

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit

by Dan Trygg

“So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. ¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this-- not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. ¹⁴ I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵ For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.” Romans 14:12-19

Romans 14 is about relationships in the Body of Christ. Again, it is easy to think of the kingdom of God as a place, or a group to which you belong. We think about things in terms of “membership” or “being part of something”. That reinforces the notion that we are either “in” or “out” of the kingdom of God, as though *that* were the main idea. We think in dualistic terms, like we are “saved” or “unsaved”, ...we are “lost” or “found”, ...we are “citizens of the kingdom” or we are *not*. *That is not what the kingdom of God is all about, however.*

The kingdom of God is not a “place” that we will go to someday. It is not a “club of the redeemed”, or even the “family of God”. It is not simply the gathering, collection, or membership of the saints, ...here in this life *or* even in the life to come. It is not about who you are associated with, or where you go on Sundays. It is not about denominations or theological opinions, right or wrong. In fact, the kingdom of God is not about *you*, at all. The real question is: Are *you* about the kingdom? You see, the kingdom of God is not about a place, or an identity, or an association with a group, a belief system, or who *you* are. The kingdom of God is about who *He* is.

The kingdom of God is wherever, however, whoever, and whenever God's will is being carried out in response to His direction. It is the reign and rule of God. It is coming into agreement with the heart, mind and purpose of God. As we are, and to the degree we are, in agreement with God's working through us, we are living-out, expressing and demonstrating the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is the influence of God's Spirit, equipping, empowering and leading us into action. The Holy Spirit will always lead us into agreement with God's heart and purpose. It will lead us into active-partnership with Him to accomplish the will of God.

We get it backwards. We want to claim God for *us*. We want Him to bolster *our* opinions. We want to say that “we got it right”, and therefore everyone else should agree with *us*. Again, the focus is in the wrong place. It is not about you, or me, or someone else. It is about God, ...His will, ...His way, ...what pleases Him, ...how He wants to do things. We don't get to “armchair quarterback” God. We don't get to advise or counsel Him. He is the King. He can do *what* He wants, *when* He wants, and *how* He wants. ...and He might not work in someone else's life the same way He is working in yours.

That is what the believers in Rome were struggling with. They had different opinions about things. Paul instructed them to take care not to hurt or offend one another about these heartfelt differences. Some had the freedom in their faith-understanding to eat anything. Others, who were “weak” in faith, were very concerned about not eating something that would somehow make them “unclean” or “offensive” to God, or even to other gods, so they only ate vegetables. The tendency was to poke at each other's differences. Those who had more freedom made fun of those who were more concerned about their scruples. They would even eat meat in front of them, flaunting their freedom, and offending them. They would try to pull them into arguments or debates over this issue, which caused separation, divisiveness and alienation. The other group, those with the more restrictive beliefs about food, would judge and condemn the others, who were eating what they themselves were not comfortable eating.

Paul takes both groups to task. Those with freedom should not regard with contempt those who have these legalistic scruples, nor should those with the scruples judge those who do not feel compelled to believe as they do. In the end, it is not *their* place to judge or condemn the servant of another. They are not answerable to each other; they are answerable to God. And HE accepts them! They will have to stand or fall before their own Master, ...and HE is able to make them stand!

In another example, some people observed certain holy days or festivals, while others kept every day the same. Each person must be convinced in his own mind. Those who observe special days, do so to honor God. And those who keep every day the same do so because they feel their freedom honors God. Both are honoring God, and both

are giving thanks to God. Why should we be judging another, or regarding him with contempt? We all are answerable to God, and we will all stand before His judgment seat some day. We all will have to give an account for *ourselves* before Him, one day.

