

Much has been written concerning the Kingdom of God, even too large, comprehensive treatments. There is, at the same time, also a place for a brief, introductory coverage of the meaning and nature of the Kingdom of God, and in this the author has sought to incorporate the main elements of the Kingdom of God.

This book should be helpful in giving an all-over view of the Kingdom and in encouraging readers to go on to more detailed studies on the same theme. The personal benefit of knowing the meaning of the Kingdom of God will soon become evident to the thoughtful reader.

The Rev. Geoffrey Bingham, an Anglican clergyman, a teacher of interstate and international experience, has been a missionary with the Church Missionary Society, Principal of the Pakistan Bible Institute and of the Bible College of South Australia, and is currently Executive Director of New Creation Ministries.



New Creation Publications Inc

Comprehending

the Kingdom of God



Geoffrey C Bingham

Comprehending the Kingdom of God

Other Books in This Series

Comprehending the Covenant
Comprehending the Family of God and Man
Comprehending the Kingdom of God
Comprehending the Resurrection
Comprehending Justification
Comprehending Fruitfulness of God

Geoffrey Bingham

NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC.
PO Box 403, Blackwood, South Australia, 5051
1999

Published by
NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC.
PO Box 403, Blackwood, South Australia, 5051

© Geoffrey C. Bingham 1999

National Library of Australia cataloguing-in-publication data

Bingham, Geoffrey C.
Comprehending the Kingdom of God

ISBN 0 86408 231 2

1. Bible—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. Kingdom of God—Biblical
teaching. I Title. (Series: The Comprehending books;
no. 3.)

231.72

This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the
purposes of private study, research, criticism or review,
as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be
reproduced by any process without written permission.
Inquiries should be addressed to the publisher.

Wholly produced and set up in Adelaide, South Australia

Typesetting: *Pam Webb*

Cover Design: *Openbook Publishers*

Printer: *Openbook Publishers, Adelaide*

Foreword to the 'Comprehending Books'

For over twenty-five years New Creation Teaching Ministry (NCTM) has been developing Christian Resources, and by means of its Publishing Unit—New Creation Publications Incorporated (NCPI)—has brought these to the general public and is making them further available on the Internet. NCPI distributes books, booklets, other printed study materials, audio and video cassettes, some music CDs and is forming CD-ROMs. All of these are for use by pastors, theologians and other persons. NCPI also has an Imprint named Troubadour Press. By means of NCPI and Troubadour Press, we seek to cover Bible teaching, Bible commentaries, theology, history, personal counselling and certain devotional materials. It also publishes useful fiction and non-fiction volumes, including poetry and hymn books. In addition, it seeks out valuable out-of-print theological books and republishes them.

Many of our NCPI publications are quite substantial and deal with a wide variety of subjects. In some cases certain readers find they cannot take on board books designed to deal thoughtfully and in detail with their subjects or topics. These

readers would like smaller books or booklets which would give them the essence of the subjects they are seeking to understand. It is obvious that often a reader may find a substantial book too much to take in, and may even lose the essence of its subject. It is a pleasant fact that many of our booklets are in demand and are sufficient to inform their readers on a particular subject. One consideration, of course, is that our booklets are less expensive than those which deal in detail with their particular theme, though none of our books is really expensive.

Here, at NCTM–NCPI, we pondered the whole matter and came up with the idea that we would develop what we have called ‘The Comprehending Series’. These booklets would be in a format easy to handle, to read and to comprehend. By ‘comprehend’ we mean each title would deal with its subject so that it would be easy to understand. We decided that it should still have to have substance, and would not be designed for laziness in reading, or be superficial in its material. We had hoped the general public and those with minds for biblical truth would enjoy the Series and not find the books difficult to comprehend. We also hoped that thoughtful students and scholars would find them quite useful. We decided that the subjects should be those which constantly come up in conversation, confront us often in life, and would be helpful in gaining knowledge and wisdom.

We thought it would be good to have a regular format and a cover by which we could quickly recognise the Series. Of course, we send out these

slim volumes with a certain heart-trepidation. Doubtless some of them will be thought to be too simple, and others to be too difficult, but on the whole we feel they will fulfil a felt need and with a prayer and a tremor or two we send them out to the public. It could be that you might come to welcome and appreciate them. We hope so.

Geoffrey Bingham
General Editor
NCPI, 1999

Foreword

Much has been written concerning the Kingdom of God, even to large, comprehensive treatments. There is, at the same time, also a place for a brief, introductory coverage of the meaning and nature of the Kingdom of God, and in this the author has sought to incorporate the main elements of the Kingdom of God.

This book should be helpful in giving an over-all view of the Kingdom and in encouraging readers to go on to more detailed studies on the same theme. The personal benefit to knowing the meaning of the Kingdom of God will soon become evident to the thoughtful reader.

Geoffrey Bingham
August, 1999

The Kingdom of God: What Does It Mean?

Part I: A Survey of the Kingdom in the Scriptures

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

The Kingdom of God is the reign and rule of God over all things. God is the King of all creation. This covers things celestial and things terrestrial. That is, He is sovereign in all that happens. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. All things have their being in Him, and their life and existence from Him. What we will see in our second section is that the terms 'Kingdom of God' and 'Kingdom of heaven' are used not only to cover the whole of creation, but also, in particular, God's reign over His obedient people; and from this Kingdom all are excluded who are not born of the Spirit and given entrance to the Kingdom. At the end-time only the obedient will inherit the Kingdom 'prepared for them from the foundation of the world'.

THE NATURE AND HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSAL KINGDOM OF GOD

Man was created in God's image which means, among other things, that Man was to be God's regent in this world. He was to show God's Kingship. He was created outside the Garden of Eden and placed in it. He was given the mandate to multiply, fill up the earth, subdue it and have kingship (dominion) over it. From the beautiful Garden he was to take the Edenic way of life to all the world. The Edenic way of life was that God was King, Man His subject. Other passages of Scripture, besides the first three chapters of Genesis, lead us to believe the Garden was beautiful, functional; a place of intimacy with God, of worship and of service. Adam was appointed to be prophet, priest and king to creation. There are references to 'the mountain of God' as being in Eden, and this seems to be the centre of worship. Also it was, or contained, a sanctuary of God. In other places it is indicated that it was the place of reigning over the whole world. The Garden had a river to water it. At the perimeter of the Garden the river divided into four streams, it seems, to water the whole earth. Eden, it would seem, could be called 'the city of God' and 'paradise'.

