

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

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Introduction

These studies on the kingdom of God and the spiritual world are a response to the request of my colleagues in the Apostolic Fellowship International to prepare a document that could serve for conversation and review in the encounter to be held in Italy in September, 2007. It seemed appropriate to open the subject with an appreciation of the reality of the spiritual world. Otherwise we run the risk of supposing that the kingdom of God is similar to other human kingdoms known in the world.

THE REALITY OF THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

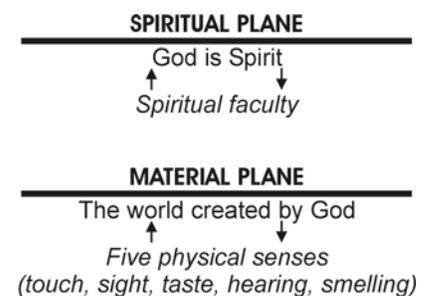
The world in which we live was created by God. And the most wonderful aspect of this creation is that God inhabits this world. We are not dealing simply with the physical aspect which we can observe with our eyes, measure and study, for this world has a spiritual content that makes it live. The world without God would only be a shell, a skeleton, a scaffold. The life of this world is God's presence. So declared David in Psalm 19:

*¹The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
²Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
³There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
⁴Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.*

The prophet Habakkuk also proclaimed (2:14):

*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,
as the waters cover the sea.*

The Bible affirms with absolute clarity and conviction that the world in which we live is of both spiritual and material nature. In order to **perceive the material world** the Lord has provided us with five basic senses: touch, sight, taste, hearing and smelling. But these senses **are of no help in perceiving the spiritual world**, for that world is not visible, and it cannot be touched, heard, tasted or smelled. The perception of spiritual reality requires the exercise of a **spiritual sense or faculty** which God has provided us. In the



Bible it is called a person's «spirit» (see 1Cor 2:11–14; Job 32:8; Prov 20:27).

We must recall that our God has a spiritual nature, not material. Jesus Christ affirmed this reality to the Samaritan woman in John 4:24: «*God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth*».

Christ refers to **God's presence** in this material world as «*the kingdom of God*», his government, his reign over the world from the spiritual plane. He confronted Nicodemus with this reality in John 3:5–8:

I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

A DIFFERENT DIMENSION

The concept of needing to be born again in order to know or experience the kingdom of God underscores the fundamental difference between the spiritual and material planes. A person needs to know (experience) a very different kind of existence from that with which he is acquainted on the natural or material plane.

In order to be able to think in spiritual terms we must free ourselves from the concept of a world that has only three dimensions. We are dealing with a different paradigm. It's like the difference between swimming and running, or between walking and flying, or between decimal mathematics (based on the number 10) and digital math (based on the number 2). We need to accustom ourselves to different parameters, a different kind of comprehension.

The material world is measurable, it has weight and distance, it is limited to time. But the spiritual world is eternal, infinite, and corresponds to God's spiritual nature.

LIFE ON TWO PLANES

The marvelous aspect of this reality is that God gave to human beings the ability **to live on both planes**, both spiritual and material. But our difficulty in perceiving the spiritual world is something we have known since infancy, for from the beginning we began to know the world around us largely by our five senses. A baby begins to know the world largely by touch and taste. Over time each person learns to use his other senses. As he grows, he perceives and evaluates all that is around him by what he sees, hears and smells.

Many of us then discover that it is impossible to know the spiritual world through the same five senses. At times we try to introduce into the equation our imagination or deduction, but these do not help us to experience the spiritual plane. We must do what Jesus said: We must be «*born again*».



God's involvement with the world where the spiritual permeates the material plane is presented to us as the activity of the Holy Spirit. Genesis 1:2 introduces this idea with the affirmation that «*the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters*». God's involvement is also seen in his speaking in the midst of chaos and disorder. The biblical text affirms that «*God said*», a phrase that is repeated again and again. Later we learn of the divine decree to make a human being and place him in this world to put it in order, subdue it and govern it (Gen 1:26–31).

In Genesis 2:7 we observe that «*the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being*». It is obvious from the outset that the man's relation with both the material and the spiritual worlds develops in a completely natural and normal manner. He enjoys fellowship with God his creator and he exercises the dominion that God assigned him over the material world around him.



