

CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM

A SOCIETY WITHOUT STATUS

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DEDICATION

To the scattered Citizens of the Kingdom
among whom I have been privileged
to catch glimpses
of Kingdom living

PREFACE

Citizens of the Kingdom: a Society Without Status is a Biblical study of God's intention for his people, variously labeled his church, his Kingdom, his disciples, his followers. It is in no way intended to be an exhaustive treatment of the subject: that is the work of many lifetimes, and must always be a corporate effort among those people. It is, I hope, one contribution to the task that we should all be about: simply seeking for faithfulness, and calling one another to seek together with us.

This particular work has grown out of ten years of teaching classes on the methods of Biblical Word Study and introductory New Testament Greek to folks representing more than a dozen different denominational backgrounds, and more than thirty five years of searching for people who share our desire to throw all that we are into the quest for faithfulness. The classes were based on the assumption that the New Testament is its own best commentary, and that any word is best understood by a careful examination of every context in which it occurs. Consistently, class members discovered wonders that they had never imagined, each time they put forth the effort to study a word in depth. Such are the riches of the Living Word of God! Some of those word studies form part of the basis for this work.

Biblical quotations from the Old Testament are taken from the Revised Standard Version. New Testament quotations are from the author's own translation, the *Pioneers' New Testament*, 1992, unless otherwise noted

CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM:
A SOCIETY WITHOUT STATUS

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INTRODUCTION

This is a call to those who claim the name of Jesus Christ to take seriously his invitation to citizenship in his Kingdom. When he talked about the Kingdom of God, Jesus never intended that we relegate his words to a pie-in-the-sky never-never-land in some far-off future. He called people to a very practical, though quite unfamiliar, way of life: a life governed by absolute loyalty to him in every respect. People's lives were drastically altered when they made the commitment to become his followers: and the New Testament never gives any indication that his expectations were going to change as the years went by.

What really changed when you committed your life to the Lord? How is your daily life different from that of your kind, friendly, considerate, clean-living, but unbelieving neighbor? How is your church different from his service-oriented luncheon club? I mean, really: in practical, observable terms that reach beyond the rhetoric about eternal rewards and retribution, and touch areas that make a significant difference in the here and now?

The Kingdom of God that the New Testament describes is not an idealistic daydream. Jesus repeatedly told people that it was already among them. The Kingdom exists wherever a group of people take the King seriously. It is not a matter of speculation and theory, but of commitment and obedience.

The Kingdom of God is an entity with cultural expectations, personal role definitions, goals, methods, and organizational practises that are entirely different from those of any other society that has ever existed on the earth. This is because its citizens have chosen to follow their King's directions, and to work at becoming a colony determinedly, even fanatically, loyal to their King. No one can participate in the Kingdom alone: because ever since the beginning, God has been trying to call out "a people for his name". It is a corporate effort.

The life of citizens of the Kingdom is described in the New Testament, but it can only be seen by people as the citizens put it into shoe leather. In their life together, God intends that the world see his own wisdom and glory. What a privilege to be invited to participate in such a project!

This is an examination of some aspects of life in the Kingdom. It is also an invitation to join in the effort to discern more fully what it is to become the people of God. Only as many of the Lord's people devote themselves, together, to the task of discerning and reflecting the vision of his Kingdom, can the life that he offers be brought to bear on the world so in need of the touch of his power, his wisdom and his love.

God grant that some may hear his call, and accept the challenge of his offer of full citizenship in his Kingdom!

CHAPTER 1

CITIZENS, OR RESIDENT ALIENS?

The King of Kings is recruiting citizens for his Kingdom. From every nation, tribe, and tongue they come, to be built into "a people for his name." The New Testament letters, in many cases, were written to clarify both the glorious privileges and awesome responsibilities that citizens have been given in the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to help that widely varied group to learn the ways of Kingdom living. They describe a radical change: from death to life, from alien to citizen, from captive slaves to a ransomed, free people. "Now, therefore, you all are no longer strangers and temporary residents, but you are fellow-citizens of the holy ones, and members of God's household" (Ephesians 2:19). "He rescued us from the authority of darkness, and transported us into the Kingdom of the Son of his love" (Colossians 1:13). "But our citizenship belongs in heaven...." (Philippians 3:20).

"Transported," "translated," or "transplanted" into His Kingdom! This was no casual figure of speech to the first recipients of Paul's letters. Deep in their common memory was the shame of the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, and many similar experiences in the ancient world. Pyramids had been built, the Greek civilization developed, and now Rome ruled the world, fueled by the labor of captive peoples. Conquered nations, reduced to slavery, were evident on every hand. The figure of the Colossian passage was painfully familiar: a whole people being literally uprooted and transplanted into a foreign jurisdiction. But the transfer of which Paul wrote was different! This one was the result of the gracious act of God in the deliverance of his people! Jesus has also transferred his people to foreign territory. Even though it is, in actuality, the homeland they were supposed to inhabit from the beginning, it is strange and unfamiliar territory to people accustomed to a world that does not acknowledge their King.

Jesus is still recruiting citizens for that new Kingdom: a Kingdom different from anything the world has ever seen. And yet, strange as it may seem, through the ages, people who are called his followers have consistently balked at the idea of participating in a life vastly different from their surrounding culture. They would prefer to defer the difference to a future, heavenly paradise, thank you, and not be bothered with it now.

Is it not possible that, had the Lord Jesus confined his remarks to ethereal talk of heaven and hell, he would very probably never have so incurred the wrath of the authorities of his own day? What caused all the trouble with the organization-types, who thought they had God neatly packaged in a box in their pockets, was Jesus' proclamation of the present reality of a new Kingdom: a Kingdom whose ways were as radically different from common first century culture as they are from our own. His opponents understood, far better than we do, that in the Kingdom of which he spoke, nothing is the same. Nothing is familiar and manageable. Nothing is under the control of those who are used to exercising control. And yet, contrary to the assumption of some twentieth century activists, Jesus was not talking about a revolution. A revolution only changes the cast of characters in an oppressive power system. It reverses the roles of oppressor and oppressed. Jesus, on the other hand, is out to rearrange the entire structure of things in such a way that there exists no oppressive power structure. His Kingdom is a strange, new world: a Society Without Status, where the familiar patterns of hierarchy and dominance do not exist. In the Kingdom, there is only one Lord, and all the citizens are brothers and sisters.

The idea of citizenship was well understood by the original readers of Paul's letters. Paul himself, on more than one occasion, took advantage of the privileges afforded him by his Roman citizenship. Citizens enjoy a privileged and protected position not accorded to aliens in a country. Citizenship can be acquired: one officer with whom Paul spoke had purchased his for a large sum (Acts 22:28); but a person born into citizenship seems to have held status a cut above those who bought it.

Jesus' citizens also have the privilege to acquire Kingdom citizenship by birth. In fact, the life of the Kingdom is so vastly different from any other, that Jesus spoke of the transition as being born all over again. "Born again" is a term used loosely, and seldom taken very seriously in the twentieth century church. In fact, the more prominently (and dogmatically) it is used, the less it usually means. Most of those who call themselves the Lord's people, who affix "born again" to their credentials rather like an honorary degree, are often shocked if confronted with the notion that such a birth should result in a radically changed way of life. For sure, a few peripheral external aspects of life may need to be cleaned up, but little change is expected in most areas. However, birth is a very radical experience! At birth, a child must adapt to drastic changes. Even the means of sustaining life is altered. The new life of the Kingdom requires transitions that are just as radical. One's life has totally different goals, and is sustained in different ways.

Even on a worldly plane, it is a weighty decision to change one's citizenship: one that should not be taken lightly, nor made impulsively. Kingdom citizenship must be taken just as seriously. It involves much more than raising one's hand in a meeting, or walking down an aisle. Have we who call ourselves God's people indeed become citizens of the Kingdom -- accepted the privileges and responsibilities, the complete change of focus, that go with Kingdom citizenship -- or are we content to remain in the Kingdom as foreigners and aliens?

There is nothing wrong with living in a country as an alien. Even if citizenship is contemplated, one is wise, if not legally bound, to live there for a while, and learn a country's ways and expectations, before taking such a far-reaching step. Likewise, no one should be rushed into the Kingdom. It is imperative that a candidate for citizenship be fully apprised of what he is getting into! On the other hand, not everyone who visits a country has any intention of moving on to citizenship. People go to another country for a variety of reasons.

It is possible to go into another country simply as a tourist. Tourists display a variety of attitudes toward the places they visit. Some find much to appreciate, to admire, to learn. Others -- well, others don't. These latter our family refers to as "turistas". When we lived in southern California, we often had occasion to cross into Mexico, and became acquainted with many folks there. We felt highly complimented when one of them remarked, "Ustedes no me parecen turistas" (You all don't seem to me to be tourists). We knew all too well what Jose meant. We too had seen the turistas who acted as if they owned the place, complaining loudly about everything that was not "like we do it at home", rudely unwilling to adapt, even for a few hours or days, to the ways of the people whose guests they were. They should have stayed at home! They would have been happier among the familiar sights, sounds, and smells, and they assuredly would not have been missed! Some folks greet new experience with condescension: "How quaint!", seeing everyone and everything from their own narrow and decidedly superior perspective. "Good" and "bad" are defined in terms of familiarity. Closely related to these are the folks who project the "Great White Father" image, that exclaims over the "backward" and "ignorant" characteristics of those who do not live as they themselves prefer. They're convinced the world should be made over in their image, and would be delighted to be appointed the honored engineers of such a project, (as long as they didn't have to dirty their hands.) All of these turistas share an irrational fear of the unknown, an innate distrust of the unfamiliar, and enormous relief when they return to their homeland. They distrust the food and water, and would never dream of forming friendships with the folks they meet, let alone learning anything. As for citizenship? Forget it!

Do you know any turistas in the Kingdom?

Of course there are also visitors who truly appreciate what they see and learn. They learn the language, at least enough to communicate. They adopt some of the customs of the host country -- the ones that appeal to them. Not being citizens, they are perfectly free to be selective in their adaptations. They make friends, and relate graciously to those they meet. Some even return home so enamored of the places they visited, they can talk of nothing but returning. But they usually don't. They did not make the commitment of citizenship. Despite their much healthier attitude, they are still tourists, and as such, they themselves retain sovereignty over their own way of life. This is a much more subtle temptation for Kingdom citizens. But full citizenship demands total renunciation of that autonomy.

Some folks go to another country as entrepreneurs. They go for what they can get out of it: to exploit people or resources for their own profit. They may talk about "development" or "aid", but the bottom line is still their own profit, personal, organizational, or national. It really doesn't matter what the effect is on the hapless host. Profit, economic or political, or, preferably, both, is the name of the game. Fortunately, some Christian people are beginning to develop a conscience against this sort of foreign experience. Perhaps eventually, we will also educate our consciences against those who are into the Kingdom for profit. Their methods differ only slightly; their obvious motives even less. Some even go so far as to represent the lure of profit as valid "evangelism", ignoring the difficulty of finding anything like that in the words of Jesus, who told at least one prospective convert "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor..." Like their admittedly secular counterparts, they learn enough of the language to make their schemes sound good, but that's where adapting to the Kingdom stops. Kingdom principles are observed only when convenient, or if they can be manipulated to advantage. The profit all goes one way. The King who refuses to be manipulated is either deposed or ignored, and loyal citizens are abused and violated.

There are even some who enter a country deceitfully, whose goal is its detriment, or even its destruction. They may assume the guise of tourists, entrepreneurs, or even candidates for citizenship, but their loyalty is to another power, and it is the interest of that power that they serve. This has also happened in the Kingdom.

Then there are those who enter a country as refugees. They are fleeing famine, war, or other destruction in their homeland. They didn't really want to leave their former homes, and did so only to save their skins. Some eventually adapt and become citizens. Others, like a lady we met some years ago, have no interest in learning to become a part of a new community. She only mourned the loss of her former home, and rejected all our efforts to befriend her. She wanted no new home: she longed only to return to the one she had lost. Sadly, there are many refugees in the Kingdom. They have been urged to flee there to escape destruction. They see no reason to learn new ways. They have no plans to become contributing citizens. They only want a place to hide. But can you blame them?

Has not this been the main thrust of what we have called "evangelism?" It is instructive to compare Jesus' methods of recruiting citizens to those employed by folks of our day who call themselves "evangelists". Never once did Jesus plead or beg for attention. Never did he threaten or seek to terrify anyone. To crafty, grasping Zacchaeus, he said simply, "I'm coming over for lunch," and the man's life was radically transformed. To cussing, swearing Peter, who in his confession of being a "sinful man" would have been a prime target for today's "soul-savers", he simply invited, "Follow me: I'll teach you to fish for people." A threatening question, "Where would you be if you died tonight?" is not a New Testament quotation, nor a New Testament concept. Both Jesus and the apostles consistently spoke of life, not death, when inviting people to citizenship. In every instance, the call was to become a participant in a new and totally different life, in company with Jesus himself, and with the others he had called. They were a motley bunch indeed. But they were not refugees seeking shelter! They were members of a citizenship class.

Nowhere does the New Testament call turistas, tourists, entrepreneurs, or refugees to the Kingdom. To be sure, no one is excluded. Folks are frequently invited to "come and see". There is nothing wrong with beginning as a tourist: in fact, probably everyone should. But the true content of the invitation is citizenship.

No one is a citizen alone. He shares both privilege and responsibility with all other citizens. He pledges support and allegiance, and receives the protection of his new country. A loyal citizen will give every effort for the best interest of the Kingdom, and never pass anything hurtful into the hands of another sovereignty.

The responsibility of a foreigner in a country, on the other hand, is minimal. He is not expected to conform, except to respect the law. He has no obligations to other citizens, nor they to him. Neither, though, does he share the privileges and protection of citizenship. Only as citizens can people participate fully in all the benefits and privileges of any country -- or of the Kingdom.

Becoming a citizen of a country requires, first of all, a renunciation of all other loyalties. One's former homeland has no further claim on him. Can you imagine applying for citizenship in any country of the world and replying, when asked to give allegiance, "Well, I'd really like to keep my options open!"? How far do you think your application would get?

A candidate for citizenship is expected to be familiar with the constitution and laws of a country, with its language, its goals, its self-perception, and to adopt them as his own. No less the Kingdom. It behooves us to look carefully at this Kingdom in which we are offered citizenship. What are its expectations, its cultural "givens"? What can we learn from its history?

There are certain defined functions that citizens are expected to perform in any society. These functions may differ from group to group, but they always exist. They include principles that govern how citizens relate to one another, and how they perceive their own roles. To pick out just a few of these, from a Kingdom perspective:

1. The King is the absolute ruler. What he says, goes.
2. The Kingdom is not a democracy. Its people have no concern for "equality". Their goal is much higher than that. They are to become one. They are called to a unity as complete as that which exists among the persons of the Trinity. This was God's intention stated at creation, and the content of Jesus' last recorded prayer.
3. The Kingdom is not a place to "find yourself", or your "identity". That search belongs to the old creation, where self-centeredness quickly became the original sin. The New Creation of the Kingdom was engineered by one who spoke of -- and demonstrated -- losing, denying, disowning the tyranny of self, in favor of being built into the Kingdom.
4. The Kingdom is not an institution, with hierarchy and flow-charts. There is only one superior, the King. All the citizens function together, in the various roles he may assign, as a Society Without Status, according to the King's example. They have deliberately rejected the self-aggrandizement and status-seeking of the world from which they came.

5/6. Kingdom citizens have two assignments, two goals: to be built into the Body of Christ, and to function as that Body in the world. The whole New Testament is devoted to instructions for those two tasks.

Are we ready then, to accept the King's offer of full citizenship? The Kingdom has been a long time in the building, and it is not finished yet. One must study the blueprints carefully, and only then decide whether or not to participate. The blueprints are not subject to revision. They were drawn by the supreme Architect of the universe, who also set the standards for the building code!

There is no greater privilege than to become an integral part of the eternal purpose of our God: and the only way to that goal is to follow the pattern modeled by our Servant-King. In the unity of our fellow-travellers, there is safety and strength. When each part of the Body is working properly, in the selfless love of the Kingdom's Society Without Status, the ultimate outcome of the journey is assured.

Until then, the citizenship class always has room for more. There are no restrictive quotas. The King is still recruiting citizens for his Kingdom.

CHAPTER 2

THE UNITY OF THE TRINITY: THE IMAGE OF GOD

What does a "theological" topic like "the Trinity" have to do with a discussion of God's practical intentions for his Kingdom? Precisely the fact that it was never intended to be a topic for theological arguments at all, but rather a pattern for the corporate life of God's people. This was obvious from the dawn of creation: but folks have always had a perverse inclination to avoid acting on the obvious by making it a subject for obscure and complicated discussions!

Scholars have argued for centuries over a precise definition of who in the Godhead is responsible for what, totally missing the point that, where there is true unity, such specific detail is irrelevant. In the Western individualistic cultural obsession to give credit -- or blame -- where it is due, we are bothered that, although we assume the speaker in Genesis, who speaks everything into existence, to be God the Father, in several of Paul's letters, it is Christ who is honored as Creator and Sustainer of all things (e.g. Colossians 1:16). A professor who had a very low opinion of Scripture once told me, "Paul should have known better!" To see Jesus Christ in such a position disturbed his preconceptions. And then, when mere humans try to define and prescribe a complete job description for the Holy Spirit, carefully picking and choosing only those aspects of his character and activity that fit their individual and denominational biases, whole churches are split, and brethren are alienated by the fallout. What a tragic distortion of the beautiful message the Lord has been trying to get across to his people!

Jesus said it best -- not surprisingly: he should know! -- as quoted in John 10:30: "The Father and I are one!" This is what upset the religious leaders of his day so severely. This, in the end, was the capstone of their case against him, when they put him on trial: "Because of this, therefore, the Jews were seeking to kill him, because he not only was breaking the Sabbath, but was saying that his own Father was God, thus equating himself with God" (John 5:18). These good people did not condemn the Lord Jesus for improperly differentiating the "division of labor" between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: it was the union that they found impossible to handle. Yet that truth runs as a refrain throughout the Gospels: the diverse function, yet complete oneness of Jesus and the Father.

This is much deeper and stronger than our modern ideas of "unity", where folks each allow the other to go his own way without interference, big-heartedly pretending to overlook differences and disagreements. It is a complete oneness of purpose, of desire, even of identity! That's why we can't figure it out. We so adamantly insist on our own "identity" that we cannot conceive of true oneness. It was the unity transcending the diversity of function that Jesus' opponents had trouble with. After all, they had it all in a box -- literally. At the door of every Jewish home was found a box containing the "Shema", taken from Deuteronomy, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one..." And in that box, there was no room for God walking around among people, as either Man or Spirit.

We "modern Christians" fancy ourselves more enlightened, but have, in reality, approached the other extreme. In our concern for orthodox Trinitarian views, we have lost sight of the unity of which our Lord spoke. Either one without the other diminishes the truth.

Did it ever occur to you how closely parallel is the concern the Lord Jesus expressed in his prayer (recorded in John 17) to the purpose attributed to God in the Creation account? In spite of his Biblical accuracy leaving something to be desired, James Weldon Johnson, in his well-known Creation poem, conveys the thought very well, when he has God musing, "I'm lonely: I'll make me a world," and later, "I'm lonely still: I'll make me a man." This will be considered at greater length in the next chapter. Suffice it here to say that these sentiments are just another expression of Jesus' desire when he prayed, "Father, I want the ones that you have given me to be with me, where I am..." (John 17:24).

The key, for our present purpose, is to be found in the Genesis version (1:26): "Then God said, Let us make man in our image." Image, (εικὼν, eikon) is a fascinating word to trace through the Scripture. By far the most common reference is to idols: images or representations formed and worshipped by people in their stubborn refusal to honor the true God (Romans 1:23). Isaiah's caustic description is a classic example (44:9-20) of the folly of idolatry. There are, however, several notable exceptions. Whereas Genesis speaks of Man (a generic term that has no reference to gender) being created in the image of God, the New Testament speaks of Christ himself being that image (II Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15), and God's people being destined (Romans 8:29) to be "conformed to the image of his son." Are these contradictory statements? Not at all. They are simply different ways of saying the same thing.

By Paul's testimony, obviously the whole "image of God" idea wasn't working too well in the abstract. It was sadly distorted, often beyond recognition, as people chose to go their own way. In his letter to the Romans (1:18-32) Paul describes a tragic, downward spiral, as people's chosen disobedience

led to greater blindness and further removal from the plan of the Creator. The Lord Jesus, on the other hand, provided the concrete example of the fulfillment of God's original plan, as well as the power necessary for his people to achieve it. For this reason, Paul could reassure his readers, "Just as we bore the image of the (man of) dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one" (I Corinthians 15:49).

But what is it, to "bear the image" of another? In the case of pagan idols, of course, images were made to portray both the identity and the especially desired or feared characteristics of the object of worship: witness the exaggerated appearance of power, ferocity, or sexual prowess of such statuary. These are images created by man, representing qualities he hopes to emulate. As is so frequently the case, violations like this of the good ways of God are simply warped versions, distortions, of what he had intended. Instead of bearing the image of the Creator God, men created gods bearing images that they themselves chose. They got it backwards: but in both cases, "bearing the image" implied a manifestation of the outstanding characteristics of the one whose image is borne.

Christians don't have a lot of problem with seeing the Lord Jesus as the expression of the personality and character of God. His word to Philip, "The one who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9), is straightforward and comforting. But Jesus takes this one step further. John 17 is not only the classic statement of his unity with the Father, but also of ours with him! Just as emphatically as the Master expresses his total oneness with the Father, he prays for his followers' identification with himself, and with each other! "...that they may be one, just as we are...that they all may be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that also they may be in us, in order that the world may believe that you sent me...I in them and you in me: may they be made completely into one...." Why? "So that the world may believe!" This has nothing to do with verbally convincing people of the accuracy of a set of propositions about the nature and purpose of God. The only truly valid form of "evangelism" is a demonstration project, of the complete unity of the Father, the Son, and the people of God!

Might it not be that at least one reason why people have had such a hard time formulating, understanding, and defending a satisfactory "Doctrine of the Trinity" is their perverse insistence on dividing what God has made ONE? When Jesus spoke of his relationship with the Father, or of the Spirit that he/they would send, he simply did not go into all the detail that some of his people would have preferred. He testified very clearly that he and the Father are one, and that the Spirit is an integral part of the team -- that the unit, together, makes the stupendous power of God available and active on our human scene. He apparently did not consider it necessary to draw us a diagram -- though many well-intentioned folks, since then, have undertaken to correct that oversight, and have generated more heat than light in the process! Because they are one, the members of the Trinity are, if one may indulge in a human figure, more concerned about getting the job done, than about who gets credit for what! And what is the job? Exactly what he said on Creation Morning: making Man in the image of God!

