

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life:
(6) Following Jesus Christ Rightly -- #3: Seeking First the Kingdom of God**

Introduction:

We have been addressing what we assert to be the most important Scriptural truths and principles for Christian living. We have referred to this category of teachings as “Following Jesus Christ Rightly.” We are not saying that knowing and doing these things is necessary or essential in order to receive salvation. We addressed those truths earlier. We are saying, however, that these matters are critically important to understand and practice, if we, as believers, desire to experience the blessing of God in our lives and to be used by our God to further His will in the world in which He has placed us.

Now as we identify and rehearse these matters, I cannot say that we are addressing these matters in the order of their importance. I do not have a list of subjects before me that we are following. I am choosing each topic with each passing week. Perhaps in time we can suggest an order of importance, but our week-by-week selection does not necessarily suggest priority of one of these matters above the others. We are attempting to set forth important truths that we should all understand and apply in our lives.

Today we want to speak to a matter of which every Christian should understand and practice in life. Our Christian life should be one of *seeking first the kingdom of God*. To begin to understand this important matter, let us turn to our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. In a few minutes we will read the section that pertains to our subject, which is **Matthew 6:19-34**, but first we want to establish the foundation of our understanding regarding the kingdom of God.

The Sermon on the Mount is a body of teaching that our Lord Jesus gave to His disciples who gathered about Him. We read just a few words that speak of the occasion of this sermon to His people. Matthew 5:1 and 2 read,

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. ² Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: ³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Our Lord was addressing His disciples. He opened His teaching session assuring them that if certain qualities were true of them, they were citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Now it is important for us to understand that when Matthew commonly used the expression, the kingdom of heaven, he was referring to what others called the kingdom of God. The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of God.

Our Lord set forth the qualities of kingdom citizens in the Beatitudes. There are eight of them. If these qualities are true of you, you may be assured that you are a citizen in the kingdom of God—Jesus is your King and He has granted you salvation from sin and your entrance into the kingdom of God. Jesus said,

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.

⁷Blessed are the merciful,

- For they shall obtain mercy.
⁸Blessed are the pure in heart,
 For they shall see God.
⁹Blessed are the peacemakers,
 For they shall be called sons of God.
¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
 For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

True disciples of Jesus Christ are characterized by these beatitudes. They are blessed, for theirs is the kingdom of God. They are citizens of the kingdom of God.

Actually the major theme of the entire Gospel of Matthew is the good news of the kingdom of God. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news that the long-promised kingdom of God has arrived in Jesus Christ. Here is an outline of the first chapters that reflect this major theme of Matthew's Gospel.

I. Prologue (chs. 1, 2)

- A. The Genealogy of the King (1:1-17)
- B. The Birth of the King (1:18-2:23)

II. The Kingdom Comes (chs. 3-7)

- A. Initiating the Kingdom in the coming of Jesus (3:1-4:11)
- B. Announcing the Arrival of the Kingdom (4:12-25)
- C. Jesus' First Discourse: The Sermon on the Mount -- The Laws of the Kingdom (chs. 5-7)
 - 1. The Beatitudes (5:1-12); characteristics of Kingdom Citizens
 - 2. Interpreting the Law for the Kingdom (5:13-48)
 - 3. Piety in the Kingdom: Charity, Prayer, and Fasting (6:1-18)
 - 4. A Heart for the Kingdom (6:19-34)
 - 5. Standards of Judgment in the Kingdom (7:1-29)

We can see that throughout the Sermon on the Mount the King of the kingdom of God gave forth both insight into the nature of the kingdom of God and instruction to His disciples on how they were to live as kingdom citizens.