Up to that point everything seems to be harmonious and normal ... until Adam and Eve make the fatal decision to attempt independence from God. In dealing with the world as an autonomous entity they discover to their great regret that because of they have lost a vital and spiritual relationship with God the creator of all, they have also lost their authority and control. The world has become hostile to them, reacting against man's dominion. By introducing the factor of independence, which is to say, living exclusively on a material plane, separated from God, they discover that **without spiritual perception and order they no longer have what they need to govern the material world**. They find themselves without spiritual insight, and they are now on a par with the material world. They no longer possess the fundamental distinctive that comes from a spiritual relationship with God.

At that point God introduces his plan of rescue and redemption for humanity (Gen 3:15), but the damage had been done in the material world, which is now subject to vanity. The apostle Paul refers to this situation in Rom 8:19–25, where he mentions both the frustration and corruption, as well as the «*hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God*». That is to say, **the final deliverance of the world depends on the full redemption of human beings**. Both human beings and the world now need liberation and redemption.

It seems obvious that **the alternative that God presents to man is to repent of his pretended independence and place himself again under total dependence to God (that is, under God's government) on the spiritual plane**. All this is involved in the term *to be born again*, which implies living in the Spirit, the equivalent of living under God's government in this world.

GOD AND ISRAEL

The story of God's dealing with Israel in antiquity reveals the latent tension between God's desire to govern and direct his own people and the almost permanent tendency of that people to do things on their own, without submitting to their creator and redeemer. There are a few bright places in that history but mostly shadows. We find the stories of **those that chose to live under God's government** — Enoch, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, Elijah, Jeremiah, etc. — and also of many more who insisted on doing things their own way, provoking God to turn his back on them. There is a fundamental difference between the person who draws his orientation from God's presence in his life and the one who does things on his own, without taking God into account.

For example, the biblical commentary underscores the faith of Abel who *«offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings»* (Heb 11:4). We also find Enoch who *«was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God»* (Heb 11:5). Then there is Noah, who when *«warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family»* (Heb 11:7). There is also Abraham: *«By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God»* Heb 11:9–10). Then these testimonies from Hebrews 11 conclude with this word of hope and encouragement:

« These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect» (Heb 11:39–40).

JESUS, THE SON OF GOD

The story continues with little variation ... until an event occurs in Bethlehem that would alter the entire human history: Jesus is born to the virgin Mary. The fact of having been conceived by God himself in the virgin Mary means that this marvelous being is distinct from all others, for he has a nature that is fully spiritual as well as material. Theologians have struggled with this reality which is unique, without parameters for comparison, and have come to define the person of Jesus Christ as one hundred per cent human and one hundred per cent divine. He is not half and half, nor part God and part man. He is the eternal Son of God, although the term that he preferred to use when referring to himself was: «Son of man».

For the purposes of our study we should observe that **Jesus integrated the two natures in his person in a completely natural and spontaneous way**. Other people had no problem in recognizing him as an equal, that is, as a normal human being. But Jesus did not limit himself to the material plane. He always



enjoyed full and intimate communion with God his Father. **The kingdom of God was his natural habitat**; God's government was for him totally normal and natural. The spiritual plane was perfectly familiar to him. In other words, he **combined in his person both the spiritual and material realities, without tension**, without difficulty, and without frustration.

Thus he lived in the home of Joseph and Mary; thus he worked in the carpenter shop in his youth; thus he presented himself in the synagogue of his home town; and thus he initiated his ministry in Galilee. So it was that upon the announcement following his baptism by John the Baptist: "*The time has come*", he said. "*The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!*" (Mark 1:15), **he was referring to himself. The kingdom of God came near to men in the person of Jesus Christ.** To understand the relationship between human beings and God's kingdom or government, it is essential to understand the life of Jesus Christ. His presence among men represented God's presence and government. That presence of God is a challenge to us all to examine our life and make the necessary adjustments in order to live in accord with his will. The kingdom of God is near ... in the person of Jesus Christ.