A bit of vocabulary should be clarified here. I am referring to the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament which was the Scripture used by the New Testament writers. When the Scripture speaks of the creation of Man, the word is used in the generic sense. Man (*ανθρωπος* – *anthropos*) includes both men (*ανηρ*-*aner*) and women (*γυνη* - *gune*). It might better be rendered "people", except that it occurs also in the singular. In no case, however, is *ανθρωπος* intended to specify gender. On Creation Morning, as the Creator spoke everything into being, he is quoted "Let us make man in our image." There are two significant things here. "Man" is the generic word, and it is used in the singular, thus implying the whole species, not a single individual (there is no definite article); and God is speaking of himself in the plural. Through the centuries, this has been understood by the church as the first hint of the truth of the Trinity. It is in "OUR" image that God wants people created.

For this reason, an understanding of the nature of the Trinity is integral to the understanding of how "man" is created in the image of God. By many who are called "authorities", the so-called "Doctrine of the Trinity" is considered to be one of the most complicated. No attempt is being made here to be exhaustive about all the technicalities in which those experts delight. I do not believe that God, whose whole purpose in dealing with man is to reveal himself, is being intentionally obscure. Ours is not a faith for an intellectual elite, but for ordinary people who desire to be obedient. The reason why people have such difficulty with the Trinity idea is that they perversely keep trying to take apart what God has said is absolutely inseparable!

The point, therefore, of what God has been trying to do throughout all the ages since Creation, is to provide for the world a demonstration project -- a visible example -- of what he has in mind: to reveal himself! This is his intention in creating, then re-creating, man in the image of God. The will of God, as Paul explains in Ephesians 1, is "that absolutely everything be summed up under the headship of Christ" (verse 10). His people are presently part of the preview (v.22), as Jesus has already been made head over all things for the church, in which (3:10) the world, with all its powers, human or supernatural, is expected

to see the revelation of the "many-faceted wisdom of God." But how can this be?

There is another very significant element in the John 17 passage which is seen throughout the entire New Testament. Just as Jesus does not concern himself with dividing the functions or personalities of the Trinity, so also he was not praying for individuals! This is made clear in two different ways, neither of which is immediately obvious to the person who reads only English. In Jesus' prayer for "all" those who were given to him, he had the choice of using the word $\pi\alpha\varsigma$ - pas , "all", a collective term, $\epsilon\kappa\alpha\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$, hekastos, "each", which refers to individuals. In every case, it is $\pi\alpha\varsigma$ that is used, or a plural pronoun. The individual form does not appear a single time. This characteristic is reinforced consistently throughout the New Testament, by the almost exclusive use of the second person plural in verb forms and pronouns. The English language no longer distinguishes between singular and plural forms of "you" as Greek does. Speakers of languages that do make such a distinction often have less difficulty in grasping the concept of corporate identity that is so crucial to understanding Kingdom living. Without this distinction, one has no clue whether a group or single individuals are being addressed. There are a few instances where a single individual, or the individual members of a group, are addressed: there are other ways of expressing that grammatically. But in the New Testament, the vast majority of both instructions and promises are addressed in the plural. The Christian life was never intended to be lived alone.

The "image of God" that is our destiny can only be understood in the context of the Trinity: diverse in function, yet perfectly one. A single individual person, however faithful and obedient, can never fully be created -- or even re-created -- in the image of the Triune God! We're simply not big enough! But that was God's intention from the beginning. It's not a mistake! It's not an exercise in futility! The Father was never interested in a collection of excellent individual specimens. He doubtless enjoyed exercising that avocation in the vast array of birds and bugs and beasties, earlier on. But in creating Man (the species) in the image of God, he was interested in a People, a Kingdom, a Body, to demonstrate, in a form the world could see, the unity of the Trinity, the very nature and being of God.

This unity is probably one of the most difficult concepts for our individualistic western minds to grasp, geared as they are toward the pagan Greek concepts of personhood and individuality articulated by the philosophers of the fifth and sixth centuries B.C., rather than toward the corporate, Biblical models. Obviously, it was also difficult for the first century folks to whom the Gospel of the Kingdom was originally proclaimed: they too were steeped in Greek thought. Clearly, this is why such a large part of the New Testament is devoted to an attempt to restructure our thinking on the subject, and also why so many of those writings are misunderstood. Scholars insist on trying to interpret writings "according to the times," not realizing that, like everything God has ever initiated, these writings were intended to change "the way things are/were", so that the church, the assembly of the called-out ones, can become the exhibit where God can be revealed. It is in the mutual, unifying love of the diverse, often scrappy, even obnoxious disciples, that the world will see the power of God.

It does not require the power of God to make common cause for people that are already pretty much alike. But when vastly different folks, even former enemies, are functioning together in the love of God, no one can avoid noticing! That's why we are admonished to be built together, to grow together, to be joined together, to recognize that we are heirs together, to suffer together, to reign together! This is the intent of Jesus' prayer that his followers be made one. He had provided the ultimate example, in his demonstration of perfect union with the Father; and in some unexplained way, the giving of his life opened the way for that union to be realized among his people. The purpose behind everything that God has been doing, ever since the beginning, is to create a people in his image!

Perhaps the best, and saddest, illustration of our total misunderstanding of what the Lord is trying to do, is seen in the little ditty that always calls forth a somewhat embarrassed chuckle:

"To live above with the saints in love,
Oh, that will be glory!
But to live below with the saints we know,
Now, that's a different story!"

It is precisely the "saints below", with all their foibles, who must bear testimony to the unifying power of God, or nobody will. The authenticity of the message is confirmed or denied by what happens when former enemies come together in the love and peace of the Spirit of God.

Medieval mysticism stressed the individual "union of the soul" with Christ: a lonely, subjective adventure, supposed to attain spiritual heights inaccessible to the ordinary believer. It was a retreat from a corrupt and degenerate church, where entrenched hierarchy and empty ceremony had replaced the healthy life of the Body of Christ. Is there a similar reason why we are seeing a revival of this orientation in the late twentieth century? Nowhere in the New Testament can such withdrawal and introspection be found. The New Testament speaks not of "holy" hermits on mountaintops, but of holy brethren (also a generic

term, completely independent of gender). The New Testament focus is outward, in praise-filled obedience to the Lord, in loving service offered in his name to all in need, not inward, on one's own so-called "spirituality".

The concept of the Body of Christ, created in the image of God, is most crucial. The world does not want or need to be told how things should be, or what God is like, or what he wants people to be. It needs and wants to be shown! And in order for that to happen, "a people" bearing his image is absolutely essential.

There are two components in realizing conformity to his image: one active, and one passive. The active one is described in Colossians 3, and other similar passages, where we are admonished to "put off" every vestige of any former way of life, and "put on", or clothe ourselves with the characteristics that will reveal the image of God. The passive one is seen in II Corinthians 3:18 as we (together: this is all plural) behold the glory of God, which is another of the privileges Jesus prayed for us, we become transformed (a passive verb) into his likeness. "Time exposure", someone has called it, to the Lord of Glory, results in our being changed, together, into the very image of God!

"Changed." That word should not be as scary in the church as it is in the world. In the union of which our Lord speaks, differences are not ignored. When Scripture speaks of our being made one, massive changes are assumed. Sources of division, self-centeredness of various kinds, are removed by ALL parties being transformed by the power of Christ. One of the reasons why we do not see this happening is that we no longer assume any need to change. We have bought into the pagan statement, "I'm OK, you're OK," when in point of fact, none of us is OK. If we were, Jesus was wasting his time to even bother coming, let alone dying! True, you don't need to come my way, and I don't need to come your way. But we both need to be changed, to go the Lord's way. Only so can we be recreated in the image of God.

This, then, is the goal of the citizens of the Kingdom. It is what they are about: being made one. The citizens of the Kingdom do not so much scorn power, position and status, as simply ignore it: there are more important concerns to occupy their attention. Kingdom citizens are united as inseparably as the Persons of the Trinity, being continually created and recreated in the image of God. As they are in the process of being made as perfectly one with each other as Jesus and the Father are one, they are bearing testimony, by the very miracle of that union, to the power and grace of God.

CHAPTER 3

MUTINY IN THE GARDEN:

SELF-CENTEREDNESS, THE ORIGINAL SIN

Like most of our problems, and God's, it all started in the Garden. In fact, ever since the beginning, the story of the human race has been a chronicle of frustration: the frustration of the plan of the wise and loving Creator, who wanted to provide an unimaginably beautiful life for his creation, in order that his creatures might reflect the beauty of his own perfection. After God created Man "in his image", he gave people a home in the garden that he himself had planted for them. All they had to do was to follow his instructions and take care of it together -- not at all a bad job, since there were no weeds yet -- and enjoy its produce. After work, the people and their Lord had time to enjoy each other's company and talk things over: an idyllic situation indeed.

What went wrong? The Tempter appealed to the one thing that has probably destroyed more people, families, churches, and nations than all the wars, plagues and other assorted catastrophes of history. Modern psychology calls it the Self, or self-image, identity, self-consciousness, self-assertiveness. The Bible spells that "S-I-N".

Infinite Love had designed a set of instructions for this new creation he called human life. It stands to reason that the inventor of anything ought to know best how it will work: but how often do any of us read the instructions before trying to operate some new gadget? We assume that we are bright enough to figure it out for ourselves. In that context, we have no room to be surprised or overly critical that when the suggestion came, "God's not saying that for your good: he's just trying to keep you from Reaching Your Full Potential," the people's response was exactly the same as that of individuals, groups, and nations today who are clamoring for "liberation" and "self-determination": "Yeah, anyway, who does he think he is, trying to restrict my freedom? Why shouldn't I do as I please?" or the classic adolescent response, "What's wrong with it?" So they sold out: only secondarily to the Devil. The real master our first parents chose was SELF -- autonomy -- self-determination -- their own idea of what would work out best. And down through the centuries since, their descendents have done a notoriously bad job of structuring this thing called life, even to get the results that they think they want.

Now, Self is actually a rather ambiguous thing. In its proper place, regulated, developed and controlled as the Creator intended, it is a good gift of God. "Self" is one legitimate translation of the Greek ψυχη - psuche, which is often rendered "life" or "soul". This is what Man "became" (Genesis 2:7 LXX) when God breathed life into him. It is not something one has, but what we are. But every good gift of God can be used rightly or wrongly. Rightly used, it contributes to the realization of God's purposes. Wrongly used, it produces death and destruction.

A new baby, for example, is completely self-centered. He must be, in order to survive. Demanding to be fed when hungry, warmed when cold, and dried when wet, is the only way he can sustain his tiny life. The newborn's self-centeredness is the good gift of God. But characteristics that are "cute" in an infant or toddler are quite disgusting, or perhaps pathetic, in an adult. We were never intended to live out our lives as demanding infants. The New Testament is full of admonitions to "grow up", into him (Jesus), into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, to be no longer children.

In a family setting, it isn't long before Mom or Dad says, "OK, sweetheart, now I need some rest too!", and having ascertained that nothing is really wrong, decides to let the little tyrant yell, instead of coming running at his slightest squeak. Far from showing a lack of concern on the parents' part, they are teaching the first necessary lesson in breaking the tyranny of Self: "Other people have needs, too. You aren't the center of the whole universe!" In families where that sort of thing doesn't happen, the child soon learns how to rule the parents, to his own detriment as well as theirs. Such families are not pleasant companions!

Unfortunately, some of the Lord's people have never caught on to that first lesson. They see themselves as "King's Kids" who deserve to be coddled and spoiled. The Master and Creator of all things is viewed as a sort of celestial nursemaid or errand-boy, obligated to come running at their slightest whimper, to supply whatever their selfish little hearts desire. There are even people who teach this sort of spoiled-brat behavior to be an expression of "faith"! Rather, it is simply a replay of the Mutiny in the Garden: "I want it MY way!"

These folks who choose to remain in their infancy are not alone, of course. Others throughout Biblical history have manifested the same mutiny, creating both personal and national disasters in the process. Abraham decided to take matters into his own hands when God seemed slow in delivering the

promised son, and millions of people are still suffering the consequences. Jacob, jockeying for supremacy, unwilling to wait for God's fulfillment of the prophetic word, found himself running for his life. Joseph's brothers, jealous of his status, determined to undermine it. David's escapade with Bathsheba ("NOBODY tells a king what to do!"), Samson's choice of a wife from the enemy camp, Rehoboam's arrogance before the elders, Nebuchadnezzar bragging in Babylon, all have one thing in common: each one saw himSELF as of supreme importance, the center of his own universe, self-determined and independent.

It does not require unusual powers of perception to see the same thing around us constantly, when heads of state, on all sides of any given world conflict, display more concern for their own prestige and "image" than for the people and nations entrusted to their leadership; when lesser leaders, on political, business, and even organized "church" scenes, back off from what they know is right, lest they endanger their "position"; when we as individuals choose our own comfort or luxury over reaching out to heal the hurts that abound on every side. The spirit of the Mutiny is very much alive and well.

Jesus spoke of another way. "If anyone wants to come after me, he must deny himself..." There are sermons by the dozens on the end of that quotation, most of which reduce the admonition to "take up the Cross" to a sickly sentimental acquiescence to wrong, or the endurance of unavoidable difficulty, real or perceived. Neither of these bear any resemblance to what the Cross meant to Jesus! His cross was not merely an unavoidable inconvenience! It was not a concession to insurmountable evil! Never forget: Jesus could have avoided the cross! He was not kidding when he told his over-zealous defenders that "he could have called ten thousand angels..."! But he chose to endure all he did, for our redemption, and to inaugurate his Kingdom! It was the selfless culmination of a selfless life. The call of Christ is to deny ourSELF. By ignoring this former phrase, we have cheapened and emasculated his admonition to take up the cross. Self denial and cross bearing do not constitute an insipid, sanctimonious giving-up-candy-bars-for-Lent. They rather call for a total reorientation of our entire personality. The Cross -- avoidable suffering voluntarily endured for the cause of Christ and the Kingdom -- can never be "taken up" by anyone whose life is still focused on himSELF.

Small wonder, then, that Jesus spoke of entry into his Kingdom as requiring being born all over again. As we have seen, the new human life must focus on the self, in order to survive. The new Kingdom life, on the other hand, begins with the rejection of the self, the very thing that was previously perceived as essential to survival. But survival is no longer an issue, to one who becomes identified with the resurrected Lord! Stories abound, during times of intense persecution, of the utter frustration of oppressors, when their victims could not be terrified by threats of death. Jesus lives, and we in him! In this confidence, Kingdom citizens are set free to obey their King, and to ignore any consequences. Perception of this freedom has been at the root of every major advance of the Kingdom: mission efforts, reformations, multitudes of expressions of faithfulness in the face of hostile societies and governments. It kindles what the world sees as heroic courage, but what is in reality, simple obedience. Resurrection makes concern for survival obsolete.

Closely related is the frequently repeated statement, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." Often, large segments of the church have copped out on these grounds, citing chapter and verse to justify not even trying to apply Kingdom principles to everyday life. This error results from buying into the eastern notion of a dualistic universe, in which all matter is evil, and only the immaterial, or "spiritual", is good. That idea spawned one of the early heresies, in which it was contended that Jesus could not possibly have been truly human, if he was indeed truly God, because to assume physical form would have been to acquire evil. The church recognized the error of that reasoning, but has not as universally recognized that it applies also to Kingdom living in the here and now. There is no dualism in Scripture. Everything God created is good. "Flesh" (σὰρξ - sarx), in most instances, although some have insisted on translating it "sinful nature" (NIV), refers simply to the human nature: our physical, ordinary life. Rightly used, the human nature, too, is the good gift of God. Our Lord also ate, slept, laughed, loved, grew tired, in short, lived among his people. "God incarnate" means "God in the flesh"!

But left to itself, it is our human nature, self-centered, self interested, self willed, that cannot function in Kingdom citizenship. We like to excuse our failures, our perversity, our oddities, by a sheepish, half-apologetic disclaimer, "After all, I'm only human." That may be a valid excuse in the kingdoms of the world, but not in the Kingdom of God. Kingdom citizens have left such excuses behind. They are still "in the body", but they refuse to be ruled by their human nature.

The effect of rebirth is intended to be the creation of a life that operates by completely different principles. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are gone! Look! Something new has happened!" (II Corinthians 5:17). Only so can Kingdom principles be implemented. Now, to say the old is gone and everything is new, is not to advocate the pipe-dream of instant, "sinless perfection". The new life, just like the former one, is a constant adventure of growth and learning. But the aim, the direction, the

orientation, is radically changed. The Lord does not seem to be nearly as concerned with where, exactly, we are on the journey, as he is with the direction we are headed, and that we are moving along. A child learning to walk frequently needs to be picked up, have his skinned knee kissed and duly band-aided, and be sent on his way again. So do we, as we learn to walk in the Kingdom. But if we have truly chosen the new life, and been born into Kingdom citizenship, the Self will no longer be the focus of our life. The Kingdom's goals will consume our entire attention.

Yet, what have we done? In the name of Christ, institutions that claim to be his are peddling "improve your self-image" as if it were something to be desired! Self-actualization, self-assertion, self-realization, self-fulfillment, and all the rest of the self-centered idolatry of the society around us is not only tolerated, but actually advocated! Seminar after film series after encounter session urges us to analyze ourSELF, bolster our ego, feel good about ourSELF, express ourSELF, or something similar. The Mutiny in the Garden is proclaimed from pulpits and over the airwaves in the name of the one who told us to deny ourSELF! Myriads of "Christian" professionals make a luxurious living by continually propping up the sagging self-image of their introspective clients.

Jesus knew that the self-focus was futile. "He who would save his (ψυχη -psuche) self, will lose it," he declared. Jesus encountered many troubled, hurting people. But he had a different solution. He directed the focus away from the self, and involved them in the work of the Kingdom! Peter's confession of being a "sinful man" or a "failure" elicited, not a comforting, "there, there, we'll have to work on your self-image," but a command: "Follow me: I have a job for you!" The woman of Samaria was neither scolded nor "affirmed" for her sordid way of life. She was sent home to the very folks she had been avoiding by her noontime trek for water, to tell of the Messiah! For Kingdom citizens, our "identity", our sense of worth, is found as we ourSELVES become lost in the ultimate work of all the ages: "He who loses his (ψυχη - psuche) self for my sake and the Gospel's, shall find it!"

Self-idolatry is nothing new. The Greek philosophers of the fifth and sixth centuries BC were saying the same things. Their teaching was well known to the folks to whom the New Testament was written. Thales' "Know thyself" was probably more familiar to them than to us. This is probably why the New Testament writers take such pains to take the focus off of the individual. The "wisdom of the world" is no wiser now than it was then. It is still an exercise in futility to focus on one's self, refusing the only real cure for the human condition. The world's wisdom is still dominated by the Mutiny in the Garden.

In contrast to our Lord's injunction to deny ourself and give ourselves fully to his Kingdom, modern efforts to revise his instruction manual and redecorate the Kingdom sound strangely like that first insidious question: "You surely don't think God meant what he said, do you?" "He doesn't have your best interest at heart." "Assert yourself. Be all you can be. Don't be pushed around!" It is greatly to be feared that even many of those who proclaim themselves to be his followers have "exchanged the truth of God for falsehood, and worshipped ... the created thing, rather than the creator" (Romans 1:25). May the Lord in his mercy break our slide along that downward spiral of choosing what seems best to our selfishness, give us the vision to refuse to join the mutiny led by the proponents of the self, and motivate us to identify fully with his Kingdom!

CHAPTER 4

FROM GARDEN TO VINEYARD

God was not satisfied to leave mankind floundering in the morass of self-centeredness created by the Mutiny in the Garden. Time after time, the Scriptures record his efforts to call out and create a people through whom his purposes might yet be realized. Noah's sons were sent out with instructions to replenish the earth. The call to Abraham was not alone for one man's family, but in order that "by you will all the families of earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Moses' interviews with Pharaoh, and all the ensuing signs, were intended "that the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord..." (Exodus 7:5). Carefully set forth in the Law were provisions for any strangers who chose to be identified with the people of God.

Israel was supposed to be a people with a difference. On every hand were "the nations", each with its absolute ruler, each with its patron gods. By contrast, Moses, although chosen by God as deliverer and lawgiver, shared leadership responsibilities with seventy elders. Even during the chaotic period of the judges, when single leadership did emerge in times of crisis, it did not follow the pattern that prevailed in the surrounding cultures. One of the very early illustrations that God intended a different type of leadership appears in the parable that Jotham set before the people, after Abimelech had killed all his brothers and appointed himself king according to a more "acculturated" pattern (Judges 9). Each of the useful plants, the olive, the fig, and the vine, is represented as having been offered, in turn, "kingship" over the trees. Each in its turn refused, recognizing that its intended function is fulfilled in being productive in the service of man, not in the prestige or status that might derive from kingship. Only the bramble, which bears no useful fruit, and serves no useful purpose, accepted the offer of dominance over the others.

This becomes a theme that recurs repeatedly throughout all the Scriptures: the importance of fulfilling one's intended function, and the negative light placed on grasping or exercising status. In order for God's plan for his people to be realized, for man to be recreated in the image of the Triune God, a Society Without Status is required, where all are one, under God's exclusive lordship.

Lack of status does not mean that there is no leadership. There certainly is: strong leaders were called, and some functioned well, leading the people of God to unity and victory. Unfortunately, though, the characteristics of the Mutiny in the Garden also reappeared, each time one of those leaders decided that his function had earned him a position of status. Such situations are numerous: we will look at two.

Samuel, who had served faithfully as God's spokesman, was upset when the people asked for a king (I Samuel 8). The Israelite elders had good reason for the request: Samuel apparently had been so busy about the Lord's work that he had neglected to train his own sons properly (another problem that has been around a long time), and they were shamefully abusing the leadership they might have inherited. But one abuse is never corrected by further disobedience. Instead of demanding that things be straightened out according to God's designated patterns, the elders decided to take matters into their own hands and design their own solution. "Everything would be fine, if only we had a king!" God went right to the core of the problem when he reminded Samuel, "They have not rejected you: they have rejected me!" (verse 7).

