

IN MEDIO

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The People of God Part Three: “The Sons of the Kingdom”

In the first century CE there were some, many, who believed that the Jewish organization of religious worship represented by and practiced in the Jerusalem temple arrangement and also as taught and practiced in synagogues throughout surrounding cities, represented Jehovah’s arrangement. They were right. That is one reason why Jesus himself referred to the temple of Jerusalem as, “the house of my Father” (John 2:16).

But Jehovah’s arrangement, including his earthly temple, had become corrupted by men. Jehovah’s arrangement was corrupted by men who were presumptuous (Matthew 3:7–10), by men who condemned the guiltless ones (Matthew 12:1–7), by men who taught men’s commands as if they were God’s commands (Matthew 15:1–9), by men who questioned the authority of others to teach, rather than the teaching itself (Mark 11:27–33), by men who “like ... to be called Rabbi by men” (Matthew 23:2–7), by men who scheme and who use “crafty device” rather than stand up for what they believe in, in front of the crowds and in front of all onlookers (Matthew 26:3–4). In the first century Jehovah’s arrangement was even corrupted by people who feared losing their place and their position more than they feared God himself (John 11:45–48).

These problems were not new among God’s people. Incredibly, Jehovah has had to deal with all of these same or very similar problems where his chosen people have been concerned time and time again. Unfortunately, in this world Jehovah’s arrangement has always been subject to corruption because of man deciding for himself what is good and what is bad and because of his reliance, not on the best available reasons for a particular belief or course of action, but most often because of desire, human desire that often puts pleasing other humans above pleasing Jehovah God himself. Eve chose to please herself before her husband and before her God (Genesis 3:6–7). Adam chose to please Eve and himself before his God (Genesis 3:12). Satan clearly was only interested in pleasing himself, for he lied without regard for those whom he tempted and deceived, and thus he is referred to, not as the one who liberated mankind by giving them the knowledge of good and bad, but as one who was “a manslayer when he began” because he “did not stand fast in the truth” (John 8:44). One way or another, it seems that people are always putting themselves or others ahead of Jehovah God, with the

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result that “their fear toward [him] becomes men’s commandment that is being taught” (Isaiah 29:13).

If you were alive during the first century CE, just before or even during the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, who would you have followed? Would you have sided with the Pharisees, scribes, and others who were in charge of the temple, the synagogues, and Jehovah’s earthly arrangement of worship at that time (John 7:13; 9:22; 12:42; 16:2)? Or would you have sided with a man who “had his clothing of camel’s hair and a leather girdle around his loins [and whose] food too was insect locusts and wild honey” (Matthew 3:4)? Would you, or I, have accepted the one who, though he could have borne witness to himself, told everyone that he did not teach what was his but only what was from his God, and that people could see this by simply looking at the things he said, at his teachings, and at the “works [he was] doing in the name of my [his] Father” (John 7:14–18; 8:13–14; 10:25; 12:49–50)? Or would we have sided with those who cared, not for who was telling the truth, but only of whether or not someone disagreed with their teachings, as can be seen from the following account:

John 18:19–24 (NWT)

And so the chief priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered him: “I have spoken to the world publicly. I always taught in a synagogue and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. Why do you question me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them. See! These know what I said.” After he said these things, one of the officers that was standing by gave Jesus a slap in the face and said: “Is that the way you answer the chief priest?” Jesus answered him: “If I spoke wrongly, bear witness concerning the wrong; but if rightly, why do you hit me?” Then An’ nas sent him away bound to Ca’ia·phas the high priest.

Though it may seem like an easy choice to make upon reading these accounts, remember: If you truly would have sided with John the Baptist and with Jesus Christ you would have been expelled from the synagogues (John 12:42), persecuted (John 18:25–27), and quite possibly even killed (Acts 7:54–60). None of these would have been very pleasant then, or now. But if in the first century CE we were looking for the truth and seeking it on the basis of the best available reasons for belief and not through mere group association, then I have no doubt we would have come to John or to Jesus and ‘openly confessed our sins.’ Nevertheless, acting in accordance with the best reasons for belief would have put us at odds with the existing temple arrangement and Jewish system of religious worship as overseen and administered by the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the chief priests, the older men, and their scribes, for these had “made the word of God invalid because of [their] tradition” (Matthew 15:6). In spite of their religious work and their position in Jehovah’s arrangement, they were disapproved as John the Baptist himself made clear:

Matthew 3:7-10 (NWT)