CREATION, THE COVENANT AND THE KINGDOM

Eden's manner of life as the Kingdom of God was linked with both covenant and the law of God.

Man, made in God's image, was in communion with Him. He was one with God in all that God was and is. God as the Triune God was covenantal in His relationships within the Godhead. That is, His relationships were of love which flowed from the Father to and through the Son and Holy Spirit. This relational, covenantal Being was the nature of Man as His image, because Man was object and beneficiary of His covenantal Being. No covenant exists without law, and no law should exist apart from covenant. The covenant was first creational and, when Man fell, was to be seen as wholly of grace, Man not deserving the relationships and benefits of covenant.

This meant that Eden, especially before the Fall, was a place of love, of moral harmony, joy and peace, all of which accompanied obedience. This was the expression and outworking of the law of God which was first the very law by which God worked, the essential law of His being. Secondly it was the law imparted to Man and made an essential part of his being as a creature of God, as a son and a royal subject who in turn was a royal head of creation. Eden, then, was the Kingdom of God in which covenant and law played their indispensable part.

THE KINGDOM IS ATTACKED: THE SERPENT SEEKS TO SET UP THE KINGDOM OF EVIL

The serpent—Satan, that ancient serpent the devil who goes out to deceive the whole world'—

beguiled Eve and, through her, tempted Adam to disobey the one negative injunction God had given; and Man ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and so was doomed to death. He had a death in relationship to God. For his own good he was put out of the Garden. Sin had entered into the Kingdom of God, but it still remained the Kingdom, God as its King, and Man defaulting in his calling as prophet, priest and king. God's grace was present from the beginning—compare the proto-evangel of Genesis 3:15 —and Abel became the first prophet, taking up, we assume, the true role of Man as prophet, priest and king.

Through the Fall, and even perhaps prior to it, the ancient serpent had become the king of the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of deceit, and of a system which aped the creation of God and God Himself. It can be gathered generally from Scripture that the conflict of the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness began in Eden and was expressed in the relationship between Cain and Abel. To be in the Kingdom of God was, from the first, to be persecuted for righteousness' sake. We note that Satan 'formed' his kingdom from fallen angels, principalities and powers of a celestial order as well as human persons who came under his tutelage. Jesus once told leading Jews that they were of their father the Devil and that they did his will. We must also see in the prophecies that these dark powers manipulated and controlled various nations from time to time.

THE KINGDOM OF EVIL WILL EVENTUALLY FALL

The Kingdom—so far as this world and its time are concerned—has obtained from the beginning of creation and will continue to the end. The kingdom of darkness obtains in time but will be destroyed in time and have no place in eternity. Rebellion against God consists in rejection of His Kingdom and His righteousness. Man's oneness with God consists in life and presence in His Kingdom; in covenant relationship and obedience to its law. When the term 'the Kingdom of God' is used, then it is understood to mean the Kingdom of which God is King and that His Being is exercised in His reigning, in His sovereign plan for His creation. To speak often of 'the Kingdom' is to be in danger of thinking of an entity which is a thing on its own. Only where God is, and is in action, is His Kingdom. So as regards the kingdom of Satan there is not a system apart from Satan which he utilises, but all his action with, in and through his cohorts is what is the meaning of his kingdom. In passing we note that Satan is a creature and cannot create, so that opposition to the Kingdom of God can never be successful though its nuisance action is enormous.

In history, the Kingdom of God obtains always. Because it is the reign and rule of God, it is eternal. The situation of Man became bad because of the evil of every thought of the imagination of men's hearts (Gen. 6:5; 8:21), and so the earth became filled with violence and corruption and God judged it in

the Flood. The Adamic sin (cf. Rom. 5:12–21), which led to this judgment of the evil kingdom, still had its effects after the Flood. At the time of the Flood, God reiterated the creational covenant with Noah, for all creation for posterity (Gen. 9:1–17). The Kingdom of God continued. Evil became manifest, especially through idolatry. Idolatry is the substituting of an object of worship for the true God. It is always associated with the forces of the kingdom of Satan (I Cor. 10:18–22). It is a rejection of the covenantal relationship of God with Man, and Man with God.

THE KINGDOM AND THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

God chose an idolater, revealing His glory to him, so that the man Abraham, the idolator, became the head of a covenant which was to be universal and involve—one way or another—the whole of humanity, all the nations of the earth. It was a covenant of grace intended to deal with the destiny of nations, and not only of an earthly inheritance of Canaan but also with the inheritance of eternity.

In one sense Abraham took up the qualities of prophet, priest and king, and Canaan was to be akin to Eden as the Scriptures ascribe those qualities as intended for it. Abraham also knew and obeyed the law of God.

Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, was the chosen — elect—head of the nation of Israel. God was acknowledged as its King, and the nation was

called 'priestly'. God, as its holy King, met it at Mt Sinai and declared its character to it. He brought covenant before it, a covenant in which law played a central part, but like all other expressions of His covenant, it was one of grace. It was to witness to God and His Kingdom. In itself it was to be the core 'Kingdom of God'. Canaan was to be as Eden in its garden, in horticultural fecundity, in its river and in its holy 'mountain of God'. This priest nation amongst all the nations was to be a holy Kingdom. Its worship sanctuary was made after the heavenly pattern. God did dwell in the midst of Israel as its King. Even the election of an earthly king did not alter it from being a theocracy.

ISRAEL WAS GOD'S KINGDOM

Israel failed in many ways. It was idolatrous. It depended not on God but on its own workings. For such things it was judged. Eventually David became its king and brought peace and prosperity to it. This kingdom of Israel became the paradigm for God's true Kingdom. Solomon maintained the peace of the kingdom, extending it in prosperity and security. God made a promise with David of a covenant which embraced both covenant and kingdom, these both constituting the true Kingdom of God. The message through the prophets, both before and after the Exile of judgment for Israel's apostasy, was that a Messiah would come and rule over them. A number of paradigmatic figures were pronounced by the prophets, and a

pacific kingdom on the pattern of David's kingdom was nominated. Great days were nominated in which a garden such as Eden, the holy mountain of God, the sanctuary of God and the river of God are mentioned. God would gather Israel from its dispersion, and this eschatological Kingdom would have a sanctuary to which all nations would come. The regeneration of these nations would take place in connection with the mountain of God, and God would be King over all the earth — something He had always been, but now it would be visible and complete.

