

The Culture of the Kingdom The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit

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We've been talking about the culture of the kingdom and we've said that one of the reasons why the present church is in an identity crisis is because it has allowed its culture to become the culture of the current marketplace; it has lost connection with the historic culture of the early church. Now here I'm not speaking about traditions, I'm speaking of what forces transformed Jew and Gentile who opposed each other, who were radically divided even among themselves, transform them from that condition to being a unified Body that reflected the love of God the Father and of the Lord the Jesus Christ. How could people from such diverse backgrounds, coming together in the kingdom, be so utterly transformed? And the answer is, that through the Holy Spirit, a culture was given to the early church, which culture has been lost. We interpret Scripture, indeed we interpret life and all the influences of life, through the filter of our culture.

So the early church had a culture, it's spelled out for us in Acts 2. In Acts 2 beginning at 42, it says, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers and the Lord added to their numbers every day those who were being saved." Today, by our traditions of interpretation, for us the apostles doctrine is what has been written down, both in the New Testament and interpreted for us through the writings of the church fathers and the writings of the reformers and more importantly the writings and teachings of those we look to for leadership and that's our notion and version of the apostles doctrine. Fellowship is nearly considered having a meal together, at the church building, preferably, or having some activity for the young people or activity for various groups of people within a church context. The breaking of bread is muffled but it comes out as being something vaguely resembling having the Lords supper. And prayer, well that's everything from structured prayers to all night prayer meetings because that's how our present culture interprets those four imperatives, those four foundations of the culture of the early church.

But as we've been revisiting what these things actually mean, an entirely different picture is emerging. We have given consideration to the first of these pieces: the apostles doctrine. We saw that there in fact are apostles today and the apostles are the mail men who deliver the word which is like bread from heaven for the day, that their function is

to establish the order and the government of God upon the earth as delegates of the King, which foundations of authority and order empower and release the people of God to functioning in their destinies, the destinies that have been appointed from the foundations of the earth, which destinies are the precise ways in which God himself intends to live through people in the earth. But today, of course, everyone wants to know what their destiny is but very few go beyond those inquiries to find out how God provided for them to live in these destinies. It is not just important that you do something significant with your life, it is important that what you do be what God intended for you to do; why you were put here. But more than that, what God intended to do is what He intended to do Himself through you and therefore the kingdom is your context in which to live out the purpose for which you were put here.

The function of the apostles is to establish order in your life and order in your thinking so that you could clearly see what God has made you to be and equally, clearly understand so that you may rely upon what power, what giftedness, what insights, what creativity, what uniqueness God invested in you by which He intends to function through you. What are the graces that God put in you, deposited in you that He may use through the unique expression of Himself that you are? That's what the apostles do: they lay out that foundation so that you may build on it properly, reasonably being able to rely upon what God has committed Himself to be and to do, through you.

Now, absent the apostles, we have no chance of church being meaningful. That is why church has descended – or devolved I should say – into simply rituals and people hope that by doing these rituals you will get to go to heaven when you die. And most people then think that your destiny has really nothing to do with your life as a believer; your life as a believer is perceived as an addition to what you go off and do. So most people have the idea that they'll go off and live a successful life by the sweat of their own brow, by the workings of their own ingenuity and imagination and when they get rich they'd be a good person and part of being a good person, they would give some money to the church. And the church is foolish enough to encourage that perspective and especially to encourage those gifts, those monetary gifts.

But it's not that; there are not two lives to be lived, there's only one life. You came here to live to the glory of God. And everything that would satisfy you, everything that would cause you to reach the highest expression of life in the earth, for you. If you are a business man, for you to be the very business man that you could be. If you're an artist, for you to be the most creatively competent that you could possibly be. If you are a school teacher, for you to have insight into the nature of the children that you are raising up. If you're a farmer, for you to have understanding of the cycles of nature. Whatever it is that you are put here to be, the greatest that you could possibly be is within the context of the kingdom of God. Unfortunately you've been told otherwise, you've been told that the Christian faith is really about going to heaven, it's not about functioning on the earth.