When he [John the Baptist] caught sight of many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to the baptism, he said to them: "YOU offspring of vipers, who has intimated to YOU to flee from the coming wrath? So then produce fruit that befits repentance; and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'As a father we have Abraham.' For I say to YOU that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Already the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree, then, that does not produce fine fruit is to be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Though "many of the Pharisees and Sadducees" who came to John could have accepted what he said and then repented, they as groups and as individuals for the most part presumed their legitimacy as God's people to be a result of their lineage and not their works. It apparently never occurred to them that Jehovah would cease to tolerate their failure to live in accordance with truth, and that "the kingdom of God [could] be taken from [them] and be given to a nation producing its fruits" (Matthew 21:43). Apparently they believed that once chosen by God meant always chosen by God, regardless of what they decided to do or what they decided to teach thereafter. They forgot that God chose Abraham because of the faith that he showed by his works (Genesis 22:9-12; compare James 2:21-24) and that God would consider others Abraham's children only if they 'did the works of Abraham' (John 8:39).

Truth is not an inheritance, nor is it something you can confer upon someone; you cannot appoint someone to the 'office of the truth.' A person either believes what is true or most likely true based on the best available reasons, or a person does not. A person either acts in accordance with beliefs that are true or that are most likely true based on the best available reasons, or a person does not. That is why in the Bible the "sons of the kingdom" are described by Jesus in two very different ways. The first is:

Matthew 8:11-12 (NWT)

But I tell YOU that many from eastern parts and western parts will come and recline at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens; whereas the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the darkness outside. There is where [their] weeping and the gnashing of [their] teeth will be. [Underline added.]

The second description is from Jesus' illustration of "the kingdom of the heavens," where he speaks of "a man that sowed fine seed in his field" (Matthew 13:24) and explains:

Matthew 13:37-39 (NWT)

The sower of the fine seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; as for the fine seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; but the weeds are the sons of the

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wicked one, and the enemy that sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is a conclusion of a system of things, and the reapers are angels. [Underline added.]

Jehovah God threw the first “sons of the kingdom” into the darkness outside because they ‘rejected the chief cornerstone’ of the kingdom, Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:42). These “sons” did not ‘produce fruit that befit repentance’ (Matthew 3:8). Subsequently, God’s Son came and sowed “seed” (= the “word of God” [Luke 8:11]) in the field of the entire world. According to Jesus (Luke 8:4–15), some of the seed “fell alongside the road and was trampled down, and the birds of heaven ate it up” (= “the ones that have heard, then the Devil comes and takes the word away from their hearts in order that they may not believe and be saved”), some seed “landed upon the rock–mass and, after sprouting, it dried up because of not having moisture” (= “the ones who, when they hear it, receive the word with joy, but these have no root; they believe for a season, but in a season of testing they fall away”), some seed “fell among the thorns, and the thorns that grew up with it choked it off” (= “the ones that have heard, but, by being carried away by anxieties and riches and pleasures of this life, they are completely choked and bring nothing to perfection”), and “some other fell upon the good soil, and, after sprouting, ... produced fruit a hundredfold” (= “the ones that, after hearing the word with a fine and good heart, retain it and bear fruit with endurance”).

It is the last “seed” mentioned by Jesus that grows into “the sons of the kingdom,” “the righteous ones [who] will shine as brightly as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43). In addition to the types of seed mentioned by Jesus in his illustration of the kingdom, there is still other “seed,” seed sown not by Jesus but by his “enemy,” the Devil (Matthew 13:39). Satan’s seed grows into “the sons of the wicked one,” and they exist right in among the seed sown by Jesus so that the two “grow together until the harvest” (Matthew 13:30). How, then, can we make sure we are the seed that ‘retains [the word of God] and bear fruit with endurance,’ and also identify those who are doing the same today? How can we recognize “the sons of the kingdom” who are the “fine seed” sown by Jesus, those who have a “fine and good heart”? The answer to this question is as simple and as difficult as the questions asked at the beginning of this article with respect to the first–century Jewish system of worship, John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ: We must look at the fruit produced by each “seed” and then respond to what is said, taught, and the works that each person does, as Jesus himself cautioned:

Matthew 7:15–20 (NWT)

Be on the watch for the false prophets that come to YOU in sheep’s covering, but inside they are ravenous wolves. By their fruits YOU will recognize them. Never do people gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles, do they? Likewise every good tree produces fine fruit, but every rotten tree produces worthless fruit; a good tree cannot bear worthless fruit, neither can a rotten tree produce fine fruit. Every tree not producing fine fruit gets cut down and thrown into the fire. Really, then, by their fruits YOU will recognize those [men].