At God's direction, Samuel proceeded to warn the people what a king would be like. The refrain is depressing:

"He will take your fields.
He will take your produce.
He will take your sons.
He will take your daughters.
He will take your flocks.
He will take your herds.
You will be his slaves."

Gone is the mutuality of nomadic days. A king must be supported in style!

But the people were adamant. "No! But we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may govern us, and go out before us, and fight our battles!" (v.20). What is this but another expression of the Mutiny in the Garden? God's people were not called to "be like all the nations!" God had said "Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples.... and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation..." (Exodus 19:6). Furthermore, God had specifically and deliberately reserved for himself each of the functions for which they wanted a king. It was he who was to govern (I Samuel 8:7); it was he who was to go before his people (Exodus 13:21); and he who was to fight their battles (14:14). None of these roles were to be usurped by a mere man! God's people were called to be different --but again, they preferred a more conventional style. God called it what it was: a rejection of him as their king. Nevertheless, the Lord

allowed them to choose a human king: but specified that the role of that king was to be drastically different from the role models in the neighboring nations.

Already in Deuteronomy 17, recognition was made that eventually, there would be a king. This is not presented as part of God's plan: there is simply a statement that it will happen. But unlike the average Eastern monarch, whose word -- or even whim -- was law, and whose dominion was absolute, the king over God's people was himself to be subject to the Law that God had given, and to study it continually. He was not to adopt the affluent lifestyle of self-gratification common to his peers, multiplying gold, silver, horses, wives, but was to remember "that his heart not be lifted up above his brethren"! (Deuteronomy 17:20). A very different sort of king!

Even though the demand for a king was repeatedly criticized as a deliberate act of disobedience and rebellion against God, Samuel was nevertheless commissioned to tell the people, "If both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well..." (I Samuel 12:14). In spite of their rebellion, they were encouraged, "The Lord will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself" (12:22). If the king will cooperate, he may still share in this privilege.

Saul's initial response to his calling seemed to fit the prescription well: he acknowledged that he was (9:21) of the least family of the smallest tribe. Unfortunately, he soon forgot. It was not long before Saul, mistaking his assigned function for a position of status and privilege, presumed to offer sacrifice, which was NOT his function. For this presumption, he was promptly informed that, having overstepped the designated boundary, he had forfeited his job.

He had presumed to act as would have been expected in any other nation. In the surrounding societies, nothing would have been amiss if the king had set himself between the people and the god. Many considered the king actually to be an earthly manifestation of the god. Kings were not subject to law. They were the law. But God had something different in mind. God did not commission a king to stand in for him. God himself was to be the only sovereign. His people were to be a Society Without Status, subject only to him.

Much later, during the reign of Ahab, the vision of a people under God's direction seemed almost completely lost. Like most of his predecessors, Ahab had ignored the admonitions of the Law, and lived in acculturated luxury with his unbelieving wives, among whom the most notorious was Jezebel. Here is a classic incident of the clash of cultures (I Kings 21).

When Ahab asked Naboth to hand over his vineyard, they both knew very well that Naboth was not only within his legal right, but was obligated by Law, to refuse. God's Law stated clearly that one's inheritance was not to be transferred (Numbers 36:9). Jezebel, however, from the pagan kingdom of Sidon, had no such scruples. Her cultural definition of a king was different. What a king wanted, he took. No questions. Her challenge to her sulking husband, "Aren't you the king?" (v.7) reveals a vastly different perspective on that office. Her subsequent legal charge against Naboth, "You have cursed God and the King" (v.10), fit her own culture perfectly, since kings were viewed as direct representatives, or even incarnations, of the gods. She saw kingship as a position of status and privilege, not as a function of service. Kingship was, to her, a position which entitled a person to appropriate to his own use anything and anyone that took his fancy. The death sentence was merely a convenient and efficient means to exercise that authority. No big deal.

But to God, who had decreed a Society Without Status, it was a very big deal indeed. Elijah as his messenger brought two very serious charges. The first is reminiscent of the original Mutiny: "You have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord" (v.20). The second is more far-reaching: "You have made Israel to sin." Throughout the history of God's people, there have been countless times when one person's sin adversely affected the fortunes of the whole community: this is not the first evidence of corporate responsibility. But a person who assumes a position of status bears an awesome responsibility for those under his leadership -- more than one man is capable to bear. It was assuming status and privilege that belongs only to God that caused Ahab's downfall, and that of many others.

One is made to wonder if this early vineyard incident lies at the root of the prophets' repeated use of the Vineyard as a figure representing the people of God. It comes up repeatedly, in the prophecies of Jeremiah (12:10), and Hosea (10:1), although Isaiah's account (5:1-10) is the most detailed. All, though, deal with similar themes of the rejection of God's ways, abuses of power (status), and consequent disaster.

Isaiah portrays God's careful nurturing of his people in the image of the meticulous preparation, planting, and care of a vineyard. "What more could I have done?" he asks. Yet, the yield is not as intended. "When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?" Isaiah does not leave the interpretation of the figure to our imagination. "For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting: and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed, and for

righteousness, and behold, a cry" (v.7). There follows a grievous catalog of offences having one thing in common: a flagrant disregard for the ways and purposes of God, and inordinate indulgence of wanton, selfish luxury at the expense of the lowly: in short, a gross violation of the Society Without Status. Disaster can no longer be averted, or even delayed. The Lord himself vows to remove his protection, and declares that the vineyard will be utterly abandoned.

In his turn, Jeremiah picks up the figure (12:10), blaming the "shepherds" for the vineyard's destruction; a precursor, perhaps, to Ezekiel's later scathing denunciation of self-styled "shepherds" who deplete the flock for their own selfish gratification. In both cases, those to whom the care of God's people was entrusted, again mistaking function for status and privilege, had abused his people and frustrated his purposes, bringing destruction on both themselves and the nation.

It is no wonder, then, that Jesus himself aroused such a tempest, when he made deliberate use of the same Vineyard figure. This figure appears three times in Matthew's account. Only one of the parables has parallel passages in Mark and Luke: the one most easily recognized as being related to Isaiah's indictment of Israel (Matthew 21:33-45; Mark 12:1-12, Luke 20:9-19). The story describes in more detail the master's efforts to obtain the desired fruit from his vineyard. Here the blame falls on those entrusted with the management of the operation, rather than on the vineyard itself, as in Isaiah. Repeatedly, the owner has sent his servants to try to remedy the situation, but without exception, they have been ignored, abused, or killed. The Son himself clearly expects to suffer the same fate.

Although Matthew's is the only account where Jesus is specifically quoted as pointedly directing the conclusion at his hearers, "Therefore, I tell you all that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will bear its fruit" (v.43), the reaction of the religious rulers leaves no doubt that they have understood its intent. "The scribes and the ruling priests tried to lay hands on him at that time, but they were afraid of the people: they recognized that he had told this parable against them" (Luke 20:19). They were not about to acknowledge the Lord of the vineyard or his Son. They had traded their assigned function (tending and caring for the vineyard) for status (ruling over it). They had no interest in the Kingdom's Society Without Status. People with status to lose, seldom do.

Matthew's Gospel includes two other Vineyard parables. The two sons who were commanded to work in their father's vineyard (21:28 f) appear as an introduction to the story we have just considered. In Jesus' explanation, again, behavior (function) is the key to being included. There is no reference whatever to position (status). In fact, the expected positions are reversed: it is the favored eldest who comes in for criticism.

The principle shows up even more clearly in Matthew 20:1-16. From the perspective of normal human expectations, the workers hired in the early morning had every right to gripe. True, they were paid according to their contract, but after all, they had worked far more than the rest! Surely they deserved more than the newcomers! Tell it to the union! Their protest to the Lord of the Vineyard seems justified: "These last people worked one hour, and you made them equal to us, who bore the burden of the day, and the heat!" (v.12). Doesn't seniority confer any status at all? "Wait a minute," the Master replies in effect, "Who said anything about seniority? This is a Society Without Status. You both did all I asked of you. Your needs are alike. I choose to provide for those needs equally."

Our status-conditioned minds scream in protest, "But that isn't fair!" and the Master replies to us as to them, "Don't I have the right to do as I wish with what is mine? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" It was not a question of one group having abundance and the other suffering. Both were paid the standard survival day's wage. Even so, it is obvious that this way of calculating was as hard to accept in the first century as it is today.

The parable is immediately followed by the petition of Mrs. Zebedee, asking for prominent (status) positions in the Kingdom for her boys. Hadn't any of them even been listening? Patiently, Jesus explained again, even more pointedly: "That's how the world is organized, but we are doing something entirely different! **It shall not be that way among you!**"

In his final reference to the vineyard figure, Jesus made a significant change. This, of course, is his discourse, recorded in John 15, in which he represented himself as the true Vine, the Father as the Keeper of the Vineyard, and his followers as the branches. The deviations from the previous accounts are sharp, but fit in well with what had been prophesied. We made brief reference earlier to Ezekiel 34, where, chastising the unfaithful, selfish shepherds, God declared his intention to take over the job himself, and put things right. Both Isaiah and the Synoptic writers refer to similar self-centered (mutinous) unfaithfulness on the part of the keepers of the Vineyard. Now at last, with the Father in charge, things will be done as they should.

The Lord Jesus himself is the Vine, planted and nurtured by the Father's hand. Far from being autonomous units, his people are the branches, integral parts of the parent Vine. For a branch to think in

terms of autonomy would be utterly ridiculous. "The branch cannot bear fruit on its own, unless it remains on the vine" (v.4). If detached, it can only be discarded. There is no status among the branches of a vine. The only criterion of value is fruitfulness. Fruitful branches are of equal value. They are pruned and trained, so that they can increase their fruitfulness, fulfilling their intended function. There is only one method of assuring fruitfulness: attachment to the vine and thus to all its other branches. The proper relationships among the branches are established by the vinedresser who does the pruning. He needs to make sure that they do not compete for sun or nutrients, that one does not overshadow or dominate another.

Jesus goes on to make it abundantly clear that the life to which he is calling his people is one that will continually collide headlong with virtually all of the expectations of the rest of society. The bulk of his final discourse reported in John 14-17 concerns how they are to live together in the face of that collision. The rest of the New Testament clarifies many of the specifics. That final discourse concludes with the prayer already considered in Chapter 2. Several times, the request is repeated, "that they all may become ONE....."

The Lord Jesus' goal and constant prayer for the citizens of his Kingdom is that they may all become one, demonstrating the unity of the Trinity, as they function in a Society Without Status: "so that the world may believe."

CHAPTER 5

PREPARING THE WAY: FROM KING TO SERVANT

"But when the fulfillment of the time had come, God sent out his Son..." (Galatians 4:4), or, as Jesus had put it in the parable of the Vineyard that we have just considered, after centuries of sending prophets and other leaders and having their message ignored, the Owner of the Vineyard, as a last resort, sent his Son, saying, "Maybe they will listen to him."

Ever since the tragic Mutiny in the Garden, preparations had been underway for this moment. It was a keen disappointment, but not a surprise, to the Planner, that his blueprint was so consistently disregarded. In the very early days of the establishment of his people, the people through whom all the world was intended to be brought to his feet, God's message had come to the entire nation of Israel. That was the way he had wanted it. But they were afraid, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die" (Exodus 20:19). God had created Man for fellowship with himself -- to walk and talk with him. He had called this people to be his own, but they preferred to keep their distance, and to put someone, in this case, Moses, between themselves and their God. God had wanted to be close. They wanted him more remote. They turned their backs on the privilege of hearing directly from him, and walking in the close companionship that he had intended.

Depending on a single human leader, even the most faithful, consistently led to disaster. Throughout history, it has only been when God's ordinary people, together, have had access to his direct Word, that they have flourished in faithfulness. Perhaps a brief historical survey will illustrate the point.

Down through the ages, there were many occasions when God's people, seeing the tragic results of going their own way, turned back to him in dramatic reform movements. Some of these reforms were more successful and lasted longer than others, but the only ones in history that lasted even a generation were those in which God's Word was made available to all the people. Those that depended on a powerful leader, no matter how excellent and faithful that leader may have been, fell apart quickly: some upon the death of the leader, and some even sooner.

We have already seen how, in spite of specific instructions that the Word should be constantly taught in the daily life of every family (Deuteronomy 6:7 -- "and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise"), the people chose rather to depend on Moses for their knowledge of God. His entire tenure was a roller-coaster ride of obedience and rebellion on the part of the people, several times centering on a leadership struggle. The problem is, where there exists such a thing as a prestigious position, people have always competed for it, in that old, mutinous urge to be the one "on top." The perverse tendency to see status instead of function in leadership has been the bane of faithful leaders throughout history.

Gideon had the right idea (Judges 8:3) when the jealous men of Ephraim confronted him, challenging him for not calling them to share the glory of a battle, and he answered mildly, in total disregard for status, "What have I done, now, in comparison to you?" , and later, when they would have made him their king (8:22-23) , he refused, saying, "The Lord will rule over you!" Unfortunately, that attitude never became the norm.

During the whole chaotic period of the judges, it is significant that not once does the record contain any reference to the Word of the Lord or the Law of the Lord. It seems to have been completely ignored, while "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6). People did turn back to God when they were in a tight spot, and he graciously raised up someone to rescue them, but no one turned them back to his Word.

We have already considered, in the previous chapter, the sad story of the beginning of the Israelite kingdom. During the period of the monarchy, several kings did institute notable reforms, though there is no record that any of them accepted the kingly function -- the redefinition of the role -- prescribed in Deuteronomy 17:16-20, a warning against the accumulation of treasure and luxury, against returning to Egypt, and , most importantly, "When he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God ... that his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren, and that he not turn aside from the commandment..." This would have produced a very different version of kingship from what prevailed in Israel or its surroundings. A king who obeyed commands, instead of only issuing them, would have been unique indeed.

We will look briefly at four of the outstanding reform movements in the later years of the kingdoms. Every one began with a rediscovery of the lost Law, and a recognition that its principles were

not being carried out. II Chronicles 17 contains the history of the reform under Jehoshaphat. Not only is it said of him that "his heart was courageous in the ways of the Lord" (v.6), but he even sent priests and Levites throughout the entire kingdom to teach all the people from the book of the Law (vv.7-9). His reign was peaceful and prosperous. When the country was threatened, he assembled all the people to seek the Lord (II Chron. 20) and took counsel from both prophets (vv.14-17) and the people (21). All together experienced miraculous deliverance as they obeyed. Even so, the summary of his reign laments (20:33), "The people had not yet set their hearts upon the God of their fathers," and the subsequent godless leadership led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness again.

After a succession of short-term, unfaithful leadership, Joash appeared. He was the little boy rescued from Athaliah's slaughter by Jehoshabeath, the wife of Jehoiada the priest (II Chronicles 23 and 24). Joash was raised by this faithful couple, and later installed as king at the age of seven. He reigned under the tutelage of Jehoiada, and many abuses were corrected. There was a great turning to the Lord, but there is no mention of the Word, or of the people having been taught. Everything depended upon Jehoiada, and at his death, the reform fell apart. Joash, accustomed to taking orders from another, succumbed to less godly influences (24:17 f), and brought disaster upon both himself and the nation.

Josiah, another boy-king, demonstrated great zeal for the book of the Law when it was found during a clean-up of the mess in the temple. Not only did he himself determine to follow its directives (II Chronicles 34:19-21), but also (30) "The king went up to the house of the Lord with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the Levites, all the people, great and small, and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord." The testimony follows that the people continued faithful throughout his reign.

After the Exile, Ezra and Nehemiah collaborated in a similar effort (Nehemiah 8), assembling "all who could hear with understanding" to attend to the reading of the Law. When all the people had access to the Law of God, faithfulness prospered. But this was so seldom the situation! Much more frequent are the accounts of rulers who chose to go their own ways, who copied the pagan practises of surrounding nations, who preferred the status of kingship to its proper function, which would have kept God's word before his people and the nation in safety. Through the accounts in both Kings and Chronicles, the summary statements report far more often, "He did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord, and caused Israel (or Judah) to sin..." than they do "He did what was good and right in the sight of the Lord...."

There had to be a better way.

Prophets, notably Isaiah and Jeremiah, began to speak of a vision of a better day. They spoke of God himself leading his people, and a transformation of the people themselves. "I will put my Law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord", for they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest," says the Lord (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

Isaiah described the one who would accomplish all this: not a king, but a Servant. The king-thing simply hadn't worked. Kingship is perceived as a position of status, and as such could not ultimately be a part of the Kingdom of God, which has room for only one King. A servant, on the other hand -- who ever aspires to that status? Because servanthood, slavery, is utterly without status, only a Servant could show the way. Only a Servant could accomplish the work of establishing the kind of Kingdom that God had in mind.

"Behold my Servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice..."(Isaiah 42:1). "Behold, my Servant shall prosper," Isaiah continues (52:13), and then proceeds to describe his humiliation! "Despised ... rejected ... sorrowful ... smitten ... wounded ... oppressed ... afflicted..." a very strange description of prosperity! But this is soon clarified. It is "the will of the Lord" that "shall prosper in his hand" (53:10). This highlights the difference between a Servant and a king. The king's own will is his law. The Servant acknowledges only his master's will. Only in the role of the Servant is the tyranny of self-interest, the old Mutiny in the Garden, definitively reversed. "By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my Servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities" (53:11). "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows - He was wounded for our transgressions - The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:4-6).

Self-interest would cry out again, "But that's not fair!" and indeed it isn't. But it was the only way. Nothing else had worked, and the Servant was willing to endure what was manifestly unfair, for the sake of establishing the Kingdom of God. The Son/Servant was and is our only hope.

In order for that hope to come to fruition, a lot of very basic rearranging needed to be done in society at large, and in the minds of the people to whom the Servant was to come. Preparations had to be made for the birth of the new Kingdom, the Society Without Status, where God alone would be the sovereign. The key to this new society is to be found in several of the prophecies immediately before Jesus'

birth, in John the Baptist's introduction to his own ministry, and in a number of Jesus' own statements. The common thread is one form or another of the word, *ταπεινω* - *tapeinoo*. This word has been variously translated: "abase, bring low, humble, cast down," and in other forms, "lowliness, humility". It is used where Mary speaks of the Lord having considered the "low estate" of his handmaiden (Luke 1:48), and of having put down the mighty and exalted those "of low degree" (1:51-53). There is frequent contrast between being "humbled" and "exalted". This has led some folks to conclude that the Lord is asking for an abject expression of self-deprecation, a groveling attitude of worthlessness, that almost denies the work of God in making his people whole and worthwhile! Others, reacting against such excess, have opted for the self-exaltation of the Mutiny.

A far healthier concept is to be found in Luke 3:5, in John's quotation of Isaiah: "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low (*ταπεινοθησεται*)," to prepare the way for the Lord! The image is one of road construction. The goal is a straight, level highway. Rough places are to be smoothed out, hills scraped into valleys. It is leveling that is being called for, not degradation.

A similar theme comes through in Paul's eloquent description of Jesus' condescension to our human condition (Philippians 2:8). It is after Jesus "emptied himself", sacrificing his position (status) of equality with God, "taking the form of a servant", that he "humbled himself (*εταπεινωσεν*) and became obedient..." which eventually led to his being exalted above all things. What was this "humbling himself"? Jesus never groveled, or said he was no-good! He simply **deliberately obeyed**, dedicating himself fully to the Father's plan. It is this attitude that we are called upon to emulate. Humbling oneself, in the New Testament, is neither more nor less than renouncing the self-centered focus of the Mutiny in the Garden, and committing oneself fully to the obedience modeled by the perfect Servant.

Jesus spoke of himself as "meek and lowly (*ταπεινος*) in heart" (Matthew 11:29), when he invited us to share his yoke. Yoked animals cannot function unless they are taught to work together. The stronger one needs to lead, but may not abuse or dominate. Although infinitely stronger, our Lord has chosen the way of gentleness, deliberately adapting his strength to our need, in order that we may learn and fulfill our function. He challenged his self-seeking disciples to "humble themselves" as a child (Matthew 18:4). A child, unless grossly abused, does not grovel, either. Open and unassuming, he is not impressed with status or position, until his elders teach him otherwise. Children have a delightful disregard for convention and formality. They give everyone the benefit of the doubt. How sad, that such forthright honesty and enthusiasm is so soon acculturated out of our experience. Jesus seeks to put it back.

He scolded those who vied for seats of honor at feasts, quoting from Proverbs that "He who humbles himself will be exalted" and vice-versa. Again, the idea is the leveling of status. James, in his instructions about the relations of rich and poor in the church (chapter 2) becomes quite specific in denouncing any hint of favoritism in the brotherhood. There is simply no place for status of any kind, in the new Kingdom.

The more derogatory notions of "humility" were still very much in evidence in society at large. Paul went to great lengths in the letter to Colossae (chapter 2), to make the point that the false "humility" (self-denigration) of worshipping angels (or messengers), and neglecting the body, as some kind of enhanced "spirituality" is not of any value to the Lord's ways. It is actually only another form of showing off, of self-focus. Rather, in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, he speaks of his service among them (Acts 20:18-35) as having been characterized by "humility", and illustrates the point by listing his faithful testimony, his having supported himself materially, and his honesty before them all, as documentation. He urges the brethren at Philippi (2:3), "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves" (RSV) or, "Do nothing from strife or rivalry, but, rejecting status, consider others of higher rank than yourselves" (PNT). He then proceeds to use the life of Jesus as an example. In the Ephesian letter, "lowliness" (an assumption of completely level standing), is listed with gentleness, patience, and forbearance, as needful for relationships among God's people.

In this light, it is clear that John's voice in the desert was actually summarizing all that God had been trying to do, ever since the Garden Mutiny. Prepare the road for the Lord! Fill in the low places, scrape off the hilltops! Straighten what is crooked, smooth out what is rough! The result? "All flesh shall see the salvation of God!" (Luke 3:6). Not a select few; not members of a hierarchy of kings and priests and prophets; not even only his own people! All flesh shall see! John's words to the individuals and groups who came to him echo the prophets' calls for justice and equality, in perfect harmony with his call for the leveling of the road. There must have been a ring of authenticity that penetrated the darkness in which the people had remained for so long; a faintly familiar note that identified the message with the former word that had come to their forebears centuries earlier. Wonderingly, people began to whisper, then to ask almost openly, "Can this be the Christ, the Coming One?" "No," John replied, "only one preparing the way. One far greater is coming!"