Beginning with Matthew 6:19, our Lord began to emphasize a one particular aspect of kingdom living. The outline for Matthew's Gospel in *The New Reformation Study Bible*, which is reflected above, describes this section as "A Heart for the Kingdom." It continues from verse 19 through 34. In order to understand better the theme as a whole, let us read all of these verses at this time. Jesus told His disciples these words:

¹⁹"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²²"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

²⁵"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

²⁶Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

²⁸"So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; ²⁹and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one

of these. ³⁰Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³***But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*** ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

We may consider these verses according to the principles our Lord gave to His disciples. ***First***, we read in **verses 19 through 21** that a disciple of Jesus Christ should have ***the focus of his heart upon spiritual, permanent, and eternal matters.*** ***Secondly*** we read in **verses 22 and 23** that ***the desires of the heart will affect how one will view life and his purpose for living.*** This is true of true disciples but it is also true of all people everywhere. In these words our Lord instructs us of the importance of viewing all of life with a proper perspective, with a proper aim in life. He likens the eye to be the lamp of the body. It provides illumination for the soul to see and interpret and understand things rightly, so as to live rightly. In other words, the eye is the gate by which we enter into the world and move about the world, and interpret the world every day of our lives. The analogy depicts two kinds of people. The disciple of Jesus Christ has a healthy eye but the non-disciple has a diseased eye, which either has blinded him or has so limited his ability to see the world rightly that he is unable to function rightly. If the eye is healthy, then everything is seen and perceived correctly; if the eye is defective, everything is seen and perceived incorrectly. Our Lord was telling His disciples that they are to have a singular aim or goal of life. We would argue that the healthy eye is the person who sees all of life as an opportunity to glorify God. ***Thirdly***, we read in **verse 24** that as disciples of Jesus Christ ***our resolve should be to serve God with all our heart.***

We next read in **verses 25 through 32** our Lord’s instruction to His disciples about ***the subject of undue anxiety or worry about many things.*** We live in a world in which every one of us encounters causes of anxiety with which we must address and manage. People through history have always had causes for anxiety with which they had to cope. We are no different today. Some think that we are more prone to anxiety in this modern world. This is evidenced by the attention and press given to the subject of fear or anxiety. It is a subject addressed in many places by many people. But the manner in which the world tells us we should deal with our anxieties and the manner that the Lord would have us deal with our anxieties are quite different.

Certainly the world recognizes that people suffer from anxiety. It is a common malady of modern man. Some have argued that there is greater anxiety currently in our society due to the economic difficulties we face. They may be right. It has been asserted that:

Worries about finances have long been a leading cause of anxiety for Americans. When asked what stressed people the most in a recent ADAA online poll, 45 percent responded “personal finances.” They have good reason to feel stress. The U.S. Department of Labor reported in March 2009 that the number of people receiving unemployment benefits reached a record high.

The following month a Washington Post-ABC News poll reported that more than six in 10 Americans say they are stressed out over the nation’s troubled economy, one-third reporting serious stress. Even among those who feel the economy is improving, a majority still named it as a source of their stress.

Another ADAA online poll confirms that sentiment: Nearly 77 percent said the economic downturn has caused a moderate amount to “a lot of stress.”

If so many people share such deep stress and worry about their bank balances than they did before this financial free fall, does that mean they all have an anxiety disorder? Does it mean anxiety disorders are on the rise? The answer: no.

Anxiety is a normal reaction to stressful and uncertain situations. It's your body telling you to stay alert and protect yourself, in this case to watch your spending, try to save for an emergency, work to keep your job, or consult a trusted financial expert.¹

And so, the world tells us that a certain degree of anxiety is good and helpful for us, if kept to a manageable level. Our Lord tells His disciples, however, *"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on"* (Matt. 6:25). And then Paul later wrote:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Phil.4:6f)

The world has provided a psychological disorder classification for anxiety. It is called **Generalized Anxiety Disorder** (GAD). And there is a national non-profit organization dedicated to the problem-- **The Anxiety Disorders Association of America** (ADAA). According to this organization a person is "diagnosed" with this disorder if the following are characteristic of him/her:

Generalized anxiety disorder is characterized by persistent, excessive, and unrealistic worry about everyday things. People with the disorder, which is also referred to as GAD, experience exaggerated worry and tension, often expecting the worst, even when there is no apparent reason for concern. They anticipate disaster and are overly concerned about money, health, family, work, or other issues. GAD is diagnosed when a person worries excessively about a variety of everyday problems for at least 6 months.²