But what “fruits” come from the “good trees” of Christian seed? Since not “everyone saying to [Jesus], ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of the heavens” but only those who ‘do the will of his Father’ will, what is ‘the will of Jesus’ Father” and how could many who call on Jesus as “Lord” at the same not know or follow the teachings and direction of his God and Father (Matthew 7:21:–23)? Indeed, how could Adam, Eve, Israel of old, Jewish society in the first-century, and those in the Christian congregations who call Jesus “Lord” have ‘come near with their mouth, glorified Jehovah merely with their lips, only to remove their heart itself far away from God’ (Isaiah 29:13)? Since today this question involves the types of “fruits” displayed by “fine” Christian seed, as taught in the Bible, specifically in the New Testament, it is there we should look for answers when seeking to identify “the sons of the kingdom.”

“By Its Fruit the Tree is Known”

After reading the above selections from Jesus’ illustrations regarding the sower of seed, one might think that anyone in whom the “seed” of God’s word is sown will be one kind or another of the sown seeds described by Jesus, and that this is the only kind one can be throughout his or her life. But such is not the case, as Jesus elsewhere made clear when addressing the Pharisees:

Matthew 12:33–37 (NWT)

Either YOU people make the tree fine and its fruit fine or make the tree rotten and its fruit rotten; for by its fruit the tree is known. Offspring of vipers, how can YOU speak good things, when YOU are wicked? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure sends out good things, whereas the wicked man out of his wicked treasure sends out wicked things. I tell YOU that every unprofitable saying that men speak, they will render an account concerning it on Judgment Day; for by your words you will be declared righteous, and by your words you will be condemned. [Underline added.]

There are times when we all say words or teach things that we later regret. Thus, by our regret and by changing what we say (and, thus, what we teach) we can “make the tree fine and its fruit fine” (compare Matthew 21:28–32). Conversely, we might have at one time ‘sent out good things’ only to later “make the tree rotten and its fruit rotten” (compare Hebrews 6:4–8). But since fine trees are only fine if they are ‘made fine’ and stay fine by producing fine fruit, and since rotten trees are only rotten if they are ‘made rotten’ and stay rotten by producing rotten fruit, then we have good reasons to believe that no one, not even those who are right now ‘fine trees,’ will always be considered such regardless of what they ‘send out.’ The ‘fine trees’ can be made ‘rotten’ and the ‘rotten trees’ can be made ‘fine’ all because of what comes “out of the abundance of the heart.”

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Therefore, whether it was the original “sons of the kingdom” or those who were ‘sown’ after the first were rejected “the sower of the fine seed, the Son of Man,” whether it was the Jewish people of God, the first-century Christian people of God, or the nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty-first century people of God, “by [our] words [we] will be declared righteous, and by [our] words [we] will be condemned.” By our “fruit,” the words, teachings, and deeds that we ‘send out,’ we will be “known.”

But in view of the wide range of teachings that various “Christian” groups ‘send out,’ how can the people of God be identified today? What “fruits” does the New Testament clearly teach would be produced by “the sons of the kingdom”? While there are many clear teachings given in the New Testament, many important teachings that describe the “fruits” of Christianity, in what follows I am presenting those “fruits” that collectively will help anyone recognize “the ones that, after hearing the word with a fine and good heart, retain it and bear fruit with endurance” (Luke 8:15). What follows is not meant to be a comprehensive listing of all the ‘fine fruits’ that would help us identify one as a ‘son of the kingdom,’ but only a partial listing of things that would definitely, collectively belong to the produce of ‘good trees’:

1) “Witness work”(Revelation 6:9):

And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those slaughtered because of the word of God and because of the witness work that they used to have.

The “sons of the kingdom” have the “witness work” of “bearing witness to Jesus” (Revelation 12:17), and in so doing they are also “bearing witness that the Father has sent forth his Son as Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14). This “work” is directly and fiercely opposed by “the dragon,” Satan, who at some point “went off to wage war with [those] who observe the commandments of God and have the work of bearing witness to Jesus” (Revelation 12:17). This “witness work” and the opposition to it should be evident among those who are the people of God, for it eventually leads to the equivalent of being “executed with the ax for the witness they bore to Jesus and for speaking about God” (Revelation 20:4). In this way, Babylon the Great is “drunk with the blood of the holy ones and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus” (Revelation 17:6), for she rides atop the wild beast whom the “sons of the kingdom” refuse to worship (Revelation 17:3), a ride that will continue at least until this “beast” and the “ten horns” destroy her, too, as God wills it (Revelation 17:15–17).

These witnesses of Jesus and of God do not seek to learn and require others to believe “knowledge of the times or seasons which the Father has placed in his own jurisdiction” (Acts 1:7). They do not add to “this good news of the kingdom [that] will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations” (Matthew 24:14) by forcing others to accept uncertain interpretations about when “the kingdom of our God and the

authority of his Christ” has “come to pass” (Revelation 12:10). That is not a part of the “witness work” described in the Bible. The “sons of the kingdom do not need a false motivation to serve God and Christ as their witnesses. They “are all sons of light and sons of day” and they ‘need nothing to be written to them’ concerning “the times and the seasons” because they know quite well that Jehovah’s day is coming exactly as a thief in the night’ and this fact alone is enough for them as they ‘are not in darkness, so that that day should overtake them as it would thieves’ (1 Thessalonians 5:1–5).