JOHN THE BAPTIST, CHRIST AND THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

Into this prophetic presentation, however inadequate and faulty it may have been in Israel, came John the Baptist announcing the Kingdom of God being on the doorstep, and calling for repentance by the nation with a view to the remission of sins. He spoke of one who was to come who would baptise believers with the Holy Spirit, and such a baptism—we gather—had to do with entrance into the Kingdom and the power for proclamation of that Kingdom.

From Genesis 3 to John's coming, the Kingdom of God had been opposed by the serpent or 'the red dragon'—'that ancient serpent called Satan and the devil'. In the Old Testament he held power by reason of idolatry (cf. Rom. 1:18–25), and Israel was virtually destroyed by it, apart from the faithful

remnant to whom John now talked. Jesus also spoke of the Kingdom and called for repentance and belief in the gospel of the Kingdom.

Jesus was the one who manifested the Kingdom in all his words and acts, and attacked the powers of darkness. His ministry was manifestly this, but he had come into the world to destroy the works of the devil (I John 3:8), and this he did at the Cross where the prince of this world was cast out by Christ's bearing the guilt of the human race and thus voiding Satan of his own great weapon—death which brings the fear of death (Heb. 2:14–15; cf. I John 4:18). Christ fought the powers of darkness on the Cross and defeated them likewise. The story of the repentant thief showed he would be with Christ in Paradise—the Garden. Christ's proclaiming the triumph of the gospel to the enchained spirits in prison (I Pet. 3:18–19)—rebellious angels probably—was the proclamation of the victory of the Cross and the Resurrection.

THE KINGDOM AND GOD'S VICTORY

His Cross, Resurrection and Ascension brought the triumph of the Kingdom, Jesus now being enthroned as the Son-King of the Kingdom, his Father being King eternally. Jesus was the Adam who was God's Regent because he was the true, radiating image of God, whereas Adam had been only the reflective image (Gen. 1:26–28) and had failed. Through Christ, the Kingdom was now 'the Kingdom

of the Lord and his Christ', 'the Kingdom of Christ and of God', all reminiscent of Psalms 2, 89, 110, etc. The period of action indicated in I Corinthians 15:24–28 and the Book of the Revelation shows that Christ was using the victory of his Cross and Resurrection to bring every enemy under his control and to destroy them as agents of the kingdom of darkness. We note in all this, also, 'the patience and endurance of the saints' even unto death as they proclaim the testimony of Jesus and keep the commands of God.

THE CHURCH THE PROCLAIMER OF THE KINGDOM

The Church which is the creation of Christ, brought into dynamic being at Pentecost and was given understanding of the whole plan of God, is the proclaiming agent of the gospel of the Kingdom, and calls men and women into the Kingdom. They enter the Kingdom but as yet do not inherit it. They are called into the Kingdom of God and glory (I Thess. 2:12), but that is ahead of them as a full inheritance; so meanwhile they must be wary of the devices or stratagems of Satan as they live the quality life of the Kingdom as in the Sermon on the Mount. This is the life given, not attained. The Sermon on the Mount simply tells how life is lived in the Kingdom and is not prescription, as such.

We note that the Kingdom has ever been from the beginning, and life in it has been as Christ describes it in the Sermon on the Mount. The Kingdom of God *comes* with Christ and is not made to

be triumphant through Christ and his Person and Work. It has always been triumphant. It is the action through Christ the Son by which the Kingdom of God destroys the kingdom of darkness. In Revelation 19, Christ is still at this work, and completes it in his Person. The Church is Christ's covenant-partner in proclaiming the Kingdom and living its life. The evidence of this is on the one hand the unremitting persecution by the serpent of the people of the Kingdom, and on the other 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit', for the Kingdom is 'the Kingdom of the Son of His love', and therefore is a kingdom of love. The kingdom of Satan is a kingdom of hatred. The Kingdom is also not in mere words but in power. Galatians 5:22–23 shows that the harvest of the Spirit is the way the Kingdom really, essentially, is. Galatians 5:22–23 equals Matthew chapters 5 – 7; that is to say that the fruit (harvest) of the Spirit constitutes the criteria for life in the Kingdom.

THE SECOND AND LAST ADAM BRINGS IN THE KINGDOM

What Adam did not do, though given the creational mandate in the context of the creational covenant, Christ did. He was Prophet, Priest and King, which Adam should have been but reneged. Christ is the Second and Last Adam, and he has been 'Edenising' the world and will complete this Holy City–Paradise, the very one into which the thief on the cross entered on the day of the Cross.

Needless to say, this action of Christ is seen and sensed only by faith and not by sight. The kingdom of darkness is given its death knell by the Son-King who then gives the Father the Kingdom which has wholly triumphed. The Son has destroyed the works of the Devil. He has opened the Kingdom of heaven to all believers. Matthew 25:34 shows this, 'Then the King will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" '.

LIVING IN THE KINGDOM NOW, AND EVENTUALLY INHERITING THE KINGDOM

Those who were—and are—members of the Kingdom of God were—and are—also members of the church of Christ. These will inherit the Kingdom (cf. Matt. 25:31, 34). They will be those who have conquered the serpent and have believed for the inheritance of glory (Eph. 1:18; I Cor. 2:7; Rom. 8:18). Even they must not take their being in the Kingdom for granted: they must persist in living the true life of the Kingdom. Galatians 5:19–21 (cf. Gal. 6:7–8; Eph. 5:5) shows this for it says, 'Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.'

What we have written above in Part 1 is the history of the Kingdom of God from first to last, the beginning to the end; for it has always been the power of God and the plan which He had before the foundation of the world for its ultimate climax in holiness, glorification and perfection. All things have had and do have and will have their being in Him, and their life and existence from Him. What we have seen above and will see in Part 2 (below) is that the terms 'Kingdom of God' and 'Kingdom of heaven' are used not only to cover the whole of creation, but in particular, God's reign over His obedient people; and from this Kingdom all are excluded who are not born of the Spirit and given entrance to the Kingdom. At the end-time only the obedient will inherit the Kingdom 'prepared for them from the foundation of the world'.

