

The Kingdom of God Is...

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome he spoke of the kingdom, but not by saying, “the kingdom of God is like.” Rather, he wrote, “the kingdom of God is.” He was saying something about the *nature* of the kingdom of God.

The Christians in Rome were divided. There was a doctrinal issue (ugh!) over the eating of meat as well as 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

That statement followed his assertion that *there was no restriction in the eating of meat*. However, instead of demanding that everyone adopt his apostolic explanation of liberty, he warned those who already understood their liberty (that all meat could be eaten) not to harm their fellow Christian who, for conscience sake, could not enjoy the same liberty. Then came his explanation: **“The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking.”**

Bear in mind that some Christians believed it to be a sin to eat certain meat. So they abstained to avoid sinning. It truly was a *doctrinal* issue.

Have you ever known of an issue in which one group believed that a certain practice was sinful, yet another group believed they had liberty to engage in that same practice? In an open discussion of scripture each group considered the scriptures with a good conscience. Yet both, using the scriptures, came to conflicting conclusions. Their conclusions were based on their reasonings.* Stalemate! What next?

* ‘Reasonings’ is the literal meaning in Romans 14:1 where some translations have *opinions* (NASB, ESV, RSV), *disputable matters* (NIV), *doubtful things/issues* (NKJV, CSB).

What issues of our day are similar in nature to those in the church in Rome?

Has God actually left some doctrinal questions without clear answers in scripture? *Yes and No*.

There ARE some questions/issues for which there is no direct instruction or guiding example. Yet, 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 people are more interested in *brotherly love* or *personal liberty*. Are you seeking “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,” or are you zealous for your liberty!? Do peace and joy accompany your definition of righteousness? What is the kingdom of God really about?

Those who pursue ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ will show self-restraint regarding their perceived Christian liberties. They will consider their fellow Christians first.

In contrast to those who show restraint are those who insist on pursuing their Christian liberties. In reality they are merely set on indulging in their personal desires.

On one occasion Paul wrote...

All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. ²⁴Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.

—1 Corinthians 10:23-24

Voluntarily giving up my Christian liberty for the sake of my Christian brother...That is the meaning of ‘love your neighbor.’ Isn’t that what the kingdom of God is about???