LESSON 8

Its Supreme Value: The Kingdom of God

The child of God, as is true of men in general, needs a unifying centre around which he can build his life. It has been said that "all men who attain have one great ruling aim." There may and will be other centres or aims, but these will be subservient to and integrated into the one unifying centre or "ruling aim." The more thorough the unification or integration, the more completely the individual will fulfil his potentiality.

There is no aim or centre, for the Christian, that is more inclusive or adequate, than his devotion to the Kingdom, the rule, the reign of God. This means, among other things, that the supreme value for the Christian is God-centred rather than man-centred. This is in harmony with the distinctly Christian approach to life—God is always the predominant point of reference. In contrast, the philosophical approach is man-centred. For example, the *summum bonum* in philosophical ethics is found within man: it is happiness, wisdom, self-realization, or the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

The Christian discovers that when he puts God, His will, His work, His kingdom first in his life he receives as a by-product the deepest, most abiding and most meaningful happiness and personal fulfilment. He also discovers that as he "seeks first the kingdom of God," he ministers most effectively to the needs of his fellowman. In other words, one who places the Kingdom first in his life also in the truest sense puts his fellowman first.

The child of God needs a unifying _____

around which he can _____ *his life.*

(centre, build)

The supreme value for the Christian is _____

_____ *rather than* _____

_____.

(God-centred, man-centred)

The Meaning of "The Kingdom"[1]

One of the difficulties in any study of the Kingdom of God is the fact that it is not clearly defined in the Scriptures. As prominent as the Kingdom was in the preaching and teaching of Jesus, He never defined it. He evidently assumed that the people

The Kingdom of God is not _____

_____ *in the Scriptures.*

[1] Two of the better recent books on the Kingdom of God are George Eldon Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (Harper & Row, 1964), and Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Westminster Press, 1963). Ladd's book is more thorough than his earlier book, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Eerdmans, 1959). Perrin's book, in the main, is an analysis of the position of various scholars concerning the kingdom.

Three of the most helpful older books on the kingdom are John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Abingdon, 1953); H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Willett, Clark, and Co., 1937); and Ernest F. Scott, *The Kingdom of God in the New Testament* (Macmillan, 1931).

Martin Buber's *Kingship of God*, trans. by Richard Scheimann (Harper & Row, 1967), provides some background material for an understanding of the kingdom concept. Based on a manuscript discovered after his death, Albert Schweitzer's *The Kingdom of God and Primitive Christianity*, trans. by L. A. Garrard (Seabury Press, 1968), is a survey of biblical material, with a major emphasis on the teachings of Jesus.

who heard Him speak of the Kingdom knew what He meant. It is relatively clear that the concept of the Kingdom of God was and is closely related to if not an integral part of the idea of the kingship of God. The Kingdom describes or represents the relation of God as king to men as subjects. From the perspective of the king, the Kingdom signifies His dignity and power. His dignity is something inherently His as king. His power is an external expression of His basic nature and dignity. Both God and men have some distictive relations to and contributions to make to the Kingdom. God, as king, provides guidance and protection. Men as subjects of the king are to trust Him and to be loyal and obedient to Him. The Kingdom can be interpreted either as the reign or the realm of the king. From the biblical perspective, the primary emphasis is on the reign.

The Kingdom of God describes the relation of God as king to men as _____.

(clearly, defined, subjects)

The whole kingdom concept is closely related to the idea of the sovereignty of God. When "kingdom" and "sovereignty" are properly understood they can be equated. The king is sovereign. His kingdom represents his sovereignty or rule. This means that for practical purposes the Kingdom of God can be equated with the intentional will of God. The prayer

> Thy kingdom come,
> Thy will be done,
> On earth as it is in heaven.
> (Matt. 6:10)

is not two petitions but one.

The Kingdom of God can be equated with the intentional _____.

(will of God)

Another matter that creates some problems in properly interpreting the meaning of the Kingdom of God is the fact that Matthew uses the term kingdom of heaven. This term or expression is found thirty-one times in Matthew, with only three references to the Kingdom of God (19:24; 21:31, 43). In contrast, Mark and Luke speak of the Kingdom of God sixteen and thirty-two times, respectively, and do not use the phrase "kingdom of heaven" at all.[2] It seems relatively clear that the two phrases can be equated (see Matt. 19:23, 24). This is particularly evident when one compares parallel verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Matt. 19:23; Mark 10:23; and Luke 18:24).

"Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of heaven" can be _____.

(equated)

What is the reason for the difference in Matthew and the other synoptics? The usual explanation and evidently the correct one is that devout Jews so reverenced the name of God that they sought to avoid using His name. Matthew was the most Jewish of the gospel writers and seemingly wrote his Gospel primarily for Jewish readers. Hence he avoided the use of "kingdom of God" and substituted "kingdom of heaven."

Devout Jews sought to avoid _____.

(using His name)

In addition to "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven,"

[2] The phrase "kingdom of God" is seldom found outside of the synoptics. There are only two references in John (3:3, 5), six in Acts, and a total of only eight in all the Pauline epistles, with five of these in First Corinthians. It is possible that Paul avoided the use of an expression so predominantly Jewish in its background. It has been suggested that "eternal life" in John's writings, and to a lesser degree in the Pauline epistles, is comparable to "kingdom" in the synoptics. There are sixteen specific references to "eternal life" in John's Gospel with an additional six in First John.

there are a number of biblical references to "the kingdom of the Father" (see Matt. 13:43; 26:29; cf. Matt 25:34; Luke 12:32). Also the word "kingdom" is frequently used in an absolute sense without any defining word or phrase but where the reference is clearly to the "kingdom of God."

Jesus and the Kingdom

When Jesus came, saying, "The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15), He was using a familiar term. The Jews in the days of Jesus connected the kingdom idea with messianic hopes, which flourished among them.[3] The idea of the kingship of God is very prevalent in the Old Testament. In the earlier days the kingship concept was restricted, in the main, to Israel. As the nation declined, the remnant idea became more prevalent and God tended, in a sense, to be the king only of those who voluntarily accepted His reign. There is also found in the Old Testament the idea that the Lord will "reign for ever and ever" (Ex. 15:18) and that His kingship is universal. He was recognized as "king of all the earth" (Ps. 47:7), as a God who "reigns over the nations" (Ps. 47:8).

The Jews in the days of Jesus looked forward to the coming of the Kingdom of God as a time when God's judgement would come upon their enemies and as a time of national justification, restoration, and exaltation. They also thought of it as an earthly kingdom to be set up and ruled over by the Messiah or the Son of Man.

As was so frequently true, Jesus utilized current terminology but breathed new life and meaning into the old. He definitely rejected the idea of an earthly kingdom with the Messiah as the king of the kingdom. He largely ignored the nationalistic elements of the current Jewish perspective. He did not abolish entirely the idea of the Kingdom as a future hope, but he also made it a present reality. As John Bright says, "The future tense of the Old Testament. . . has now become an emphatic present. . . . In the person and work of Jesus the Kingdom of God has intruded into the world."[4] This does not necessarily mean that the sense of the future was discarded. Pannenberg, whose major emphasis is on the "imminent kingdom" (it "was the resounding motif of Jesus' message"), suggests that "it is a mark of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God that future and present are inextricably interwoven." He further says, "Jesus underscored the present impact of the imminent future."[5] He also suggests that the main way Jesus modified the Jewish conception of the Kingdom was His emphasis on its imminence.

To the Jews, the "Kingdom of God" was a _____ term.

(familiar)

As the nation of Israel declined, the remnant idea became more _____.

(prevalent)

Jesus utilized current terminology but breathed new _____ and _____ into the old.

To Jesus, the Kingdom of God was both future and _____.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

[3] Most books on the Kingdom, such as Bright, Ladd, and Schweitzer, give considerable attention to the Jewish background for the Kingdom of God. Rudolph Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom* (Herder & Herder, 1963), devotes the first of three major divisions to "The Kingship of God in the Old Testament and in Later Judaism."

[4] Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, p.216.

[5] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Westminster Press, 1969), p. 53.