Part II: The Full Proclamation of the Kingdom

CHRIST AND HIS TEACHING ON THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The matter of the Kingdom of God bulked largely in the mind of Jesus Christ. Not only did John the Baptist link him with the Kingdom of God, but Jesus affirmed what John had said (Mark 1:14). It was because of the matter of the Kingdom that large crowds flocked to hear him, even though their ideas of the Kingdom may have been faulty. His teaching on the Kingdom takes up a considerable amount of text in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). The Sermon on the Mount takes up three chapters of Matthew's Gospel. The parables of the Kingdom are also rich teaching on the Kingdom. Christ's ministry is the proclamation of the Kingdom. Matthew 4:23 says, 'And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people', and Matthew 9:35 adds to this, 'And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity'. His teaching of the Kingdom was in word and deed, alive and dynamic. A key

to this is John 6:63, 'It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life'. He was really claiming that what he does is the Kingdom in its action in this world. In Matthew 12:28 this is clearly stated, 'But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you'. In his other works of healing and miracles it is the same, 'Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you"' (Luke 10:8-9). We have seen that Christ's ministry was to 'destroy the works of the devil', and this he did in word and deed, especially the work of the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension, as Acts 10:38 shows so clearly, 'how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him'.

THE DISCIPLES CALLED TO PREACH THE KINGDOM OF GOD

After his resurrection, Christ talked with his disciples over forty days regarding the Kingdom of God, telling them that they would be baptised in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:49; Acts 2:4ff.) and as a result witness to him. This was virtually telling them that they would proclaim the Kingdom. At a time when the disciples had seemed discouraged, he said to them, 'Fear not, little flock,

for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom' (Luke 12:32). He also told them at the Last Supper that the Kingdom of God was theirs, 'You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom' (Luke 22:28–29). The Book of Acts is the account of them proclaiming the Kingdom of God although they do not often describe it that way (cf. Acts 8:5, 12; 19:8ff.; 20:25; 28:23, 30–31).

PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD TODAY

We now look at what is our part in the proclamation of the gospel of Christ—the gospel of the Kingdom—today. 'The gospel of Christ' or 'the gospel of God' in the New Testament are the same as 'the gospel of the Kingdom'. This was revealed at Pentecost. Just as the apostles could not establish what was—and is—the gospel but by the Holy Spirit, so we cannot understand the mystery of the Kingdom (Mark 4:11–12) and communicate it apart from the Holy Spirit. To be in the Kingdom is to know it, and to know it is to preach it. Such preaching is really a witness. We must, then, keep in mind the following:

The Kingdom of God Is Christ's Kingdom

If we do not believe in heart and mind that Christ rules as King over all the Kingdom now and

for ever in its widest dimensions as creation, and in its intimate nature as the Kingdom of the redeemed, then we will not proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom with power and assurance. We need to see and believe that it is Christ's own Kingdom, however that may relate to the Father also being King. The following Scriptures bear out his unique Kingship:

The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers (Matt. 13:41).

Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom (Matt. 16:28).

Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matt. 19:28).

And he said to her, 'What do you want?' She said to him, 'Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom' (Matt. 20:21).

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne (Matt. 25:31).

And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom' (Luke 23:42).

Jesus answered, 'My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world' (John 18:36).

It is apparent from these quotes that the early church went out with great gladness, great assurance that Christ was on the throne of God and reigning. Authority had been given to him so that he could send his people into all the world proclaiming the gospel. It would do well for us to continually ponder Christ's active Kingship and so proclaim it.

The Kingdom of God is the Father's Kingdom

The Kingdom is the Kingdom of God. There is no such entity as 'the Kingdom', a power situation which is dynamic within itself. It is God Who is powerful, and the power of the Kingdom is the power of God Himself. In our last paragraph we saw that Christ is the power and authority of the Kingdom, but whereas it is 'the Kingdom of the Son of man', it is first the Kingdom of the Father and the Kingship is delegated to the Son. Thus, in Luke 22:28–29, Jesus speaks of the Father appointing to him a Kingdom, 'You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom'. In Ephesians 5:5 Paul speaks of 'the kingdom of Christ and of God' and in Revelation 11:15 we read, 'Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever"'. The Sermon on the Mount is filled with references to the Father and His Kingdom. First Corinthians 15:24–28 is the key to Christ's

present reigning, his defeat of the enemies under the ennoblement of the Father, and finally Christ's delivering the Kingdom to the Father 'that God may be everything to every one' or, 'that God may be all in all'.

This is immensely encouraging to those who proclaim the Kingdom. The kingdom of the world cannot maintain itself. It is taken up into the Kingdom of God, its evil dissolved, and all is made to be subject to God.

Entrance into the Kingdom Determines the Manner and Mode of Living in It and Proclaiming It

Those who proclaim the Kingdom cannot properly do so unless they are living in the Kingdom in accordance with its Kingdom principles. These principles are well set out in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. chs. 5 – 7). We say 'principles' and not 'prescriptions'. To be under the King is a great act of grace on the part of God, both in giving us entrance into the Kingdom, and then so relating to us that we live the life that He has given us in Christ and His Spirit. In Matthew 18:1–4, Jesus makes it clear that unless one humbles himself as a little child he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. A child in society is no 'great one'. In the Kingdom of heaven, greatness is seen in serving. He who does not strive to be master but is glad to serve has greatness. Christ comes into the world not to be served but to serve. Humility is the hallmark of the Kingdom. Christ shows the humility of the

Kingdom in the passage of Philippians 2:1–11. Paul enjoins his readers to (i) ‘in humility count others better than yourselves’; and (ii) ‘look not only to [your] own interests but also to the interests of others’. Christ showed that the way of himself—and thus of the Kingdom—is humility. It is true that ‘God raised him up to be both Lord and Christ’ (Acts 2:36) and in this Philippian chapter to be Lord over all, but the Christ who was made King was the Christ who inherently was humble. Humility was his hallmark. In Revelation chapter 5 Christ is the Lamb that had been slain, but at the same time the powerful Lion of Judah.

From all this we deduce that Christ’s defeat of evil by the Cross was his demeanour before God and Man, namely that of humility and serving. Thus to live in the Kingdom is to be humble. ‘For the kingdom of God is not [matters of] food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.’ Thus it can be called ‘The kingdom of the Son of his love’ (Col. 1:13), and it is right to say that the criteria of the Kingdom are the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23).

