

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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THE SPIRITUAL KINGDOM

In Luke 17 v 20 – 21 we read that Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come. His reply was straight to the point – the kingdom of God is within you. With this comment Jesus gave a very clear indication that following the completion of His task on Earth – our redemption and His physical resurrection – there would be a phase in human history when a God-given power would be present within all His followers. Ecclesiastes 3 v 11 shows that every human being has a capacity to reach out to the deeper reality of our existence (“God has set eternity in the hearts of men”), but the New Testament makes it clear that this “spiritual” dimension, brought about by the indwelling Holy Spirit following Pentecost, would create a body of people (a kingdom) living far above the physical and material constraints of natural fallen humanity. The New Testament is full of this teaching: John 3 v 3 – 8; John 16 v 12 – 16; Acts 1 v 3 – 8; Romans 8 v 5 – 11; Colossians 1 v 9 – 14; and many other passages. Sadly, when we talk about this marvellous transformation we tend to concentrate on the gifts of the Holy Spirit or maybe, a little less, on the fruits of the Holy Spirit, rather than on our total renewal as a spiritual people. True spirituality is our coming closer and closer to the heart and mind of God in all His triune fulness, and being totally changed by it.

The fact is, humanity is actually desperate to embrace a spirituality, thus breaking out from the constraints of mere physical and material existence. That is the basic idea behind religion, but all religion with its so-called spiritual experiences is false if it does not result in a true and vital relationship with the one and only God who is the creator and redeemer: John 14 v 6; 1 John 4 v 1 – 3. Even within the broad reach of Christianity, “religion” is often a substitute for a true spiritual relationship with Jesus, for that alone is what qualifies an individual to be a member of the kingdom of God. In this study we look at the basis of true spirituality, and the way in which that inner character can develop as we grow in grace.

Throughout the Bible we are shown that the spiritual dimension is all-embracing in creation. God Himself is Spirit (John 4 v 24), and therefore is the source of all true spirituality. One of the most fundamental problems we face today is that modern thinking decries the existence of the spiritual, certainly as a basic cause of all existence. Instead of seeking a spiritual understanding in matters of science, philosophy, politics, morality, etc, modern man in his wisdom concentrates on natural, physical and material dimensions to provide the deepest answers to life. In consequence man has lost all sense of real meaning and purpose in this world and denies the very existence of God. The biblical emphasis on the spiritual becomes totally marginalised and true Christianity is ignored. As members of the spiritual kingdom, we need to demonstrate in our worldview, our lifestyle, our worship and in our witness that the world needs to understand that only in God’s spiritual kingdom can truth be discovered.

God, being spirit, is without beginning or ending; He is eternal. To understand the reason for all creation, and its purpose, there has to be an eternal first cause which is not part of that creation, nor could it be: there cannot be a universe arising from absolutely nothing. Therefore a “big bang” cannot be the first cause, as prior to it happening there needed to exist space for it to occupy, time for measurement of God’s purposes, matter that could explode in the first place, and energy to give it force. As all these features had to be in prior existence, so atheistic science is still looking for what existed before the big bang. But the only logical explanation is that creation came out of another dimension altogether, and that has to be the eternal, spiritual dimension; there is no other. The question “Who created God?” is meaningless as we have to look for a creator with power and purpose who, by definition, could not be a part of the physical creation (John 1 v 3).

Yet many Christians are ambivalent about the early chapters of Genesis, especially chapter 1. “In the beginning God” (v 1) states the first cause of creation clearly; He “created the heavens and the earth” (v1) states the creation of the space for the universe; the progress of light and darkness (v 3 – 5) shows the creation of time; the creation of water shows the basis for the creation of matter; the presence and activity of God the Holy Spirit show the origin of all energy within creation. In this spiritual dimension God is infinitely powerful, so time is of no importance for the progress of creation, and He can achieve whatever He wishes in whatever time He chooses. Six of the days in this planet’s timescale is plenty of time for Him!

This brings us to the development of our spiritual lives as we walk the Christian path. Many dear believers do find it difficult when they have had a great deal of exposure to atheistic thinking, especially if they are involved in some aspect of science or professional environments where acceptance of atheistic ideas is of consequence. Many have lost their jobs, careers, reputations and friendships over this whole issue, and yet we have a duty to take a spiritual position on origins according to Hebrews 11 v 3 and 6. The danger has been that our spirituality, based on obedience to the Word of God, has been compromised by seeking to adapt to the world's "wisdom", thereby losing much of its latent power. In the history of Protestant Christianity, we have had wonderful movements of the Holy Spirit bringing us back to a more spiritual way of life – the Reformation, the Great Awakening, genuine revivals from time to time, etc. With so much of our modern thinking based on humanistic principles and laws, and the belief in man's ability to determine his own future, maybe we do not have the spiritual depths we once did, especially in church life and personal faith. The turning of the tide would no doubt start with individual and collective concern before God for a renewal of our own spirituality, at whatever cost.

Here are three examples from scripture (out of many we could look at) to help us develop a deeper, God-centred spirituality.

Philippians 3 v 7 – 10a.

Paul, now in Rome under house arrest, and with so much of his life's ministry as an apostle behind him, states quite simply that he "wants to know Christ". After all the busyness of his ministry over many years he now has an enforced state of ease in which to reflect on the personal character of the Lord. This wasn't a denial that he had walked with Jesus all that time, but he realised that there is a deeper sense of the Lord's presence as a friend and companion in a personal way. We can be very busy with knowing all about Jesus, with working for Him, especially in the Gospel and with pastoral care for others – all very good and useful – but it is another thing altogether to fellowship with him continually, spirit to spirit. The Lord has the greatest of love for each of us so that we might be His friends for all eternity (John 15 v 13 – 15). To enjoy the hope of that amazing future with Him is deep spirituality indeed, even now. Jesus offers us an endless hope; atheistic humanism offers us just a hopeless end. The result is that as we get to know the Lord better and better, we enter ever more deeply into His nature and accept the full spiritual dimension of His glory (Colossians 1 v 15 – 17).

Philippians 2 v 13

Paul had encouraged the Philippian Christians to greater humility and love toward each other (2 v 2 – 5), and then in verses 12 & 13 he advises them to have a holy fear (fear and trembling) in the outworking of their saved lives as they become vessels in God's hands to enact His will and good purposes. There is so much of our own plans and ideas in our Christian work, but a deeper spirituality is when we have the humility to seek, recognise and obey His sovereign leading in everything. The result is a consciousness of having a more sanctified and blest life without our own pride and self-esteem getting in the way - a true spirituality indeed.

Psalm 62 v 5 – 8

These verses hardly need any explanation, but speak for themselves. David knew much about rejection by his parents (Psalm 27 v 10), and by some of his older brothers (1 Samuel 17 v 28 – 29), but from the days of his loneliness as a shepherd boy, when he learnt that in his isolation the Lord was his shepherd, he had a deep spirituality. That inner spiritual life was under attack from time to time, from within and without, but such was his closeness to the Lord that as a man after God's own heart he was used as an illustration of "great David's greater son" – the future messianic kingship of the Lord Jesus Himself (Isaiah 9 v 7).

*May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.*

*May I run the race before me,
Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus,
As I onward go.*

Kate B Wilkinson