There can be no question about the centrality of the Kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus. It was the subject of His earliest recorded preaching: "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15; cf. Matt. 4:17), was His continuing theme, and when He appeared to the disciples after His resurrection He spoke to them concerning the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). The idea of the Kingdom permeated and dominated His entire ministry. It was the key or unifying theme of His preaching and teaching. For example, almost all of His parables were kingdom parables. L. H. Marshall suggests that *"all the ethical teaching of Jesus is simply an exposition of the ethics of the Kingdom of God, of the way in which men inevitably behave when they actually come under the rule of God."*[6]

The idea of the Kingdom permeated and _____ *Jesus' entire* _____.

(dominated, ministry)

Since the Kingdom was central in the life and ministry of Jesus, it was natural and inevitable that it would be central in His instructions to His disciples. It was the first specific petition in the prayer He taught His disciples to pray (Matt. 6:10). This implies that before a disciple of Christ has any right to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," "forgive us our debts," or "lead us not into temptation" he must pray, "Thy kingdom come." This is not the prayer of a pious person who wants to escape from the world or of a reformer who thinks he can remake the world. Rather, it is the prayer of the child of God who lives in the world, and who recognizes that the Kingdom is God's and that He alone can bring it to realization in the world.

The Kingdom was central in Jesus' _____ *to His* _____.

(instruction, disciples)

Jesus also instructed His disciples and would instruct us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). This should be accompanied with a childlike trust that the heavenly Father knows our needs and will provide the necessities of life for us. James Hastings suggests that "seek first his kingdom" is Jesus' definition of the chief good. Jesus also compared the Kingdom to the "treasure hidden in a field" and to a "pearl of great value." When one discovered the hidden treasure or the pearl of great value he "went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matt. 13:44–46). The Kingdom is the supreme value for the child of God.

According to Hastings, the chief good is to _____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

The Kingdom was of central importance in the continuing ministry of the disciples. When Jesus sent out the twelve, they were instructed to preach as they went, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 10:7; cf. Luke 9:2). Similarly, the seventy, when they were sent out on a missionary journey, were to preach "The kingdom of God has come near to you" (Luke 10:9).

The Kingdom continued to be of central importance to the _____.

(disciples)

The Nature of the Kingdom

Let us examine in more detail the nature of the Kingdom, basing our study primarily on the teachings of Jesus. Where else could we go for an authoritative word concerning the nature of the Kingdom? Unfortunately, some biblical scholars attempt to press everything Jesus said concerning the Kingdom into their

[6] L. H. Marshall, *The Challenge of New Testament Ethics* (Macmillan, 1946), p. 31.

preconceived concept or mold. Isolated verses can be quoted to support widely divergent interpretations. However, all that Jesus taught concerning the Kingdom cannot be wrapped into one neat little package. His teachings contain varying and at least on the surface paradoxical perspectives.

It will help us properly to interpret and evaluate these seeming paradoxes if we will keep in mind that the Kingdom is basically spiritual and inner. Paul says that "the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). But while basically it is a spiritual kingdom there is also a deep and an abiding concern for the material well-being of people. In the model prayer immediately following the prayer for the Kingdom is the petition for daily bread (Matt. 6:10, 11). The basis of the separation of the sheep and the goats at the time of judgement was their service to the hungry, thirsty, lonely, naked, sick, and imprisoned (Matt. 25:3, 5–36, 42–43). The main contrast regarding the Kingdom is not between the spiritual and the material but between the spiritual and the physical. Since the Kingdom is basically spiritual and inner, it should not and cannot be identified with any earthly, man-made structure or organization, not even the Church. This spiritual Kingdom is naturally and inevitably primarily inner. But just as inevitably it has its outer manifestations.

Also, the Kingdom is a gift of God: "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). As a gift it is to be received (Mark 10:15). It is also to be prayed for (Matt. 6:10), and what we pray for we should work for. We can even say that when we experience it as a gift we accept it as a task. In this regard, the Kingdom is somewhat comparable to the Promised Land, which was given to Israel by the Lord, and yet they had to struggle to win it.