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We have just considered Jesus' announcement at the initiation of his public ministry. The Gospel of Mark is considered the oldest of the four Gospels, and we take from it the words of Jesus (Mark 1:14–15, NIV):

Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Evangelical Christians in our days are not accustomed to hearing the gospel presented in these terms; therefore we need to stop and think about its significance. I want to call your attention to a paraphrase of this text by Professor Dallas Willard*:

Jesus then came into Galilee announcing the good news from God. "All the preliminaries have been taken care of," he said, "and the rule of God is now accessible to everyone. Review your plans for living and base your life on this remarkable new opportunity."

Before making some comments, I would like to present some other texts in which we find references to the same kingdom of heaven in the words of Jesus, John the Baptist and the disciples of Jesus:

Matt 3:1,2; 4:17; 10:5–7 (NIV):

*In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven is near.**"*

*From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven is near.**"*

*These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: '**The kingdom of heaven is near.**' "*

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF "KINGDOM"?

In the first place we must clarify that *kingdom* does not refer to a place, neither to heaven nor to any other location. **Kingdom** (Greek: *basileia*) **means government, dominion**. Essentially, it refers to **rule or control over something**. In that sense every human being has his own *kingdom*, referring to all that is under his responsibility and authority. In reality, the total absence of the exercise of authority would mean negation of the human being. For even in a minimal way, every person is responsible for his words, his thoughts and his actions; that is to say, in that sense he is exercising his government or dominion. Biblically, this attribute is one of the evidences of our having been made in God's image. When a person loses every trace of control or dominion in his life, he ceases to exist, he dies.

KINGDOM =	GOVERNMENT CONTROL DOMINION RESPONSIBILITY
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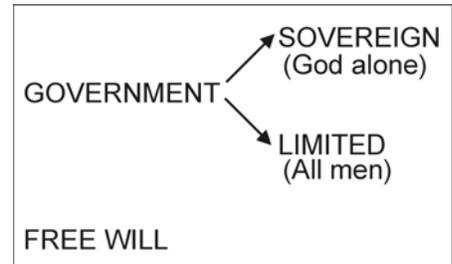
The kingdom of God is **the only government that is completely sovereign**. That is to say, it cannot be resisted or invalidated by anything. Even so, in his marvelous wisdom, he has given us a **free will**, which is not the same as sovereignty. This determines our liberty to choose, whether in favor of or in opposition to God or another being.

This attribute makes possible the most wonderful and pleasant experiences that a human being can know, but also allows us to explore the darkest depths of rebellion, conflict and misery, as a **consequence** of our wrong choices or those of others. If our free will allows us to make decisions that satisfy us and open us up to experiences that are exceptionally pleasant, it

also obliges us to face the consequences of our wrong, obstinate or even evil decisions.

POSSIBILITIES OF FREE WILL

Thus the possibility of exercising dominion and governing can lead us to the best or the worst experiences; toward happiness and fulfillment or into the most horrible misery. Once it is settled that each person has his own “kingdom”, government or free will, **it would be completely incongruent to expect God to intervene every little bit** to save us from the consequences of an error on our part or of others. On the other hand, **if we submit to his government** and direction in our lives, other possibilities open up to us for his light and salvation, or for what the apostle Paul calls “*the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know [God] better*” (see Eph 1:17). It is not that God distances himself from us arbitrarily, but that he respects our choice to draw near or to turn away from him. He calls us and wants to recover the lost fellowship with mankind.



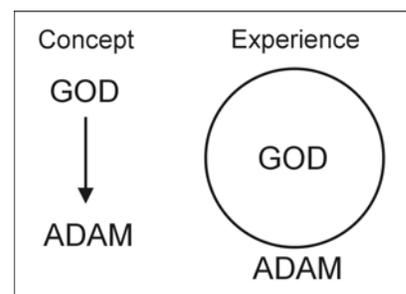
WHAT DOES THE ANNOUNCEMENT MEAN: “THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS NEAR”?

The **key to understand this affirmation is the person and life of Jesus Christ**. In him the kingdom of heaven draws near to us. Jesus was a man that lived completely under God’s rule, under the light of heaven. In him we perceive that heaven is not distant. His name was Emanuel, “God with us”. **In him heaven draws near. God is not distant**, he is not far away, he is here.

The kingdom of God did not originate with Jesus, nor was Jesus the only person who knew God to be near him, intimate, although it is true that no one has known God in the level of intimacy that Jesus experienced. God considered **Abraham** his friend and shared with him intimacy. We also read of **Moses** that spoke with God “face to face”. **Enoch** walked with God for so long and with such intimacy that God took him. So these men (and others) spoke of the nearness of God, and in some measure the government of God could be seen in their life.

