go into Lucifer's part in all of this, but rather I want to show that physical Israel is a type of the Kingdom of God. Notice what God says in His preamble to the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 19:3-6 And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: `You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. `Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. `And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

He was offering them a chance to be in His Kingdom in a physical way to show us what things were like. You might want to go see later I Corinthians 10:11 where Paul tells us that all these things happened to them as examples to us for our admonition, so we could learn and

understand how God works. In many cases with Israel, it was so we could learn and understand what not to do. Much of the time they were a better negative example than a positive one. But He said that they were His Kingdom.

We see the beginning of it, now we will see how it unravels.

I Samuel 8:4-7 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.

Physical Israel threw the Kingdom of God away. "We do not want you to reign over us, God. We do not want to be a part of your Kingdom."

God still worked with them. But this is very clear that they rejected God as their King. They wanted someone that they could see. They wanted some physical man to lead them in battle, and represent them.

I am sure it sure hurt God to be rejected like this. Here, He had done so much for them as He had recorded in Ezekiel 16. The story goes that He had picked them up when they were cast off and bloody. And then, He does so much for them—He decked them with jewels and raiment, and all sorts of fine things; and they just thumbed their noses at Him. They rejected God as their King.

Much later, Jesus confirms all this while speaking to the elders of the Jews.

Matthew 21:43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

So, here is the King Himself saying, "I am going to pluck it from physical Israel, and give it to a nation who does not deserve it, but whom I have redeemed. And we found that in I Peter 2: 9-10, where we have become a holy nation; those who were not a people are now the people of God—you and me!

Summarizing this, from time immemorial, God has existed, and ruled the universe. We do not know how far back that goes—it does not matter. At some point, He created all things, and appointed the archangel Lucifer to manage His government and Kingdom on the earth, which was over one-third of all the angels. And when Lucifer rebelled, and became Satan the Adversary, the Kingdom of God reverted back to its heavenly domain. Then, at some point, God created man; and Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, failed to qualify to receive God's Kingdom. They had access to the Tree of Life. Remember that we saw in Romans 8: 14 that those who have the Spirit of God they are the sons of God? They rejected the Tree of Life, and

took for themselves the knowledge of good and evil.

And then, 2500 years later (more or less), God raised up the nation of Israel, which He used as a physical type of His Kingdom on earth to teach us lessons, to give us prophecies and instructions on how the real, literal future Kingdom of God works. And about 1500 years after that, Jesus Christ came, died for our sins, rose the third day, and He founded the church of God on the day of Pentecost. Members of the church of God, who are truly God's sons and daughters begotten by the Holy Spirit, are considered citizens of the Kingdom of God, as ambassadors; as having spiritually entered into it.

However, until our change comes, if we fall away, we can have our citizenship revoked, and wind up in the Lake of Fire. Though God is powerful, and wants you there, the final decision is still yours. Just because God has already translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love, it does not mean that we have made it.

Some time back, Charles Whitaker gave a sermonette on the theme of eternal security. It does not exist, unless you faithfully walk with God to the end. "If you keep on keeping on, I will do My part, and you will make it."

But, you can still fall away.

In the spiritual type of the Kingdom of God, God's work right now is building our character into the image of His Son, and training us for our ultimate positions as kings and priests in the real, future, literal Kingdom of God in which we will reign with Christ 1000 years, and forever beyond that! And who knows what we will be doing then.

But now, we are learning, growing, and maturing, and being built up into Christ. And when Christ returns to this earth, He will set up his Father's Kingdom from Jerusalem, and reign for a thousand years. And during this time, we know from other scriptures that Christ will rule and bring all nations into and under the Kingdom of God—Isaiah 2 says that the nations will flow into the Kingdom of God during the Millennium.

We will skip over Satan's mad final attempt to derail God's plan, but it happens. And then finally, Christ will deliver the Kingdom to the Father. (I Corinthians 15: 24-25) After Christ has put down all, and there is nothing left to subdue, He will turn the Kingdom over to His Father who will descend after He has renewed the earth and purged it by fire, and from here He will rule all the universe for all eternity. And so will we (Revelation 21: 1-3).

So, where are we now?

Well, you are still flesh and blood. Herbert W. Armstrong used this next passage a lot; the old "hat pin trick." Ever poked yourself accidentally with a pin or needle? You are still flesh and blood, are you not?

I Corinthians 15:50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

We know by very hard and cruel logic if you have done the hat-pin test that we have not

inherited the Kingdom of God yet. It is just as true today as it was when Herbert W. Armstrong was proclaiming that years ago. You cannot inherit the Kingdom of God as a flesh and blood human being.