One of the most prevalent and perplexing paradoxes concerning the Kingdom is that it is a present reality and yet a future hope. Barth expresses something of this idea when he says that according to the Old and New Testaments the rule or government of God "is always a completed fact . . . which can be known to us, and yet also an imminent event towards which we are only moving and which is still concealed from us."[7] The present and the future aspects of the Kingdom were not really antithetical in the life and activity of Jesus. The Kingdom as future was evident in the teachings of Jesus but it was a future that had already broken into the present. The imminent Kingdom had become the invading Kingdom, being present in the world in the life and ministry of the Messiah, the Son of God. "The kingdom of God is the lordship of God established in the world in Jesus Christ. It is the rule of God as it takes place in Him."[8] There is also a very real sense in which the Kingdom is timeless. He is the great "I am." Christ is "the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is and who was and who is to come" (Rev. 1:8). The timelessness of the Kingdom is comparable to the dynamic nature of the Christian life. We are saved in all tenses. We have been saved, are in the process of being saved, and shall

Isolated verses can be quoted to support widely _____ *interpretations.*

(divergent)

The Kingdom is basically _____ *and* _____.

(spiritual, inner)

The Kingdom of God is a _____.

(gift)

The Kingdom is a present reality and yet a _____.

(future hope)

The Kingdom is timeless just as _____ *is* _____.

[7] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. by G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich (T. & T. Clark, 1960), III, 3, 157.

[8] *Ibid.*, IV, 2, 655–56.

be saved. The Kingdom has come, is a present reality, and yet it is a future hope. The present ties the past and future together.

The culmination or consummation of the Kingdom may come soon or late, sudden or gradual, but it must and will come. Jesus plainly taught that no one knew when it would come. His main emphasis was that the disciple was to watch and be ready at any time. Jesus did teach that the Kingdom was imminent (see Mark 1:15). This note was also present in the writings of Paul: "the appointed time has grown very short" (1 Cor. 7:29; cf. Rom. 13:11–12); in Hebrews: "you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:25); in James: "establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8); in Peter: "the end of all things is at hand" (1 Peter 4:7); in John: "children, it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18); and in Revelation: "the time is near" (Rev. 1:3; cf. 22:7–17, 20). Some biblical scholars contend that all of these were wrong about the imminence of the coming of the Kingdom. Is there not a possibility that this is the correct and the healthiest attitude for any one to have regarding the consummation of the Kingdom? It can be considered as always imminent though its consummation may be long delayed. At least a consciousness that it may come in its fullness at any time will encourage us to be alert, to seek to be ready for its coming.

An examination of some of the scriptures mentioned above as well as other references will reveal that the eschatological and ethical aspects of the Kingdom do not stand out in marked contrast. Neither dominates the other. Some scholars seek to unlock every door of the Kingdom with the eschatological key but that key does not fit every door. The teachings of Jesus are largely but not exclusively set in an eschatological framework. Really, the eschatological aspects of His teachings are closely related to His ethics. The two—eschatology and ethics—belong together, although all of His ethical teachings are not eschatological in perspective. There is a close relation of eschatology and ethics not only in the teachings of Jesus[9] but also in other portions of the New Testament. For example, the imminence of the coming Kingdom is used at times as the basis for ethical exhortations. An example is the above reference to First Peter. His statement "The end of all things is at hand" is followed with "therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. Above all hold unfailing your love for one another.... Practise hospitality. ... As each has received a gift, employ it for one another" (1 Pet. 4:7–10). The general relation of eschatology and ethics is clearly evident in Paul's great chapter on the resurrection. At the close of the chapter he breaks out in those often quoted words:

> "Death is swallowed up in victory."
> "O death, where is thy victory?
> O death, where is thy sting?"
> The sting of death is sin, and the

(God, timeless)

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God was _____.

(imminent)

The eschatological and ethical aspects of the Kingdom do not stand out in _____.

(marked, contrast)

Which part of the adjacent quotation emphasizes eschatology and which part implies an ethical emphasis?

_____

_____

[9] See Amos N. Wilder's *Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus* (rev. ed.; Harper & Brothers, 1958). Considerable material in the book relates to the Kingdom, with the last two chapters most specifically on the Kingdom: "The Ethics of the Kingdom and the Mission of Jesus" and "The Kingdom of God and Moral Life."

power of sin is the law. But thanks be
to God, who gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then notice the exhortation that follows immediately:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be
steadfast, immovable, always abounding
in the work of the Lord, knowing
that in the Lord your labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:54–58).

