

understand the Bible than we do. While reading these writings may leave us feeling good and uplifted, for the most part they do not challenge us to determine for ourselves what God would have us to do as citizens of His Kingdom. It is unfortunate that in today's society, the unbridled acceptance that these writers are indeed teaching the true Word of God is so extreme that when their teachings are challenged in view of what the Scriptures actually teach, the individuals raising the challenge are often chastised as being unloving or negative. We must *never* forget that the Bereans checked even the words of *Paul* against the Scriptures to see if what *he* was telling them was indeed in accordance with the Word (Acts 17:11). The reliance upon contemporary writers (or even ancient writings other than the Scriptures) for our source of spiritual food is equal to a diet of nothing more than junk food. Could it be that the reasons for so frequently avoiding *in depth* Bible study is a symptom of the infiltration of the world into the Kingdom of God?

We have heard in many ways over the last several years that the Bible is complicated and difficult. And since even scholars can not agree on what it says, (hence — numerous denominations) we could never expect to be able to study and arrive at *solid* conclusions. Accepting a philosophy such as this in some way *excuses us* from having to study *enough* to arrive at conclusions that we are convinced are accurate and Biblical. Therefore, *by today's standard*, most everything that we might believe to be taught in the Scriptures is viewed as either the result of nothing more than *individual opinion* (which varies from person to person) or perhaps the result of traditions that probably had no Biblical basis in the first place. This is a very dangerous attitude that results in a serious lack of searching the Word for Truth and knowing we *can* find it there.

We categorically reject philosophies of our current generation that propose that only a select few can understand God's Word. Additionally, we reject teachings that promote that all practices of the church are the result of traditions and are therefore subject to revision as the current culture might demand. While it is definitely true that there *are* many practices within the Lord's church that *are* the result of traditions established throughout history, there are also just as many practices that are very solidly based on what the Scriptures teach us. It is the God given *responsibility of every one of us* to study *the Bible* until we know which is which. Otherwise, we are in serious danger of accepting *someone's* word instead of *The Word*.

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DILIGENCE

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11

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The (Christian's) Human Dilemma

The time, the place and the situations may differ, but the dilemma is the same for all Christians everywhere. Once born into the Kingdom of God the battle begins in earnest. The struggle between the physical and the spiritual intensifies in response to our determination to be guided by God and His Word rather than the dictates of the physical world in which we live.

So what are we to do? In short, we are to use God's Word as the guide (or the instruction manual) for all that pertains to our walk as children in the Kingdom. This physical world however, presents us with a broad spectrum of situations in which we continually find ourselves that intensifies the struggle.

Let's first consider the world and its organization. What is it that's considered to be important in the physical realm of this world in which we live? A list of some of those things might include these: location, position, status, wealth, longevity, fitness, degree of education, natural family, country clubs, sports, hobbies, friends, food, clothing, housing, politics, physical disasters. While there are certainly more items we could add to this list, it is evident that our physical life is impacted by all of these things to some degree. These are factors we have to deal with in our physical world. The struggle surfaces as we come to understand what it is that *we should be* spiritually according to the Scriptures — yet are individuals who live in this physical world. We begin to realize that the spiritual nature of our existence as a child of God places limits on some of the activities in which we might otherwise be free to be involved as well as the methods that we might otherwise use to accomplish various goals that we have in front of us. We find it easy to accept that there are numerous rules of the physical world in which we live and violation of those rules can bring loss to us in many forms. It is sometimes more difficult however, to accept that our birth into the Kingdom of God also carries some rules and violation of those rules can also bring loss to us.

There is a great deal of power and prestige involved in the world order. Wealth, position and power often go together. We readily accept that we must recognize and respect the person in charge of any worldly function. Most of us readily obey that patrolman when he signals us to pull over and stop. We also obey the laws of the land and pay taxes as we should. Silence is quick when the gavel strikes the bench.

We also heed (or at least we *should* heed) the speed limit signs in our neighborhoods. Generally speaking, those rules and laws have been laid out for our benefit and often times for our protection so we readily give respect to those individuals who are in charge of our worldly situations. To not give *proper* respect is to *disrespect*. This is all relative to the physical nature of the world in which we live.