CHAPTER 6

"IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU" JESUS SPEAKS TO STATUS

The radical call to citizenship in the Kingdom, the Society Without Status, recurs like a refrain throughout Jesus' entire earthly ministry. Continually, he both taught and modeled a total disregard for the status-consciousness so prevalent in society, then as now.

To people who held positions of power and prestige, this presented a serious threat: witness Herod's irrational cruelty in his obsession to destroy "the one born King of the Jews" in infancy. In his fury of self-preservation, it never occurred to him that a baby could hardly depose an old man! It was not so much the birth of a baby that provoked such jealous rage, as the realization that if this was indeed the beginning of the fulfillment of all that the prophets had said, not only Herod's own position, but the whole oppressive system of which he was a part, and from which he derived his power and luxury, was about to become obsolete. A similar fear was articulated later by the Jewish leaders, as they lamented, "If we let him be, everyone will become faithful to him, and the Romans will come and take away both our position and our nation!" (John 11:48). They seem to have understood far better than we, the radical nature of Jesus' challenge to the established structures. Actually, the threat they feared was less the Romans than the drastic reordering of society that would take place, were the Kingdom to be truly received by the people.

In his first public appearance, Jesus showed a deliberate disregard even for the status that he himself deserved, when he came to John for baptism. John had already acknowledged him as the "Lamb of God," and objected when Jesus requested to be baptized, "I'm the one who needs to be baptized by you !" But in his first public act, the Lord of Glory submitted to baptism at the hands of one who had declared himself to be merely his messenger: thus setting a precedent for a lifetime of lifting up the underdog at his own expense.

Immediately after the baptism accounts, each of the Synoptic writers records the incident of Jesus' temptation. In every case, it was his determination to be obedient instead of self-seeking that was under attack. The alternatives proposed by the devil, in each instance, describe self-focused action, whether in the apparently minor temptation to use his power for his own convenience (to satisfy his hunger), or the more spectacular, attention-getting bid of a leap from the Temple. Jesus chose to ignore the allure of self. Most relevant to our point here is the other temptation, listed second by Luke and last by Matthew: "Leading him up, he (the devil) showed him (Jesus) all the kingdoms of the inhabited world, in a point of time, and the devil said to him, 'I will give you all this authority and glory, because it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. You, therefore, if you worship before me, all will be yours'" (Luke 4:5-7).

It is significant to note that Jesus did not argue with the claim that the kingdoms of the world belong to the devil, or that dominion over them is gained by worshipping him! Many of his twentieth century followers, indeed, those of all centuries since the fourth, when the line between church and civil citizenship began to blur, have had a big problem with that concept. Being as reluctant as the first century disciples to realize that Jesus' Kingdom is "not of this world", they see no necessary conflict with temporal power. But Jesus had no such ambivalence. The Kingdom he had come to build was something entirely different. It co-exists with the kingdoms of the world, but takes no cues from their structure or their ways. The day will indeed come when "The kingdoms of the world have become (the property) of our Lord and his Anointed, and he shall be King forever!" (Revelation 11:15), by the sovereign act of God. But the time was not yet, and Jesus was willing to wait.

It is no temptation that is outside the realm of possibility. A person can be tempted to do what he ought not, but never to do what he can not. We cheapen the message if we assume that the devil could not have delivered on his offer. The temptation was real. Jesus knew very well that he was destined to reign: but he also knew the road that must be travelled to reach that ultimate destiny. The temptation was to short-circuit the process, to achieve immediate power, prestige, and temporal status, without fulfilling his intended function, the modeling of the selfless servanthood of the Kingdom, thus providing for the redemption of his citizens. The devil's offer was, in short, a chance to opt for the crown without the cross. It was Jesus' choice of obedience, and his refusal of the short-cut, that led to his eventual exaltation above all things, in which his people through all the ages since have found strength and comfort and hope. The time had not yet come. Throughout the next three years, the refrain was repeated: "My hour has not yet come." Jesus deliberately chose the path of the Servant, the way of meticulous obedience, of patient waiting, of the laborious building of a Kingdom that is "NOT of this world."

His own "inaugural address" summarized his choice of the function of a servant over the status of

a king. This statement of his purpose can only be understood in the context of the temptations he had recently rejected. He had just been offered limitless earthly power, prestige, and status, but instead announced that his mission was to "preach good news to the poor...to announce release to the captives...to send out the broken ones in freedom..." (Luke 4:18). For this task, he claimed the Lord's "anointing" -- a commissioning reserved for priests and kings, not servants! Who ever heard of a servant being anointed? But this particular Servant is also the King of Kings!

The agenda Jesus announced was not exactly what the world's powerful, or those who aspired to be the world's powerful, had in mind. They were looking for a political coup, which would smash Roman rule and allow their own hierarchy to take over. But then, the world's powerful usually have neither the desire nor the ability to "preach good news to the poor". Their "good news" is reserved for their wealthy cohorts. The poor? This man has to be kidding!

Consider for a moment the "status" of the poor. Ask the Pharisees, who consider only the members of their elite circle to be worth their time. "None of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in him, did they? But this crowd, that's not acquainted with the Law, they are cursed!" (John 7:48-49). Or, in their scorn for the blind man Jesus healed (9:34), "You were altogether born an outcast, and are you teaching us?" They took their cues, obviously, from the mind-set expressed in Jeremiah's prophecy (5:4), "Then I said, these are only the poor: they have no sense, for they do not know the way of the Lord, the Law of their God." There was a very good reason for that ignorance! The poor had to spend all of their time and energy barely surviving! They had no access to the luxury of time to become well-versed in all the intricacies of the Law. And, goodness knows, nobody was about to teach, and thereby empower them! As long as they didn't know the Law called for justice and mercy...who would challenge the oppressors? And to keep them in their place, ostensibly because of their lack of knowledge, it was assumed that they were some lesser order of beings. What would be "good news" for such people?

Jesus called them blessed, and promised them the Kingdom of God! He spoke of the truth of God having been "hidden from the wise and understanding and revealed to babies" (Luke 10:21). He was continually criticized for keeping company with the "wrong kind" of people, for eating with the outcasts and losers of society. No wonder "the crowd listened to him gladly" (Mark 12:37)! They warmed to the love and genuine inclusiveness that he communicated. Those who had been accustomed to being scorned and put down all their lives, found in the Lord Jesus one who fanned into flame the nearly-extinguished spark of hope, exactly as Isaiah had promised he would do (42:3), and welcomed them into his family!

There was only one requirement for joining the new Kingdom, and even the very family of the King. That requirement was as accessible to the poor as to the rich, to the high and lowly alike. The only requirement was, and is, obedience to the King's command, "Follow me!" And what a mixed multitude responded to that call! From the very beginning, the Kingdom was designed to demonstrate the power of God by welding together the most unlikely assortment of people imaginable, into a unity as complete as that of the Trinity! When Paul wrote to the Ephesian church of Christ's having broken down the walls between diverse peoples, and destroying their hostility, the concept was not original with him. Jesus started it. What power but God's could bring together Matthew the traitor-collaborator and tax collector with Simon, the revolutionary zealot? Or brothers like James and John, whose relationship must have been stormy in order to earn them the nickname, "Sons of Thunder"? Or a coarse fisherman like Peter with aristocratic Bartholomew? All, with varying degrees of understanding, responded to the call to follow. Yet, even near the end of their apprenticeship, Thomas had to admit in bewilderment, "Lord, we don't know where you are going -- how can we know the way?" (John 14:5). Jesus' response was not intended to be enigmatic. It was unequivocal and simple: "I AM the way" (14:6). The citizens of the Kingdom, like Abraham centuries before, are called to follow, not knowing where, but confident of whom they follow.

For three years in the fields and towns of Judea and Galilee, they had followed, listened, assisted, observed the strange behavior of the Man they were beginning to recognize as "the Christ of God." They had basked in the glow of belonging, as he sent word back to his visiting family, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, this one is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matthew 12:50). They had listened with satisfaction as he beat the Pharisees and scribes at their own game of intricate questionings. They had enjoyed the privileged position of hearing his detailed explanations of parables that left outsiders puzzled and confused. As momentum was building, gilded dreams began to take shape. They began to see themselves as candidates for positions of power! After all, if they were the closest associates of the King...

They were still assuming that the Kingdom would be set up along standard, conventional lines, to compete with, and ultimately to replace, the political system they knew and under which they chafed. After all, was it not the proudly status-conscious officials that their Lord had scolded for choosing the places of honor at feasts, and the best seats in the synagogues? If "those that exalt themselves will be humbled, and those that humble themselves will be exalted," then doesn't that mean that the pompous, self-serving

bigwigs will come crashing down from their pedestals, to be replaced by the longsuffering, downtrodden good-guys, namely **us**? The disciples had not yet understood the extent to which the Kingdom will upset the world's system. They were expecting only a revolution.

Revolutions have never solved anything. A successful revolution merely results in an exchange of status between oppressors and oppressed. The system that caused the oppression is altered little, if at all. There is much revenge, little justice. Jesus never called for a revolution. He called for the creation of something entirely new. The abuses of status oriented systems, whether defined by race, nationality, gender, or anything else, cannot be corrected simply by changing the cast of characters. The system itself must be radically altered. The only lasting solution is to eliminate status altogether. While status exists, people will compete, climb over each other, abuse, even kill each other, in order to achieve it. Where no status exists, there is no incentive for all that scrambling conflict, and energies can be directed more creatively. So the Kingdom is designed to do exactly that: to eliminate every vestige of status and hierarchy, so that all its citizens are set free to give their full energy to the service of the King.

Jesus also warned his followers against looking for the Kingdom in particular geographical locations. "The Kingdom of God is in your midst!" The Kingdom exists contemporary with and parallel to the kingdoms of the world. It does not so much seek confrontation with them, as it simply ignores them, operating as it does by entirely different principles. The wheat and the weeds grow together until the Lord's time. Confrontation happens, to be sure, just as Jesus said it would, as a result of cultural collisions that are caused by people's faithfulness to the King. But confrontation is not the primary function of Kingdom citizens. Their job is not to try to force the world to conform to their standards, but faithfully to demonstrate, to anyone who cares to look, the power, the wisdom, the intentions of God.

Clearly, the idea of a Kingdom without any status or hierarchy was as alien to those first disciples as it is to us. How can you have a Kingdom without any organization? How can it function without somebody in charge? Repeatedly, the question came up, "Who will be the greatest?" Consistently, Jesus did not appear to deem the question worthy of a direct answer. "As long as you're asking that question," his responses imply, "you've totally missed the point." Calling a little child, he instead initiated an object lesson. Notice, he did not say the child was the "greatest", but rather that without the attitude of a child, no one would enter the Kingdom at all. Frequently, a child derives his status from bragging about his father. And we all have one Father!

In the Kingdom, no one is deprived of status in favor of another: status itself must cease to exist. Yet, Jesus never assumed that everyone was alike or "equal." The Kingdom runs on a principle that transcends the democratic ideal of equality as drastically as it does the hierarchical concept of status. People are NOT "created equal." To pretend otherwise under the guise of "equal opportunity" is as foolish as it is cruel. Folks differ vastly in ability, and in intended function, and suffer severely if faced with expectations that they cannot meet. Jesus recognizes that there are differences, and tailors assignments to those differences. All are *valued* equally; they *function* with great diversity.

Notice Matthew's account of the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14 f). Each of the servants was given different responsibility, "to each according to his ability." There is no illusion, no need to pretend, that they or their abilities are identical. But notice also that the commendation received by each one who faithfully administered his charge, was identical: "Good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Come into the favor of your master!" (21,23). It is not ability that is rewarded, but faithfulness. And every person, regardless of his ability, has an equal chance at faithfulness.

By way of contrast, look at the stern condemnation of another servant, who, viewing his responsibility for others as a position of status, began to abuse them (Luke 12:45-46). He was assigned a function (supervising the work and seeing that everyone was fed and cared for), but he viewed it as status (lording it over his charges), and at his master's command, he was summarily removed from the Kingdom.

Even faithfulness, though it is required of citizens, and commended in several accounts, does not earn any status. Jesus' instructions are, "When you have done everything that was commanded for you, say, 'we are useless slaves, because we have (only) done what we ought to do'" (Luke 17:10).

In spite of all these case studies and examples, the disciples -- and we -- still manage to miss the point. Even on the last trip to Jerusalem, on the way to the Cross, the disciples who had followed the closest, who had heard the most, were still scrapping over who would be the greatest (Luke 22:24-27). Jesus recognized the problem: they were still thinking of a Kingdom organized on worldly principles. They could not imagine any other kind! Patiently, he explained again. "The kings of the nations are domineering over them, and those who flaunt their authority are called benefactors. But you all must not be so!" Matthew relates the same incident to the request of Mrs. Zebedee that her sons have the top positions in the Kingdom, and reports a similar reply: (20:25) "You all know that the rulers of the nations dominate them, and their great ones wield oppressive power over them, but it shall not be that way among

you all!" You don't understand yet, fellows: we are creating something totally apart from all that. "Whoever wants to become great among you all, shall be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you all, shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be waited-on, but to serve, and to give himself..." (26-28).

If anyone ever deserved a position of status, it was the Lord of the Universe, as he walked through his creation. But he had "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant." "It is enough for a disciple to be like his teacher, and a slave to be like his lord" (Matthew 10:25). This is a Kingdom that operates on strange and different principles. The King has declared and demonstrated himself to be a Servant, for only so could he redeem his lost creation. If the King is a Servant, what else can his subjects be? How can the subjects of a Servant King assume any positions of status among themselves?

Later, Jesus sharpened the point still further, after a discussion of the status seeking of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:1-12). "You all are not to be called Rabbi, for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And don't call anyone on earth Father, for your one Father is in heaven. And do not be called leaders, because your one Leader is the Christ." *There is no room for any kind of titles of honor in the kingdom! Honor belongs exclusively to the King!* Yet what a collection of titles those who claim to represent him have amassed! The adoption of any title other than "brother" or "sister" constitutes unwarranted presumption that is in *direct violation of the King's instructions!* How did that clear command come to be ignored so universally in his church? We are admonished later by Paul (Romans 13) to give the proper respect to worldly authorities: but among the brotherhood, among the Kingdom's citizens, what is called for is not such a hollow thing as respect. The citizens owe each other familial love!

For Kingdom citizens, brought together by their response to the King's invitation "Follow me", there is the brotherhood of a Society Without Status, in which the members are not equal, but something much better: they are one.

CHAPTER 7

DISCERNING THE BODY

Jesus had prayed that his followers be made one. He had provided the ultimate example, in his demonstration of perfect unity with the Father, in his perfect obedience to the Father's will. And, in some unexplained way, the giving of his life (Ephesians 2) opened the way for that unity to be realized among his people. This must be at least part of what Jesus meant when he said at the end of his earthly life, "I have finished the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). The purpose behind everything that God had been doing, remember, ever since the beginning, was to create a people, in his image, and a Kingdom for them to enjoy with him.

We have seen how the Gospel accounts describe Jesus' efforts on behalf of the establishment of that Kingdom: how he outlined and demonstrated the attitudes and way of life necessary for its realization. Even at the end of his tenure on earth, however, the people he was counting on to continue the work were very fuzzy in their understanding of what it was all about. They were still, although much more cooperative than they had been at first, very much a disparate group of individuals, at a loss to know the next steps to take, in the absence of their Lord. They needed a break. A few of them, probably to wear off the emotional overload, went off fishing. They had not yet become "a people."

The rest of the New Testament is, in large part, concerned with the continued creation of that people: the Kingdom of God. The early accounts in Acts describe the beginnings of that new creation, the new society. Clearly, something had happened, even before Pentecost. One would scarcely recognize the men who, only days earlier, had been pushing and shoving each other to assure for themselves positions of power and status, in the description of the group in the upper room. "All these were like-mindedly paying constant attention to prayer, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.... the crowd of people was about a hundred and twenty" (Acts 1:14-15). This was the context for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: a group unitedly waiting for the fulfillment of their Lord's promise. After convincing them that he really was alive after his death, Jesus had commissioned them to make him known throughout the world, but instructed them to stay put until they were given the power to do the job. And upon their receipt of that power, the whole thing began to snowball.

There is no record of any organized "evangelistic campaign." The demonstration of the power of the Spirit brought people running together by the thousands, asking, "What shall we do?" and three thousand were quickly added to the group. Acts 2:42-47 summarizes the agenda for these newly acquired brethren: "They were paying eager attention to the apostles' teaching, and to sharing, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers...many wonders and signs happened through the apostles... all those who were faithful were in unity, and had everything shared. They sold property and possessions, and divided them to all, as anyone had need. Daily, they gave eager attention, like-mindedly, in the Temple, breaking bread from house to house praising God..." It is in this context that "The Lord added to their number..." For some perverse reason, in recent years, his church has taken upon itself to try to "add to the number", which is clearly shown here to be the Lord's job, without giving any attention to preparing the conditions under which that growth originally happened. Then we wonder why it doesn't work! Oh, maybe sociologists can engineer the acquisition of many individuals, but a genuine Body is not formed by their methods. That requires the power of God.

These folks knew that they had become involved in a drastically different new life. Teaching, therefore, was crucial, in order that they learn how that life was intended to operate. Fellowship (see *κοινωνία* - *koinonia*, chapter 12) provided the opportunity for practical experience in the Kingdom living which they were being taught. Wonders and signs accompanied the message, as the Lord had said they would, but the greatest wonder of all was the transformation of those thousands of individuals into a cohesive brotherhood, where "The multitude of those who had become faithful was of one heart and one life; and none of them said that any of his possessions was his own, but for them, everything was shared. There was no one needy among them" (Acts 4:32-34). No hint of coercion taints this picture of brotherhood: it was not a condition of membership in the group. The sharing of their goods was compelled only by their being built together into the household of God, and the consequent love that was growing among them.

Several figures are employed by the New Testament writers to describe the unity that is intended for those who are thus called together. They are fellow-citizens with the saints, members of the household of God, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, all of which strongly emphasize their having been brought together by a power outside themselves. Peter and Paul both speak of a building, of which Christ is the cornerstone. The latter's elaboration, in Ephesians 2:21 ff, is striking: this is a

building with a life of its own! As we are "joined together," as we are all "built into it," it "grows" into a dwelling place for God! This is another instance where readers of most English versions receive a mistaken impression: the "you" that are being built into His dwelling place is plural, not singular. It refers not to an individual, but to the group in and among whom the Lord intends to dwell.

In close harmony with this concept, probably the most frequently used figure is that of the Body of Christ. Paul wrote to the Colossian church that "all the Body, supplied through its joints and ligaments, and knit together, grows with a growth that comes from God" (2:19). This situation may be viewed in three ways: and each is essential to the understanding of the others. One may focus on the diversity of the members of the Body and their intended functions; on the unity with each other into which the Lord Jesus has brought them; or on their identification with the Lord himself as the Head of the Body. None of these may be omitted without serious damage to the whole.

The contribution of every part is essential to the growth of a Body. By far the most extensive treatment of this theme appears in I Corinthians 12. "Just as the body is one, and has many parts, and all the parts of the body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ" (v.12). Our human bodies are intricately and carefully designed by their Creator. Each part has a necessary role to play, in order that the whole may function properly. "You all, then, are the Body of Christ, and individually, you are parts of it" (v.27). Individually, we are members. In fact, the choice to be joined to the Body of Christ should be the last individual act of a person's life. From then on, he is no longer a separate individual, but a part of a larger whole, a member of the Body. Alone, a hand, a foot, an eye, an ear, cannot survive long. Neither can it fulfill its proper function, without the contribution of the rest of the Body. An individual part can't even be in a proper relationship with the Head, if the necessary connecting parts are missing. A finger is of no use unless it is attached to a hand, which itself is useless without being connected to an arm, which is utterly dependent on a shoulder Were each individual part to be attached directly to the head, the result would not be a Body, but a monstrosity! No part could function properly! "Just Jesus and Me" simply doesn't work! Only together can God's people reach out to become an extension of the Lord Jesus' presence in the world. Yet, many folks continue to urge the various individual parts of the Body to get out and reproduce all on their own. They define this reproduction, depending on their theological perspective, as to evangelize the world, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to make peace among unbelievers who know only individualism, and have no idea what peace would look like if they saw it. It simply doesn't work! All of these are worthy objectives: very much in harmony with the purposes announced in the King's inaugural address (Luke 4). But only as the members are built together into a functioning unit, to become the unified Body of Christ, to demonstrate his ways, can such monumental tasks be accomplished.

Probably the most detailed instructions in this regard occur in Ephesians 4. Paul speaks of various functional persons having been given by God to the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. He maintains that all of these exist for a single purpose: "equipping the saints: for work of service, and for building the Body of Christ." They are neither officials empowered to rule over the rest, nor employees hired to do all the "work of the Church". They are members of the Body, entrusted with the responsibility to lead and facilitate the work of all the others. It is only when this happens that "the whole Body, harmonized and knit together, through the proper functioning of every available ligament, according to the measured working of each individual part, makes bodily growth for building itself up in love" (v.16).

Paul also illustrated the indispensability and mutual dependence of every part of the human body in I Corinthians 12, stressing that no part can claim greater value than another, nor divorce itself from its need for all the rest. He likewise reminds his readers that no part need feel inferior because of its function. Romans 12:4-5 carries the same idea: "Just as in one body, we have many parts, and all the parts don't have the same function, so we, though many, are one Body in Christ, and accordingly, parts of each other." In exactly the same way as our physical bodies are intended to function, we belong to each other, and must function together. The members of the Body are intended to support, build up, and serve each other. The leadership functions (see next chapter) are intended to help them learn to do that. The Body together, then, becomes the manifestation of the Lord's presence in the world.

This is the context in which the various discussions of spiritual gifts are found. The lists of gifts differ slightly, and none pretend to be exhaustive. Volumes have been written in attempts to categorize, domesticate, and rationalize them, elevating some and ignoring or disparaging others, depending on the bias of the writer. Hapless souls are urged to choose among items on a codified list, which is "their gift", as if it were a merit badge! Such exercises miss the point completely. The message is simply that in a healthy Body, whenever a need arises, the Lord has a member of the Body available and empowered to minister to that need. If the Lord assigns a job outside the Body, he likewise provides one or more members with the power to accomplish the task. These empowerments should not be viewed as diplomas or status symbols: they are simply the wherewithal to get a job done. They constitute a delivery system, bringing the power of

God to bear upon the human situation. None of the "gifts" suggest any outstanding merit on the part of the person entrusted to deliver them, any more than the postman is responsible for what you receive in the mail. The gift is from the Lord! The one who "receives" the gift is the person who needed some sort of service. The person who "exercised" the gift, through whom the need was supplied, is only the "postman", the vehicle for the delivery of God's gracious provision.