And you've been told that there are so many restrictions that attend the Christian faith that you have to break loose of those restrictions and be actually in sin before you could have any chance of being creative. Now, sin is the consequence of your own self will but creativity is the intention of God and the endowments of God; you can be phenomenally creative without being sinful. In fact, what devours – like a cancer – the fruit of your creativity, is sin; righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

It's a mistake to think that to be outrageous and bizarre is somehow creative, that's just rebellious. Genuine creativity enriches the lives of human beings in a way that is irreplaceable, in fact, if you did not live and if you did not function, the entire human race would have been diminished by the exact extent of your contribution to the human race. Unfortunately, so many artists and business people – even if they create phenomenal works of art – overshadow those things - even if they create incredible businesses - they tend to overshadow these things by the consequences of sinful behavior and do not leave to the earth the clean creativity that God intended as their bequest – it's His bequest, actually - to the earth - through them.

You know, it's funny how when we talk about great painters, for example, we may praise their artwork but decry say, their neglect of their families or their womanizing if we're talking about men or their sexual habits and practices. We talk about business men who created phenomenal wealth but we speak also of their vindictiveness, vengefulness and their unconquerable greed. Why does it have to be both? The answer is, because when you live what God put you here to be by your own strength and apart from God, it will invariably produce this mixture and it's the mixture that – to a great measure – denies the truth and the full competence of who you are from being your proper legacy. Well, because the church has not taught us properly we don't understand that everything God put in you to be and to become, He made it possible for you to draw from the contextual support of the kingdom in order to be able to accomplish that.

The kingdom is different from what it has been presented as being and it's most definitely different from what the church has presented it as. Church often presents God in a manner that enhances selfishness, greed and corruption of the leaders of the church. I'm not saying that all leaders of the church are selfish, greedy and corrupt but far too many of them are, to the point where it's a minority of leadership that is reliable, trustworthy and a proper representation of Christ and historically that the majority has been corrupt.

So it's time to revisit the culture of the kingdom because what has been lost is the true culture of the kingdom and it was lost when the church was invited to become an extension of the state. When the monarchs gave authority to bishops in the hope that the bishops would keep the populations in line and support the monarchy and it's claims – especially as monarchies reached out to conquer new territories – the church and the state became one and the true culture of the kingdom was lost and replaced by the culture of

the state. So people, typically, will be church members because they're born into church membership. In fact, most nations that possess a national church, most people groups have no idea who they actually are as a people group apart from how that is defined by the nexus of the church and their culture. And that's because initially the church took on the culture of the people.

I had an interesting example of this recently. I was in the Ukraine and I asked an audience – I was trying to explain the racism that's inherent in national churches because they're churches of a particular race of people. And to illustrate my point - looking as I do, I asked the Ukrainians who look as they do - if I could be a member of the Ukrainian orthodox church. And I guess no one had ever asked them that, no one who isn't a Ukrainian had ever asked them that because the point was stunning. My point is that the culture of the kingdom has been lost, it has been co-opted by the state and then the church re-paid that co-option in full by becoming the culture of the nations.

So, in effect, the church has played back to the nation whatever the pagan cultures of that nation were before they even knew anything about Christ. So you know, if you're a Christian in England for example, you practice druid ceremonies right alongside Roman traditions, right alongside Celtic traditions, and they're all called Christian. And that's what has replaced the original culture of the church. The original culture of the church, at it's foundation, relied upon the doctrine of the apostles. Then, the next big item of culture that has been almost entirely lost to the church is fellowship. Today, when we talk about fellowship, it is commonly referred to as a meal together.

Now, when I speak of the culture of the church, what you will see is that all of these cultural elements exist in the Scriptures in both the Old Testament and the New Testament and in the Old Testament these things existed more or less as types and shadows. Meaning, the full weight of that revelation had not been given, had not dawned upon the recipients of these symbols. So when we speak of apostles doctrine for example, in the Old Testament there was more of a prophetic functioning by rulers; Samuel is a good example of that. Samuel spoke the word of the Lord...in fact it was said in the first chapter of Samuel that in the days of Eli, the word of the Lord was seldom heard in Israel and visions were very scarce. Now naturally, if that is the condition, when Samuel shows up even as a young boy, you will understand why God begins to speak to him in the night as a young boy in the temple because the season had changed with the coming forth of an apostolic type figure in the Old Testament. He was a prophet, he was a wise man, he was a ruler. We see these designations in Scripture, “Behold, I send you prophets, wise men and teachers...” these are the component graces that go with the apostolic. So even though we have the reference of someone like Samuel in the Old Testament, it is not until the New Testament that we properly understand the apostolic but we see Paul as a figure, restoring order to the people of God in the New Testament and his administration is very much like his antecedents in the Old Testament, the ones

who have come before him in the Old Testament.