GOD’S ORIGINAL PLAN

In our study on the reality of the spiritual world we considered the way that God wants to work through the human race to make known and extend his rule in all the earth. We also noted Adam and Eve’s unwillingness to develop their lives in total dependence on God. They chose rather to act according to their own free will and the result was that they lost the privileged relationship they had enjoyed with him.



At the beginning, Adam and Eve were able to count on God’s inestimable and glorious presence. Their fellowship with the creator and finisher of everything was not a difficult task, but rather the source of all their joy and constant encouragement. It never occurred to them that they might be better off anywhere else. As they extended God’s rule more and more, they saw it as a way of making known the greatness and majesty, the benevolence, the wisdom and righteousness of God who was not only their creator but the object

of their admiration and worship.

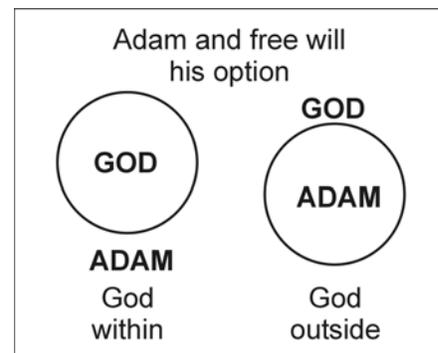
God did not manage them like pawns on a chessboard, but rather gave them broad liberty to explore, to experiment, to investigate and extend their dominion. In reality, the union between them as created beings and God as creator was so perfect and satisfying that it never occurred to them to think in terms of “us” and “him”. **They did everything together, in fellowship, in agreement.** They consulted with God about everything, and they acted with his full backing. God himself rejoiced to see how they progressed day by day.

THE POSSIBILITY OF SEPARATION

But at some point **they would face a dilemma.** For if they were really free to determine their actions, then **they were also free to turn away from God,** even to try to be independent (in some measure) of the divine purpose. Otherwise, their joy and happiness could not last. For to be genuinely happy, a human being has to want to do what he does; he has to want to love the object of his affection and admiration. And he has to know that if he does not want that, his love and service is not obligatory. Otherwise, it loses its meaning. Service that is forced, or love that is imposed, cannot bring happiness.

ABILITY TO DO GOOD OR EVIL

Thus God’s great “experiment” with the creation of beings that can exercise their own will and even oppose him **implies a real and serious danger.** Just as men can know the glory and ecstasy of God’s presence, they can also turn their back on him under the pretense of doing things as they prefer, on their own account. Although, in truth, **such an option is destined to end in total frustration and disappointment,** not because of God’s judgment or punishment, but rather **because of man’s basic incompetence** when facing so many things around him that he cannot control. He cannot manage the weather. He cannot manage the will of other persons, nor even of animals. He does not have adequate weapons to deal with God’s arch enemy, Satan. Therefore, if he chooses to take his own pathway, sooner or later he will realize that he doesn’t have what he needs to make it on his own. He can never “meet his budget”; he gets frustrated because others don’t work with him.



LOST SHEEP

One of the most graphic terms the Bible uses to describe this frustrating situation of men is found in Isa 53:6:

*We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way.*

And we find the same metaphor in Mar 6:34:

*When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them,
because they were like sheep without a shepherd.*

Sadly, not all lost sheep are aware of their wandering and therefore, do not recognize their need to be found by the good Shepherd. Here we can perceive the basic condition that is required of a

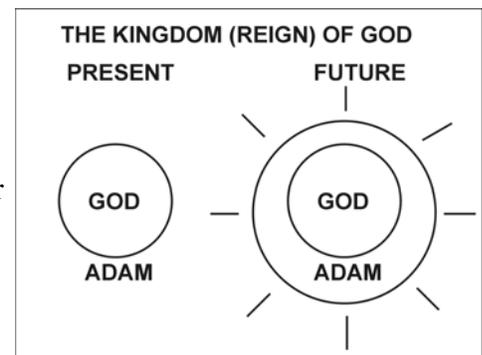
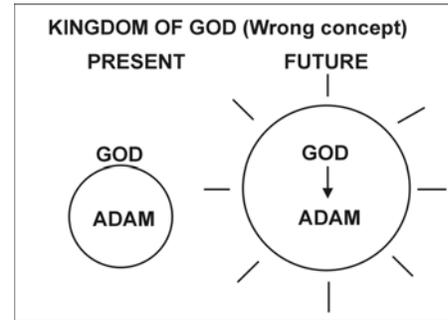
person before God’s rule will seem like good news, salvation, refuge, a safe harbor. He has to have an awareness of his need of God.