To proclaim the Kingdom, then, we must let go all matters of pride, of seeking to build our own kingdom, of being Nimrods and Lamechs and proud Nebuchadnezzars, becoming like Christ in his death (Phil. 3:10) as did Stephen the first witness to be killed. He showed his Master in the forgiveness of those who were killing him and said, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’. As we live in the Kingdom in the Spirit, our ministry will be authentic, a true proclamation of the gospel of

the Kingdom. What an immense privilege and responsibility for all who have been entered into the Kingdom, by grace!

THE SUBSTANCE OF THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

From all the materials contained in this small book we can see what is the message of the gospel of the Kingdom, and so in these paragraphs we will be repeating things which we have already said. As we have pointed out, ‘the gospel of the Kingdom’ is the same as ‘the gospel of Christ’, ‘the gospel of God’ and what Paul calls ‘my gospel’.

The Gospel of the Kingdom Is the Message That God the Creator Is ‘Lord of Heaven and Earth

He is King over all things (Matt. 11:25; Luke 10:21; Acts 4:24; cf. Gen. 14:18–22; Ps. 135:5–7) and so reigns over all the earth. Related to the fall of Man, ‘that ancient serpent call the Devil and Satan’ (Rev. 12:9) has his kingdom of darkness and seeks to overcome God’s Kingdom. He has rebellious mankind in thrall and they have to do his will (Eph. 2:1–3; John 8:44; I Tim. 3:6; II Tim. 2:24–26). Man is kept in his bondage by the fear of death (Heb. 2:14–15; I John 4:18). Christ has become incarnate to destroy the works of the devil (I John 3:8). He has done this effectively in his redemptive work of the Cross and his defeat of death in the Resurrection. His present reigning overcomes any

power Satan may think he has (Heb. 2:14–15; Luke 10:18; John 12:31; 16:11; Luke 4:6; I John 5:19; cf. I John 5:4–5). At the climax of history God will be shown to be King over all the earth (Zech. 14:9; cf. Rev. 11:15–18; 19:6–7). This means that His holy Kingdom is for ever and ever. The *manner* of this Kingdom is shown in the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, the Holy City, the New Temple which is God and the Lamb, the eternal Paradise and the redeemed people of God who are ‘a kingdom and priests to [their] God’ and all celestial creatures, who along with the Redeemed ever worship and serve God. This is the Kingdom come.

The Gospel of the Kingdom as the Gospel of Salvation Is Set Out in the Apostolic Message

This is the message that the Apostles and all other members of the Church preached to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles. The following are the elements of the gospel which are known as ‘the *kerugma*’ or ‘the proclamation’.¹ The *kerugma* has to take into account the teaching of the Gospels, and in particular, the Synoptic Gospels. We need to see the continuity between Israel of the Old Testament, Israel as contemporary with Christ, and the significance of Christ for the matter of the proclamation. The secular proclamation was an

¹ The other term ‘*euangelion*’ is translated ‘good news’, and as someone has quipped, ‘It is good news for bad men and bad news for good men [that is, the self-righteous]’. The substance of the good news and of the *kerugma* are the same.

announcement made by a proclaimer, generally in the market place and its message was that of the Emperor, and had to be obeyed on pain of death. The *kerugma* of God was likewise proclaimed. It was not an invitation given but a command issued. Keeping in mind what the Gospels say of Christ, the best way to determine the content of the proclamation is to be found in Acts where the proclaimers such as Peter, Stephen, Philip and Paul give their messages. Whilst not always being named as such, they are Kingdom messages. The substance of the *kerugma* is as follows:

- (a) The message immediately linked Israel with its history. It brought that stream of historic continuity to the incarnation of Christ.
- (b) It spoke of the ministry Christ had given, and then of his death, resurrection, ascension and present reigning, with some reference to his return. The death of the Cross, though a scandal, was predestined by God and was not only valid but the means of Man’s salvation.
- (c) The primary message was Christ’s resurrection and ascension, and the announcement that ‘Jesus is Lord!’ The message insisted it was working on verifiable facts, that there were witnesses to Christ’s resurrection, and the Resurrection was an act of God which attested to Christ as Lord over the creation. Romans 10:9 shows that to be saved one must believe this message. This was the case at Pentecost.

- (d) Jesus' Messiahship is attested, and Israel must acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God as he has been attested '...in power... by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord'.
- (e) Because of Christ's Lordship-Kingship, Israel—and indeed all humanity—must repent, believe, convert and be forgiven of its sins through grace, and so receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We have seen above that receiving salvation brings a person both to be a member of the Church and a son of the Kingdom. The Church is the proclaimer of the Kingdom. Conversion, therefore, brings the redeemed person into the ministry of proclaiming the Kingdom.

Part III: Anticipation of the Fulfilment of the Kingdom

How do we understand, 'Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory'; 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'; 'The kingdom of God has come upon you'; 'The kingdom of heaven is among you'; 'it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom'; 'we have received a kingdom'; 'I appoint to you a kingdom'; 'Thy kingdom come'; 'the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; 'has transferred us from the dominion of darkness to the kingdom of the Son of his love'; 'shall not inherit the kingdom of God'; 'through much tribulation we shall enter the kingdom'; 'by his appearing and his kingdom'; 'the Lord will save me for his heavenly kingdom'; 'so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'; 'inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'; 'the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ'; 'And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God" '?

It is evident from these quotes that (i) the Kingdom of God was prepared before the earth was created; (ii) the Kingdom was known to Israel; (iii) it was at hand when John and Jesus preached; (iv) it came upon people when Jesus ministered; (v) it was among the people in Palestine; (vi) believers entered the Kingdom; in fact they were taken from the kingdom of darkness and placed in the Kingdom of the Son of God's love; (vii) believers were yet to inherit the Kingdom, that is, in its eschatological state; (viii) the Kingdom was yet to come in all its fullness, believers having but a proleptic experience of the Kingdom as they hoped for its coming; and (ix) the Kingdom is coming, but when it comes believers will inherit in all its fullness.

Historically the Kingdom is always present—from the beginning to the end of time—but its sovereignty is always being contested by Satan and his kingdom of darkness. In terms of eras or dispensations, the Kingdom of God was always creationally present, but it became covenantally present first with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and then with Israel itself, as a nation. In the New Testament it comes with Jesus the King—crowned at his baptism—and is present in his Person. Those who respond to the gospel of the Kingdom enter the Kingdom, but it is yet a Kingdom known only in faith, hope and love. Believers look for its full coming with the return or *parousia* of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, when they shall inherit, which means they will be 'a kingdom and priests unto their God'.