So my point is, in the days of Samuel no one called him an apostle but he functioned among Israel in that particular fashion; he reminded Israel of the word of the Lord. He left us then, this template in the Scripture of such ones arising who would bring the people back to the ways of God and show them the perspectives of God. Now in the same way, all of the other elements of the culture of the kingdom refer back to their Old Testament and scriptural antecedents. That's why we know what these things mean, and for us to simply cast these things, cast their meanings - in terms of contemporary understandings - is to miss the whole point of Scripture. So when we say 'The apostles doctrine' is very much about what the church fathers say or what the leaders of our churches say and so on, when that's our perspective we're missing the point; God had sent ones in the Old Testament, God has sent ones in the New Testament and their role is essentially the same in both contexts: to bring the people back to and to line them up – as in a plum line – with the things of God, to restore order and government to the house of God.

In the same way, fellowship, the second of the four elements of the culture of the church - apostles doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers - in the same way, fellowship has a long standing, historical context within the Old Testament and in the New Testament we see the same thing brought forth but now...whereas in the Old Testament it's practiced in physical terms, in the New Testament it's practiced in spiritual terms; it exists in type and shadow in the Old Testament, it functions in reality in the New Testament.

So let's begin an analysis of the cultural piece, one of the cultural references of the kingdom, that is the reference to fellowship. It is definitely not and after this discussion you will more than likely never again refer to fellowship as 'eating a meal together', what in America is called 'potluck'. Fellowship, look at this, the word “fellowship” occurs in interesting context in the New Testament. I want to show you a couple of quick references. In II Corinthians chapter 13 verse 14, Paul says, “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” “The fellowship..” and he adds, “of the Holy Spirit..” “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” So fellowship evidently has to do with something the Holy Spirit does. Look at this again from Philippians chapter 2, “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, any comfort from His love, any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like minded, having the same love, being one in the Spirit and purpose.” And then he goes on to say, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition...” and so on.

So, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is further defined as the resulting relationship between the people, which relationship has been produced by the Holy Spirit who

indwells each of them. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit: this is a much bigger subject than one can imagine and it's definitely more than potluck. It has to do with the way the Body of Christ is arranged by the Holy Spirit. Now this is called 'the assembling of the Body of Christ' and we will look – in our consideration of this matter – we'll look at I Corinthians chapter 12 where the apostle Paul lays down for us a fundamental principle of the assembling of the Body by the Spirit. Now he says this, verse 12 of I Corinthians 12, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts, and though all its parts are many they form one body, and so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one Body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

Now what he's telling us here is that the Holy Spirit assembles the parts of the Body and this is the resulting fellowship that comes about. The fellowship of believers together is to recognize how the Holy Spirit has assembled you with another. Now why is it that the Holy Spirit baptizes people into the Body? Look and see this piece. From the same I Corinthians it says, “But God has revealed it to us by the Holy Spirit,” this is I Corinthians chapter 2 verse 10, “the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way know one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may freely understand what God has given to us.”

Now what did I say earlier on? Did I not tell you that everything you were put in the world to be or to become was meant to be within the context of the Body of Christ? As long as we see the Body of Christ as an institution, that notion of you living out your destiny within the Body of Christ is too limiting because if you think of the Body of Christ institutionally, about all you could do is what you do on Sunday mornings. But if you think of the Body of Christ as being you - as a part of the Body - assembled to all the other parts and that assembling is being done by the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit is creating an environment of fellowship that enables you and sustains you to live the life that God has put you here to live and that's the fellowship that you should not forsake.

Now I want to talk about, in the upcoming broadcast, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit because that's the way you have been assembled by God into the Body of Christ. I'm Sam Soleyn, we'll see you at that broadcast. Thank you, bye bye.