HAPPINESS: PRESENT OR FUTURE?

There are many who cannot imagine **how anyone can be happy by simply doing God’s will**. We are so far away from the first experiences of Adam in the garden of Eden that it is difficult to understand that such a life is still viable. The only life that many people know is a life of frustration, of unrealized dreams, of misery, of discovering their own limitations and vulnerability.

There are many who even consider themselves followers of Christ who **see the possibility of complete happiness only in heaven in the distant future**.

Once in a great while they experience a trace of heavenly light that for a brief moment lightens their daily path, but soon they return to a boring existence or to one that is simply miserable. They are very **far from thinking that a life of victory and constant confidence might become their own experience**. For them, “humanity” is equivalent to being condemned to a difficult life of constant contradictions. If that is your condition, I have GOOD NEWS for you. There is an alternative! It is possible to enjoy a real and constant experience of confidence in the Lord; it is possible to rejoice always in his presence. But let me illustrate that fact before explaining how you can have such an experience.



JESUS WAS BORN IN A CONTAMINATED WORLD

When Jesus was born to the virgin Mary in a small village of Palestine, **the world around him seemed to belong to God’s enemies**, as well as to those of all humanity. Jesus’ own people —Israel— were subjected by force under the Roman army. There was little possibility for prosperity, or even of receiving a good education. Early in his life Jesus learned at the side of Joseph his step-father how to manage the tools of the carpenter’s trade. His home was humble; he never knew material abundance.

But at twelve years of age his vocation for the word of God and for reverence for God became quite evident. Even then he spoke of his heavenly Father’s “business” or interests as something that would determine his pathway in life. At the age of thirty he finally left the carpenter’s shop and assumed the posture of a teacher among his people. At the outset the rabbis and scribes admired him, and soon a band of followers formed around him who were enchanted with his person, his teaching and his acts of mercy and healing.

AGREEMENT BETWEEN JESUS AND HIS FATHER

From the initiation of his ministry when baptized by the prophet John the Baptist in the River Jordan, **his heavenly Father gave audible and visible testimony of his approval and his anointing upon Jesus**. In the development of his ministry in Galilee and other parts of his native

land, **Jesus always testified of his complete satisfaction with his Father's will**, and also of the Father's satisfaction with him. At no point did that seem to be a heavy load that he must bear with resignation. With satisfaction he communicated, not his own words, but those of his Father. He said that the works that he did were all determined by his Father. He affirmed that he was fully aware that he pleased the Father in all things, absolutely everything. He alleged that he could do nothing without him. That he had come from the Father and would return to the Father. His delight was always to do his Father's will.

At no time did he assume the posture of a puppet. His actions were perfectly natural and spontaneous. It was evident that for him, life had no sense apart from doing God's will. His tranquility when facing danger or threat did not change, nor diminish. At no time did he defend himself nor allow himself to get involved in polemics. Even in his discussions with the Pharisees, he never vacillated nor looked as if he were insecure or uncertain. He was always himself, confident, sure of his Father's support, sure of his Father's purpose and his perfect plan. Even when he was falsely accused, and required to give a defense before the Roman governor, he did not flinch, nor vacillate; he didn't even open his mouth except to say that **his destiny was not in the hands of Pontius Pilate but in those of his Father.** His composure was so perfect and entire that even at the moment of greatest pain and agony, he extended his love and affection to a criminal hanging on the cross by his side to assure him that he would be with him in Paradise that very day.