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM WHEN IT WILL HAVE COME

Ultimately the Kingdom of God will be what it has always been: the reign and rule of God. Yet that reign and rule has had various modes which we might call creational, covenantal, eschatological and ultimate, that is, of the *telos* or goal. It is not difficult to see the Kingdom in all of these facets.

The ultimate of the Kingdom prepared for the saints from the foundation of the world is really what is called 'the Holy City' or 'the Bride of Christ' or the Jerusalem above—'the mother of us all'. It is the Holy City in which the ultimate temple is 'God and the Lamb' and God is the light of it. This is the Paradise of God, the new and complete Eden with its river of life, its tree of life and the perpetual fruit of it. It is the ultimate home of God comprised of 'many mansions'. Into this Kingdom nothing that is evil or unclean can enter. This has been brought about by the Son's battle with Satan and his kingdom. This rule of darkness has been destroyed for ever.

It remains now for the saints to enjoy the Kingdom, which they once entered and which they now inherit. It remains for them to share the rule of it with their Father and His Son, for they have inherited 'all things'.

Appendix: Love in the Kingdom of God

Part I: The Kingdom of Love in History

INTRODUCTION: GOD—CREATOR, REDEEMER AND GLORIFIER

We are conscious that in both the Old and New Testaments the fact of God's Kingdom confronts us. Its idea is there strongly in both Testaments, where much is said about its nature and powers as well as its King. Unless we see Scripture as a unity, and trace its action from the initial creation to the 'new heaven and a new earth', then we will miss the true nature of the Kingdom. This, anyway, we should have seen in the text of our book. We know that in the beginning the creation was perfect and God ruled over all. In spite of the Fall, all things proceed within the Kingdom as planned and controlled by God—even though this may not seem to be the case. God's history, which we explain as 'intention, promise and fulfilment', comes to its fulfilment as the successful Kingdom, as the Holy City and Paradise, especially as the kings of the

earth bring the glory of the nations into it. It is helpful to trace some of that history, even though it may appear quite sketchy. It is up to us as readers to fill in the needed material.

The Kingdom Created in Love for the Goal of Love

Following this first section, we will trace the way in which the Kingdom proceeds in history, but first we must look at what appears to be a contradiction in that history.

The Apostle John wrote, 'God so loved the world . . .' On this statement God loves all His creation, from first to last. We are told in other places in Scripture that His plan is ultimately to bring it to be a Kingdom wholly of love; love which can never be interrupted. When He created, however, it was the Kingdom of love—'God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good'. One of the indications was that vegetation was given for food, not the flesh and blood of creatures, as is indicated in Genesis 1:29–31:

And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

The effect of Man's sin is seen in Genesis 9:1–7, where now Man will eat of the flesh of animals,

and it is commanded that animals and human beings should not kill a human being:

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image. And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it.'

At the end of time, in the new age, this system will be reversed, if we take the words of Isaiah 11:6–9 literally:

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
and the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall feed;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put his hand
on the adder's den.
They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

Romans 8:19–21 seems to point to the liberation of the creation into a glorious existence of non-corruption and beautiful freedom from death:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Because of Man's sin in Eden, the conflict between good and evil, love and hatred, peace and violence ensued, and it is no wonder that those who look at creation by human reasoning alone find everything confusing. There seems to be no total universal love, and any claim, that faith which is inspired by God's Word can help us to see it otherwise, meets with so much scorn. We have, then, to try to see it by the way the Scriptures set out the plan of God, the plan of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom of Eden

At creation, God created Man and then a special garden for him in which He placed him. It was a centre of beauty, serenity and worship. When the woman was created from the man, it was socially complete. It has often been spoken of as a place of God's Presence, a place of worship of Him by Man and so a holy sanctuary. It is understood as the original Paradise, and as having all foods necessary to its inhabitants. Its river watered the garden and then divided into four, watering the earth. In

it, Man was commanded to be fruitful and fill up the earth, that is, expand the glories, beauties and ethos of Eden to the ends of the earth. He was to 'Edenise' the whole creation.

Without doubt it was the Kingdom of love, and had the first couple not sinned the world would have been filled with the Edenic way of love, love for God and Man, because Man was loved by God, and as we have said, creation was essentially a love thing.

We have already stated that the fall of Man brought disaster. The couple was ejected from the Garden. Life that had violence within it was now in the world. Blood would be shed. Injustice, hatred and greed would capture men and women of a certain kind. Cain stands as the violent one, Abel as the lover.² Abel had faith in God and was accepted. So the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the serpent were in the one creation. Only by seeing this, and realising the two kingdoms are incompatible, can we understand the seeming contradiction of the Kingdom of creation. In one sense all evil powers and rebellious humanity exist within the Kingdom, though they do not agree with it, or submit to the King of all the earth, God.

The Kingdom of Israel

Whilst the *term* 'Kingdom of God' does not exist, as such, in the Old Testament, yet its *idea* is

² For both men and their attitude see I John 3:10–18.

strongly there. Israel understood itself to be God's people in a special way. God had told them: 'Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel' (Exod. 19:5–6).

At the dedication of the gifts given to build the temple, King David had prayed:

Blessed art thou, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come from thee, and thou rulest over all. In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank thee, our God, and praise thy glorious name (I Chron. 29:10–13).

David saw that, whilst God had chosen Israel for His special people, He was nevertheless over all heaven and earth. David was the man to whom God promised an everlasting covenant and an everlasting kingdom. In II Samuel 7:12–16 and I Chronicles 17:16ff., this promise of God is set forth, though we will not seek to open its full meaning here. It is sufficient to say that in David was the promise of both the Kingdom and the

Covenant, that both are mentioned in Psalms and the Prophets relating to David's kingship. In the New Testament this matter is further emphasised.

Whilst the coming kingdom of David is most interesting to pursue, yet we need to see that the kingdom of Israel was essentially one of love. God's choice of Israel was out of electing love, and His assurance to them of His love was very strong.³ Not only are the 'ten words' the summary of the love of God to Israel, and their love to Him and their neighbours, but also the whole law of Sinai was for the well-being and the social living of all the community. The New Testament affirms this in the recorded words of Christ, Paul, James, John and other teachers and writers.