None of the things designated as "gifts" (χαρίσματα - charismata) have anything whatever to do with natural talents or learned abilities. This is not to say that one's abilities are not also God-given: they certainly are, and should always be devoted to his service: but that is not the subject under discussion here. Some folks who are uncomfortable with the thought of God's supernatural activity have tried to redefine the term to apply to any kind of expertise or skill, but there is no linguistic justification for such verbal gymnastics. No, "spiritual gifts" are neither more nor less than the supernatural provision of God for the needs of his people. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for everyone's benefit" (I Corinthians 12:7). We are each set in the Body for a particular purpose in the plan of God: for the good of all the other members. The Spirit hands out assignments as he pleases. We need only to be available.

Sadly, such usefulness is foreign to the experience of many, if not most of the Lord's people. As in our human bodies, parts that are immobilized and unused eventually become unusable. Weakness, disease, and even paralysis may result when a member gets no exercise in its intended work. There are many members in the Body of Christ in dire need of "skilled and strenuous "physical therapy", if they are ever to function as their Lord intends.

There were no bench-warming spectators in the New Testament church. "Church" was never intended to be a spectator sport, for which the vast majority are not participants, but are reduced to mere observers of a performance by a handful of professionals. In fact, everyone had so much to contribute that some regulation was necessary, so that their contributions could all be shared in an orderly manner. The latter part of I Corinthians 14 provides a scenario for how this is intended to work. When the assembly comes together, everyone is to bring "a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation"(v.26). Instructions are very specific, making provision for everyone's contribution to be heard. "For you can all prophesy, one at a time, in order that all may learn, and all may be encouraged" (v.31). Is there anyone among us who is already so mature, so complete, that he no longer needs to learn or to be encouraged? And who is wise enough to predict, from what brother or sister the needed lesson or encouragement might proceed? The emphasis is on the Body's need for the ministry of every brother and sister (see Chapter 13).

The figure of the Body, secondly, speaks of the unity of its members, as well as their diversity of function. It does not require the power of God to unite folks who are already pretty much alike. But when former enemies are so united, everyone knows there is more than human power at work. Most outstanding here is the discussion in Ephesians 2 and 4. "Recognize one body and one spirit, just as you all were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one (commitment to) faithfulness, one baptism, one God and Father of all ..." (vv.4-6). The unity cited here is not something that mere people can create or engineer. It is the result of the sovereign act of God. The task of citizens of the Kingdom is to "maintain" it (v.3), and maintenance, as every homeowner knows, means work! Lots of work! Constant work! Anticipation of possible problems, taking action to prevent them, and fixing things that break down. If we maintained our houses the way we work at "maintaining" the unity of the church..... would any of us have a roof over our heads?

The vivid description in Ephesians 2:1-10 of the work of Christ in redemption forms a background for the further elaboration of its results. Paul goes on to apply the cosmic theme of man's reconciliation to God to the very practical matter of relationships between Jew and Gentile. Here was no mild difference of opinion. Outside of Christ, these people were poles apart. Think of the starkest contrast you can imagine: middle eastern Jews and Arabs? Ku Klux Klansmen and black activists? Communists and right-wing fundamentalists? These are the ones who, if truly reconciled to God, Jesus has also reconciled to each other! We were called into one Body! All the dividing walls are broken down! We have all been made one! This transformation is not spoken of in the future tense. It is not a dream of a far-off "someday". The verb form is an aorist participle, which denotes decisive, completed action. The same form is employed in speaking of the enmity having been destroyed. The kingdoms of the world are intent upon destroying their enemies. For members of the Kingdom of God, Jesus has destroyed the enmity! His people have not always recognized the difference. But the work is done! It is nailed to the Cross. Any supposed understanding of the Cross that does not include the uniting of former enemies as loving members of the same Body, is incomplete and manifestly untrue. In fact, it is only "in one Body" that we are reconciled to God at all! Reconciliation is not a private affair. God's purpose is "that he might create in himself one new man in place of two" (v.15). Such a new creation is possible only "in the blood of Christ"(v.13): not by some magical transaction or convoluted formula relating to ancient ritual sacrifices, but by the Blood that

flows through the Body, bearing nourishment and life!

Both of these facets of the life of the Body, the essential contribution of every member and the uniting together of vastly diverse members in Christ, are equally necessary expressions, if, as he intends, the world is to see in that Body the expression of the power and purpose of God. Repeatedly, the church, the called-out-ones, are spoken of as the Body, under Christ, the Head. What an awesome privilege and responsibility! "He is the Head of the Body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, in order that he might become the highest-ranked among everyone (everything)!" (Colossians 1:18). "Holding onto the Head" (2:19) is the only recipe for bodily health. One, and one only, is supreme over all creation. The members of his Body are valued and essential. They are even characterized as "the completeness of the One who fills everything in every way" (Ephesians 1:23). They are identified in some mysterious way with all that Jesus is: but only as they function together under his supreme direction as Head. The authority that the Lord now exercises as Head of the Church is intended to be a preview of the dominion he will eventually enjoy over the entire creation (Ephesians 1:10, 22). It is devoutly to be hoped that the creation will do a better job of paying attention to his directives!

But do not lose sight of the way he defined his dominion! The King -- the Head -- the Lord of Creation -- has chosen for himself the stance of a Servant! And if the Head is a Servant, can his Body be anything else? Can the members of that Body usurp prestige that even the Head has deliberately rejected? The Body as a whole exists to manifest Jesus' presence in the world. How did Jesus summarize his activity in the world? In Chapter 6, we considered his statement of purpose in his inaugural address: good news to the poor, healing to those who need it, release to the captives and the oppressed. And at the end of his time here, he could pray, "I glorified you on earth by having finished the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). Is that what we as his Body are about?

For citizens of the Kingdom, this is not optional. It is not "an interesting thing to think about"! The concept of the Body is most crucial, though it has seldom been recognized as such. In I Corinthians 11:29-30 Paul diagnoses the source of weakness, sickness, and sleep (probably death) in the church as "not discerning the Lord's Body." Centuries of Christians have used that statement as a point of departure for long and endless controversies over the proper understanding and observance of the Communion service (see Chapter 12), and excused themselves from any practical response. But this statement was never intended to be theoretical or theological. It is intensely practical. Paul's serious admonition about discerning the Body immediately precedes and introduces a very extensive discussion of the Body and its function, and must be understood in that context.

Until our fellowships are living examples of the reconciliation of former enemies by the resurrection power of God ... until every brother and sister is being built up and enriched by the ministry entrusted to every other brother and sister ... until we allow ourselves to be joined together, built together, grow together, into one Body, enhanced by the contribution of all its diverse parts, representing to the watching world the unity of the Trinity ... until then, we have not learned rightly to "discern the Body."

The life of the Lord Jesus will not flow through a Body whose fragments are rushing off in different directions taking their cues from some outstanding leader other than the Head, oblivious of their need of or their responsibility for other members. His life will not flow through a Body, most of whose parts are atrophied from disuse. The Body will grow, mature, become what the Lord intends, and reproduce (in that order!) only when all its parts are working together, sharing with one another all that he has entrusted or revealed to each of them, "having the same care for one another," each joyfully fulfilling his own functions and just as joyfully appreciating the functions supplied by the other parts.

The only status belongs to the Head: but everyone is indispensable, if we learn rightly to discern the Body.

CHAPTER 8

LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH:

THE VEIL IS TAKEN AWAY!

One of the major differences between the Kingdom of God and other societies of every age and culture is the complete unity of its citizens and the total absence of status of any kind among them. There is only one King. All the rest of the citizens are his voluntary slaves, whose only goal or purpose is his pleasure. That relationship affects every aspect of their life together.

Is it necessary to assume, then, with all the emphasis on the contribution of every member of the Body, and the absolute leveling of status among the citizens of the Kingdom, that no leadership is required or welcome in the faithful Body of Christ? By no means! Leadership has not been eliminated: it has simply been redefined. True, there are no positions of power or prestige in a faithful expression of the Kingdom, but there are many needs for leadership, on the part of those who see their task as merely fulfilling one among many functions, and not as a position of status. Actually, more true leadership takes place when the role is viewed as a function rather than a status. One who occupies a position of status expends a tremendous amount of energy and effort simply to maintain himself in his position: to grease the wheels of the system from which his status is derived. The leader who is merely serving a function, on the other hand, is free to focus on getting the job done, even to the point of working himself out of his present job. His sense of value is not derived from the status of his position, but results simply from his awareness of having been chosen, with all the other citizens, as a participant in the Kingdom. This pattern was already clear as we looked at the functional behavior of the persons of the Trinity (Chapter 2). When people see functions in the church as giving one person status, power, or authority over others, they have simply failed to understand the extent to which the Kingdom of God rearranges the world's ways.

This orientation of the Kingdom, of course, is as diametrically opposed to the approach that prevailed in the cultures of the first century as it is to any other. The Jewish and pagan religious systems had a surprising amount of common ground. In both, the ordinary person was denied the privilege to approach his god directly. The office of a priest-intermediary was required. After all, one had to be frightfully careful: a mistake could have dire consequences. People were familiar with the Old Testament stories of death and disaster coming upon those who presumed to get too close. The pagan priests also had a tight rein on their constituencies. They ruled by dint of their superior, esoteric knowledge, by trickery shared only with their own initiates, and by fear. The gods had to be appeased to avoid disaster, and only the priests knew how to mollify them. This made their power over the people virtually absolute. The Jewish priesthood was hereditary, and though, in principle, it lacked the degradation of the heathen practises, there was ample reason for Isaiah's complaint: "The shepherds also have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, each to his own gain, one and all" (56:11); or Ezekiel's "The shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep!" (34:8). That's what happens when the priesthood becomes a hierarchy, a requisite link between God and man, empowered to dispense or withhold the favor of God. This is the reason why Jesus went to such great lengths to warn people against the pompous behavior of the scribes and Pharisees, and accosted those individuals directly with the charge, "You have taken away the keys of knowledge: you did not enter, yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering!" (Luke 11:52).

This was the setting in which occurred, at the moment of Jesus' death, an event that would both symbolize and effect the solution to the problem of exclusive, hierarchical leadership for all time. The veil of the temple was split in two! What's more, it was torn from the top to the bottom, clearly showing the rending to be an act of God! This was one of the Lord's most triumphant moments, recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels, yet it has received little notice in the church.

The purpose of the temple veil, in harmony with the old, hierarchical system, had been to separate ordinary mortals from the presence of God. It kept everyone but the high priest from approaching, or even seeing, the place where God's glory was said to dwell. Jesus' act, in bringing his people back to God by the giving of his own life, utterly destroyed the curtain that had served as a physical separation, as well as removing any further spiritual need for such division. His work, remember, by his own testimony, was to make us one: with himself, with the Father, and with each other. The letter to the Hebrews repeatedly exults in the way that Christ has opened for us, "through the veil", making it possible that we now enter his very presence with confident joy!

There is only one other New Testament reference to a "veil", in II Corinthians 3:13-16. Here, Paul, using a different word, is speaking of the veil that Moses used to conceal the fading glory of his face

from the Israelites. The Exodus account (34:32-35) gives the explanation that the people were frightened at the sight of the radiance of Moses' face, after his interviews with the Lord. (Evidence, perhaps, that Moses did write the account?) Paul makes it look more like Moses didn't want them to see the glory fade. In either case, the function of this veil, too, was to separate: this time, to separate God's designated spokesman from "ordinary" people: the classic "clergy - laity" division. The thought of separation continues as Paul mentions that the veil remains on the hearts of those who choose not to move on beyond Moses to the Lord of whom he prophesied. But, "whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away!" (v.16)

THE VEIL IS TAKEN AWAY! That has to be one of the most gloriously triumphant statements in all of Scripture! Both the separation between God and man (the veil of the temple), and that between "layman" and leadership (Moses' veil), are intended to be forever done away in Christ! ***Any manifestation of either, on the part of the church, constitutes a denial of the finished work of Christ!***

There are several significant implications here. The Exodus account makes no claim that Moses' veil was God's idea. It was adopted at Moses' own initiative. The removal of the veil signifies that, whether it was used because of the people's fear of the glory of God on Moses' face, or Moses' own reluctance to let them see him becoming an ordinary man again, all need for it is abolished in Christ. Jesus desires that his people *behold* his glory (John 17:24)! Through the Holy Spirit, he has chosen to speak to and through ALL of his people. We now have no reason to be either fearful of glory or ashamed of human weakness: our Lord has made ample provision for both. Since he is the only one with any status, none of the rest of us has any position of status to defend, or to be fearful of losing.

In practical terms, the new arrangement requires of a spokesman for God, three things, outlined in the following section (II Corinthians 3:17 through 4:5), all of which were quite unheard-of before: accessibility, accountability, and availability. Verses 17 and 18 go on to explore the results of the removal of the veil. The Spirit of the Lord has brought freedom! "And we all, with faces that have been uncovered, reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into his image..." It is no longer the privately reserved privilege of a few to look upon the glory of God! As we all, together, marvel at his glory, our consequent transformation is part of our all being recreated together in the image of God. And if our Lord and God has gone to such lengths to make himself accessible to us, a person who claims to represent him dare not do otherwise. Nothing is to be said or done in veiled secrecy any longer. The citizens of the Kingdom are children of light, not darkness: and light hides nothing.

Accountability is called for in 4:2: "We renounce the hidden, shameful things. We are not living in deception, nor distorting the Word of God, but by a plain revelation of the truth, establishing ourselves before everyone's conscience, in God's presence." The word of God is the only reliable basis for accountability. It provides the standard to which the behavior of both leaders and other citizens must be compared. The New Testament is replete with examples of people who, entrusted with roles of leadership, went to great pains to be certain that everything was done with the utmost integrity. From every congregation that contributed to the relief offering for Judea, Paul took along a representative, to certify the safe delivery of the gift (see II Corinthians 8 and 9). When Peter was sent on his somewhat questionable mission to the house of Cornelius, he was careful to take along six other brethren from Joppa as witnesses and participants, even though he went in direct response to a vision from the Lord (Acts 10). After each missionary journey, Paul and his co-workers reported back to the church at Antioch, from which they had been sent out. Free-lancing was not and is not the mark of faithful leadership! NO ONE has a direct line to God independent of the counsel of faithful brethren.

Finally, availability will characterize any leadership patterned after the Servant-King. In II Corinthians 4:5, Paul affirms, "We are not preaching ourselves, but the Lord Jesus Christ, and ourselves as your slaves, because of Jesus!" Jesus is the only worthy model, and he consistently defined leadership as selfless service. Accounts of the early church abound with instances of people's extreme care to be faithful in this regard. Very early, Peter and John had a golden opportunity (Acts 3) for the status-trip they had coveted earlier. You remember how, even on the way to the Cross, they were jockeying for positions of status in the Kingdom. But now, after Pentecost, they passed it up, as will anyone who has truly been affected by Pentecost. When the worshippers rushed together in wonder at the healing of the lame man by the Temple gate, the apostles responded instinctively -- with transformed instinct -- "Why are you staring at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made this man walk?" (v.12), and clearly declared the resurrection power of Jesus to be responsible. Paul and Barnabas had a similar experience at Lystra, where they had all they could do to avoid being worshipped as gods! (Acts 14:8-18). They, too, had to insist repeatedly, "We are only humans, like yourselves!" All these brethren took the greatest care to be available for whatever service the Lord directed, but also to refer all credit to him alone.

The concept of leadership without status was as foreign to the first century as it is today. The first

three chapters of Paul's letter to Corinth are concerned with an attempt to make the point that the church is not intended to rally around human leadership, but to see each one as simply another link in the work the Lord wants done. "I planted," Paul reminded them, "Apollos watered, but God made the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters amounts to anything, but only God, the grower. The one who plants and the one who waters are one ..." (I Corinthians 3:6-8).

There will -- there must -- be leadership in the Kingdom. But faithful leaders will take care that there be no veil, no activity that is not completely open before all, for in Christ, the veil is taken away! Total openness, total honesty, the complete absence of any shred of secrecy or manipulation, or any attribution of status to any individual, is the order of the new Kingdom life.

Another safeguard which helped prevent the abuse of authority is the consistent pattern throughout the New Testament that every assignment, every "office" in the church, is spoken of in the plural. In every city where a group of believers emerged, the apostles who had brought the message appointed local elders (plural) to supervise the new brotherhood. Ephesians 4:11 lists apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers (all plural) as those who are to facilitate the ministries of all the saints. And even a cursory study of that term reveals that "saints" consistently refers, not to individuals of unusual powers or superior "holiness," but to all the people of God. There is no hint of expectation that all the jobs in any congregation, any local manifestation of the Kingdom, will be filled by one or two individuals hired to "run" the church! In a faithful "colony of the Kingdom," nobody is overworked! If in any congregation or denomination someone is overloaded with responsibility, someone else (probably quite a few "someone elses") are being cheated out of the privilege to be active in the King's service. The primary job of any person in a leadership assignment should be to see that the Body benefits from the contribution of every brother and sister. This is elaborated even more vividly in I Corinthians 11 (see Chapter 13).

Jesus himself had sharply defined the function of leadership and strictly forbidden any honorary titles or deferential treatment of anyone filling such a role (see the end of Chapter 6). The lesson was apparently learned very well: so well, in fact, that people from this distance find great difficulty to sort out from the record, just who had what responsibilities in the New Testament church. This is probably because when anything needed to be done, somebody simply did it; obedient to their Lord, they did not use highly defined titles, flow-charts, and job descriptions. The "jobs" that are mentioned are viewed in terms of a particular function at a particular time, to meet a specific, perceived need. No one seemed to be the least bit confined. Steven, for example, chosen for the deacon work of providing for the widows, became a powerful preacher. Paul's letters name other "apostles", including both male and female names, of whom Acts bears no record. Philip, also starting out as a deacon, was later known as an evangelist. The concern, clearly, was getting the work done, not handing out certificates of merit or protecting anyone's "turf"!

Contrasting views of leadership did cause considerable conflict. For example, there was a severe clash in the encounter of Simon the Magician with the apostles, in the new church in Samaria (Acts 8). Before Philip's arrival, Simon had been enjoying the status accorded him by his magical powers. When he met Philip, who had come in the power of God, Simon had no trouble recognizing a superior. His behavior indicates that he assumed the way to further increase his own status was to identify with that greater power. Probably he had acquired his present position in a similar way. Philip was preaching "the good news of the Kingdom", where all are of equal usefulness and value, but Simon apparently missed that part of the message. He saw only the miraculous manifestations of power. He determined to get in on the goodies. Peter, with the discernment of the Holy Spirit, went right to the core of the problem. "You are no citizen of this Kingdom," he declared in effect, "for your heart is not right toward God. We are not representing status that can be bought and sold, but the gracious gift of God!" Thus the insight provided by the Holy Spirit cut short the ambitions of at least one "entrepreneur" toying with the Kingdom for his own profit. Then, in a startling expression of trust in the power of God, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, and Philip was sent on to Gaza, leaving a brand-new fellowship without any outside supervision! They had, however, just experienced a dramatic lesson in leadership: there was no doubt about who was to be the "boss"!

Jesus had stated it very plainly. "You have one Teacher, and you are all brothers" (Matthew 23:8). Different people may be entrusted with leading or supervising different aspects of life in the Kingdom, but **no one individual is in charge!** In fact, the only New Testament reference that implies a single individual exercising authority over a local group of believers, III John 9-10, is made in strict criticism, not approval. Diotrephes is chastised for not receiving "us" (presumably John and some associates), for speaking against the elder apostles, for loving to be first, for refusing to welcome other brethren, and excluding those who do: in short, for insisting upon "running the show", building his own little dynasty. No one has that right, in the Kingdom.

There is also only one instance of congregational leadership being recruited from outside the local

group: when Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch, to help him get started, perhaps to serve in a kind of apprenticeship. Even so, the leadership there was multiple, and these two were soon sent on by the church at the Holy Spirit's direction. The more usual pattern was for the apostles to appoint local elders in every group.

No leader must ever be beyond challenge. Paul reported to the Galatian church (2:11-14) about his encounter with Peter, when the latter needed correction for his behavior among the Gentiles. On several other occasions, he contested the claims of those who sought to establish status for themselves on the grounds of their "pedigrees". The most lengthy of these discussions consumes much of the tenth and eleventh chapters of II Corinthians. Paul's own evaluation of the "pedigree game" is eloquently expressed in Philippians 3, where he labels it mere garbage (or manure)! All that matters now is "to be found in him (Jesus)", to be in the process of becoming what the Lord intends.

How, then, were assignments made? In many different ways. Saul, used to giving orders, was introduced to his new role by Ananias, an obscure disciple in Damascus, who is never mentioned again. Ananias' obedience to the Lord, however, was a link in the chain that gifted the church with the ministry of Paul. Later, Barnabas took him in hand and encouraged the other apostles to accept the authenticity of his conversion. How much poorer we all would be, had these two brethren not functioned in faithfulness!

Matthias (Acts 1) was chosen by lot, at the initiative of the first eleven disciples, after the congregation had suggested two nominees.

The deacons (Acts 6) were selected by the entire congregation, to minister to an unmet need among them. The twelve, who obviously exercised some measure of authority, did not act threatened or defensive when the oversight was called to their attention. Neither did they call a private "ministers meeting". They threw the issue back to those who had perceived the problem, and said, in effect, "You're right. The situation needs to be remedied. Find some qualified people to do the job."

Prophets (plural) and teachers (also plural) in the Antioch church were enjoying a prayer meeting when the Holy Spirit spoke, commanding that Barnabas and Saul be commissioned for a special assignment (Acts 13).

At Lystra, Paul met a promising young man, and personally invited Timothy to join the work (Acts 16).

The method of selection does not seem to have mattered. In no instance was a permanent, or even a temporary title conferred upon anyone. Jesus had forbidden that! Each was simply called to perform a necessary function.

In view of the importance of function, a look at the system in action may be helpful. A good example is the account in Acts 15. The Gentile brethren were being hassled by some self-appointed "defenders of the faith". The troublemakers had not come with the endorsement of the brotherhood, but on their own initiative. Discussions became quite heated. Consequently, the church commissioned Paul, Barnabas, and some others who are not listed, to take the matter to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, who apparently were serving in a supervisory capacity. Their choice is described by the same word sometimes translated "ordain." Sent by the church, they set out, reporting as they went the works of God in calling many Gentiles to himself.