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Citizens of the Kingdom

Since the Kingdom is the supreme value for the Christian, it is important that we understand the conditions for entrance into and the grounds for greatness in the Kingdom, along with the ways that we can help to promote the Kingdom among men.

One problem about discussing "entrance into the Kingdom" is that many people find it difficult to understand how one can enter a spiritual kingdom. They associate "entrance" with a door or gate, with something physical and material. But when a child of God submits to the rule or reign of God he enters the Kingdom of God. There is a sense in which this is a one-time entrance. But since our submission to the rule, reign, or will of God is never perfect, our entrance into the Kingdom in another sense is never complete; it is a continuous process. We have entered but we are also entering.

What are the conditions for entrance? There are several plainly stated by Jesus. (1) Repentance: "The kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). (2) Childlikeness: "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Mark 10:15; cf. Matt. 18:3; 19:14; Luke 18:16–17). (3) Obedience: "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). (4) Righteousness: "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). (5) Unselfish unconscious service to those in need: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned (Matt. 25:31–46). These ministries, however, may be as much an evidence that one is in the Kingdom as they are requirements for entrance into the Kingdom.

"There is at least one other major condition for entrance into the kingdom. It is single-minded devotion to the kingdom and the things of God." This is where the rich young ruler failed. To enter the Kingdom "one must be willing to give up anything that stands between himself and supreme devotion to the Kingdom of God. This emphasis on single-minded devotion is the background for the hyperbolic statement by Jesus to cut off, if necessary, a hand or a foot, or to pluck out an eye. He said, 'It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell' (Mark 9:47; Matt. 18:9). The Kingdom is worth any sacrifice; it is life's supreme value."[10]

Is the following statement true or false?

If we are to help promote the Kingdom among men, it is important that we understand the conditions for entrance into and the grounds for the greatness in the Kingdom.

_____

(true)

When a child of God submits to the rule or reign of God he enters the _____.

(Kingdom of God)

Read the adjacent paragraph and list six conditions for entrance into God's Kingdom.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

[10] T. B. Maston, *Biblical Ethics* (Word Books, 1967), pp. 51–52.

The beatitudes, standing at the beginning of the so-called Sermon on the Mount, mention qualities that indicate that one is in the Kingdom. The relation to the Kingdom is spelled out specifically in the first beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3; cf. Luke 6:20). Exactly the same ending is found in the last of the beatitudes, or next to last if verse 11 and 12 are considered separate beatitudes. The statement is: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:10).

The subject of greatness in the Kingdom was evidently a relatively frequent topic of conversation among the disciples. On at least one occasion they pointedly asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18:1). He called a child and placing him in the midst of them said, "Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:4). On another occasion John and James (Mark 10:35), with their mother (Matt. 20:20), requested the chief seats in Christ's Kingdom. Jesus reminded them and the other disciples that worldly rulers lorded it over the people. This was not to be true in His Kingdom. He said, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:43–44; Matt. 20:26–27). In this area as always, He exemplified in His own life what He expected of His followers: "For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45; Matt. 20:28).

What are our responsibilities regarding the Kingdom? Most of these have been mentioned. We should pray for its coming, recognizing that it comes as God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. We should be supremely devoted to the Kingdom. It should be, in practice as well as in theory, the supreme value in our personal lives. We should seek the Kingdom first, valuing it above all worldly and material things. We should be willing to make any sacrifice for the sake of the Kingdom: material possessions, family ties, even life itself. Loyalty to the Kingdom of God and to the God of the Kingdom should come first in our lives.

We extend the Kingdom of God as we increasingly open our hearts and lives to the rule or reign of God. We promote His Kingdom as we extend His righteous reign not only in our own lives but also in the lives of others and in the society in which we live. Let us be careful, however, that we do not get an exalted conception of our contribution to the Kingdom. Let us never forget that it is *His* Kingdom. He gives it although there may be some activity even in accepting a gift. And, as suggested earlier, a promised land that is given must be won. The Kingdom is God's supreme gift and man's supreme task. When we think about the uncertainty of the consummation of the Kingdom, the supreme admonition is to watch, to be on the alert. This means that we should "sit loose" not only to things temporal but also to our own lives.