Supposedly 6.8 million adults in America, or 3.1% of the population may be classified as having this disorder. They say that women are twice as likely to be affected. Interestingly, the Anxiety Disorders Association says this about the causes:

Although the exact cause of GAD is unknown, there is evidence that biological factors, family background, and life experiences, particularly stressful ones, play a role.³

Now they say that GAD is a disorder and should not be confused with "regular anxiety" which is common to us all. But then they describe GAD's symptoms as simply greater in degree than those who do not have GAD. We see, therefore, the common manner in which the world deals with problems in the human condition. They first describe it, then they label you with a diagnosis. Then they prescribe their treatment, usually counselling and medication. Those who seek out the world's "remedy", either continue to suffer with their problem, drug it, or desensitize it with alcohol and illegal drugs, or they indulge in fun and games to divert themselves.

The "professionals" suggest what to do to help someone with anxiety. They say,

- Encourage, but do not force, each other to talk.
- Share feelings and fears that you or your loved one may be having.
- Listen carefully to each other's feelings.
- Offer support, but don't deny or discount feelings.
- Remember that it is OK to feel sad and frustrated.

¹ <http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/generalized-anxiety-disorder-gad/gad-vs-general-anxiety-about-economy>

² Much of the following information was found here: <http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/generalized-anxiety-disorder-gad>

³

- Get help through counselling and/or support groups.
- Use prayer or other types of spiritual support if it helps.
- Try deep breathing and relaxation exercises.
- Close your eyes, breathe deeply, focus on each body part and relax it, start with your toes and work up to your head.
- When relaxed try to think of a pleasant place such as a beach in the morning or a sunny field on a spring day.
- Talk with a doctor about using anti-anxiety or anti-depressant medicines.

They tell you what you are **not** to do when trying to help an anxious person:

- Keep feelings inside.
- Force someone to talk if they are not ready to.
- Tell a person to cheer up if they seem depressed.
- Blame yourself or another person for feeling fearful, anxious, or depressed.
- Try to reason with a person whose fears, anxieties, or depression are severe; talk with the doctor about medicines and other kinds of help.⁴

That is the world's description of the problem and their recommendations for a solution. Again, what does our Lord say? ***"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on"*** (Matt. 6:25). Our Lord would have His people free from all anxiety. The salvation that our Lord brings us is full and complete, delivering us from all that afflicts us. He does so not by removing the causes, but by enabling us to conquer those causes when they confront us and challenge us.

The people of this world are a fearful people. But our Lord would have His people not fearful of the things that cause the people of this world to fear. Throughout this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ reproves the anxiety with which men torment themselves, particularly regarding providing for themselves food and clothing, and at the same time our Lord provides a remedy for the problem. Yes, our lord is concerned about removing from His people *undue* or *excessive* care about matters, for it is the nature of this life to give careful attention with much concern about numbers of things. But these concerns should never rise to the level to which they debilitate us, but rather they should be sufficient to motivate us to address and deal with important issues of this life. **John Calvin** wrote:

When He forbids them to be anxious, this is not to be taken literally, as if he intended take away from his people all care. We know that men are born on the condition of having some care; and, indeed, this is not the least portion of the miseries, which the Lord has laid upon us as a punishment, in order to humble us. But immoderate care is condemned for two reasons: either because in so doing men tease and vex themselves to no purpose, by carrying their anxiety farther than is proper or than their calling demands; or because they claim more for themselves than they have a right to do, and place such a reliance on their own industry, that they neglect to call upon God. We ought to remember this promise: though unbelievers shall "rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows," yet believers will obtain, through the kindness of God, rest and sleep (Psalm 127:2). Though the children of God are not free from toil and anxiety, yet, properly speaking, do not say that they are anxious about life: because, through their reliance on the providence God, they enjoy calm repose.

After our Lord first commanded His disciples not to be anxious, as we read in **verse 25a**, He proceeds to give reasons for trusting God with one's concerns. ***"Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"*** (v. 25b). He argues from the greater to the less. The Lord has already given us life. He gave us bodies in which to live in His world. And since He has done this, is it not unreasonable to think

⁴ http://www.cancer.org/docroot/MBC/content/MBC_4_1X_Cancer_Anxiety_and_Fear.asp?sitearea=MBC

that He will fail to give us what is necessary to sustain our life? Our Lord assumes, does He not, that our heavenly Father is fully mindful of our needs? This is not even a matter of question.