In Jerusalem, they met with "the church, and the apostles, and the elders." As they repeated their report, some folks objected: likely either the ones who had precipitated the problem or some of their cohorts. At this point (perhaps there was too much commotion to make any sense out of the situation), the apostles and elders gathered to study the matter. Before a judgment was made, however, "ALL the assembly" (literally, all the multitude) listened to the testimony.

In an eloquent demonstration of New Testament leadership, James summarized the argument, related it to Biblical precedent, and recommended a solution. "Then it seemed right to the apostles and elders and the whole church (emphasis mine), having chosen men from among them, to send them to Antioch ..." (Acts 15:22). Their letter speaks of "having come to one mind", and confidently reports, "it seemed right to the Holy Spirit and to us ..." Here is New Testament leadership at its best: hearing all sides, bringing them face to face, and helping them to a consensus that results in great rejoicing among the brethren. No closed-door meeting of a hierarchical in-group, but open sharing of perceived light among the citizens of the Kingdom, produces joyful growth in the Body.

Clearly, there will be leadership. That is to be neither lamented nor celebrated, neither sought nor avoided, but carefully controlled, and conformed, not to the pattern of the world, with its executives, flow-charts and committees, but to the model of the Servant-King. In the Kingdom, the Society Without Status, all the citizens function together, in obedience to one Leader, each filling the role assigned to him at the moment, in the power of God, in faithfulness and joy.

CHAPTER 9

SYMBOL OR SACRAMENT?

Symbols play significant roles in any cultural setting. They are visible or verbal expressions of the values of a society. Furthermore, a symbol can be an extremely valuable teaching tool. If teaching is neglected, of course, a symbol can lose its significance and either disappear or be misinterpreted, thereby becoming a detriment, rather than an asset, to the original intent.

This problem has led some groups to reject symbolic teaching altogether, or at least to think that's what they are doing. Usually, such groups or individuals have only traded one set of symbols for another: because, consciously or unconsciously, people will symbolize the attitudes and actions that they consider important, in order to reinforce their chosen values.

Words and behavior may both have symbolic functions, but for the purpose of this discussion, we will confine the designation "symbol" to a tangible object, something that can be seen and handled, that is designated by a group to serve a special function apart from what might be considered normal or obvious. The choice of a symbol is completely arbitrary. No obvious connection with the principle symbolized is necessary. In fact, for a symbol to function properly, its meaning should not be immediately apparent. It should provoke questions; it should require explanation, and thus provide an opportunity for teaching.

For example, consider an instance long before the New Testament era. There is nothing obviously significant about a small pile of stones on a riverbank (Joshua 4:1-7). One elder from each tribe of Israel was instructed to carry one stone out of the bed of the Jordan River as the people miraculously passed through on dry ground. Twelve stones that were small enough for a man to carry would not make a very big pile. We are not talking about some massive monument. But when the children, who had probably played and climbed on that stonepile dozens of times, as children will, finally asked, "What are these stones doing here, anyway?", they were to be told the story of God's miraculous deliverance of his people. Having asked a question, they were ready to listen to an answer, and essential understandings of the very existence of the people of Israel could then be communicated. Notice that the symbol was only a pile of ordinary stones. In obedience to God's command (Exodus 20:4-6), there was no representation of any kind, no image involved, lest that image supplant God as an object of worship. No unusual power was attributed to the stonepile: there were no mystical, magical connotations. It served only as a reminder, an impetus for teaching. This is the ideal function of a symbol in the life of God's Kingdom citizens.

When the meaning of a symbol is forgotten or rejected, of course, it no longer carries the intended freight. It either becomes meaningless and disappears, or, worse, becomes invested with meaning that was never intended. In the Old Testament times, some of the stone piles were knocked down and forgotten, and their educational (symbolic) value was lost. During times of reformation, some of these memorials were rebuilt: a return to God's ways consistently reawakens a realization of the need for teaching. Other symbolic stone-piles were turned into altars, and designated "holy places", a turn of events that denied the affirmation that all people and places belong to God, and reduced the life which he had designed for his people to the lesser status of merely "a religion."

"Religion", as understood by many anthropological students of cultures, is an attempt on the part of a people to understand, appease, and control forces and events that threaten to overwhelm their fragile existence, to explain the inexplicable, and to bring some order into the perceived chaos that surrounds them. By this definition, true Kingdom citizenship, true Christianity, if understood as outlined in both the Old and New Testaments, is not strictly a "religion" at all. Faithful Kingdom citizens do not seek to manipulate a deity for their own convenience, but rather offer themselves to be used for the purposes of their King. They are learning to substitute trust and obedience for explanations of things and situations that are beyond their understanding. Their worship consists of acknowledging and applauding their King, and reporting for duty in his service, rather than attempting to placate malevolent powers. In fact, perhaps one of the greatest dangers threatening genuine Kingdom citizenship is that of reducing it to the level of "a religion".

One of the outstanding ways in which the understanding of God represented by the Hebrew culture differed from the religions surrounding them, was the firm conviction that God was the initiator of the relationship. It was he who was directing and molding his people; they were not to attempt to manipulate him. The loss of this distinction created disaster every time it happened. In the Kingdom, the King is in control of all of life, and does not cede that authority to any individual, as we have just seen in Chapter 8.

It is the pattern of "religions" to codify elaborate theologies and/or pantheons, and to designate and elevate to high status certain individuals who specialize in keeping the system and its adherents in proper

order. Elaborate rituals are designed for that purpose, including highly symbolic ceremonial actions and incantations, and venerated objects or places. To the outsider, the performance of these activities appears to be an expression of superstition, sorcery, or witchcraft. To the insider, it is the solemn observance of sacrament, based on the assumption, shared, unfortunately, by many Christians, that the proper ritual, properly performed by a properly qualified individual, will have desired, predictable results in making the observers/participants the recipients of some sort of benefit from their gods.

Such an orientation reinforces the status of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, by ascribing to its members the power to dispense or withhold the favor of God. That sort of a system bears no resemblance whatever to the principles outlined by the Lord Jesus to his disciples concerning leadership in the Kingdom. The grace of God is indeed mediated to people through people, but it is through the gathered group of believers that God's power and glory are revealed (Ephesians 1:20).

When the symbolic stone-pile became an altar, approachable only by a designated priesthood, and both assumed mystical, magical properties, the people of God made another step farther away from the close fellowship he had intended to share with them. Not until the Veil was torn apart centuries later was the possibility of that closeness renewed.

As the New Creation of Kingdom Citizens began to take shape, new symbols spoke of its guiding principles. Folks entered Kingdom citizenship by re-enacting the King's burial and resurrection in water baptism -- they expressed their devotion to each other by following his instructions and washing one another's feet -- they shared bread and wine as a testimony to their unity with him and with each other -- women covered their heads as a reminder of the mutual responsibility of all the citizens for each other. There were also other symbols comprised of actions that had no specific material representation: people were commissioned for specific tasks by the laying-on of the hands of the brotherhood -- they shared their resources as they shared their lives.

None of these observances was assumed to have any magical power if followed, or dire penalty if neglected: they were simply joyful celebrations, expressions of belonging to the Kingdom. We find recorded no carefully constructed formulas, no instructions for any "holy" mediator or "sacred" location. All God's people were now holy mediators for one another, and all the world was seen as their Lord's rightful domain.

When the symbols of the Kingdom become viewed as sacraments, however, no longer simple vehicles for teaching but rituals assumed to have an inherent power of their own, God's people stand again in peril of violating that early command against the worship of created things. Constant vigilance and careful teaching are necessary, lest the distortions of sacramentalism and hierarchy befall the symbols of the Kingdom, and Kingdom citizenship cease to be a Life, and become merely one "religion" among many. All too easily, brotherhood is displaced by a hierarchy, whose members assume themselves to be empowered, like their pagan counterparts, to control access to the power of God. All too easily, mutual celebration gives way to formal ceremony, with strictly prescribed procedures and qualifications, without which people are deemed unacceptable to their God. It is a great tragedy when symbols that were intended to express the joyful union of citizens with their King and with each other become tools of oppression to subject "ordinary" people to a hierarchical structure. It is an enormous loss, not only to the individuals so deprived, but also to the very integrity of the Kingdom. Kingdom citizens must exercise the greatest diligence to employ all its symbols as they are intended to be used, and to teach the significance of each with the utmost care.

Among its symbols, every society has some that are designated, implicitly or overtly, as "status symbols". An expensive car or house among many North Americans, an abundance of cattle among some East Africans, a collection of scalps or heads of enemies among some less sophisticated societies, all express that the owner has attained a status a cut above the common folk: that he is among the "Joneses" that everyone else is trying to "keep up with." The Kingdom also has its status symbols, but as usual, with a difference. The status symbols of the Kingdom of God represent, not the attainment of status, but a total, deliberate rejection of it. They symbolize the radical beginning of a new life, a servant-orientation modeled after the King's example, the leveled-out unity of all the citizens, the absolute indispensability of every member of the community.

Of the symbols called for in the New Testament, at least four are tangible, observable things that were intended to be invested with symbolic significance, to provoke questions that would enable the citizens to remind one another and to teach others of the Kingdom values that are so drastically different from those of any other society on earth. All these symbols have at some time been observed, at least in parts of the church, in varying degrees, but probably seldom with full recognition of all the content they were supposed to convey. In fact, each of these Scripturally mandated symbols illustrates a different way in which very essential teaching has been lost, because of its symbol being incorrectly understood.

The Water of Baptism is symbolic of one's deliberate choice of a new life/birth, of burial with Christ and resurrection to a new life in his Kingdom. Most Christian groups use water in some form of initiation rite: I will leave it for you to decide how closely yours conforms to the New Testament understanding.

The Basin and Towel, used in the washing of one another's feet, never did really "catch on" in most Christian groups. One could speculate whether this is because it was not understood, and therefore thought peripheral, or whether it was understood too well, and people rejected the type of relationships it was trying to establish. In either case, neither the practise nor the teaching has ever been really common.

The Bread and Cup, otherwise known as Communion, the Lord's Supper, or the Eucharist, on the other hand, is almost universally observed in some form, but very seldom with all the implications called for in the New Testament, and often with implications quite foreign to the initial intent.

The woman's covering of her head, once widely observed at least as a custom, has never been accompanied by its Biblical meaning, as far as I have been able to determine, and consequently has suffered neglect.

In each case, the loss is not only of an external, observable symbol, but of a critical aspect of the understanding of Kingdom citizenship. Perhaps if the citizens of the Kingdom can be encouraged to take a fresh look at its symbols, and the teaching that was supposed to accompany their observance, the Society Without Status may yet be realized among us.

CHAPTER 10

THE WATER OF BAPTISM: SYMBOL OF NEW LIFE

Baptism is the first symbol of the Kingdom in which a new citizen participates. It is the expression of his commitment to the life of the Kingdom, and his obedience to its King. It pictures one's death and burial with respect to all that has gone before, and his intention to "walk in newness of life": in the resurrected life of Christ. In the New Testament, it was universally experienced as a result of a person's deliberate act of commitment. As we have seen, ideally this should be the last individual decision he ever makes entirely on his own. From now on, he is an integral part of the Body of Christ.

It is no accident or odd coincidence that water should be chosen as the symbol of new life. Even throughout the Old Testament, water was used to symbolize life, and the intervention of God in human affairs. The desert culture of the Hebrew people lent itself well to an understanding of this figure. In a desert environment, where there is water, life flourishes. Where there is none, all is barren and lifeless. The prophets spoke frequently of the action of God as a spring or stream of water in the desert, refreshing and reviving. Water is also connected with physical birth, and therefore a logical accompaniment of rebirth into the Kingdom.

Because of the use of water in various rites of washing and bathing in surrounding cultures, both Jewish and pagan, some people have considered Christian baptism to be an outgrowth of one or more of these. It is true that the element of cleansing does appear in New Testament references, in the ministry of John the Baptist much more than in later instances; but a resurrected life is the far more prevalent theme among Kingdom citizens. In the Old Testament that was in use in the first century, the Greek Septuagint, the word βαπτίζω - baptizo, from which our "baptize" is derived, occurs only twice: in the account of Naaman the Syrian plunging into the Jordan River at Elisha's direction to be cleansed of his leprosy, and in Isaiah's prophecy where he speaks (21:4) of being "overwhelmed" at the horror of the coming destruction. The noun form, βαπτισμα - baptisma, does not occur at all. Therefore, it seems like stretching things considerably to relate the practise to some Jewish ritual already established. Here, as so frequently elsewhere, the Lord is clearly doing "a new thing" in his effort to teach important truth to his people.

What, then, is the message that he is trying to communicate, and what is the vehicle he has chosen? Let's try to cut through the centuries' accumulated clutter of disputes over things like the quantity and location of water required, the specific methods of application, and the timing of the event, and at least make an effort to see what was communicated to the first folks to whom the idea was introduced.

Where there is little prior Biblical usage of a term on which to base our understanding, it is necessary to look to extra-Biblical writings for help. One does not look elsewhere for theological understanding, please remember: only to observe what a word may have meant to the folks who used it, since usage is the key to linguistic understanding. The Oxford Greek Dictionary, a fascinating compilation of classical and later uses of words in Greek literature, lists quite a variety for βαπτίζω. The examples include:

- drowning
- the sinking of a ship
- being completely overcome, as by debt, wine, or sleep
- the dyeing of cloth
- the gilding or silverplating of metal
- swimming.

While some of these might make interesting object lessons, they do not necessarily constitute any definitive instructions. Although in the sixteenth century, opponents of the Swiss Brethren who re-discovered believers' baptism, retaliated by drowning some of them, it was surely not at the Lord's direction! Instructions must be drawn from the Scripture itself.

All the Gospels bear testimony that Jesus' ministry was preceded by that of John who was called "the Baptizer." He introduced himself as the one sent to prepare the way, as we saw in Chapter 5. This charge had been entrusted to him (Luke 1:17) in the angel's prophecy to Zachariah, his father, before John was conceived, and confirmed by the joyful father at his birth. But what would it take, to "get a prepared people ready for the Lord"?

John confronted everyone, high and lowly, religious or otherwise, with the same message: "μετανοεῖτε- metanoete ", most commonly rendered "Repent!" Unfortunately, generations have emasculated that clarion call to either a meek, insipid assent to a vague sort of "original sinfulness" that needs to be removed by prescribed incantations, or an acknowledgment of having committed some particular "no-no" for which their hapless target has supposedly incurred the fearsome wrath of God. John

was neither instituting nor revising a list of no-no's. That was the pastime of the priests and rulers, the Pharisees and Sadducees: John had little use for them! He was calling folks to prepare to participate in the Kingdom of God! Being "sorry" for having done wrong (or sorry one got caught) is a far cry from the all-encompassing, drastic reorientation of life called for in the thundering command, "μετανοεῖτε!"

Literally, the word denotes a change of mind, of focus, of direction: a course correction of the most drastic sort. One would not do linguistic violence to say, "Re-focus your entire life!" All that matters now is faithfulness to the Kingdom. The interviews described in Luke 3:10-14 make it obvious that folks understood life-changes to be involved. "What shall we **do**?" is their uniform response.

People came from everywhere in the area to John, and were baptized by him in the Jordan River, acknowledging that they had fallen short of God's intentions (the more literal rendering of "confessing their sins"). Submitting to John's baptism was a step toward getting their lives lined up with the Kingdom. Luke 7:29-30 is interesting in this regard: "even the tax collectors acknowledged God's justice, receiving the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and scribes rejected the plan of God for themselves, not being baptized by him."

Jesus also came to John for baptism. He had no shortcomings or failures to acknowledge: but at the beginning of his public ministry, there was certainly a radical change in the life that had heretofore been occupied with the mundane concerns of daily existence, and was now to be wholly devoted to the introduction of the Kingdom. It was a fresh start, a new beginning. This idea grew more and more predominant as time went on.

Jesus and his disciples seem to have gotten in on the action without delay. John notes that it was the disciples (4:1-2) who were doing the baptizing, and not Jesus himself. Why might this have been? We can only conjecture, of course, but it fits well with what we have already seen of Jesus' methods of operation. Having deliberately rejected his deserved position of status, he had no hang-ups about delegating authority. He had no "face" to save. Jesus opposed the pretensions of status-seeking constantly, and this was no exception. Can you imagine the havoc that could have been caused, had some folks in the brotherhood later been able to brag that they had been baptized by the Lord himself? Paul had enough trouble with that sort of thing in Corinth (I Corinthians 1). Just before he left the earth, Jesus would entrust his followers with the responsibility to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach. Here was their chance for a supervised apprenticeship.

Jesus, by John's testimony, was the one sent to baptize, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit.. That was to come later. At Pentecost, the whole picture changed. It is only after the arrival of the Holy Spirit that water baptism becomes linked to that event, although it was included in John's prophecy; but from then on, the two baptisms are spoken of together almost constantly. At the close of Peter's sermon, his instructions were (Acts 2:38): "Change your ways, and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the taking away of your shortcomings/failures, and you all will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." This represented a significant shift.

When Paul came upon the group at Ephesus that had been baptized by Apollos before the latter knew anything but John's baptism, he felt it necessary to correct the teaching they had received. Those brethren immediately submitted to baptism (re-baptism?) in the name of Jesus, and received the Spirit as a result. When Philip, preaching in Samaria, baptized some new believers, other apostles' prayers some time later ministered the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. And when Peter's visit to Cornelius bore fruit, it was the obvious coming of the Spirit that he and his brethren accepted as evidence that God thought it was OK to baptize Gentiles. The order in which it happened does not seem to have mattered that much: but the two events, baptism in water and the receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit, are definitely expected to be related.

Most of these folks appear to have received baptism almost immediately upon accepting the message of the Kingdom. It was a confirmation of their commitment. They "received the Word," "listened to the message," or some similar expression, and then were baptized. The variety of places and situations leads one to guess that the procedure was not always uniform. The historical uses of the word already listed, certainly imply a person's being submerged in the water, as does the frequent reference to burial, which makes it reasonable to assume that this was probably the usual procedure. That was also most likely the reason for using a river (the Jordan: John even comments on the choice of Aenon "because there was plenty of water there" 3:22-26), or stopping by water along the road (in the case of Philip and the Ethiopian.) In the days before indoor plumbing, however, it is probable that there was no such opportunity at the jailer's house in the middle of the night, in Philippi, or the house on Straight Street in Damascus where Paul was healed. This could pose serious problems for folks committed to sacramentalism, in which, remember, "the proper ritual, properly performed by a properly qualified individual" is required. Deviation from an accepted norm could invalidate a "sacrament". But for a symbol of commitment to the Kingdom,

the *content* of the relationship symbolized, and one's understanding of that content, is more critical than any detail of ceremony. I rather suspect they used as much or as little water as they had available!

Who, then, was baptized? The instructions in Mark 16 are clear: those who decided to become faithful.

Acts 2:41 those who received the Word

Acts 8:12 men and women who believed Philip's preaching

Acts 8:36 the Ethiopian who came to faith

Acts 9:18 Saul, after his healing

Acts 10:47-48 Cornelius' household: "all who were listening" and had received the Spirit

Acts 16:15 Lydia and her household

Acts 16:33 the jailer in Philippi and his household

Acts 18:8 many in Corinth who listened to Paul

There is no instance where anyone made that decision for anyone else. It is important to note that in each of the three cases where a "household" was baptized, they had already been listening to the Word.

"Household" in the first century referred not only to one's immediate nuclear family, but to whatever servants, extended family, or guests happened to reside together at the time. All seem to have been included in the audience to which Peter spoke in the "household" of Cornelius, who had gathered a considerable company.

Who did the baptizing? Well, who was instructed to? Doesn't it seem a bit strange that while most, if not all, of the Lord's people accept the so-called "Great Commission" as being addressed to themselves, in terms of the responsibility to evangelize, as if that were the only task the Lord had assigned, very few if any include the duty to continue to "teach everything that Jesus commanded" to those who receive the message, and even fewer would consider it in their province to baptize a person who came to faith? Yet the Lord did not say, "Go corral people and drag them to church for your preacher to baptize and teach"! At least, that is not a very literal reading of Matthew 28:20. Is this not another place where the church has succumbed to unwarranted sacramentalism, insisting that a "qualified" person (whatever that is) is needed? We have few records of who did the baptizing in the New Testament church. Paul says he didn't do it, in Corinth, but he doesn't say who did. Philip and Peter are mentioned; Ananias probably baptized Paul: he was the only one there. Most of the time, we just don't know. It must not have mattered. The validity of a symbol depends, not on the meticulously correct performance of a ceremony, not on the expertise or holiness or other qualification of a person officiating, but on the reality of the relationship it represents, and the careful communication of its meaning.

We need, then, to examine the principles that are to be taught by the symbol of baptism. Three are outstanding.

In Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, he referred to the necessity of a person's being "born of water and the Spirit" in order to participate in the life of the Kingdom. There is no general agreement as to whether this comment is a specific reference to baptism: the word does not appear. Both this expression and John's later reference to Jesus' having come "by water and blood", since they are not specifically explained in their context, have been subject to quite a variety of creative explanations by folks who are unable to live with unanswered questions. I feel no need to add to the confusion. However, because of the association of water with physical birth, it seems at least safe to assume that, whatever else may be included, the beginning of a new life is certainly in view. When a baby emerges from the watery environment in which it has been nurtured for nine months, a very different phase of its life has begun. When a new Kingdom citizen emerges from the water of baptism, he begins a new life as well.

Much more common throughout Scripture, is the figure of death, burial, and resurrection. Paul's letters are full of admonitions to "put to death" those aspects of life that derive from our earthly, human nature, and "put on" the characteristics of the new life in Christ. Romans 6:3-4 contains one of the most graphic statements: "Those of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. Therefore, we were buried together with him, through baptism, into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life." Paul goes on to detail the identification with Christ's death and resurrection that is the Kingdom citizens' hope and confident expectation. Baptism thus becomes a powerful tool for teaching the definitive end of one's former life, and the beginning of something entirely new.

Finally, in Peter's first epistle, he makes a strong statement of the symbolic role of baptism, in relating it to Noah's experience. He speaks of Noah and his family having been literally, physically delivered from the flood by his obedience to God's instructions, and then continues (3:21), "That's an illustration, now, (of how) baptism saves you all: not getting rid of bodily dirt, but the desire for a healthy consciousness of God through Jesus Christ's resurrection" (emphasis mine). As Noah was rescued through

his obedience, we also choose to obey, and participate in the life to which our Lord calls us.