Therefore, let us not judge or condemn each other, rather **let us determine not to put any stumbling block or offense in front of our brother or sister. We should not do anything that may injure our brother or sister, ...or cause them to go against their own conscience. If they think something is unclean, ...to them it *is* unclean.** Don't entice them to do something they are not in good conscience free to do. It will destroy them, and cause disruption in their walk with God. **Be careful that the very freedom that has been a blessing to you should be spoken of as a stumbling block or an evil thing. Why? Because the kingdom of God is *not* eating and drinking, *but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.***

That was a lot of set-up to get to the main statement for today's study, ...but it was important to get the context. **I think what Paul is saying, in one sense, is "The main thing is to keep the *main thing* the MAIN THING!" All this divisiveness, ...this comparing with each other, or this judging or holding others in contempt...THAT is NOT the kingdom of God!** These are issues of distraction from imperfect, fallible people. **Paul did the right thing, ...he turned their focus to the KING.** *Everyone* is answerable to *Him*. We will all have to give an account of ourselves to Him. **Changing their focus to God as their King, changed *everything!*** Instead of focusing on themselves, and comparing themselves with others, **the main thing in the kingdom of God is: What does the King want? The King put us into small cadres of believers to build each other up and help each other grow.** We are in this thing together, so we need to work together to help each other mature and become effective in His service. That is *exactly* the focus of the next few verses, and the flow of thought that began with chapter 12, the practical section. That is all about transformation, learning to grow, and helping serve one another in the Body of Christ. **The kingdom of God is not about disputes about food or drink, or any other peripheral issues. The kingdom of God, the reign and rule of God, is about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**

These are loaded terms, pregnant with meaning. The word "**righteousness**" occurs 86 times in the NT, and had already been used by Paul 28 times in this epistle to the Romans alone. Jesus had spoken of it 9 times, saying that those who hunger and thirst for "the righteousness" are blessed, because they will be satisfied (Matt. 5:6), and that our righteousness must be *more than* the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, or we would not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20). He said that our foremost pursuit should be the kingdom and the righteousness of God, not wealth. God will add what we need, if we seek Him first (Matt. 6:33). In Romans, Paul had said that the gospel revealed a righteousness of God out from faith (1:16,17), ...a righteousness apart from works of the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ (3:21,22), ...being justified ("righteous-i-fied") freely as a gift, by God's grace, through the redemption of Christ (3:24). Because of God's doing, His provision through Christ, this righteousness is credited to the one who believes, apart from works (4:3,5,6,9,11,22). More than just covering sin, however, the ones receiving the overflowing abundance of grace, and the gift of this righteousness, will "reign (verbal form of "kingdom") in life by means of Christ" (5:17). We can now present our 'selves', our "members" as "instruments of righteousness" to serve God (6:13,16-19). Now we have been set free from sin, so that we can serve in newness of the Spirit, and not in the old way of trying to keep the law (7:6). It is the principle of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that has set us free from the principle and power of sin and death (8:2). In our own flesh, we did not have the power or ability to obey the law, but through the indwelling Spirit, we now have the life and inner serenity (peace) to be led by Him and do His will (8:3-14).

Jesus had declared that He had given **peace** to His followers, ...a peace that is not according as the peace that the world gives. "Do not let your hearts be troubled ('stirred-up'), nor be afraid ('cowardly, timid, fearful')" (John 14:27). This admonition follows immediately after telling them that, though He was leaving, He was going to send them another Helper (a Helper like Him), who would never leave them. They would not be left alone. He would assist them, guide them, teach them, and remind them what Jesus had taught them (14:16-16). Although things were going to look bad, and they were going to be scattered, He had told them what would take place so that they would have peace in Him. They may experience trouble in this world, but they could have confidence and firmness of purpose in the face of these difficulties, because He had overcome the world (Jn. 16:33). Peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

In that same conversation, He said that He was telling them these things so that His **joy** would be being in them, and that their joy would be made full (15:11). They would experience grief and sorrow, but then they will experience a joy that no one could take away (16:20-24). Again, in His prayer, He said that He was coming to the Father "so that they might have My joy having been made full in themselves" (17:13). Joy is also a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). He enables us to rejoice in tribulation (1 Thess. 1:6).

Being filled with and led by the Holy Spirit *is* walking in the kingdom of God. Righteousness, peace and joy come as we are receiving the infilling invigoration of life and grace from Him, as we walk in agreement with God.