Anything beyond this, and beyond the clear biblical indications of Jehovah’s day such as the cry of “Peace and security!” or other descriptions of those living in the “last days” (for example, 2 Peter 3:13; 2 Timothy 3:1–7), which is itself (“last days”) a description applied since the first-century (Acts 2:17), is beyond “the teaching of the apostles” (Acts 2:42; 16:4). This includes uncertain beliefs associated with the “seven times” of Daniel 4, which times are nowhere in the entire Bible said to represent anything but Nebuchadnezzar’s removal from and return to his kingdom (Daniel 4:23–26). If others want to consider possible applications of this prophecy beyond this, then that is something they should keep to themselves and never allow affect the thinking and “witness work” of the “sons of the kingdom.” The “sons of the kingdom” would never force others to accept chronological speculation, or even probable interpretation of chronology, as this subject is nowhere given such a place in the New Testament. They would never require others to accept something uncertain as if it were certain, knowing that such a requirement could cause others to stumble (Matthew 18:6). They might teach certain applications of prophecy, but with care and caution never to allow speculation to infect the mindset or motivations of others. Only disappointment and an improper motivation can result from trying to figure out what is not ours to figure out.

Again, while world conditions since 1914 may indicate the trapped presence of Satan and his demonic angels, the “good news of the kingdom” to which the “sons of the kingdom” bear witness does not include a requirement that people accept an uncertain interpretation of Bible chronology as “good news.” Why would they? Instead this “witness work” focuses on what has been “ordered us to preach to the people ... to give a thorough witness that this is the One [Jesus Christ] decreed by God to be judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42), and “to bear thorough witness to the good news of the undeserved kindness of God” (Acts 20:24). The “sons of the kingdom” bear witness “to the truth ... [and they] go on walking in the truth” (3 John 3).

2) “No part of the world” (John 17:15–19):

I request you, not to take them out of the world, but to watch over them because of the wicked one. They are no part of the world, just as I am no part of the world.

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The “sons of the kingdom” are those who “belong to Christ; Christ, in turn, belongs to God” (1 Corinthians 3:23). None of them have anything to do with what makes this world “the world,” namely, “the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one’s means of life” (1 John 2:16), together with other “worldly desires” (Titus 2:12). Of course, the “sons of the kingdom” are tempted like anyone else, perhaps even more so because of the “war” that the Devil wages against them in particular (Revelation 12:10; compare 1 Peter 5:8). But even though we suffer at his hand in this world, we keep fighting. We are in the world but we resist becoming one with the world, for we are and can only be one with it or with God and Christ Jesus (John 17:20–26). We do not accept the weakness of the flesh as something approved, but as sign or our need of forgiveness through Jesus’ sacrifice so that ‘after we have suffered a little while, the God of all undeserved kindness, who called us to his everlasting glory in union with Christ, will himself finish our training’ (1 Peter 5:10).

The “kingdoms of the world,” their authority and their glory, belong to Satan the Devil (Matthew 4:8–9; Luke 4:5–6). At the same time, God can establish who rules the earth and he absolutely does influence the hearts of kings (Proverbs 21:1; Daniel 4:17; Revelation 17:17). But the “dragon” is also able to give “its power and its throne and great authority” (Revelation 13:2), so being no part of the world would have to include not ‘worshipping’ its kingdoms with such words as, “Who is like the wild beast, and who can do battle with it?” (Revelation 13:4). As “witnesses to the people” (Acts 13:31), the “sons of the kingdom” do not ‘worship the wild beast nor its image and they do not receive its mark on their forehead or upon their hands’ (Revelation 20:4). For this reason, they are persecuted by being ‘delivered up to local courts and scourged in their synagogues,’ even “haled before governors and kings for [Jesus’] sake, for a witness to them and the nations” (Matthew 10:17–18).

Yet, the “sons of the kingdom” are also submissive to the “superior authorities” that in one sense ‘stand placed by God,’ for they are part of “the arrangement of God” in the earth today (Romans 13:1–2). Thus, the full extent of any Christian’s political involvement would have to be decided by each Christian. The “sons of the kingdom” do not make rules about whether or not a person can vote or salute the flag, neither of which involve any kind of worship or admiration for any political “beast” but only an acceptance of the laws of the country (depending on the wording of any pledge or salute, or course), and an attempt to better the nation or locale in which a Christian lives. None of this would ever be a part the “witness work,” but it is for each Christian to decide how they will act in the world outside of this “work” and in the light of what the Bible clearly teaches. But since politics is not something on which Christians will agree, then it is not something that should be brought into the congregations. Each ‘son of the kingdom’ must stand before Christ and God, both of whom will determine whether or not the individual was a “part of the world” in a disapproved capacity.