How can you explain this when you find scriptures that say that we are now citizens of it? And, that God has already translated us into it? It seems to be a bit of a contradiction, does it not? It does not seem to mesh. Jesus said you had to be born into the Kingdom; and that spirit is spirit, and you cannot be a spirit if you are flesh and blood because spirit goes like the wind. You cannot see the wind. It goes where it wants.

Obviously, we are human. You get hit, it hurts.

We are kind of between things, are we not, between the two sides of the matter. We are human, but God considers us part of the Kingdom. We have not inherited it, but we are already citizens of it. We are ambassadors for Christ, and doing His will on this earth, yet we are not in glory. We are still corrupt. And we die.

So how can we, sinners all, be part of God's Kingdom now? Do we not pollute it? Do we not corrupt it? Does this not make God's Kingdom impure somehow?

Well, the answer is very simple, as well as theologically intricate. I will not give you the theologically intricate in its fullness right now, but I will get to it. But first, here is the simple explanation. (Always start with the simple, and go from there.) It is a semantic difference between being transferred, or translated, as opposed to inheriting. Those are two different ideas.

This transference that Paul talked about in Colossians 1:13 is a legal designation showing that your citizenship, your loyalties, your responsibilities, your authority, and your whole life have been reassigned from this world to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Try this analogy. If you move from Texas to North Carolina, you must go to the local Department of Transportation and get your driving privileges transferred from one state to the other. You do not own the state of North Carolina just because you have a driver's license, but your rights and privileges are transferred legally from one state to the other, and you are now considered a citizen of new state—in this case North Carolina.

You may live there, (this is where the analogy breaks down); but the transference of legal designation has occurred already. Now, that ought to equate to what is happening with us and the Kingdom of God. I think you get the point.

God has said, "I want that one. And from this point on, he belongs to Me, though he lives down there in the world. And so now, he answers to Me only. Now, he will have to live down there with man's government, but right now, he is Mine. I have transferred him into My Kingdom; no one touches him. He is not a full-fledged member yet; he is still corruptible; but he is Mine. He has got My Spirit, he is My son." It is pretty simple to look at it this way.

Herbert Armstrong used the analogy of the difference between being begotten, and being born again. This is a similar idea. When you are begotten, and you begin to grow in your mother's womb, you have all the rights and privileges of a family member in that particular family, do you not? The fetus is the son or daughter of a mother and father. But, they are not a complete,

functioning member of that family until they are born. And, should that fetus die, do not the parents grieve? They lost a son or daughter! And though the interaction between them, especially the father, was minimal, he still considers that child who died to be his own. It is a wonderful analogy. I am sure God inspired Herbert Armstrong's mind. It is perfect.

I want to touch on the theological answer. I think you will get it. I am sure that scholars could write books on this, but there is no need. The Spirit of God helps us to understand. We can see it in the first four verses.

Colossians 3:1-4 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

This was a very interesting study on these four verses. I will give you a brief rundown of what is in here. Maybe you will want to chase this out later on your own.

First he mentions our baptism. We were baptized and given His Holy Spirit. We were raised with Christ. If you go back to Romans 6, you will find these same words explained by Paul in verses 1 through 14. Baptism is a type of death and resurrection. Our old man died in the watery grave, and we were raised to newness of life. And now, our life is in Christ. Otherwise, we would be dead. We now live in Him.

Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

We died a death like Christ—crucified with Him—put to death our sins; and then we were raised to newness of life in Christ. That is the only way that we can have life—in Christ. Our sins were wiped out by His sacrifice, and now we are placed under grace. We are saved by grace through (a living) faith.

Now, the second part is that because we have this new life, our goals and attitudes—everything about us—is now supposed to be focused on things that are above. We are no longer supposed to have our noses in the gutter, our feet dirtied by this world, but rather our minds are set on things of heaven—the Kingdom of Heaven. "Seek those things which are above." We are in the process of putting our sinful nature to death completely, and building righteous, godly character by letting God build righteous, godly character in us.

This continual process of putting sin out and putting righteousness in by the Holy Spirit—functions of God that He helps us with, while we yield—along with a huge amount of God's grace, keeps us in the game. Otherwise, we would be dead again. Seek those things which are above—we put the sin out, God puts His righteousness in us, molds us and shapes us into the image of His Son. And as long as we are going through this process with Him, and continuing to yield, we stay under grace, and we remain a part of the Kingdom—citizens of that

Kingdom.