Here we must walk a very thin line between sacramentalism on the one hand, whose advocates would pounce on the "baptism saves you" part of the statement, and "earned salvation" on the other, that attributes God's acceptance to our correct behavior. Both are in error, being only partial. A ceremony without the obedience called for by the King, is worthless as far as the Kingdom is concerned. But the question, "Do I have to?" is NEVER a relevant question for a Kingdom citizen. Jesus' call is to follow him into the new life of resurrection in the Kingdom of God! The citizen who responds to that call, from that time on, seizes every opportunity to follow more closely: to obey more carefully. No one who has truly caught a glimpse of the Kingdom would ever even consider trying to "get away with" doing less than expected! No, you don't "have to" obey, under peril of exclusion from the Kingdom, with respect to baptism, or anything else. But, says the King very clearly, "If you love me, you will."

So newly recruited citizens are welcomed into the Kingdom through the water of baptism. It is only the beginning . It celebrates their decision to leave the old, self-centered life behind, and to live henceforth in the resurrection of their King. As it is observed in the Body of Christ, it becomes a powerful teaching tool, reminding all the citizens of the reality of rebirth, of their deliberate choice of burial and resurrection with their Lord, and of their commitment to obey the King in every detail.

The baptism of a new disciple is a joyous celebration of new life!

CHAPTER 11

THE BASIN AND TOWEL: SYMBOL OF SERVICE

The Basin and Towel are used in the observance of believers' washing one another's feet. Among the few groups that retain this practise, it is usually explained as an expression of "humility" or "servanthood", but little attention is given to the meaning of those terms. In Chapter 5, we explored the implications of the word *ταπεινω* - *tapeinoo*, which is translated "to humble", among other renderings. We saw that its primary reference is to the leveling of status, and obedience to the King, not to any sort of self-degradation or shame. We saw how Jesus' entire life reflected this mind-set, and that his citizens are called to emulate both the attitude and the actions demonstrated by the one they call their Lord. We have also seen (Chapter 6) the radical rejection of status modeled by the Lord Jesus Christ, our Servant-King, and his instructions that his people follow that example: "It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher ..."

Even Jesus' enemies realized that something was vastly different about this man: "Teacher, we know that you are truthful, and you teach the way of God truthfully, and aren't intimidated by anybody, for you do not look at the appearance (status) of people" (Matthew 22:16), they said. No one was used to that kind of leadership. Harsh, domineering oppression, they could understand. Willing, selfless service, they could not. One can almost feel the shock waves, as the Lord encouraged his own to faithfulness: "Those slaves are privileged who, when the Lord comes, he finds watching; truly, I tell you all, that he will take off his coat, and seat them, and come wait on them!" (Luke 12:37). That's not the way society operates! A master, serving his own servants? Impossible!

Precisely because it is impossible and unheard-of, the Lord Jesus instituted a symbolic act that could rivet the principle indelibly in the consciousness of his people. There is no need to symbolize or to teach, when no deviation from normal social expectations is required. But the Kingdom calls for radically deviant behavior, which is taught and modeled by the King himself. Its symbol is the simple, everyday washbasin and towel.

John is the only Gospel writer to record this dramatic lesson. For him, apparently, it was even more significant than the Passover meal itself, or the observance that the church later made so central, the shared bread and cup. Neither of these find a place in his record. He says nothing about the disciples who were sent ahead to prepare the Passover (Luke 22:7-13), even though he was one of them. He says nothing about the jockeying for position that was still a problem even this near the end (Luke 22:24). The outstanding event of that memorable evening, for John, was the Lord's stooping to wash the feet of his followers.

Having one's feet washed upon arrival in a home was nothing unusual. Jesus' comment to the Pharisee at whose house he had dined, earlier, reveals that the most minimal, common courtesy required such service (Luke 7:44). He obviously saw Simon's giving no water for his feet as a deliberate social slight. Bare or sandaled feet that walked hot, dusty roads welcomed the cooling courtesy, usually provided by a servant or a child. A considerate host would take pains to be certain that his guests be made comfortable.

Of course, the particular upper room setting in question was a bit ambiguous. The band of disciples was far from home, in a borrowed or rented room. Who was the host? Who should have been responsible for the comfort of the others? Anyone present had a perfectly good reason to assume that the duty was not his. And after all, it was only a matter of comfort. No one's life or welfare hung on the offering of thoughtful service. No doubt there would have been plenty of volunteers, had some heroic service been needed. Peter did not hesitate, in the garden, to jump to his Lord's defense with his sword. But that is not the way of the Servant King. The service expected of Kingdom citizens is usually not spectacular. It is not obligatory. It is seldom, if ever, a part of anyone's normal "job description." Consider the King's example. To understand his behavior, the context out of which he acted is essential. We are given a list of the things that Jesus "knew".

1. He knew that his hour had come (John 13:1).
2. He knew that the Father had given him everything (v3).
3. He knew that he had come from God (v. 3).
4. He knew that he was going back to God (v.3).
5. He knew who would betray him (v.11).

He knew that his time had come. Throughout his years of ministry, the statement "My hour is not yet come" echoed like a refrain, expressing the calm confidence in which he moved, and his willingness to wait on the Father's timing. Now the climax was at hand, and his confidence was constant. The hour had come.

He knew what had been given him by the Father. Everything! The verb tense is aorist, which denotes decisive, completed action. Jesus is already the Lord of all creation, by divine decree of the Father. No one can threaten that position. A person whose position is insecure, or who aspires, perhaps, higher than he has attained, is very much concerned about protecting his "image". He feels a need to demand the respect he thinks is due his station, and to take care that he do or say nothing deemed "beneath" him. But Jesus manifests no such insecurity. He knows beyond a shadow of doubt where he came from and where he is going. He knows that he is Sovereign over everything and everyone. Secure in that knowledge, he is free to offer even menial service to his companions. And in him, so are the citizens of his Kingdom.

Most amazing of all, he knew what Judas had in mind. This was no new discovery (John 6:70-71): during the years they were together, he had given Judas every opportunity to change his mind. Now the fateful choice had been made (13:2), yet the Lord Jesus did not exclude even the traitor from this last act of service. Interestingly, by all indications, Judas had no qualms about accepting the service.

It was Peter, one of the inner circle, who objected. He seems to have recognized that something was backwards here: the reverse of the episode with John the Baptist at the time of Jesus' baptism (see Chapter 5). In both cases, Jesus chose the apparently submissive role. It was in fact, of course, the leading role: things are backwards, from the world's perspective, in the Kingdom. "Surely," Peter's response seems to say, "I have a better sense of propriety than to allow my Master to perform such a lowly task!" (But he didn't offer to do the service himself!) Jesus responded, "Peter, you don't understand." The choice of words here is very deliberate. He says, "You don't know (οἶδα - oida) what I'm doing now": you can't figure it out. This word speaks of intellectual knowledge. "But later, you will understand (γνώσεται- gnosei)" the knowledge of experience. "When you've lived a little longer in the Kingdom, Peter, it will make sense." The principles of Kingdom living often don't make rational sense. Explanations are an exercise in futility. It is only when, obediently, we begin to live according to those principles, that we begin to catch a glimpse of the relationships that our King intends. This is clearly seen in Jesus' response, "If I don't wash you, you have no share with me" (v.8). Until we receive the service of our King, we simply don't have what it takes to offer that service to our fellow-citizens. Our human obsession with propriety and status can only be overcome by our realization of our King's absolute rejection of every shred of prestige. If we are to be identified with him, there is only one way: his way. "You all call me the Teacher and the Lord, and you say rightly, for I AM. Therefore, if I, the Lord and Teacher, washed your feet, you all also ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you all an example, that just as I have done for you, you also should do. Truly, I tell you all, the slave is not greater than his Lord; neither is the sent-one greater than the one who sent him. If you all are aware of these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:13-17).

In one stroke, the King has dismissed all speculation about what is "necessary" or "appropriate." Significantly, it was after this episode that he went into great detail about the love his followers are expected to have for one another. Love is not hung-up about the legitimacy of "needs", and never asks, "Do I have to?" Love seeks for ways to be of service. That this attitude was expected to be normative in the church, is illustrated in Paul's instructions to Timothy, years later, in which he listed the characteristics of a faithful woman in the congregation (I Timothy 5:10), "she raised children, received strangers, washed the saints' feet, relieved those who were suffering, and followed after every good deed."

Frequently, even people who have no Kingdom connections will reach out to help relieve obvious need or suffering: witness the overwhelming public response to campaigns for famine relief, natural disasters, or huge medical emergencies. There is compassion in the world as well as in the Kingdom. But love is something else again. Love lays down its life; but even more significantly, it lays down all pretensions of status or position. In washing my brother's or sister's feet, I pledge that nothing is too menial or insignificant to merit my attention to their welfare. I commit myself to seek actively for ways to be of service to them.

The person who dramatically gives his life for the sake of another, is acclaimed a hero by the world. The person who offers Kingdom service, symbolized by the Basin and Towel, on the other hand, is seldom even noticed. This is precisely why the symbol is needed. Only after understanding the symbol, can we offer, or even perceive, the service. We have an answer for the puzzled question, "Why do you do a thing like that? Our feet aren't dirty!" We must seize the opportunity to teach each other how our King has decreed that we live: forgetful of self-image and status, giving ourselves fully to one another.

Yes, to one another. We are also under orders to minister to the needs around us in the world, but that is not what washing feet is about. It is our love for one another that will attract the world to our King (John 13:35). This is the recipe for the unity for which our Lord prayed: the unity of the Trinity, expressed in the unity of the citizens of the Kingdom, the Society Without Status, where the servants of the King take the utmost delight in serving one another.

Its symbol is the Basin and Towel.

CHAPTER 12

THE BREAD AND CUP: SYMBOL OF UNITY

The sharing of the Bread and Cup has become, in the experience of the Christian church, probably the most universal symbolic observance. This fact would have the potential of making the symbol an outstanding testimony to the unity of all the Lord's people. Unfortunately, however, this most widely practised of all symbols has also probably suffered the greatest diversity in interpretation and understanding, frequently being used as a harsh instrument of exclusion rather than an occasion of rejoicing in the bringing together of the richly varied citizens of the Kingdom.

Great controversies have arisen over whether the Bread and Cup should be viewed as a "sacrament" (a means by which the grace of God is literally dispensed to people), or as an "emblem" (more like an illustration of a point of doctrine). Neither word appears in Scripture, so both should be open to challenge. The sacramental view at times takes on almost magical connotations, when it is assumed that the proper ritual, properly performed, by a properly qualified individual, will have desired, predictable results, independent of any other factors. Such an orientation, as noted in Chapter 9, reinforces the status of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, by ascribing to its members the power to dispense or withhold the favor of God: a privilege that Jesus did not grant to any individual, but to the Body as a whole. Even groups who officially reject the magical connotations of sacramentalism, nevertheless betray a sacramental orientation, when they require that the observance of the Bread and Cup may only be conducted by a member of the clergy, and "ordinary" folks are not privileged to share it in simple love.

The emblematic understanding, on the other hand, tends to divorce the ceremony from the life of the brotherhood, reducing its meaning to a private assent to a set of theological propositions about such catch-words as justification, atonement, reconciliation, or salvation, which are all interpreted very individually, without any regard to one's identification with the Body of Christ. While a sacramental position errs in giving a mere man the power to make a list of who is or is not worthy to participate, and ascribes magical power to mere physical elements, an emblematic position errs in neglecting to take commitment seriously, treating what was supposed to be a symbol of deep commitment as if it were a shallow cocktail party, to which all are indiscriminately invited. Neither of these positions captures the wealth of symbolic meaning that New Testament assumes.

There are relatively few descriptions of the sharing of the Bread and Cup in the New Testament. The Synoptic writers all include it at the end of the last Passover meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. The account is short, simple, and straightforward. It is even possible that the Lord Jesus was not deliberately instituting a ceremony at all, but rather investing the most ordinary, common elements of any meal with such symbolic value that every occasion of his people's sharing so simple a thing as bread and wine should serve as a reminder of all that he had been and done among them. That appears to have been the understanding in Acts 2:42 and 46, where "the breaking of bread" is twice mentioned as an expression of the believers' common life, and a source of great joy among them.

Jesus' instructions were simple: "Take this and eat it: this is my body." He had talked earlier, at great length, of "eating his body" as being an essential element of participating in his life (John 6). Too easily, people become embroiled in disputing what is "literal" and what is "figurative" in those words, and miss the point that he was trying to make: one of total participation, of unlimited involvement. The cup, he designated "my blood of the covenant." Luke says, "the new covenant" (22:20). The former covenant had established the Israelites as a people belonging to God. The new covenant, now about to be ratified, established his new people, the citizens of the Kingdom of God. Interestingly, the Hebrew writer uses *διαθήκη* - *diatheke* in the sense of a will, as well as the traditional "covenant", relating it in that way to the necessity of Jesus' death (Hebrews 9:16-17).

The new Kingdom concept comes through vividly in the aspects of the account where the Synoptic writers differ: an eloquent example of the richness derived from the diverse contributions of God's people. Matthew records (26:28, RSV) "my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." The last phrase may also be read, "for the purpose of the taking away of failures." *ἀφίμι*- *aphiemi* is, literally, to take away. The modern, watered-down version of "forgiveness" (a sort of indulgent pat-on-the-head, with a bland, "there-there, that's all right") has greatly weakened our understanding of the idea of complete removal implied by the original word. Of the two major words translated "sin", the one used here, *ἁμαρτία* - *hamartia*, indicates a failure to measure up to a standard, rather than a deliberate transgression. A new Kingdom, a new covenant, was needed because the old one had failed to accomplish God's purpose. (See Hebrews, chapters 7 through 10). That failure, represented by the Mutiny in the Garden, the repeated rebellion of the people of Israel, and their leaders' rejection of

Jesus' invitation to his Kingdom, was now to be taken away, and replaced with the new creation of a people modeled after the Triune God himself.

Luke makes a similar statement in another way. He follows the account by recording another lecture, precipitated by another fuss about who was to be the greatest (22:24-27). "This Kingdom operates by different principles," the King urges again. "You are not to follow the patterns of the rest of the world!" Luke's record (22:17) of Jesus' instructions regarding the Cup closely parallels this orientation: "Take this and divide it among yourselves," he commands. No one is "in charge". No one is given license to mediate for the others. No priestly office is required. Simple sharing among the brethren is the order of the day.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, goes into a lot more detail about the specific observance in the church. I Corinthians 10:16 is the only place (KJV) where the label "communion" is applied to the sharing of the Bread and Cup. Somehow, perhaps because of the occurrence of the same English word in the Apostles' Creed, that label has contributed to a sacramental orientation that finds no justification whatever in the Scripture: in fact, it is a blatant contradiction of the many other uses of the original word. The word Paul chose is *κοινωνία* - *koinonia*.

Clearly, translators have not known what to do with *κοινωνία*. They have tried, in various contexts, such English words as communication, participation, sharing, fellowship, contribution, partnership, companionship, and many others. Nothing quite says it all. Perhaps an adequate word does not exist in English because the concept does not exist. Language, as a general rule, follows culture; it does not precede or invent it. "Sharing" might be as close as we can come, but that does not carry the depth or breadth of *κοινωνία*. A quick survey of some of its New Testament uses may be helpful. *κοινωνία* may refer to something as mundane as a business partnership (the sons of Zebedee, Luke 5:10), or as all-encompassing as sharing in the sufferings of Christ (Philippians 3:10). It may imply impure associations with idolators as in I Corinthians 10:20, or sharing, in Christ, in the glory of God (I Peter 5:1)! An offering for famine relief (II Corinthians 8), contributions made by a group of believers to Paul's ministry (Philippians 4:15), sympathetic involvement with those who are suffering for their faithfulness to the Lord (II Corinthians 1:7), Jesus' identification with our human condition (Hebrews 2:14), our sharing in his life (II Peter 1:4), are all aspects of *κοινωνία*. In his first epistle, John describes *κοινωνία* as the reason for his writing: that "*κοινωνία*" with the Father, the Son, and each other, may produce unity, joy, and mutual forgiveness. All this and more contributes to the totality of the concept. It is a commonness of life, a being built together: in short, an expression, among the people of God, of the Unity of the Trinity. It is the practical outworking of having been made truly one, joyfully expressed in the sharing not only of Bread and Cup, but of every other aspect of life as well. This is the word Paul chose as a label for what we have called "communion".

"The cup of blessing which we bless," he says (I Corinthians 10:16), "isn't it a sharing (*κοινωνία*) of the blood of Christ?" Confining that statement, as many groups do, to a private, individual, judicial understanding of forgiveness, does gross injustice to the abundant provision made for his people in the blood of Christ! Indeed, that provision does include personal forgiveness, but there is so much more! The Lord Jesus himself related it, as we have seen, to the establishment of the New Covenant: the new people of God. In John 6:53-56, he connects it to partaking of his own life. Paul, in Ephesians 2:13, credits the blood of Christ with reconciling former enemies, not only to God, but also to each other. In Colossians 1:20, he speaks of its bringing Jew and Gentile to oneness. In Acts 20:28, Paul calls it the means of Christ's purchasing the Church for his own possession. Hebrews 13:12 speaks of God's people (as a unit) being "sanctified", made holy, or set apart for God, by his blood. No one may choose to keep his "participation in the blood of Christ" on a private, individual level. "Participation," *κοινωνία*, sharing, is a corporate, not an individual phenomenon. The provision of the blood of Christ is much more than a new improved brand of detergent for cleaning up dirty things and people! Blood is the circulating life of the Body, bearing the elements necessary for survival and activity.

"The bread we break: isn't it a sharing (*κοινωνία*) of the Body of Christ?" (I Corinthians 10:16). In Chapter 7, we dealt in detail with the concept of the Body of Christ. Both body and blood are essential for life! At various times in history, the church has chosen to avoid or minimize one or the other, or both, in its teaching and practises, to its own loss, and that of all those who seek to be faithful. A "cut and paste" job on the provisions of the Lord for his people, simply doesn't work. The sharing of the Bread is a testimony of one's total involvement in the life of the Body: contributing and receiving all that there is to share.

Paul goes on to explain, (10:17) "Because it is one (loaf of) bread, we, the many, are one body, for we all share from the one (loaf of) bread." Here again, the unity, the coming together, is the focus of attention. Is it perhaps the loss of the vision of that unity that has led so many groups to represent the Bread with tiny bits of cut-up bread or broken crackers, or individually baked morsels, rather than the

single loaf that the apostle describes? Kingdom citizens are joined together by their mutual participation; that participation, in turn, bears testimony to their belonging to one another. This is not a casual "party": it is a statement of deep commitment to *κοινωνία*, to total sharing in a common life of absolute loyalty, not only to the King but also to one's fellow-citizens. Without such commitment, any participation becomes empty, meaningless, and even dishonest.

The depth of the commitment required has seldom been understood. The early church had problems here, too. The latter half of I Corinthians 11 reveals that selfish individualism is not a twentieth century invention. Paul addresses two symptoms of sickness (selfishness) in the Body: divisions or factions, and lack of concern for the poor in the group. In the beginning of the Corinthian letter, he had spent considerable time reprimanding them for divisions centered around strong leaders. The first and third chapters make a deliberate point that, while different functions are assigned to different individuals who serve in leadership roles, only Christ himself is worthy of being followed. Here, the term *αἵρεσις* - *hairesis*, from which our English "heresy" is derived, makes the focus more ideological than personal. Thayer defines *αἵρεσις* as "a chosen course of thought or action; a sect or party separating themselves and following their own tenets; dissensions arising from diversity of opinions or aims." Nothing that detracts from a single minded focus on obedience to the King has any place among the citizens of the Kingdom. Any other focus, be it person or idea, becomes detrimental to the proper function of the Body.

In this context, Paul even goes so far as to say, "It is not the Lord's supper that you are eating!" (11:20). The Lord's supper was designed to express the unity that grows out of absolute loyalty to the King: the unity for which he prayed, died, and was raised; the unity of diverse people who are being built together by the Holy Spirit of God, into a single Body, the Body of Christ. It is intended to be a symbol of *κοινωνία*, the deep-level, all-encompassing sharing of those who are in the process of being made one in the image of God. As the Corinthian brotherhood had been marred by clannishness, expressed in the following of lesser leaders and human ideas, the breakdown of *κοινωνία* found expression in selfish greed. In shock, the apostle sketches a scene of a sadly distorted version of a "fellowship meal", where each has provided for himself, ignoring the needs of the poor among them: "one goes hungry and another gets drunk!" (11:21). What a contrast to the description in Acts 4:34-35, "There was not a needy person among them ... distribution was made to each as any had need." Paul's complaint goes much deeper than simply protesting boorish behavior at a meal. Selfish behavior is recognized as a very basic denial of the Body of Christ!

This, then, is the context of the stern warning about eating or drinking in an unworthy manner (11:27). Unworthiness is clearly defined as:

1. divisions, centered around individuals or their ideas
2. lack of concern for poor members of the group
both of which amount to
3. failure to "discern the Body."

Full commitment to wholehearted participation in the body of Christ is the prerequisite to worthy participation in its symbol, the sharing of the Bread and Cup. It is therefore incumbent upon those who occupy positions of leadership, to assure that such participation is taught, encouraged, and welcomed! One cannot commit himself to something that is beyond the pale of possibility! The self-examination called for in this regard (v. 28) is not a pious perusal of someone's check-list of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not's," but a question of relatedness to the Body. Anything less is profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord! (v.27).

Often quoted, but seldom deeply explored, verse 26 reiterates the theme: "Whenever you all eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death, until he comes." To "proclaim the Lord's death" is not to make a glib profession that one subscribes to a canned set of propositions concerning that event. It is a public identification with all that "the Lord's death" accomplished! A variety of understandings of Jesus' death have been codified over the centuries, and crammed into a series of man-made theological boxes, all neatly defined and proof-texted. "Statements of Doctrine" never do justice to any of the messages of Scripture, and this is no exception. Such statements may include some true facts, but they consistently omit more than they include. Our God and his activity on our behalf is much bigger than the minds of even the wisest of people! This is the burden of the entire first two chapters of I Corinthians.

There are not many specific statements in the New Testament about the purpose of Jesus' death: but the ones that do occur have much wider scope than is commonly taught.