Israel, then, was a kingdom of love, and it had a sacrificial love to bring forgiveness and reconciliation between God and the people, and then among the people.

The Kingdom of Heaven in the New Testament

In the text of our book we have already seen the nature of the Kingdom of heaven of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament. Now we will discuss it in particular regarding love in the Kingdom. The materials in the text immediately below are of both a biblical and a theological nature. They are biblical in that we quote the Scriptures which state clearly who will and will not enter the Kingdom of God, and theological in that we will

³ See Deuteronomy 7:6-11, 30:6, and Exodus 34:6-7.

use the fruits of historical theology derived from the Scriptures which speak of the nature of God as love and His Kingdom as the reality of love.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS THE KINGDOM OF LOVE

We have been teaching ourselves not to think that there is an entity called 'the Kingdom' as though it is something existing in itself, something God has created and appears to exist on its own with perhaps some oversight from God. We know that 'kingdom' means 'rule', and so the Kingdom is God ruling in His creation, and ruling in the way which brings genuine life to innumerable people.⁴ It has within it the way of life, because it is the Kingdom *of* God, and *of* Christ and *of* the Spirit. That the Kingdom is the Kingdom *of* love is seen in Colossians 1:13 where it is called 'the kingdom of the Son of His love'. He who rules determines the nature and character of the creation over which He rules, and the Kingdom of men and of angels whom He rules in love.⁵

⁴ It is not that somehow there is a kingdom-creation and God has asserted His right over it, and rules. Most take ruling in a harsh sense. No: God has *created* the universe and so it is His by right of creation. His ruling over it is in accordance with His love, righteousness, holiness, goodness and truth.

⁵ Throughout this essay we mean by 'rule' God's loving and beneficent care of creation and all inhabitants. At the same time His holiness and righteousness judges and ejects from that Kingdom all that is evil and is not of holiness and love. Passages such as Matthew 7:21-23, I Corinthians 6:9, Galatians 5:19-21, and Ephesians 5:5 make this clear.

Colossians 1:13 is where Paul says we have been transferred from the power of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love. We know the Kingdom is elsewhere called 'the kingdom of God and Christ', and 'the kingdom of the Lord and His Christ'⁶. It is the Kingdom of the Father and the Son. Paul wrote, 'For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit',⁷ thus showing us the Kingdom of God is in the Holy Spirit. That is, the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of the Triune Godhead, in which the Father is love, the Son is the Son of His love and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love. Thus the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of love. In fact we need to understand that God's oversight of the Kingdom is relational and not of domination: it is of covenantal law and not of authoritarianism. It is primarily ministerial and not magisterial. What we also need to understand is that when God created His universe, His own, internal Triune Nature was covenantal, meaning that all Three Persons related as One, without any sense of contract between the Three. *In fact, their covenantal nature is that of love.* Likewise all things of the universe created by God—and especially Man—are of covenantal origin which brings covenantal functioning, and covenantal functioning *is* love.

These two elements of love and covenant constitute the nature of God's Kingdom. This is a

⁶ Ephesians 5:5; Revelation 11:15.

⁷ Romans 14:17, cf. 5:5, 15:30, and Galatians 5:22.

powerful conclusion, for the Kingdom of God cannot abide that which is not covenantal and which is not relational, in love.

A further indication of this is found in Galatians 5:19–23:

Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.

A close look at the section of 5:13–26 tells us the story that if we are legalistic then we will end up in the works of the flesh which are horrible, and we will never enter into the Kingdom of God. If we walk by the Spirit, then we will be living in love, joy, peace (etc.), indicating that these elements are lived and enjoyed in the Kingdom of God.

THE KINGDOM IS OF THE TRIUNE GOD OF LOVE

From the New Testament, then, we can see that the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of love, and all within it are expected to be lovers of God, of His creation and of all fellow human beings. However, it is not with the coming of the Son of God into the world that love begins. Love begins with God, and God was love before the beginning of creation. As

love, He created the world in love. Had Man not sinned in Eden, we would see only love. It is prophesied that at the end of time we will see only love when the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. We have seen that two kingdoms exist, the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, and so the issue of love is much confused because humanity lives in the conflict of these two. Even so, all was created in love, and for love. When we read the Old Testament, then, of course, we see many evidences of that love.

The truth of God being love we have already emphasised. What we need to keep in mind now is that the Triune God has eternally been love. The relationships within the Godhead have ever been those of full communion and so of full love. The Three Persons have been spoken of as coinhering One Another. Jesus showed this when he said, 'I am in the Father and the Father in me'. Since the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son, he also coinheres the Father and the Son as they coinhere him.

THE WAY TO KNOW THE LOVE OF THE KINGDOM

It is obvious that in order to know the love of the Kingdom we must first enter the Kingdom. We have seen that those who repent and believe can *enter* into the Kingdom in this life, and live in the Kingdom, but it is not until the experience of

ultimate glorification that they can *inherit* the Kingdom. We have seen that Christ and Paul warn folk against vainly believing they are in the Kingdom. Jesus told Nicodemus that unless he were born of the water he could not see the Kingdom of God, and unless born of the Spirit he could never enter the Kingdom of God. Both John and Jesus made repentance and belief of the gospel of the remission of sins the way into the Kingdom. That is, they demanded what is called 'being born from above' or 'the new birth'.

John in his first letter mentions this new birth in the context of God's love and love to others:

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (I John 4:7–12).

John's statement above—'he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love'—is the Apostle saying that the experience of the new birth, which brings us into the Kingdom, does two things: (i) it brings us to know the love of God, to know that God *is* love; and (ii) when one is born of God then one loves all others. The principle is, 'We love, because he first loved us' (v. 19).

Note that John tells us the *manner* in which God loved us. He loved us in the sending of His Son into the world so that we might have life through him, and love is in this that he sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. It should be clear that until we receive the life God offers to us then we will not know He is love. We can only receive that life through the suffering of Christ on the Cross as the one who made propitiation for our sins. This 'propitiation for our sins' means all the suffering of the Cross, Christ being made our sin, bearing our sin in his body on the Tree (the Cross) and suffering as the Just for the unjust.