What was Jesus' answer to the question of greatness in God's Kingdom? _____

_____

_____

_____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The Kingdom should be, in practice as well as in theory, the supreme value in our _____.

(personal lives)

We extend the Kingdom of God as we increasingly open our hearts and lives to the rule or _____ *of* _____.

(reign, God)

The Kingdom is God's supreme gift and man's _____.

(supreme task)

Inclusiveness of the Kingdom

The Kingdom of God is or should be the supreme value not

only for the individual but also for the home, the local church, the denomination, the nation, and the world. Just as surely as God is the sovereign God of the universe His rule, reign, or Kingdom is to be inclusive of the totality of the lives of the peoples of the world and of all their institutions and agencies. The ultimate and inclusive purpose of all institutions is to increase or spread God's Kingdom of love and righteousness.

While all peoples and all institutions are finally responsible to the sovereign God, Christians and Christian institutions are related to and responsible to God the King and His Kingdom in a unique way. Unfortunately, many Christians attempt to serve both the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. They have forgotten that Jesus said, "You *cannot* serve God and mammon;" He did not say, "You *should not* serve God and mammon." Someone has suggested that we should not be an amphibian, half in one world and half in the other. An attempt to be an amphibian assures us not only of an ineffective life for the Lord but also of a miserable existence. A major fault of many of us as Christians is not that we are particularly bad, but that we live for the "good" rather than the "best" and of course the best is the Kingdom of God.

Christian institutions such as the home and the Church are not ends within themselves. They serve or should serve the purposes of the Kingdom. What a contribution would be made to the cause of Christ if Christian young people entering marriage realized that their newly-established home was to be an instrument for the extension of the rule or Kingdom of God! They would also discover that such a perspective would eliminate or solve most of the potential problems they might have.

Particularly important for our study is the relation of the Church and the Kingdom. It is wise to remember in the beginning that the two cannot be equated. Furthermore, the Church should not be considered the present form of the Kingdom. Membership in one does not necessarily mean membership in the other. Citizenship in the Kingdom is spiritual membership. Membership in a church should not be, but may be, merely formal and external. The Kingdom is more inclusive than the Church. It is beyond the Church—beyond in two directions—past and future. However, as and to the degree that the Church recognizes the Kingdom as something beyond the Church, the Kingdom will manifest itself in and through the Church. The Church is a product of the Kingdom, moves or should move towards the Kingdom, and should be an instrument of the Kingdom. As Pannenberg suggests, "the central concern of the Church, and the primary point of reference for understanding the Church, must be the Kingdom of God."[11] It is even possible for the institutional Church to be an enemy of the Kingdom. Since God cannot be ultimately defeated in His purposes in and

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The ultimate and inclusive purpose of all institutions is to increase or spread God's Kingdom of _____ and _____.
(love, righteousness)

Many Christians attempt to serve both the Kingdom of God and the _____ of the _____.
(kingdom, world)

The Kingdom is more _____ than the _____.
(inclusive, Church)

Is the following statement true or false?

It is impossible for the institutional Church to be an enemy of the Kingdom. _____

[11] Pannenberg, p. 73. Ladd, in his *Jesus and the Kingdom*, has a chapter (11) on "The Kingdom and the Church." The discussion is built around five points, which summarize his position: (1) The Church is not the Kingdom. (2) The Kingdom creates the Church. (3) The Church witnesses to the Kingdom. (4) The Church is the instrument of the Kingdom. (5) The Church: the custodian of the Kingdom.

for the world, He may turn to so-called secular forces and organizations as the primary agencies for the promotion of His Kingdom. One reason for the word "primary" in the preceding sentence is the continuing evidence that God uses all men and all institutions and organizations to varying degrees to extend His righteous rule in the world. This is even true of those who oppose Him.

The sovereign God holds nations as well as individuals, homes, and churches, responsible. Nations are to be subservient to and serve the purposes of the Kingdom of God. In so far as they fail to do this the judgement of God will come upon them.