Romans 5:10 and Colossians 1:22 speak of its having accomplished reconciliation, and restored broken relationships with both God and other people.

Hebrews 2:14-15: "Through death, he (Jesus) destroyed the one who has the power of death, that

is the devil, and rescued those who, by fear of death, were held in slavery all their lives."

Hebrews 9:15-16: It put the new covenant into effect.

Philippians 2:8-9: It demonstrates the extent of Christ's total obedience to the Father, as a model for the obedience required of his followers.

Romans 6:3-6 and Hebrews 2:9: it gives ordinary humans their right of access to his resurrected life!

Romans 14:9: it makes Jesus Lord of both the dead and the living.

I Corinthians 15:3: He died on account of our failures.

II Corinthians 5:14-15: "And he died on behalf of everyone, in order that those who are alive might no longer be living for themselves, but for the one who died and was raised on their behalf."

I Thessalonians 5:10: he "died on our behalf, in order that whether we're awake or asleep, we may still be alive with him."

Only as the Body, together, becomes a living example of all that the Lord's death has accomplished, can we honestly claim that our sharing of the Bread and Cup is "proclaiming the Lord's death."

"Till he comes!" Citizens of the Kingdom also share in the symbol of the Bread and Cup as a reminder of the day when it will no longer be needed: when, at the great, final Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the Kingdom will be fulfilled beyond anyone's wildest expectations; when the oneness, the unity, that here on earth has been at best fragmentary and imperfect, will at last be fully realized. In doing so, they encourage each other to wait in faithfulness for that day, and pledge to help one another in the quest for faithfulness.

Until then, we need a reminder. We need the discipline of regularly bearing testimony to our commitment to the Kingdom that is not yet fully realized. We need continually to examine the relationships in each local manifestation of the Kingdom, to see if they are indeed growing according to the pattern outlined and demonstrated by the King. As together we experience the self-giving of the King of Kings, and seek to express it in his Body, we become moulded together, built together, transformed together, into the Image of God.

This is the symbolic message of the Bread and Cup.

CHAPTER 13

THE WOMAN'S HEAD COVERING:

SYMBOL OF LIBERATION AND PARTICIPATION

There was a time, not so very long ago, that no respectable woman would be seen in public without a hat of some sort. It had nothing to do with faith: it was simply a cultural expectation. Then later, only more formal occasions required headgear. Church services were among these occasions, but seldom was any Biblical significance attached to the practise. A few Christian groups continue to observe the custom of women covering their heads in worship as a Scriptural mandate, but even these are increasingly rare.

This is an example of a symbol that has been largely abandoned because, at least in living memory, it has never been coupled with its prescribed Scriptural meaning. In fact, frequently the groups that insist most vehemently upon the observance of the form, are among the least willing to put the intended content into practise. The woman's covering of her head, Scripturally, is intended as a highly visible symbol of the interdependence of the members of the Body of Christ, and of the liberation of every member, man or woman, to serve his or her divinely appointed function.

The primary concern in the Corinthian letter, from which this subject is derived, is for right relationships in the Body of Christ, the local expression of the Kingdom. In fact, this particular discussion, in the first half of I Corinthians chapter 11, is sandwiched between the two discourses just considered, regarding the relationships that are necessary for a healthy and honest celebration of Communion in the Body. The woman's head covering plays a crucial role in teaching and reminding the Lord's people of his intentions for their functioning together.

Although some well-meaning people have drawn the conclusion, from Paul's introductory comments about "headship", that a hierarchical arrangement is being advocated, a woman's wearing of a head covering is in no way a capitulation to the notion that women are at the bottom of a hierarchical system, relegated to the status and function of a doormat! To interpret I Corinthians 11:3 in that way is, in a very real sense, to deny the Trinity!

What is Paul saying? "I want you all to know, that Christ is the head of every man (husband), the husband (man) is the head of the wife (woman), and God is the head of Christ." He is setting up the relationship between the Lord Jesus and the Father, as the model for that between husbands and wives, and between Christ and his people. The same idea is elaborated further in John 17, considered earlier, and in Ephesians 5:20-33. The Lord intends that his people see, in his absolute unity with the Father, the pattern for their own lives. The Father, as Head, is indeed in charge. Jesus spoke frequently of his delight in doing the Father's pleasure. But there is no hint of coercion or domineering. The Father and Son were each totally committed to the welfare, and the glory, of the other. They frequently expressed their delight in one another. The Son offered absolute obedience, to be sure: the Father supplied him with unlimited power. They were both totally dedicated to the same goal. When this is the case, status becomes so irrelevant that it does not even exist. It is secondary to the attainment of the mutual goal. This is the pattern for the leadership that brethren are expected to exercise in the life of Kingdom citizens. The definition of their "headship" is to be found in the relationship of Jesus and the Father. The title of "head" is variously applied to the Father, the Lord Jesus, and to man: but remember, we are dealing with a question of function, not status. The relationship is best expressed in Jesus' prayer "that they all may be one, as we are." As we saw in Chapter 8, the primary function of leadership is to see that everyone in the group has the opportunity to function to their fullest potential. Like Father and Son, their commitment to each other is complete, inviolable, and utterly joyful. This is the meaning of "headship", the pattern that Kingdom citizens are expected to follow.

Paul goes on to make his point much more specific. Among both Jewish and pagan religionists, a prophet was in a category considerably above the average person. Prophesying was done only by those especially set apart as spokesmen for their god. Do you see, then, how very revolutionary it was, when Paul spoke (verse 4) of every man praying or prophesying? Almost as revolutionary as it would be in the twentieth century church! This was no call for conformity to the surrounding culture! Quite the opposite! Sadly, nearly two thousand years later, most Christian churches have yet to learn to obey these simple instructions. They are detailed more fully in I Corinthians 14:26-33, where a description is given of orderly sharing among God's people. The teaching here is that every man is expected to speak to and for his God! Prophecy, in the New Testament, is the sharing, with a group or individual, of a very specific word from the Lord for a particular occasion or need. Although it may occur during preaching or teaching, it need not,

and is distinct from both. Most groups of Kingdom citizens need to do some serious study of the functions assigned them by their King.

As if that wasn't revolutionary enough, the next verse (5) drops an even bigger bombshell. Women engaged in praying and prophesying? Why, they were not even allowed to enter anything but the outermost court of the Temple! And even though in the Greek culture at large, some held very prominent positions (see the accounts in Acts of Paul's journeys), in the pagan religions, even for those who held the prestigious titles of "oracle" or "prophetess", their principal function was prostitution! In western society, it is difficult to understand what a radical departure this was. If anything, the inclusion of women in the privilege to pray and to prophesy was even more out of step with the first century culture than it is with our own. Yet it is a Biblical mandate. No wonder it was also necessary to remind them that there is still a created difference in function (verses 6-9). Men and women are intended to complement one another, not vie for positions of status!

This is not an isolated principle, but is intimately connected with our whole understanding of the functioning of the Body of Christ. It is not male-female roles that are at the root of most difficulty among the people of God, but those people's stubborn refusal to learn that there is no place for any kind of status among them. Replacing status-hungry males with status-hungry females does not improve a situation in the least. As we saw in Chapter 8, when status exists, everyone wants it, competes for it. But the Lord has been trying to create a Society Without Status. What doesn't exist, cannot cause any trouble. In Christ, everyone is assumed to have a necessary and valuable contribution to make to the Kingdom. The citizens need each other equally.

Although there is more speculation than certainty surrounding the tenth verse, it summarizes and beautifully solves the dilemma of establishing a manner of functioning that is completely foreign to everyone's prior experience. "Authority (power) over her head ... for the sake of the messengers (angels)""??? A careful study of the two main words in this passage results in what may be a significant key to the entire subject, succinctly explaining why a visible symbol is needed.

There are many different Greek words that have been translated "power" in the New Testament. Each has a slightly different connotation. Basically, they fall into one of two categories: those that denote the ability to act (inherent power), and those that imply permission to act (delegated authority). *Exousia* - ἐξουσία, the one in this passage, is the primary word in the latter category. It says nothing at all about a person's ability to do anything; makes no judgment of skill or talent. It refers simply to authority: permission to act. As Paul states repeatedly in many contexts, the fact that one can do something is no necessary indication that he should. But in the present discussion, Paul has been stressing that every man and every woman has been given the authority, the right, to pray and to prophesy among their fellow Kingdom citizens. The woman is designated to have the privilege of symbolizing this extraordinary authority, by the covering of her head. It is a symbol of responsibility and privilege.

The other key word is just as interesting. *Aggelos* - ἄγγελος - is most frequently translated "angel" in the standard versions, evoking for many folks the image of a spooky figure in a long white bathrobe, wearing wings and halo, swooping out of the sky and striking terror to the heart of the observer. We will not take time at the moment to go into the fallacy of that image, except to say that it has no New Testament justification. More germane to the present discussion is the fact that the same word is used to refer to any messenger, human or divine. The word is the same: obviously, therefore, referring to the function served by the messenger, rather than to any natural or supernatural characteristics. Many of the references are to ordinary people sent on an errand of some kind: the messengers John the Baptist sent to Jesus, the spies sheltered by Rahab in Jericho, and many others. Some, to be sure, are clearly supernatural: those who appear out of nowhere, as to Mary or Zachariah, for example. Others, just as clearly, are not. The usage in the first three chapters of Revelation is interesting in this regard. The letters are written "to the messenger (angel) of the church at..." Now, clearly, it is not the Renaissance-painting variety of angel that is intended here: neither fearsome, white-robed apparitions nor cheerful fat pink cherubs have any mailing address! It is reasonable to assume that the letters are intended to go to the respective human "messengers" (secretaries? leaders?) of the congregations named. Therefore, it is possible also to suggest that a similar idea is intended in the Corinthian passage. The whole subject under discussion, remember, in the letter as a whole, and chapters 10 through 14 in particular, is the straightening out of relationships and functions in the Body. This brings to a sharp focus the role of leadership.

In Chapter 8, we looked at the role of leadership in the New Testament church in contrast to corresponding roles in other worship of the era. We saw that the dominance of the priesthood and the insignificance of the layman have been completely done away in the new Kingdom. Here, Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is initiating something totally apart from anything that anyone has ever experienced. Every man, every woman, entrusted with the ἐξουσία, the authority, the sacred charge, to pray and to

prophecy? Who ever heard of such a thing? It is so far-out, that even today, most people feel more secure with a pre-New Testament (or at least pre-Pentecost) practise, where one person alone, or at best, only a few, have the privilege to speak for God. Really now, which system sounds more familiar to you?

It was the radical nature of these instructions that made it necessary for the Lord to add a visible symbol of his new order. Remember, there is no need for special teaching or symbolism, when no departure from normal expectations is required. But when common cultural practise is being deliberately violated, very specific teaching is needed, and for this purpose, symbols are very useful. The leaders themselves had only their previous experience in their accustomed surroundings on which to rely for role models. If the new vision of a Spirit-inspired, mutually participating citizenry was to become a reality, leaders, too, would need to be reminded that they were no longer "the whole show". Both leaders ("messengers") and congregation would need to be taught to recognize the ἐξουσία, the exousia, the authority, the sacred responsibility, given to every citizen of the Kingdom. And women -- perhaps because the change was the most dramatic for them, who knows? -- were given the high privilege of symbolizing the advent of true liberation and responsibility in Christ. Seeing a woman's covered head should remind everyone in leadership that their job is to see that the Body benefits from the contribution, in prayer and prophecy, of every citizen of the Kingdom. Men and women are both intended to live in the total liberation of the privilege to serve one another.

The symbol of a woman's covered head is intended as a testimony to both leaders and congregation that we are all charged with the ἐξουσία the authority and privilege, to be channels of communication with the Lord for one another. It is a sign of exaltation to active, participating membership in the Body of Christ, to faithful citizenship in the Kingdom.

CHAPTER 14

THE GOAL OF THE KINGDOM: FROM GLORY TO GLORY

At the dawn of creation, God had announced his purpose to have a people for his own. His people were to be unique among all others on earth, created in the image of the Triune God, diverse, and yet perfectly one: one with each other, and one with their Creator-King, "to the praise of his glory". Across the centuries, despite repeated episodes of mutiny and self-seeking on his people's part, the Owner of the Vineyard had patiently worked and waited for the intended harvest, finally sending his own Son to demonstrate and bring to completion the Kingdom he had in mind.

John's gospel makes the startling claim (1:14), "And the Word became human, and camped among us, and we were seeing his glory: glory as the only one born from the Father, full of grace and truth." We were seeing his glory! The glory of God had previously been concealed from the view of mortals, hidden by the thick veil of the Temple. Yet repeatedly, John reports that, in Jesus, that formerly hidden glory was being revealed. The miraculous signs the Lord performed are described as having "revealed his glory" (2:11). Just before raising Lazarus to life, Jesus gently scolded Mary, "Didn't I tell you that if you are faithful, you will see the glory of God?" (11:40). And, in his last recorded prayer for his disciples before his death, Jesus testified, "I have given them the glory that you have given me, in order that they may be one, just as we are" (17:22). The citizens of the Kingdom are privileged not only to see, but even to share, the eternal glory of God!

This ultimate gift, the glory of God, is, in the final analysis, the only way that the oneness of which Jesus spoke and for which he prayed, lived, and died, can ever be realized. Earlier on the same occasion, he had begun his prayer, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, in order that the Son may glorify you" (17:1). Not even the Son of God could give glory to the Father, without first receiving it, so complete was his identification with our humanity; even though the glory to which he was now looking forward had been his with the Father "before the world was made." And yet, he could also say of his disciples, "I have been glorified among them" (17:10). As his people become what he intends, his own glory appears to be enhanced.

Paul, in his letter to the Ephesian church, frequently returns to the phrase, "to the praise of his glory." This is intended to be the theme, the purpose, the constant refrain, in the corporate life of the citizens of the Kingdom. Paul is talking about something much more far-reaching than the glib disclaimer, "This is all for the glory of God," that has become a trademark for performers showing off their expertise or accomplishments, or individuals boasting about some supposed "spiritual" triumphs. New Testament references to "glorifying God" lean heavily towards action, not announcements. No attention is focused on the one doing the "glorifying": in fact, we don't even know the names of most of them.

Seeing Jesus' acts of compassion, notably healings, the onlookers "gave glory to God," marvelling at his kindness. Jesus recognized the thanks of the healed Samaritan leper (Luke 17:18) as giving glory to God; the shepherds' response of spreading the word, after they were privileged to see the promised Child (Luke 2:20), is described in the same way. Abraham's trusting obedience in the face of impossible circumstances "gave glory to God" (Romans 4:20). Disciples bearing fruit (John 15:8), and the Spirit's revealing the truth of Christ to his followers (John 16:14) accomplish the same thing. Jesus prayed (John 17:4) "I glorified you on earth by having finished the work you gave me to do." The Corinthian church is admonished to "glorify God by your obedience" in II Corinthians 9:13, and indeed, (I Corinthians 10:31) "whatever you do, do everything for God's glory!" According to I Peter 4:10-11, God is glorified through Christ, as Kingdom citizens employ their spiritual gifts in serving one another.

"Glory to him in the church!" (Ephesians 3:21). As a scruffy collection of unlikely individuals is transformed together into a Body bearing the image of God, there is no doubt about who deserves the glory! No one but the Lord of all creation, who "is calling you into his own Kingdom and glory" (I Thessalonians 2:12) could ever accomplish such a thing! Such a transformation does not happen automatically or easily.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus made frequent reference to the principle of "humbling oneself", rejecting personal status after the pattern he had set, as a prelude to "being exalted." Paul summarized in Philippians 2:8-9, "... he rejected any status (humbled himself), becoming obedient to the point of death ... therefore God has lifted him up (exalted him) ..." Jesus himself had stated repeatedly, "He who humbles himself will be exalted." The change in verb forms is significant. The "humbling" is in the active voice. Choosing and living in obedience, arranging our lives under the King's command, consciously refusing to become involved in the status seeking of the rest of the world, requires deliberate action on the part of the Kingdom citizen. The "exaltation", on the other hand, is passive. The initiative there is God's alone. "God

has highly exalted him ... " The responsibility of Kingdom citizens is to live together in obedience to their King. Any exaltation is his job, not theirs.

As a corollary to obedience, endurance of undeserved suffering seems to be integrally tied to sharing in the triumph of the King. In conversation with the grieving disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus asked, (Luke 24:26) "Wasn't it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory?" To the early disciples, "suffering" was not a label piously affixed to every disappointment or inconvenience with which they were faced. It was a fact of life: the inevitable, sometimes dire consequence of living by Kingdom principles in obedience to their King, in an alien world. The world at large does not recognize the sovereignty of our King. The world's citizens are still operating under the sway of the Mutiny in the Garden. For this reason, Peter admonished his readers not to be surprised at abuse, as if something strange were happening (I Peter 4:12-14); that is only to be expected. "But as you all are sharing Christ's sufferings, rejoice, so that in the revelation of his glory, you all may be completely caught up in joy. If you are maligned in the name of Christ, you are privileged, because the spirit of God's glory is resting on you." Just make sure, he warns (vv.15-16), that the suffering is not deserved. Faithful Kingdom citizens do not seek suffering, as if it connoted some special merit: they simply recognize it as a price which must frequently be paid for faithfulness, and accept whatever comes.

When the church becomes so acculturated that Kingdom citizens are for all practical purposes indistinguishable from those who claim no allegiance to the King, one of the first casualties is a Biblical understanding of suffering. Either the term becomes loosely applied to any annoyance, whether or not it has anything to do with faithfulness, or people begin to try to "pick a fight" with some element of worldly society in order to fulfill their quota of "suffering" at minimal cost. Instead of supporting one another against the very real onslaughts of the faithless world, many turn their attention to avoiding any major conflict situations, until the "enemy" is no longer perceived to be the world, but rather those of their fellow-citizens who would wish to maintain a costly loyalty to the King! Instead of "Let's go out to him, outside the gate, bearing the same abuse" (Hebrews 13:13), "Don't rock the boat" becomes the order of the day. Could this be one reason for the dimming of our perception of the glory of God?

Peter (I Peter 1:11) and Paul (Romans 8:18 and II Corinthians 4:17) both connect present suffering with the future glory of the people of God: not just any suffering, but that which is joyfully borne, together, as a consequence of obedience to the King. "The God of all grace, who called you all into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you've suffered a while, will himself equip you, make you stable, strengthen, and establish you" (I Peter 5:10). The "you", again, is consistently plural. "Our temporary, insignificant hassles are producing for us an overwhelming, eternal amount of glory!" (II Corinthians 4:17).

Jesus prayed, further, "Father, I want the ones you have given to me to be with me, where I am, in order that they may gaze at my glory which you have given me ..." (John 17:24). This is much more than a request for tickets to a show. Paul explains (II Corinthians 3:18) that it is as we behold the glory of the King, that we are being changed into his likeness (εικων - eikon - image), "from glory to glory"! Here we have come full circle, back to the "image of God," the reason why people were created in the first place. Created to walk with God in the Garden, man chose his own way, mutinied, and hid. Re-created, gazing together on his glory, we at last are transformed into the image he originally intended.

Consistently, people tend to take on a resemblance to whatever claims the focus of their attention. Thus TV violence becomes a sociological norm. Nations "oppose terrorism" with bombing raids and mass destruction. People who lament "brainwashing" try to combat its effects with similar techniques. Focusing on the evils of the world can never eliminate, or even alleviate them. Focusing on the glory of the King, on the other hand, transforms the beholders into his likeness.

Notice, Paul says, "We all are being changed." If the transformation doesn't happen together, it will never happen at all. "We all" is plural. "His image" is singular. God's people must be one, to bear his image, or to share his glory.

Sharing his glory was what the Lord intended for his people ever since the beginning. I Corinthians 2:7 is significant in this regard. "We are speaking God's wisdom, in a mystery that has been hidden away, which God had all arranged ahead of time, before the ages, for our glory"! Although the people he had created and called, failed, in falling short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), the Lord Jesus knew no such failure. "He is the reflection of the glory and character of God's very being, holding everything together by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3). Only so can he succeed in "leading many sons into glory" (2:10), having been made "perfect" (τελειος - complete, mature) through suffering.

Following our Servant - King through selfless obedience into the "illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Corinthians 4:6), his citizens in turn manifest that light to the people who still live in darkness. Reflecting his light, we together become the light of the world. (The "you" in Matthew 5:14 is also plural.) Just as Jesus is exalted in order that his people may share in his

triumphant glory, so his people are exalted, in him, so that the rest of mankind may see, and also enlist as citizens of the Kingdom.

But that exaltation, like everything else in the Kingdom, is something quite apart from the world's definitions. No individual achieves it at the expense of anyone else, or without the company of everyone else! It is neither more nor less than the supernatural oneness of the Body of Christ. "Christ in you, the hope of glory", often quoted, is usually misquoted, as if some private, individual accomplishment were in view. *En humin* (ἐν ὑμῖν) would be much better translated "among you", since the "you", again is plural. Just as when "the Son of Man has been glorified, God has been glorified in him" (John 13:31), so in the obedience and subsequent glorification of his people, the Lord Jesus also inherits enhanced glory: "the wealth of the glory of his inheritance among the saints" (Ephesians 1:18).

There is no greater exaltation than to become an integral part of the eternal purpose of God: and the only road to that goal is the one traveled by his own Son. The only One who has ever completed the journey has given directions to those who want to follow: to "deny oneself, take up the cross, and follow" the pattern modeled by our exalted Servant King. The road traverses many rough places that must be leveled out, and crooked places that must be made straight. There are many adversaries. But no citizen of the Kingdom travels alone.

Together, the citizens of the Kingdom are being built into a company of fellow-travellers in whose *κοινωνία* - *koinonia* there is strength and safety. They are being "built together" into an invincible Body that moves and breathes by the resurrection power of its Head. They are being "knit together" into a fabric that can withstand outright attack, or simply the wear of everyday life, as long as no stitch is missing. When each part is working properly, in the selfless love of their Society Without Status, the ultimate outcome of the journey is assured.

The journey ends at a city: a city that has been prepared for the people of God. This city has no need of sun, moon, stars, or artificial light, because its illumination is the glory of God. The city is identified as the Bride of the Lamb, the people he has purchased for his own, finally united as he intended on that far-off creation morning. Re-created in the image of the Triune God, demonstrating in concrete terms the unity of the Trinity, they reflect the glory of God.

Until then, the King is still recruiting citizens for his Kingdom.