The “sons of the kingdom” know that the “wisdom of the world” is “foolish” (1 Corinthians 1:20–29), but not all knowledge in this world is the “wisdom of the world.” There are a variety of professional trades and professional endeavors that a person may be involved in that will require education of one kind or another. It is not for anyone to judge in any respect whatsoever how a person decides to educate him– or herself for life in this world. Christians are supportive of other Christians in their ministry, in their work, in their school, and in every aspect of life that is a part of this world, so long as a person is committed in all that they do to “love Jehovah your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind” (Matthew 22:37). The “sons of the kingdom” do not over– define “the world” to include the things that may be needed for a satisfying life in this system, nor do they seek to enforce their own opinions on matters such as the extent of one’s secular education in this world. We are supportive and encouraging, leading by example, knowing that as long as Christians do not ‘love the world or the things in the world’ and develop a ‘friendship’ with it that would compromise our faith and love for God and for Christ Jesus, we will “conquer the world” through our faith while living in it (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15; 4:4–5; 5:4).

3) Caring for those in need (Luke 10:25–37):

[Jesus said:] “A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jer´i·cho and fell among robbers, who both stripped him and inflicted blows, and went off, leaving him half–dead. Now, by coincidence, a certain priest was going down over that road, but, when he saw him, he went by on the opposite side. Likewise, a Levite also, when he got down to the place and saw him, went by on the opposite side. But a certain Sa·mar´i·tan traveling the road came upon him and, at seeing him, he was moved with pity. So he approached him and bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine upon them. Then he mounted him upon his own beast and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two de·nar´i·i, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him, and whatever you spend besides this, I will repay you when I come back here.’ Who of these three seems to you to have made himself neighbor to the man that fell among the robbers?” He said: “The one that acted mercifully toward him.” Jesus then said to him: “Go your way and be doing the same yourself.”

That’s what Christians do! They teach truth (John 18:37). They are witnesses for God and for Christ Jesus. They ‘keep themselves without spot from the world’ (James 1:27). But if they do not show compassion to those who are weak, if they do not in some sense, as they are able, “render judgment for the fatherless boy; plead the cause of the widow” (Isaiah 1:17; James 1:27; compare Galatians 2:10), not only toward those “related to [them] in the faith” (Galatians 6:10) but even toward those who might be their “enemies,” then how can they ‘prove themselves sons of their Father who is in the heavens, since he makes his sun rise upon wicked people and good and makes it rain upon righteous people and unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45)? Indeed:

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Matthew 5:46–48 (NWT)

For if YOU love those loving YOU, what reward do YOU have? Are not also the tax collectors doing the same thing? And if YOU greet YOUR brothers only, what extraordinary thing are YOU doing? Are not also the people of the nations doing the same thing? YOU must accordingly be perfect, as YOUR heavenly Father is perfect.

The “sons of the kingdom” are like Jesus in this respect as much as possible, but without ‘practicing their righteousness in front of men in order to be observed by them’ (Matthew 6:1). They would certainly advocate that others follow Jesus’ example in these respects, and they would never put restrictions on the extent to which such work could or should be done, that is, beyond what the apostles themselves taught, “[L]et us work what is good toward all, but especially toward those related to [us] in the faith” (Galatians 6:10; underline added).

4) “Love among yourselves” (John 13:34–35):

I am giving YOU a new commandment, that YOU love one another; just as I have loved YOU, that YOU also love one another. By this all will know that YOU are my disciples, if YOU have love among yourselves.”

The “sons of the kingdom” are like their Father, and like their “brother” (Matthew 5:45; Hebrews 2:11), in showing love to others. This love would be especially obvious ‘among themselves.’ To know just how this would be outstanding in a way that would identify Jesus’ disciples, consider what is love:

1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (NWT)

Love is long-suffering and kind. Love is not jealous, it does not brag, does not get puffed up, does not behave indecently, does not look for its own interests, does not become provoked. It does not keep account of the injury. It does not rejoice over unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

There are many important aspects to “love” mentioned here, all of which show how the “sons of the kingdom” would treat their brothers in all things. They would never mistreat others by being unkind in requiring things for approval by God or Christ, when what they require is nowhere actually, clearly required by God or by Christ in the Bible. They would never be jealous over Jehovah’s or Jesus’ use of any one brother or sister as they “go on walking as children of light, for the fruitage of the light consists of every sort of goodness and righteousness and truth” (Ephesians 5:8–9). The “sons of the kingdom” would never “brag” or “get puffed up” concerning who they think they are, for they know that they are really “nothing” (1 Corinthians 3:7; Galatians 6:3). They would never “look for [their] own interests” at the expense of others, or at the expense of truth, for love “rejoices with the truth”! The “sons of the kingdom” never “rejoice over

unrighteousness,” for they have love among themselves in a way that would never permit injustice or anything but that which “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, [and] endures all things.”