Our Lord next illustrates for His disciples that the world about them testifies of God's goodness and of His providence in caring for His creatures. Here He is arguing from the lesser to the greater.

“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (6:26)

The only cure for anxiety is trust in God's ability to care for you and to believe in His willingness and intention to do so.

Our Lord's words fly in the face of much of modern philosophy. Many in our world view all life as equal in value, whether or animal or human. This is a fairly recent innovation in the thinking of the west. It has been a common view in much of the east. There, where Hinduism and Buddhism have been predominant, the philosophy of pantheism has affected how people view living things. All life is seen to have a part in a “divine” or “spirit” mind or force that permeates the entire universe and animates every living thing. And so in parts of the world there is no difference in perceived value between a rat and a man. There they worship rats and bats, bugs and bulls, because they perceive a common life force in all living things. Eastern religious ideas have influenced the radical animal rights' groups. They would object and reject our Lord's words, “Are you not of more value than they?” But we accept these words as true. God regards people with great concern and He will care for His own, sustaining them and providing for them. Our heavenly Father feeds the birds, and does He not care much more for you? He will therefore provide for you also that which is needful for life. Again, **John Calvin** wrote concerning this:

But it is thoroughly fixed in our minds, that the fowls are supplied with food by the hand of God, there will be no difficulty in expecting it for ourselves, who are formed after his image, and reckoned among his children. They neither sow nor reap. By these words it is far from being our Lord's intention to encourage us to indolence and sluggishness. All that he means is, that, though other means fail, the providence of God is alone sufficient for us, for it supplies the animals abundantly with everything that they need.

Our Lord next asks the rhetorical question, “*And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?*” (6:27). The answer, of course, is that no one can add an hour to his life. The time of one's birth is ordained by God. The hour of one's death is also according to God's determination. The Lord is essentially arguing, “Why are you anxious about matters for which you have no control? Your heavenly Father, who is sovereign over all things, will take care of you in this life. He has appointed the time of your death, so He will see to it that you will live until that time; He will provide for you.”

The Lord Jesus then spoke about God providing for the basics of life with respect to clothing. **Verses 28-30** read:

²⁸And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Whenever we are anxious about about food or clothing, let us remember that God will take care of us throughout the life that He has given us. Our Lord refers to the most glorious of kings, King Solomon, to show that the kindness of God, which is wonderfully displayed in grass and flowers. Our Lord's disciples should be convinced that though all their means seem to fail, all their resources seem to be exhausted, they will lack no good thing as they continue to enjoy the blessing of God.

The Lord Jesus rebukes any of His disciples who would doubt Him. He said to them, “O you of little faith.” Anxiety respecting the things we have identified reveals a disciple with little faith in his God. This is a great insult to God. That one is deserving of our Lord’s rebuke.

The final verses present the same doctrine.

³¹Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

³⁴“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

We are Christians. We are to be different than “the Gentiles”, a term for those who are not Christians, who are strangers to God and His ways. **John Gill** (18th c.) wrote these words:

The Syriac (translation) reads it so here: the phrase, “the nations of the world”, is used of the Gentiles, in distinction from the Israelites, thousands of times in the Jewish writings; it would be endless to give instances. These knew not God, nor acknowledged His providence; the greater part of them thought, that the soul perished with the body; few of them thought, that anything remained after death; and they that did, spoke very doubtfully of it: wherefore it is no wonder, that such persons should greedily seek after, and be anxiously concerned for all these things, food, raiment, and riches, and a great plenty of them; since this is all the happiness they expect; and imagine, that this is to be acquired by their care, thought, diligence, and industry; having no regard to a superior being, and his all wise providence: but for the Jews, and so Christians, who have a divine revelation, the knowledge of God, and his providence, and of a future state after this life, to act the same part the Heathens do, is exceedingly unbecoming, absurd, and wicked: and besides, such greedy desires, immoderate care, and anxious solicitude, are altogether unnecessary...

