

## SOME PRACTICAL MATTERS CONCERNING THE KINGDOM LIFE

Scripture Reading: Matt. 17:1-8, 14-21, 24-27; 18:1-4, 17, 21-22, 33-35; 19:3-8; Rom. 14:1-6

### CASTING OUT THE DEMONS

In Matthew 17:1-8 we are shown **a miniature of the full manifestation of the kingdom**. This chapter presents a contrast. On the one hand, there is the kingdom on the mountaintop, and on the other hand, there are demons in the valley. This is a picture of today's situation. Sometimes in the church meetings, it seems that we are on the mountaintop enjoying the Lord's transfiguration. But the world and human society are full of demons. We need to exercise our faith and pray, even with fasting, to cast out these demons. Why are there so many demons? The Lord Jesus gave us the reason: it is an unbelieving and perverted generation (v. 17). Toward God this generation is unbelieving; toward themselves they are perverted. Because of this degraded situation the demons have many opportunities to possess people. We need to realize both sides of this situation. On the one side is the mountaintop with the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus, and on the other side is the plain with the demons. We need to come down from the mountaintop and cast out the demons. Of course, this does not mean that we must cast out every demon, but at least we must cast out some of them. We must release some of the demon-possessed people by prayer and fasting (vv. 14-21).

### THE KINGDOM BEING FLEXIBLE

In Matthew 17:24-27 we have Peter's answer to the poll tax gatherers who inquired if the Lord Jesus paid the temple tax. As we have seen on another occasion (see *Christ versus Religion*), Peter answered wrongly because this tribute was not paid to the Roman Empire but to the temple. On the mountaintop the Lord Jesus had revealed to Peter that He was the Son of God. The temple belonged to God, and as the Son of God, the Lord Jesus was the Son of the Owner of the temple and thus had no need to pay tribute. However, Peter had forgotten the vision he received on the mountaintop. He had seen the vision, but when a practical situation arose, he was unable to apply it. When Peter came into the house, the Lord Jesus asked him if the sons of the king needed to pay tribute. Peter then realized that he had answered incorrectly, but the Lord Jesus said, "That we do not stumble them, go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you will find a stater; take that and give it to them for Me and you" (v. 27). If you want to know the details of this incident, read *Christ versus Religion*. In this chapter I want to point out primarily one matter—in the kingdom life we need to be flexible regarding matters that are not related to morality. In the kingdom we need reality, but we do not need legality. In religion there is no flexibility. For instance, you must observe the Sabbath. With the Lord Jesus, in a sense, it is permissible to pay the tribute and, in another sense, it is permissible not to pay the tribute. By being flexible, we may either pay or not pay.

When I was young, I was bothered by Romans 14 because it seemed that Paul was too liberal about eating and about the keeping of days. Paul said that it was right either to observe a day or not to observe a day. I wanted to ask him, "Brother Paul, which is wrong and which is right?" But Paul said, "He who regards that day, regards it to the Lord; and he who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who does not eat, does not eat to the Lord, and he gives thanks to God" (v. 6). To Paul both were acceptable. Could you imagine that a great teacher like Paul had such a liberal attitude in the matter of keeping of days and in the matter of eating? In Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8, Paul speaks about eating meat that was sacrificed to idols. When I was young, I simply could not reconcile these portions of the Word. In some verses it seemed that he was very strong against eating the idol sacrifices, and in other verses he said that it was permissible to eat. Later on, by experience, I was able to understand Paul's meaning: in some situations you may not eat sacrifices offered to idols, and in other situations you may eat them. You need to be flexible, not legal.

"Does not your Teacher pay the temple tax?" (Matt. 17:24). How would you have answered if you had been Peter? We all must learn to answer this way: "He may pay the tribute, or He may not pay." If we asked Paul whether we should observe the days or not, he would reply, "You may observe them, or you may not." It makes no difference whether you keep the days or not, and it makes no difference whether you are baptized one time or three times. Do not be bothered by outward legality. The form of religion is maintained by legality. If you removed the legalities, religion would collapse because it has nothing of reality supporting it. All the support for religion is found in legalities.