Preeminently, the “love” they have would move them to give their life on behalf of Christ’s sheep, even as he did (Ephesians 5:2), the very opposite of the “evil slave” who ‘starts to beat his fellow slaves’ (Matthew 24:48–29). While such love may help protect the “sons of the kingdom” from “oppressive wolves [who] will enter in among [them] and [who] will not treat the flock with tenderness,” since these also “speak twisted things to draw away the disciples after themselves” something more is needed to resist and to remove them: the truth. Only by means of the truth will anyone know if the flock is being mistreated, or misled, and only by means of the truth will the “sons of the kingdom” be “sanctified.”

5) ‘Sanctified by means of the truth’ (John 17:17–19):

Sanctify them by means of the truth; your word is truth. Just as you sent me forth into the world, I also sent them forth into the world. And I am sanctifying myself in their behalf, that they also may be sanctified by means of truth.

The “sons of the kingdom” cannot, under any circumstance, lose their commitment to the truth. If they do, how then will they be “sanctified” by means of it? People make mistakes, even big mistakes. But the “sons of the kingdom” acknowledge those mistakes when presented with better reasons to believe something different. If any were harmed by their previous error, they repent, apologize, and try to make things right. They do not “become provoked” for they have ‘love among themselves’ (John 13:35; 1 Corinthians 13:5) and those who were wronged, because of this same love, ‘do not keep account of the injury.’ Obviously, in the light of these texts, neither those who become provoked because of the truth and thereby refuse to accept it, or those who ‘keep account of the injury’ after those who have committed error have repented of their wrong, are “sons of the kingdom” (Matthew 6:14–15).

An important New Testament example of one who was appointed by Jesus Christ to “feed [his] little sheep” (John 21:15–17) but who was instead found to be mistreating Christ’s flock is the apostle Peter. In spite of his divine commission, Peter began “compelling people to live” in ways that were not Christian (Galatians 2:11–14; 6:12). This forced others in the congregation, such the apostle Paul, to act in accordance with truth, to keep truth from being sacrificed even at the feet of one directly appointed by Jesus himself. Thus, instead of accepting Peter’s actions and teachings toward others as something that, while not Christian, were nonetheless not something he should confront openly for fear of causing disunity, Paul did what Christ wanted him to do over and above all other arrangements God may have put in place: He taught the truth and

‘resisted Peter face to face’ because Peter and those with him were “not walking straight according to the truth of the good news” (Galatians 2:11, 14).

Peter, for his part, showed that he truly was simply misled and that he had “love” for the congregations after all, for he accepted Paul’s counsel as having good reasons for being true and he ceased teaching false doctrine and compelling others to listen to him. Peter was ‘sanctified by means of the truth’ that Paul presented to him. So, too, we can all change course if we find that we are “not walking straight according to the truth of the good news” (Galatians 2:11). But if we find ourselves “resisting the truth” rather than being ‘sanctified by it,’ then it is inevitable that we will become “completely corrupted in mind, disapproved as regards the faith” (2 Timothy 3:8).

No one who ‘resists the truth’ is exempt from this eventuality, because a refusal to accept what is true, or most likely true based on the best available reasons, suggests that the person who does “not accept the love of the truth that they might be saved” would rather ‘believe the lie” to protect their own selfish interests (2 Thessalonians 2:10–11; compare Romans 1:24–32). Others simply resist the truth because they have not founded their faith and beliefs on the best available reasons, choosing instead to follow “misleading inspired utterances and teachings of demons, by the hypocrisy of men who speak lies” (1 Timothy 4:1–2). These ones act “in accord with their own desires, [and] accumulate teachers for themselves to have their ears tickled; ... [and they] turn their ears away from the truth” (2 Timothy 4:4).

The “sons of the kingdom,” by contrast, are ‘sanctified by means of the truth,’ which shows itself by their “fruit” (Matthew 7:15–20). They know that the “the judgment of God is in accord with truth” (Romans 2:2), and so they do not fear his coming judgment because they are “on the side of the truth” (John 18:37). In the present world if someone speaks wrongly then, like Jesus, they “bear witness concerning the wrong” rather than react abusively to those who speak rightly to them (John 18:23). But the “sons of the kingdom” are described in other ways in the New Testament, ways that help us to further identify them.