Believers in Jesus Christ are not to be like non-Christians in that they are not to be unduly anxious. And why should they be? The true, sovereign, God who first created them and then created them anew, is for them. When we focus our interests and our concerns for the kingdom of God, then the fears that plague ordinary men will have no power over us. Again, **John Calvin** wrote:

Christ reminds us that there is the greatest inconsistency in men, who are born to a better life, being wholly employed about earthly objects. He who assigns the first rank to the kingdom of God, will not carry beyond moderation his anxiety about food. Nothing is better adapted to restrain the wantonness of the flesh from breaking out in the course of the present life, than meditation on the life of the heavens.

Our Lord tells us, “*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.*” Have first on your heart those matters which are important to God and are consistent with what He is doing in this world and in history. Seek first to order your life according to His will, according to His law, and He will see to it that you will not lack those things that cause those of the world to suffer.

Here are the words of **Matthew Henry**:

If we take care about our souls and for eternity, which are more than the body and its life, we may leave it to God to provide for us food and raiment, which are less. Improve this as an encouragement to trust in God. We must reconcile ourselves to our worldly estate, as we do to our stature. We cannot alter the disposals of Providence, therefore we must submit and resign ourselves to them. Thoughtfulness for our souls is the best cure of thoughtfulness for the world. Seek first the kingdom of

God, and make religion your business: say not that this is the way to starve; no, it is the way to be well provided for, even in this world. The conclusion of the whole matter is, that it is the will and command of the Lord Jesus, that by daily prayers we may get strength to bear us up under our daily troubles, and to arm us against the temptations that attend them, and then let none of these things move us. Happy are those who take the Lord for their God, and make full proof of it by trusting themselves wholly to His wise disposal. Let thy Spirit convince us of sin in the want (lack) of this disposition, and take away the worldliness of our hearts.⁵

Now there are several principle truths that are suggested and assumed in our Lord's words. Let us consider these.

1. The Christian is to seek *first* the Kingdom of God

Now our Lord addressed His disciples that they were to think and act in contrast from the point of view of what governed the thinking, desires, and needs of the "Gentiles", that is, non-Christians. In contrast to non-disciples of Jesus, who were not citizens of the kingdom of God, His disciples—true Christians--were to live with an entirely different aim for their lives. The Lord Jesus commanded His disciples, "***But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you***" (Matt. 6:33).

Now it is true that the Lord commonly uses the trials and concerns of people in order initially to bring them to Himself. Troubles humble us and show us our weakness, our inability, and our need for the Lord. But very soon after we come to Him, these matters are to be set aside and we are to look and desire higher and nobler ends. Having believed on the Lord Jesus for salvation, embracing Him as King, we are then to seek first His kingdom and righteousness. Anxiety for these other matters are no longer to characterize His people. God would have His people set free from "serving" the things which are the central concerns of non-Christians. We are to seek first the kingdom of God.

2. The Christian may regard God as his loving, caring, and providing Father.

Our Lord Jesus told His disciples regarding the things necessary to living in this world, "For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." But only true Christians may regard God as their Father and only they may call on Him as their Father to provide for them.

God is the Father of all them that believe (Rom. 4:11). Not everyone in the world is a child of God. Not even everyone who claims to be a Christian is a child of God. Only those who have a faith that justifies them before God have a right to be called the children of God. Galatians 3:26, "*For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*" Christians may take heart that God is their Father who will care for them and provide for them.

3. God would have His people set free from "serving" the things that are the central concerns of non-Christians, so that they will seek first the kingdom of God.

When the Lord's people are anxious about the things that once chiefly governed their concerns and efforts, they will not be seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. He would have us to be free from these things so that we might be serve our Lord fully.

I find it interesting that much preaching and teaching of "evangelical churches" seem to focus, even concentrate, on the matters that our Lord told His disciples to set aside, things for which they were not to be anxious. Now people have problems. They have concerns as to how they are going to get through their day to day existence. These matters consume their thinking. They are anxious about many things. They are just as "the Gentiles" (unbelievers) in this respect. Many churches and preachers knowing that these

⁵ Matthew Henry (17th c), from his Concise Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew.

are the desires and the drive of their people present the Bible and the God of the Bible almost exclusively as the One who will provide these things. But our Lord Jesus tells His followers, not to be as they were formerly, for they are to “seek first the kingdom of God.”