In other words, what we have been suggesting is that the Kingdom of our sovereign God embraces the totality of the life of the world. We should remember, however, that since the Kingdom is eternal and spiritual it can never be fully contained in and expressed through any human organization or institution. This means, among other things, that the Kingdom should never be equated with the *status quo* or with any programme to change the *status quo*. The Kingdom can never be completely realized within history unless we include eternity as a part of history. On the other hand, the Kingdom is the most dynamic force in the historic process. While the Christian believes that the fulfilment of the Kingdom "is bound to eternity and no imagination can reach the eternal," yet he also believes that "fragmentary anticipations" of the Kingdom are possible in the here and now.[12]

(false)

Nations are to serve the _____ of the Kingdom of God.

(purposes)

The Kingdom of our sovereign God embraces the totality of the _____ of the _____.

Is the following statement true or false?

Unless we include eternity as a part of history, the Kingdom can never be realized within history. _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. What does the child of God and men in general need? _____

2. Where is the *summum bonum* of philosophical ethics found? _____

3. Name one of the difficulties in any study of the Kingdom of God. _____

4. With what can the Kingdom of God be equated? _____

5. Why did the devout Jews avoid using God's name? _____

6. What happened as the nation of Israel declined and the remnant idea became more prevalent? _____

[12] Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice* (Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 134.

7. When Jesus gave new life and meaning to the Old Testament terminology, what did He do with the idea of an earthly kingdom?

8. List two proofs that the idea of the Kingdom permeated and dominated Jesus' entire ministry.

9. Why was the Kingdom central in Jesus' instructions to His disciples?

10. What is one cause of such widely divergent interpretations concerning the Kingdom?

11. What helps us to properly interpret some of the seeming paradoxes concerning the Kingdom?

12. What three things must we do when thinking of the Kingdom of God as a gift?

13. What is one of the most prevalent and perplexing problems concerning the Kingdom?

14. With what does the author compare the fact that the Kingdom of God is timeless?

15. What encourages us to be alert and to seek to be ready for the coming of the Kingdom of God?

16. What problem do we find when seeking to separate the eschatological and ethical aspects of the Kingdom?

17. If the Kingdom is the supreme value for Christians, what should we know about the Kingdom?

18. List the six conditions given by the author for entrance into the Kingdom of God.

19. What was an evidently frequent topic of conversation among the disciples?

20. Give the ultimate and inclusive purpose of all institutions.

21. What happens to nations who fail to be subservient to and serve the purposes of the Kingdom of God?

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3). The following activities are based on the study guide text.

1. Explain the meaning of the Kingdom of God.
2. What does the phrase "Thy Kingdom come" in Jesus' model prayer imply for the contemporary Christian?
3. Explain the nature of the Kingdom of God.
4. Discuss the relation of eschatology and ethics in the life of Jesus.
5. Explain what is meant by single-minded devotion to the Kingdom of God.
6. Make a list of our responsibilities regarding the Kingdom of God.
7. What is meant by the inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God?

Advanced activity (Level 3). The following activities are based on the study guide text.

1. Prepare a sermon outline on this topic: "Man's Part in the Kingdom of God." Support your position with Scripture references. (Students who are not pastors or studying to be pastors may prepare a Bible lesson outline instead.)
2. Why was the Kingdom of God so dominant in Jesus' thinking?
3. What is meant by the imminent return of Christ? What should this concept do for present-day Christians?
4. Show the relation of the Church and the Kingdom.

Seminar Discussion

1. What are some things that our churches could do that would enable them to contribute more to the promotion of the Kingdom of God? What about the basis on which they judge their success? Where should be or where is the primary emphasis: on people or on programmes and structures? How much and in what ways has the materialistic spirit of the contemporary world affected our churches? In turn, how does this affect the contribution of the local church to the Kingdom?
2. Should the local church as such get involved in doing anything about the problems of society, such as alcoholism, crime, drug abuse, poverty? Or should it depend exclusively on the work of members of the church, restricting itself to inspiring them to apply the gospel to the problems that they and their society face? In other words, should the church's involvement in the problems of society be direct, indirect, or both direct and indirect?
3. Discuss the benefits that could come to Christian young people entering marriage if they realized that their newly-established home was to be an instrument for the extension of God's Kingdom.
4. Level 3 students should share their sermon or lesson outlines. The leader should lead a discussion on the content of this material.