The Sheep and the Brothers of Christ

The kingdom of God includes or in some sense relates to “a new heavens and a new earth” in which “righteousness is to dwell” according to God’s “promise” (2 Peter 3:13). That promise of a kingdom was first given to the nation of Israel (Isaiah 65:17), but now it is extended to “a nation producing its fruits” (Matthew 21:43), which includes those “in every nation” who ‘fear God and work righteousness’ (Acts 10:35). The ‘sons of this kingdom’ include those separated by Jesus’ angels during “the harvest,” the “righteous

ones [who] will shine as brightly as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:36–43).

The ‘harvesting’ of the “fine seed” or the “sons of the kingdom” illustrated by Jesus in Matthew 13 is also described by him as a ‘separation’ of different kinds of people, on the basis of the “fruits” they produce that show they have living faith (James 2:26). Here is what Jesus said concerning this separation:

Matthew 25:31–40 (NWT)

When the Son of man arrives in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on his glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will put the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left. “Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, YOU who have been blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for YOU from the founding of the world. For I became hungry and YOU gave me something to eat; I got thirsty and YOU gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and YOU received me hospitably; naked, and YOU clothed me. I fell sick and YOU looked after me. I was in prison and YOU came to me.’ Then the righteous ones will answer him with the words, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and receive you hospitably, or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to you?’ And in reply the king will say to them, ‘Truly I say to YOU, To the extent that YOU did it to one of the least of these my brothers, YOU did it to me.’

Whether or not some distinction is to be made between the sheep and Christ’s brothers in terms of one group belonging to the “new heavens” and one group belonging to the “new earth,” the text does not say. There is a “new heavens” and a “new earth” promised by God, for sure, as noted in the scripture referenced earlier in this section, and in both of them, “*in these,*” righteousness will dwell. But it is also true that Jesus’ ‘brother’ is “whoever does the will of [his] Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 12:50). Since the true followers of Jesus are to have ‘love among themselves’ (John 13:35), then it also makes sense that those approved by Jesus when he is gathered, not with his “brothers,” but with “all the angels” in judgment, that those whom he approves are the ones who showed love and compassion to his or her fellow “brothers.” This is, in fact, the very essence of Jesus’ teaching in Luke 12:42–48 and Matthew 24:45–47 concerning the “faithful and discreet slave,” the latter of which accounts reads:

Matthew 24:45–51 (NWT)

Who really is the faithful and discreet slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time? Happy is that slave if his master on arriving finds him doing so. Truly I say to YOU, He will appoint him over all his belongings. But if ever that evil slave should say in his heart, “My

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master is delaying,” and should start to beat his fellow slaves and should eat and drink with the confirmed drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day that he does not expect and in an hour that he does not know, and will punish him with the greatest severity and will assign him his part with the hypocrites. There is where [his] weeping and the gnashing of [his] teeth will be.

In both the Matthew 24 and 25 accounts it is the treatment of one’s “fellow slaves” who do God’s will, Christ’s “brothers,” that is in view, or least so it seems to me (but see also below). In both accounts Jesus “arrives,” which word translates a form of the Greek word for “coming” (Greek: *erchomai*) and in both accounts there is a judgment followed by a ‘separation’ or ‘assignment’ of each individual with one group or another. One group is approved because they were faithful in taking care of the master’s “belongings” and the other group is punished for not taking care of their “fellow slaves” and because although they “understood the will of [their] master [they] did not get ready or do in line with his will” (Luke 12:47).

It is also possible that the two groups are different, and that even the times indicated by the ‘comings’ are different. Who can say for sure, really? If they are different, and if Christ has already ‘come’ to appoint his “faithful and discreet slave,” and if this “slave” is a group that is considered by Jesus to be his “brothers” as described by him in Matthew 25:40, then those who are approved by Jesus during his Matthew 25 ‘coming’ judgment do not know who these “brothers” are, for they answer the Lord with the words, “When did we see you a stranger and receive you hospitably, or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to you?” If the “sheep” are those who today know those who are Christ’s “brothers” and they treat them as if they were Christ himself because of this prophecy, why would they in the future then question the basis for their approval? (Also, compare Matthew 5:46–48, quoted earlier.) It is only by Jesus’ answer that these brothers are revealed, just as the identity of “the faithful and discreet slave” is not given by anyone except by Jesus himself, at his ‘coming’ (Matthew 24:46; Luke 12:43). Therefore, being Christ’s “brothers” should never be something that any man or group of men hold over people’s heads as if to say, “We are Christ’s brothers, so you must submit to us.” Christ’s brothers would never, ever, do that (Romans 14:4; 2 Corinthians 1:24). They might for a time ‘compel’ others to follow them (Galatians 2:14), but once presented with the truth Christ’ brothers cannot resist it. They are forever drawn to it, for they ‘listen to Christ’s voice’ (John 18:37).