Judaism was supported by three main legalities: circumcision, keeping the Sabbath, and dietary regulations. If you were born into Judaism, you were circumcised on the eighth day. Then you were required to observe the Sabbath every seventh day and to follow the dietary regulations for your entire life. These three legalities were the pillars of Judaism. When the Lord Jesus appeared, He abolished the Sabbath regulations (12:11). In Acts 10:9-15 the Holy Spirit abolished the dietary regulations, and in Galatians 5:2-6 the apostle Paul abolished circumcision. If these three supports of Judaism were taken away, Judaism would

collapse. In the same manner, Christianity utilizes many such legalities to support itself as a religion, but the Lord desires to abolish the legalities.

Look at the situation today. It is full of demons. **We must exercise our faith and pray for others, sometimes with fasting, to cast out the demons and to rescue some of the possessed persons. As to ourselves, we should be flexible and have no legalities.** I may cut my hair short, or I may let it grow long. I may have a beard, or I may shave. Either is right. I may shout, or I may be quiet. I may close my eyes to pray, or I may gaze into the heavens with my eyes wide open. Neither is wrong. I may say the words in the name of the Lord Jesus, or I may not say them and yet still pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. **We should have no legalities but be very flexible.**

### **THE PROPER CHURCH LIFE FOR THE KINGDOM**

Now we come to Matthew 18. In this chapter the Holy Spirit put some points together to show us how to have the proper church life for the kingdom. **The proper church life is the reality of the kingdom. If we have the proper church life, we have the reality of the kingdom.**

#### **Being like Little Children**

**First, we should learn to be humble.** We all need to be converted and to become like little children. There should be no giants among us; we should all be like little children. None of us have titles, for we are all children. The disciples asked the Lord Jesus, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of the heavens?” (v. 1). Everyone wants to be great. The Lord Jesus answered, “He therefore who will humble himself like this little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens” (v. 4). Can you tell us who are the great ones in the local churches? Such a concept does not originate from the kingdom of the heavens but from the kingdom of darkness. The concept of greatness comes from the kingdom of Satan. If you desire to have the proper church life, the first thing you must realize is that there are no giants in the local churches. All the church people should be little people. We should be like little children.

#### **Being Dependent upon One Another**

**Next, we should realize that little children are very dependent on others.** Every giant, on the contrary, is an independent person. Many Christians want to be independent, to exercise their character, and to be strong in themselves. **In the local churches we all must be dependent like little children.** I need you, and you likewise need me. None of us can afford to be independent; we are all dependent upon one another. **Little children depend upon one another and recognize their need for a home.** Whenever they have problems, they simply refer the problems to their home, and they listen to their home. A giant does not listen to his home. Even if a giant does have a problem, he may hide the problem from his home. It is so good to be able to tell our problems to the church. We should realize that we are little children who are dependent on our home. It is terrible not to listen to the church. In Matthew 18:17 the Lord Jesus said that if anyone will not hear the church, he should be considered as a Gentile and a tax collector. These were very ugly terms in the Lord’s time. If you were a Gentile or a tax collector, you were considered to be mean and defiled. If we do not listen to the church, then in the eyes of the Lord and in the eyes of the church, we too become mean and defiled. This is very serious. In the proper church life we all are little children who depend upon our home. We refer our problems to our home, and we listen to what the home says about them. We have covered more about this matter in the book *How to Meet*.

#### **Forgiving Others**

In Matthew 18 we see a third aspect of the proper church life—the little children living at home are quick and ready to forgive others. Peter considered that forgiving his brother seven times was sufficient, but the word of the Lord Jesus was “seventy times seven.” That indicates **forgiving endlessly, continually ready to forgive.** If someone offends you in the morning, you need to forgive him. If he offends you again at noon, you need to forgive him then. If he offends you tomorrow, the next day, and the day following, you will need to forgive him every time. The Lord Jesus did not speak in a light way. What does it mean to forgive? To forgive is to forget. If you cannot forget, it means that you have never forgiven.

