

The Kingdom of God Is...

Many of the parables of Jesus began with, "The kingdom of God is like.... With a slight contrast, and at a different time, the Apostle Paul wrote, "The kingdom of God is...." He was indicating something about the nature of God's kingdom.

The Christians in Rome were divided. There was a doctrinal issue over the eating of meat, most likely, meat that had been offered to pagan idols. In addition there was an issue about the observance of special days. As Paul dealt with the divisive attitudes of the Christians he reminded them:

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

This statement followed his assertion that in reality there was no restriction in the eating of meat. However, instead of demanding that everyone adopt the apostolic explanation of this liberty, Paul issued a warning. To those who already understood their liberty (of eating all meat), he instructed them not to hurt their Christian brother who, for conscience sake, could not enjoy the same liberty. As a further explanation he stated quite plainly:

The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking.

Bear in mind that some brethren believed it to be a *sin* to eat certain meat. So they abstained from eating in order to avoid sin. This was a critical spiritual issue. (In other words, it was not a silly issue about carpet or parking lots.)

Have you ever known of an issue in which one group believed a certain practice was a sin, yet another group believed they had liberty to participate? In an open discussion of scripture each group considered the scriptures with a good conscience. Yet, using the same scriptures, the two groups came to a conclusion that conflicted with each other. Their conclusions were based on their individual *reasonings*.*

Stalemate! What now?

Are there issues in our day that are similar in nature to those in the church in Rome?

Has God actually left certain issues unanswered in scripture?

(The answer is, 'Yes' and 'No.')

"No," God has not given us details for every specific issue. However, "Yes," an all encompassing answer is given for all churches for all time: "The kingdom of God is . . . righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

I think God wants to see whether His people are more interested in brotherly love or personal liberty. The individual aim of every Christian ought to be "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Do peace and joy fit with your understanding of righteousness? What is the kingdom of God really about?

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*Note: In Romans 14:1 translations vary: *opinions* (NASB, ESV, RSV), *disputable matters* (NIV), *doubtful things* (NKJV), etc. These are all ways of bringing out the basic meaning of the Greek term: *reasonings*.