Now, how does this have anything to do with the Kingdom of God and us as its citizens? Let's read Romans 12:2:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — His good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)

Let's also look at I Corinthians 5:9 and 10:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. (NIV)

These verses suggest that we must recognize that we are a part of the physical world and must operate within its realm, yet we are not to be a Kingdom patterned after the world.

What are some characteristics in which the Kingdom of God differs and is set apart from the world? Let's list a few distinctions that are clearly taught in Scripture.

- 1) The Kingdom of God is eternal. (Luke 1:33; Rev. 21:2 and 9)
- 2) It is a spiritual Kingdom existing in our physical world. (Rom. 12:2)
- 3) It exists in both the physical world in which we now live as well as the eternal heavenly kingdom we are promised as citizens. (I Cor. 9:25)
- 4) All citizens are equal. Each person in the Kingdom has equal access to God and to salvation through Christ. (Gal. 3:26-29)
- 5) The orderliness of the kingdom is based on functions, not levels of status or prestige. (Philippians 2:5-8)
- 6) Preference given to others in the body to gain their approval or attention is use of worldly tactics in a spiritual kingdom. We are all sinners who, but for the grace of God, would be outside the Kingdom and in a lost state for eternity. (I Cor. 12:14-26; Romans 3:23 and 24)
- 7) Viewing elders, deacons, ministers, missionaries in any light other than that of functioning members of the body lends to demeaning of those who are not in such prominent visible positions. This leads to jealousy, envy and all types of harmful tendencies. We must be able to adhere to the way in which God orders the Kingdom without giving in to worldly inclination to place status on some work and demean the work of less visible workers in the kingdom. (I Cor. 12:4-30)

Many of the struggles throughout the history of the church center around the misguided notion that there are *some* roles in the Body that are more important or prestigious than others, or that there is an earthly style of hierarchy in which certain "positions" carry more status than do others. This is highly evident in the numerous denominations that have chosen to employ a management type of system that dictates the doctrine that is taught for that particular faith. What do we mean? Well, Scripture lays out numerous patterns that should be used to guide us in His Kingdom while we are yet on this earth. But we often see that it is no different today than it has been throughout history. Individuals either choose to ignore or fail to study the direction given in Scripture and elect to follow the more familiar and comfortable paths that exist in the world. We must always have a firm understanding of *why* we believe what we believe, rather than accepting the word of someone whom we perceive might have more status or knowledge than we have. The Scriptures warn many times that there will be false teachers among us (II Peter 2:1-3). God expects *each of us* to know His Word because *His* Word — and *only His* Word — is truth (John 17:17)

All of our talent is given *by* (and should be given *to*) God. But all too often because of ego many individuals are inclined to want to be the center of attention rather than allowing God to be the focus of attention. This is the direct influence of the world and the continuing need of man to place importance on that long list included in the third paragraph of this article (those things considered to be important in this physical world in which we live). For example, we frequently see that if a person holds certain degrees conferred by men, this confirmation equates to status even in the Kingdom of God (the Body of Christ or the church). The fact that such a degree may quite possibly be in a field totally unrelated to Scripture nonetheless causes individuals caught up in the *world* scheme of order to give unjustified credibility to such an individual even in Biblical matters. The opposite is equally true. A person who does not hold a formal degree might be viewed as not having the ability to understand Scripture since s/he is not educated, when in fact it could quite possibly be true that such an individual may have more knowledge of the Scriptures than one who has several degrees, none of which have any relevance to Biblical matters. Either of these situations is improper in the kingdom of God. *Every* Christian is expected to study the Word of God. Would God impose such a responsibility (II Tim. 2:15; II Tim 3:16 and 17) if He did not also give each person the ability to understand His Words?

Some people today have given in to the notion that since so many disagree on what the Bible teaches anyway, they may as well replace their Bible study with the reading of contemporary writers, some of whom have gained broad acceptance in various religious communities. After all, they're probably as well or perhaps even better educated than some of us, so they may have a better ability to