Once, a brother came to me, saying, “Brother, let me tell you what a certain person did to me...He really offended me, but I forgave him.” Immediately, I told this brother, “Your forgiveness is quite different from the forgiveness in the Bible. The Bible says that to forgive is to forget. You say that you have forgiven your brother, but you remember everything well enough to repeat it to me. This means that you have not forgiven your brother because you have not forgotten the offense.” When God forgives us, He forgets. Although God is omniscient and omnipotent, He is able to forget. He simply cannot recall our failures and transgressions. Once He forgives them, He forgets them.

In the local churches the problems always concern this matter of forgiving. For example, when we first come together to practice the church life, everyone and everything is wonderful. After a while, although everyone is nice, some friction

gradually arises. Unintentionally, you offend me and I offend you. Sometimes you look at my countenance and feel that I am not happy with you, and sometimes I listen to your voice and think that you are not pleased with me. These things happen again and again. Therefore, **we need the forgiving grace. We need to forgive all and to forget all. Whenever we forgive and forget, we have new life in the church.** By forgetting all of the frictions, failures, and offenses, we become new. The church becomes a new church. Otherwise, our church will become an old wrinkled church. When a person becomes old, he develops wrinkles. If you visit a church that has been in existence for ten years, you can see wrinkles. What are the wrinkles? They are the unwillingness to forgive and forget. Apparently, you are willing to forgive; actually, you are unwilling to forget. This unwillingness to forget the failures of others produces many wrinkles. Thus, the church becomes an old church. If we will forgive by forgetting, every wrinkle will be removed. Every day the church will be a new church with no oldness, failures, transgressions, or offenses because all these things have been mutually forgotten.

This must be applied to your family life and especially to your marriage. You need to forgive your wife day by day and hour by hour. This means that you forget all that your dear wife has done to you. If you forget all the offenses, your wife will always be lovable, and you will have a good family life. However, if you remember even a few things that she has done to you, immediately she will cease to be lovable. You need to forgive and forget.

Matthew 18 reveals the practical way to have the church life. In this chapter **we need to be converted and to become humble little children. We need to depend on others, and we need to forgive and forget. If we practice these things, we will have a very living church.**

### **A HIGH STANDARD OF MORALITY**

Now we go on to chapter 19 to consider another point. Here, the first point that is raised does not concern legality but a high standard of morality. **In the kingdom we should not insist on any legality, but we must maintain high moral standards. We must have the highest morality, as high as God Himself.** Thus, we must go back to the beginning. Matters such as paying tribute and length of hair are not matters of morality, and we may be flexible concerning them. In the kingdom there is absolutely no legality. However, we are still human and must maintain God's standard for humanity. As far as humanity is concerned, nothing is more important than morality. **In its seriousness, immorality is next to idolatry. Nothing is more insulting to God than idolatry, and nothing is more damaging to humanity than immorality.** In both the Old and New Testaments, God never allowed anyone to be involved in the worship of idols. Also, in both the Old and the New Testaments, God never allowed any of His children to be involved in immorality. The standard of morality must be high and absolute. At the end of chapter 17, the Lord Jesus was very flexible regarding the matter of paying tribute. Whether He paid the tribute or not made no difference—He could be flexible. But do not say that it makes no difference whether we are moral or immoral. We can never say this.

The Pharisees tempted the Lord Jesus concerning divorce. Immediately, He referred them back to the very beginning of the Scriptures, taking them to the first two chapters in Genesis, and telling them that according to God's economy there is one husband with one wife and one wife for one husband. When a man and a woman are married, they become one flesh, a oneness that should never be broken. "Therefore what God has yoked together, let man not separate" (Matt. 19:6). However, the Pharisees used Scriptures to argue with the Lord. They said that Moses allowed them to give a certificate of divorce. The Lord Jesus responded by saying, "Moses, because of your hardness of heart, allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so" (v. 8). What Moses tolerated was not up to God's standard. In the beginning we see what was right according to God's standard.

In the kingdom we should have no legality, but we must maintain the highest morality. I hope that this will be proclaimed loudly in all the local churches because this is an age of immorality. Look at the situation in America and in every country today. What a shame! Nevertheless, we are the kingdom, and the kingdom must be filled with the highest morality. May we all learn to have no legality but to maintain the highest morality.

*(The Kingdom, chapter 27)*