Regardless of how the “sheep” on Christ’s right hand and his “brothers” are positioned in God’s kingdom, the “new heavens” and the “new earth” will be a part of it. Those who ‘come to life and rule as kings with the Christ for a thousand years’ (Revelation 20:4) will be permanent “pillars” in the ‘temple of his God’ (Revelation 3:12) and become a radiant bride that will descend upon earth to restore “mankind” (Revelation 21:3) to life by means of “a river of water of life, clear as crystal, flowing out from the throne of God

and of the Lamb down the middle of its [= New Jerusalem's] broad way." On each side of this river are "trees of life ... [a]nd the leaves of the trees [are] for the curing of the nations." Though the "bride" of Christ which descends from God does not need any more 'curing,' many who survive the "great tribulation" or who 'come to life [during or at the end of] the thousand years will. All of this, again, is prefaced by John's vision of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1), "the kingdom prepared ... from the founding of the world" (Matthew 25:34) for "the sons of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:38) and for any others approved by God and Christ Jesus to be among them.

Conclusion

The people of God cannot continue to be his people if they do not continue to do the 'will of the Father' (Matthew 7:21), which itself cannot be accomplished unless they are "on the side of the truth" (John 18:37). The children of the Devil are the ones who practice the Seven Levens discussed in Part One of this series, and if we follow in their steps we, like Satan, will not "stand fast in the truth" (John 8:44). On the other hand, if we 'do nothing according to a biased leaning' (1 Timothy 5:21), if we do not 'speak according to our own originality (John 7:16-18) but instead speak according to the best reasons available for belief, if we do not then 'deviate from the truth' (2 Timothy 2:16-18), or, worse, 'turn away from it' (2 Timothy 4:3-5; Titus 1:11, 13-14), we will be able to 'consider whatever things are true' (Philippians 4:8) which will lead us to the belief, based on the best available reasons, that "the Son of God has come, and he has given us intellectual capacity that we may gain the knowledge of the true one" (1 John 5:20).

The people of God never treat those who tell them the truth as enemies (Galatians 4:16). If they disagree with others concerning what is true then they, like their Lord Jesus Christ, "bear witness concerning the wrong" rather than react abusively to those who speak rightly to them (John 18:23). Once the people of God, the "sons of the kingdom," are given reasons to believe something as true, reasons that are better than the reasons for what they currently believe is true, they change immediately for they know that "if we practice sin willfully after having received the accurate knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice for sins left" (Hebrews 10:26). Yet, Satan the Devil is ever at work trying to corrupt the "fine seed" sown by Jesus Christ (Matthew 13:38-39). He does not only, or even primarily, do this from outside of the congregations of God; rather, he sows his seed in the same "field" as the Son of Man sows his, including the congregations. Satan sows "false prophets" and "false teachers among you" who cause 'the way of the truth to be spoken of abusively' (2 Peter 2:1-2). But if those "on the side of the truth" show no fear of man and instead rise up to "resist" those who "compel" others to "not walk straight according to the good news" (Galatians 2:11-14), then those in the congregations who are true and those who are false (compare Revelation 2-3) will

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be clearly distinguished from one another, with ‘the righteous ones shining as brightly as the sun in the kingdom of their Father’ (Matthew 13:43).

Who are the people of God today? Show me the people who are “bearing witness to Jesus” (Revelation 12:17), “bearing witness that the Father has sent forth his Son as Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14), and declaring the “good news of the kingdom” as a “witness to all the nations” without requiring belief on the part of others concerning “times or seasons” that are not within our “jurisdiction” (Matthew 24:14; Acts 1:7). Show me the people that are “no part of the world” just as Jesus was no part of this world (John 17:15–19). Show me the people who are caring for those in need the way Jesus did and the way he taught his followers should do (Luke 10:25–27). Show me the people who have ‘love among themselves,’ not by ‘beating their fellow slaves,’ but by laying down their life for their brothers and sisters if need be, and by ‘rejoicing with the truth’ as “love” is said to do (John 13:34–35; Matthew 24:48–49; Ephesians 5:2; 1 Corinthians 13:4–7). Show me those who are ‘sanctified by means of the truth’ and those who stand up for what is right without fear of any man (Isaiah 29:13; John 17:17–19; Acts 10:35), and I will show you the people of God.

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***This article was revised only with respect to its formatting. No changes were made to the content of the original article.**