ADAM FAILED; JESUS FULFILLED ALL AS A MAN

All this means that **Jesus perfectly fulfilled every responsibility in which Adam had failed.** Not even in the exceptional circumstances of Eden did Adam remain firm and faithful before the perfect benevolence of God his creator. Yet Jesus, in the worst circumstances, in the most dehumanizing situation, did not flinch, did not give up, but always honored his Father and trusted him absolutely for his own resurrection and glorification. All that after having walked for more than thirty years the dusty roads of his native Palestine, showing total harmony with the world around him, and constant confidence in his Father's good will.

Jesus was ALL that a man should be. And he is all that men can become. And Jesus lived all this experience **without drawing upon any attribute or resource beyond what all of us have available.** In this way he gave us the possibility and reason to affirm with all conviction and clarity that it is possible to be human and to always live in God's perfect will. This is so because every resource that Jesus had, you and I also have. That is what Jesus offers us when inviting us to receive with a whole heart the good news of God's kingdom that has come near in his person.

A FULL LIFE IN GOD

With all this we must understand that the best life —the only life worth living— is a life carried out in God's perfect will. Jesus offers us the real possibility of living in fulness, of living under the light of heaven, under the light of God. Not only does he give us strength to stand up under trials until we reach heaven, but rather in every condition, in every situation, right now, we can know his glorious presence, walk with him, live in victory and confidence, knowing that our fortune is completely in his hands.

Dear brothers and friends, we invite all to know, to embrace and participate in God's government, leaving behind every pretense of managing alone your own life. God created us to live under his rule and protection, under his grace, and embraced in his love.

*Doctor Dallas Willard is professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California (USA), minister of the gospel and author of several books. This paraphrase appears in his book, *The Divine Conspiracy* (1998: HarperCollins, San Francisco), p. 15.

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ILLUSTRATION FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

In Genesis cap. 28 we find an account that helps to illustrate our subject a bit more. It tells of an experience that Jacob had after fleeing from his family home to go to Paddan Aram. He found himself in an area that was totally unknown to him and, what was worse, he believed that he was far from the God of his parents. As he slept “*he had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it*” (Gen 28:12, NIV). There **God revealed himself to him as a God who was near him**, assuring him of his presence and that he would fulfill the promise made to his father and grandfather.

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”

(28:16–17, NIV). The presence of a sovereign God, along with the awareness of his own wrongdoing, gave him a great shock. But the most important fact for our study is his conclusion: **He found himself pondering the house of God, God’s abode, ¡on earth!**. It is clearly distinct from heaven, since he identified it as “the gate of heaven”. The key truth of this text is the revelation that came to Jacob in his dream: **¡God is here ... in my world!**



OUR DILEMMA: WE ARE ALONE AND GOD IS FAR AWAY

There are few persons—even among Christians—who seriously consider that God is here, in our world, at our side. Most of us think of God as far from us, in heaven. But **God’s great desire is to establish his home among human beings**. And he can only do it where he finds hearts open to him, subject to him, enchanted with him.

If we believe that God is far away, we have little alternative to managing our life the best we can. And we accustom ourselves to the idea that there is no other possibility. We say: “We cannot base our life on dreams; we have to be realistic”. We project far into the future the possibility of a close and intimate relationship with God, after we die. So that, while we are in this life we have to assume the responsibility that is ours: each person has to do whatever he thinks is best.



THE OTHER REALITY IN JESUS CHRIST

But the presence and life of Jesus Christ shows the error of such an assumption. **We were not designed to live far from God**, but rather to live in close fellowship with him. I can never be all that I was destined to be until I cast myself into God's arms to live according to his wonderful will. Christ's coming into this world and the announcement of the kingdom of heaven being near in his person radically changed the picture that I had imagined of the world around me, in which I live.

Until I understand this reality in Jesus Christ, the possibility of always living in victory, always confident, seems quite illusory to me, a fantasy, unreal. But **when Christ comes into the picture**, illustrating perfectly with his life that it is possible for a human being to live in an assured manner, with perfect happiness and in integrity, holiness and joyful and confident fellowship with God, I understand that I am facing a reality that I had never imagined possible.

Therefore **it is essential to perceive beforehand the kingdom of God in Jesus**, in order to understand its reality, its viability. With a God who is absent, we are not going anywhere. But with God present, absolutely everything is possible, and especially, **the full realization of my humanity is possible**. God's presence in my life doesn't make me look like a Martian, or an exotic or strange creature. **It makes me more like Jesus in his humanity**.