4. What is meant by seeking first the Kingdom of God?

Now it is critically important that we understand precisely what it is to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. We dealt with this matter in some detail not long ago, and so we will but give the abbreviated version now.

The entire unfolding of the story of the Bible may be understood as the establishing and expanding of the kingdom of God. Indeed, the kingdom of God is a major theme of the Holy Scriptures. It is a rather complex subject as well, for the kingdom of God is described in several ways in the Scriptures. **Thomas Boston** (1676-1732), a Scottish Presbyterian, wrote extensively on the subject of the Lord’s Prayer. On the petition, “Thy kingdom come”, he said that “There is a fourfold kingdom of God mentioned in Scripture.”⁶ He expounded on each of these:

(1) The kingdom of His power which reaches over all the world. The subjects are all creatures whatsoever.

(2) The kingdom of His gospel (cf. Matt, 21:43). “This is not as large as the former (i.e. #1). It is erected within it, but comprehends all the visible church...” The subjects are all members of the visible church, whether godly or ungodly, sincere or hypocrites, with their children.”

(3) The kingdom of His grace. This is narrower than any of the former, and comprehends only the invisible church; for it is not an external, but an internal kingdom, in which grace, saving grace, reigns in the hearts of those who belong to it.”

(4) The kingdom of His glory. “This is the blessed state of eternal happiness in the other world. This kingdom is now a-gathering, but shall fully come at the second coming of Christ.”

We will attempt to describe the various ideas of the kingdom of God in different terms.

(1) The kingdom of God as God’s sovereign rule over all the world through all of history.

God’s rule is complete. He is in control of all things that take place in His world. When we speak of God’s sovereignty, we are speaking of His rule over His kingdom, in a broad sense, encompassing all of His creation through all of history. Because God is the Creator, He is the King over all that He created. This idea of God’s kingdom is set forth in many places in the Scriptures.⁷

Another way to speak of the universal rule of the kingdom of God is to speak of the sovereignty of God. **Arthur Pink** wrote of God’s sovereignty; notice how he links it to the idea of God’s rule in His kingdom:

The Sovereignty of God. What do we mean by this expression? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest Thou? (Dan. 4:35). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in Heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (Psa. 115:3). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is “The Governor among the nations” (Psa. 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare

⁶ Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston* (Richard Owens Roberts, printed 1980), vol. 2, p. 571ff.

⁷ See 2 Kings 19:14-19; Isaiah 6:1ff; Psalm 22:28; 29:8-11; 103:19; 145:10-13; Dan. 3:34-37.

that He is the “Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible.⁸

(2) The Kingdom of God as King over His people, Israel.

Although God is the universal King over all of the universe and over all of history, the Holy Scriptures present God as the special King of Israel itself. He showed forth His reign over them when He first rescued Israel from bondage in Egypt.

Exodus 15:18f.

¹⁸“*The LORD shall reign forever and ever.*” ¹⁹For the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them. But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea.

God’s ongoing rule over Israel is depicted as a King over His kingdom. This is rehearsed in several places.⁹

(3) The kingdom of God as a realm in which God’s people submit willingly to the rule of God.

In one sense God’s kingdom is universal--He is the sovereign rule over all His creatures, whether they recognize or acknowledge His rule or not. And certainly God is King over Israel uniquely, over against all other kingdoms who knew not God. But thirdly, the Bible also speaks of God’s kingdom as comprised of *citizens who willingly submit to God as their King/Lord*.

Although God as the Creator is the everlasting King over all, when Adam and Eve first sinned, mankind was plunged into state of rebellion. After the fall, nothing in God’s creation was willingly submitted to the rule of God. The history of the Bible is that of God bringing into history a kingdom in which His people are brought into willing submission to God as King. This inbreaking of the kingdom, is the work of God in history bringing His creation back into submission to Him as King. This is, of course, fully realized in the kingdom of God over which King Jesus rules as King of kings and Lord of lords.

