

Kingdom Understanding is not Religious or Cultural Knowledge

We are very tempted to adopt ideas from culture and from religions to satisfy our ‘natural’ nature when we are expected to live in the Kingdom under God’s terms. The Kingdom of God is about the Spirit and living spiritually in the natural realm. It’s not about doing natural things to imitate or replace the spiritual. Natural things do occur in the Kingdom, but these flow out of the spirit. It’s not the reverse where we do natural things and try to turn them into spiritual things.

Here’s some examples.

Israel Wanted a King Instead of God

Near the end of Samuels life, Israel looked at the cultures surrounding them and demanded a King to rule them rather than a theocratic judge.¹ They wanted what culture could do for them, not what God had in mind.

1 Samuel 8:7 (NKJV) – *And the LORD said to Samuel, “Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.”*

Israel missed what God was doing. They missed his Kingdom method of leading them by his spirit through his Judges and prophets. He was the one who ruled over them as King, through his spirit-led servants, but they wanted what other nations had. They wanted a Kingdom in the Natural, not a Spiritual kingdom.

Israel Went After Other Nation’s Idols

During the many years the Israelites had kings, these kings more often than not led them astray. These ‘natural’ leaders, rather than ‘supernatural’ prophet-leaders, continued the slide in the natural way of doing things and followed their neighbouring nations into the worship of idols. The prophets who had a spiritual connection with God had to interject into the life of the nation by appealing to the reigning king.

In taking the ‘natural’ path – the path of culture and religion – Israel saw worship as a set of actions or rituals. They failed to realise that their connection with God was not about the Jewish religion, but deeper than that, it was about a relationship with God. That relationship was to be like a married couple bonded together in love and relationship – God was a husband to Israel his wife. The prophets had to be sent to the people to remind them of this underlying truth, but they don’t heed the message.

Jeremiah 31:32 (NKJV) – *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them², says the LORD.*

Isaiah 54:5 (NKJV) – *For your Maker is your husband, The LORD of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth.*

Hosea 2:2 (NKJV) [God’s Unfaithful People] – *“Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; For she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, And her adulteries from between her breasts;*

Hosea 2:7 (NKJV) – *She will chase her lovers, But not overtake them; Yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, For then it was better for me than now.’*

Hosea 2:16 (NKJV) – *“And it shall be, in that day,” Says the LORD, “That you will call Me ‘My Husband,’ And no longer call Me ‘My Master;’*

1- 1 Samuel 8:5-9

2 - For the Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; The Septuagint and Syriac read “and I turned away from them”.

Kingdom is Not Religious Activity

In the New Covenant this spiritual connection, this personal relationship with Almighty God is paramount to Kingdom thinking and teaching. There is a 'natural' tendency to turn life in the Kingdom into religion, or mix it with culture to make it more pleasing to the individual. This is not the Kingdom way.

(i) Religion: God hates religion based on outward performance with no inward correlation. A strong statement, but it's his words (see next quote). What he's interested in is wholehearted, loving relationship with him and obedience from a righteous heart. Isaiah had to make this very point clear to Judah.³

Isaiah 1:13-14 (NKJV) – *Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.*

(ii) Mixture: God does not approve of mixture. Jesus' words to the Churches of Thyatira and Pergamos stresses this and shows his attitude to it quite strongly.

Revelation 2:20 (NKJV) – *Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow[a] that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*

Revelation 2:14-15 (NKJV) – *But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*

Interestingly, when Constantine took over the running of the church and turned it into a religion, he was doing both these things which God disproves of.

(iii) Nowadays: Even today there are those who want to bring culture and religion into their church life by commanding certain foods, ceremonies, holidays and rules. The Kingdom, however, is based in a spiritual relationship with Almighty God and a righteous life flows out of that relationship because of love and a desire to please him. Paul made this very clear: The Kingdom is about the things of the Spirit of God.

Romans 14:17 (NKJV) – *for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

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