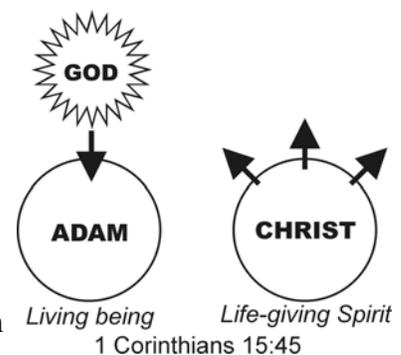
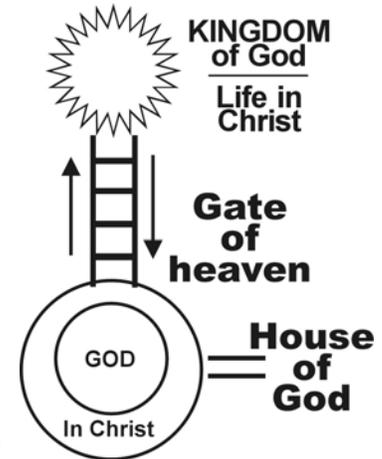
In John 10:10 Jesus promises this kind of total life, right here on earth:

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

In his priestly prayer of John 17, Jesus showed the tight relationship between knowing God and enjoying abundant and eternal life:

"This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (17:3).

In biblical language, **"eternal life"** does not refer to a life in the future (although that is included), but to a life like God's life. The reference is to a **quality of life**, just as the life that emanated in Eden from the tree of life. Paul tells us that Christ is a *"life-giving Spirit"* (1 Cor 15:45); and the life that he gives is glorious, complete, abundant, eternal. It is the life that is lived in the kingdom of heaven.



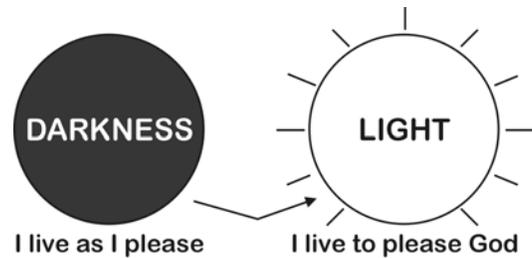
A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT

In the light of what we have considered so far, we cannot remain indifferent. The kingdom of

heaven has drawn near, placing before us the need to **make a decision**. Will we continue to insist on doing things our way, or will we come under his rule to live according to his will, with the marvelous possibilities of human development that implies?

Colossians 1:12–14 (NIV)

Thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.



Here the apostle Paul refers to the change of government in those that have experienced such a change. Consider the key points here:

- a) He has qualified us to share in the **inheritance of the saints** in the **kingdom of light**.
- b) He rescued us from the **dominion of darkness** (see Eph 2:1–3 and 2 Cor 4:1–6).
- c) He brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves (see Phil 2:9–11 and Heb 1:1–3). The phrase “brought us into” implies a change of government or rule in our life. At Calvary Christ won the battle and earned the right to rule.

MORE ABOUT THIS CHANGE

Let us now consider **Colossians 2:9–15** (NIV)

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross

- a) **What we received** as a result of the change in our status **is the very life of Jesus Christ**.
- b) We were **circumcised in heart**, that is to say, we have been **adopted into God’s family** and **included in the covenant**.
- c) How and when did this occur? v.12: When we were “**buried with him in baptism**”. We were also “**raised with him**”.

MORE ABOUT BAPTISM

See **Romans 6:1–9** (NIV)

¹What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

⁵If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—⁷because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.

- a) Baptism in water is a picture, a **dramatization of the radical change** that is produced in us when we are rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son God loves.
- b) It represents **union with Christ**, both in his death and his resurrection
- c) It is definite and final, and therefore **we should take that step with real conviction and faith**, not in a hurried manner nor under emotional constraint.

SUMMARY

In a word, living in the kingdom of God is equivalent to living in his presence. That presence is within our lives and becomes our very life. This reality of “Christ in us” is what Paul calls our “hope of glory” (Col 1:27), for it is the essence of eternal life and envisions our eternal presence with him in glory. This life, based on “Christ in us” has been made available to us in this age, in this world, because the kingdom of heaven has drawn near to us in the person of Jesus Christ.