God shows us His love in His Son, and so 'we love, because He first loved us'. That is the way of immediately coming into the Kingdom and to knowing that God is love, and so the life of His Kingdom *is* love. If we have not had this encounter with God, then all our talk about love in the Kingdom is pointless.

THE WAY OF LOVE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

To know the 'facts' about God being love, being born again, being in the Kingdom, can be a long way from having true experience of them. What does God's Kingdom mean to most people? It is an idea, and no more than an idea. To talk about 'the ethics of love' is quite empty if we do not know God personally as love, and if, therefore, we have no motivation to love.

The paragraph just written above may irritate some readers. They may say, 'I know what love is. Of course I do! I love my family, my friends, and I have love for people in painful situations. Don't suggest to me that I do not love.' Even so, there is a difference between *eros*—fallen Man's love—and *agape*, the love of God in Man causing him to truly love with no conditions attached. *Eros*, we say, is 'contractual love'; *agape* is unconditional.

Part II: Always the Kingdom of Love

We have seen that God has always been love—Father, Son and Spirit. Abel was the first of lovers. He really loved his brother and would have wanted him to be of the same love. Even so, Cain killed him in rage. We have seen the kingdom of darkness began its separate reign. Can we conceive the love of Abel, how intense and wonderful it was? It was of the love of God, for always ‘love is of God’: it has no other source.

There has always been this Kingdom of love. When in life we see the terror of the kingdom of evil and think all is finished, then we are apt to be empty, cynical and bitter. Yet the slightest thing will change us, as the butterfly on Patch Adam’s hand after his lover had been killed.⁸ We see the power of the Kingdom is love, though, of course, holy love.

Christ had to come to show that Kingdom. Some may well have been afraid of the Kingdom coming, but others welcomed it with joy, as Christ was sometimes welcomed with joy as the King of it.

Jesus told his hearers that if they believed on him and drank of him, then out of their inner

⁸ In the film *Patch Adams*, the major character works in the way of love as he sees it, but when a tragedy happens he becomes violently angry, until the gentle action of a butterfly directs his mind afresh to true love.

beings would flow torrents of living water. This referred to the Holy Spirit’s coming at Pentecost. Paul also refers to that: ‘God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit’. Now that is what happened at Pentecost. The Spirit comes bringing love, and that love becomes a river bursting through to the world. The immediate proof of their being filled with love was the way in which (i) they attended to the worship, the fellowship, prayers and rich new teaching; and (ii) they attended to the matter of love by the daily distribution of goods to the needy widows, orphans and the poor. This had been the ordered case in Israel for all who were needy, which, as we have said, was a love Kingdom. There it was prescribed, but something had gotten into the new entrants into the Kingdom. Those who had ‘this world’s goods’ sold them and gave them to ‘every person as he had need’.

I believe it is the Christian gospel which has shed its teaching down through generations so that medical care, education and care for the poor and ignorant have come from many a love-filled and Spirit-filled heart. The world aid that we see today, I believe, has arisen primarily out of our Western Christian background, out of the Christian idea of love and charity. History will bear that out. That is not to say, though, that some who help generously are not pagans, nor to say that giving has not been known apart from the gospel. True giving is true love. Conditional giving is not love.

It is here I John 3:10–18 comes in—and it is to do with the matter of giving. Now if you are a person

Comprehending the Kingdom of God

who is ever, only, a possessor of goods, then you will not give. You will not believe in grace. You will hang on to what you have. Look at the text:

By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not wonder, brethren, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.

Think, then, about II Corinthians 9:15, 'Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!' Second Corinthians 8:9 has it, 'he became poor [that we] might become rich'. Romans 6:23 says, 'the free gift of God is eternal life'. In Galatians 2:20, Paul tells us, personally, 'the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me'. In John 3:35 Jesus said, 'the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand'. In John 17, we find statements such as, 'which thou hast given me' and 'those whom the Father has given me'. Eleven times Jesus speaks of giving. God is endlessly giving to him. It is in this

Comprehending the Kingdom of God

chapter that Jesus says, 'The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one' (v. 22). Giving is of the nature of God: it is love itself in action.

Do we give? Above we have read of the 'needs' gospel, that is, folk have needs and we give: 'if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?'

God is always giving, and so He loves an hilarious giver because that one is like Him. In this sense the father of the prodigal was generous, not only because he gave to his son in the first place, but also because he welcomed the son back with love after his life of selfishness and sin.

God gives innumerable gifts for life. We remember, 'God so loved that He gave . . .' In fact there is nothing we have that we have not received as a gift: 'What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?' His gifts are to meet not only our personal needs but also the needs of all those in the Kingdom. '[G]ive, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap' (Luke 6:38). So the Dead Sea receives, but gives out nothing, and thus it dies. The Sea of Galilee receives the inflow and turns it into the outflow, and everything in it remains fresh and sweet and life-giving.

We give where we see the need. Some needs, folk can never fulfil from earthly supplies. God gives us special supplies. Thus the charismata and special gifts given to each can be used in a time of

Comprehending the Kingdom of God
crisis. When we look at using all time for our profit, then
(i) we are seeing ourselves as self-suppliers; and (ii) are
casting off the grace principle. We should give what we
have to give. As with God, giving is loving, so with Man
loving must be shown in giving.

CONCLUSION: THE KINGDOM IS OF LOVE AND FOR LOVE

Romans 14:1 – 15:14 is a disquisition on love. It needs to
be read thoughtfully. The essence of it is that love has
regard for every person, no matter what his or her
character may be. Some consider themselves to be
'strong' Christians, and so they seem to take everything
in their stride. What would constitute a 'stumbling block'
to some other, weaker Christians, the strong Christian
can handle without his conscience troubling him. One
example of this is meat which has been offered to idols.
The strong Christian knows it has been offered to idols,
but then to him 'meat is just meat'. The weak Christian,
were he to eat that meat, would believe himself caught in
idolatry. Paul's plea to the strong Christian is that he do
nothing which will cause his brother or sister to stumble.
Love is intended to edify—to build up others—so let the
strong man have his faith before God, quietly, and not
cause his brother to stumble. As Paul put it, 'Therefore, if
food is the cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat
meat, lest I cause my brother to fall'. We may conclude
with a

Comprehending the Kingdom of God
saying, 'We are not truly ever free, until we are free not to
do what we are free to do'.

Only those brimming over with the love of God will
recognise such things of love and want to do them in the
Kingdom of God.