This coming kingdom of God is set forth in the bible in several ways.

a. The Kingdom of God as a future hope to the Old Testament prophets.

This aspect of the kingdom of God, in which the citizens are joyful compliant subjects to God their King, was presented as *a future hope* by the Old Testament prophets. They foretold of the coming King who would establish the kingdom of God in which the people of God would dwell in joy, peace, and righteousness.

Isaiah 2:1ff.

¹The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

²*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the LORD’s house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;*

And all nations shall flow to it.

³Many people shall come and say,

⁸ Arthur Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Baker, 1930), pp, 23f.

⁹ See Numb. 23:21; Deut. 33:5; Isaiah 43:14f;

“Come, and let us go up to *the mountain of the LORD*,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
⁴He shall judge between the nations,
And rebuke many people;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore.¹⁰

b. The Kingdom of God is presented in the Gospels as a *present reality*.

Both John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus announced that the long-anticipated kingdom of God had arrived. “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand”, was the pronouncement of their preaching. The Jews were confused about the nature of the kingdom. They were anticipating a physical, political kingdom. Some came to Jesus and asked him about this. We read in **Luke 17:20ff**,

²⁰Now 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; ²¹nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

Perhaps one of the clearest statements of the present reality of the kingdom is when our Lord Jesus responded to some who had accused him of casting out demons through the power of the evil one. He said to them, “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, *surely the kingdom of God has come upon you*” (Matt. 12:28).

c. The Kingdom of God is also presented in the Gospels as a *future hope*.

The spiritual kingdom of Christ is shown as *future* as it increases *in this gospel age*, as more sinners are converted and become willing and submissive subjects to King Jesus. This is conveyed in the words of our Lord in this prayer petition. “Our Father in heaven; Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom *come...*” (Matt. 6:9f). We are to pray that the kingdom of Jesus Christ would expand throughout this world, encompassing people all over the world who come to believe and submit to the Lord Jesus. But the spiritual kingdom of Christ is shown as future as it will be realized at *the Second Coming of Jesus Christ*. When He returns He will defeat all who oppose His rule. He will then exclude from His kingdom any and all who refuse or have failed to believe on Him and live before Him in faith and obedience. They will be cast out of the kingdom. And then the fullness of the kingdom will be realized and eternity will begin. This idea is recorded for us in **Matthew 19:11-19**.

¹¹Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought *the kingdom of God* would appear immediately. ¹²Therefore He said: “A certain nobleman went into a far country *to receive for himself a kingdom* and to return. ¹³So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas [A mina was about 3 month’s salary], and said to them, ‘Do business till I come.’ ¹⁴But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We will not have this man to reign over us.’

¹⁰ See also Isaiah 9:6f.

¹⁵“And so it was that *when he returned, having received the kingdom*, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. ¹⁶Then came the first, saying ‘Master, your mina has earned ten minas.’ ¹⁷And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.’ ¹⁸And the second came, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned five minas.’ ¹⁹Likewise he said to him, ‘You also be over five cities.’

Here we see the kingdom of God as something to be entered when Jesus returns at the end of the age. And so, when we pray, “ Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come”, we are praying for the return of Jesus Christ and the establishing of His kingdom over the entire world.

What, then, is meant by seeking first the Kingdom of God? It is by living in a manner that the will of God is realized in our thinking and living. Jesus said to pray to the Father, “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” *We are to desire and to pray that the kingdom of God be realized in the world in which we live.* When we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, we are attempting to bring our thinking and living into submission and obedience to our King. We are to pray, “Father, may your will be sought and done by ourselves and by multitudes of others; may your kingdom become more greatly manifested in my life and in the lives you enable me to influence toward this end.” When we are seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, our greatest desire and concern is that our thinking, our speech, our attitudes, our actions, and our reactions are governed by King Jesus as He has directed us in Holy Scripture, the Word of God. May the Lord Jesus enable us to seek first His kingdom and righteousness. And may we thank our God that He will take care of all other matters, so that we no longer need to be unduly troubled by them.

Benediction:

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20f)