The third part of this is that because we died in Christ, and are raised in Christ, His righteousness, His holiness, hides us and covers us like it said in verse 3: "Your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Do you know that when God looks down upon you, and you come before Him in prayer, he does not see you in all your despicable sins and corruption, but He sees Christ in us? It is by Christ's blood that we have access to the Father, and it is Christ in us that God sees, and thus we have access to Him by the mediation of Jesus Christ. We are hidden in Christ. He covers us. He covers for us. Like it says in Romans 8, the Spirit makes intercession for us, because we do not know anything about what we need to ask about. This is all done by Jesus Christ our Mediator who dispenses the Holy Spirit.

God the Father then sees Christ in us, and it pleases Him, and He listens to us, and He grants us forgiveness, and He blesses us, and continues to build His Son's character in us, because we are rotten to the core. And it is only Christ and His righteousness that allows us the opportunity to fall flat on our faces before God, and beg to be heard, and beg forgiveness, and all those things that we need Him for.

So, we are hidden in Christ—with Christ in God.

And like I said earlier, in the parable of the hidden treasure (Matthew 13 series), that another aspect of this is that as long as we remain in Christ, our salvation is guaranteed because God will do it—He will do what He started. But, we have to make sure that we will remain in Christ.

It is really amazing to think of how little we do, and such great grace that has been given to us, that Christ allows Himself to enter us, and cover for us. And He does it out of love, of course, because He loves us and wants us to thrive as His brothers and sisters in the Kingdom.

The fourth thing is a matter of God's understanding our frame. Did not David say, "What is man that you are mindful of him?" We are so puny and insignificant. But then He says, "He understands what we are made of." Of course He does. He knows what we are all about. He knows how corruptible we are. He knows how little it takes to sidetrack us, to send us off into some distraction that is going to take us away from Him. He knows that He has set up His plan so that we have this time where we are first made of clay. We are malleable. He can shape us, and he knows the clay has flaws, and it is going to take time to bring us to the image that He wants. That is what He is trying to make.

And so, He is extremely aware that this is a training period. We are not done yet. And I thank God for that. We would be of absolutely no use for Him in the Kingdom the way we are now, unless He tests us, and trains us, and allows us time to grow and to overcome, and He gives us space to work our problems out, to repent; He in a sense has offered us a trial membership (if you will allow that analogy). He is watching to see if we will live by the rules of the club.

But, what is so good about this is that He is our personal Trainer! He is going to make sure that we shape up, so that He will not have to ship us out. He wants us there.

So, right now, God, in a sense, "puts up with" our human nature, because He knows our frame,

and when we are finally made of better stuff than what we are now, when we have no corruption, when we are glorified, then God will indeed expect to see us as perfectly righteous, and holy as He is.

For right now, we are on trial. Use it the best way that you can.

I really do not want anybody to misunderstand this whole concept, because I think it is an important one. Be aware of the responsibility that God has placed upon us as members of His Kingdom, trial members though we are. It is a great and weighty responsibility that now in this world with all that is happening, all that is going on with its sins, and all the corruption, and the world events that are hurtling toward the end of this age, He has allowed us to represent Him so that someone will look at us and say sometime in the future, "I remember him. I remember him when he was in the flesh. And you know, that one really made a difference. He believed what God said, and he lived it; and I remember that."

Who knows how many people will remember our conduct, but we hope that it was not hitting them in the face and arguing over the bill at the restaurant, or taking down the traffic cop who had the "audacity" to pull you over for going 90 mph.

You want to make sure, because you are ambassadors for Christ, that we fulfill all the requirements of our citizenship that has been transferred to us, now, by His grace.

Mr. Armstrong was absolutely right when he taught us that the coming Kingdom of God is a future event. The event that all creation has been waiting for. And it is just breathlessly waiting because it wants to see the adoption of the sons of God and their inheritance of the Kingdom.

Yet, God is now giving us, His sons and daughters, a taste of it in His church—this spiritual type of the Kingdom falls far short of what the Kingdom of God in its fullness will be. But, as Paul says in Hebrews 6: 4-5, "We have tasted the heavenly gifts, we have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come."

That is no light responsibility that has been placed upon us. And he warns us later on in that same section, that if we turn away, there is no coming back, because this awesome responsibility and privilege has been placed upon us now.

I Corinthians 2:6-10 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory [which Jesus said to Pilate, but he could not understand, and it would not ever had come to that if he had]. But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

Yes, God has indeed given us the ability to understand His Kingdom, and to participate in it in a limited way now. And even so, we have only a slim glimmer of how great it is really going to be. We can thank God that He has given us this spiritual type so we can soon know the Kingdom of God in all its glory!