

15 Contrasts Between the Kingdom Age and Religious Systems

Jesus and the apostles did not inaugurate another religious system; rather, they established the age of the kingdom of God.

As we examine the Gospels and the book of Acts, most of the teachings are about the kingdom of God. The church is not the kingdom; rather, it is the primary agent of the kingdom. The church exists to represent God and to manifest the reign of Jesus on the earth. Despite this fact, many churches, historically, have bypassed Scripture and have instead created a secondary tradition that is not close to the way of Jesus and the apostles.

I believe now is the time in which God is shaking the global church and establishing Kingdom principles. God is ripping away and exposing extraneous second-tier traditions and denominational positions that are opposed to His kingdom. Believers need to understand the difference between the characteristics of the kingdom and man-made religion. The body of Christ and its surrounding environment will be transformed only through proper alignment with His kingdom.

The following are 15 contrasts between the kingdom age and religious systems:

- 1. The kingdom focuses on manifesting God in the earth, while religion focuses on applying its traditions inside church buildings.**

The word “kingdom” implies that there is a king who rules within a region. Psalm 24:1 teaches us that the earth belongs to the Lord, and Psalm 22:28 tells us His kingdom rules over

all nations, not just over the church. Consequently, we in His kingdom are called to show that the cross of Christ impacted the whole cosmos, not just the church realm (Col. 1:12-13, 1:20).

2. The kingdom transforms individuals from within, while religion focuses on observing outward rituals.

Jesus taught us that God requires truth in the inner man (Matt. 5-7, 23; Ps. 51:6). Hence, the kingdom focuses on inner transformation, while religion concentrates primarily on observing church rituals (Luke 17:21). Christ-centered spiritual disciplines help create proper habits of the heart that are conducive to growth in the knowledge and love of God.

3. The kingdom releases all believers to the work of the ministry, while religion merely releases professional clergy to minister.

In the kingdom, all believers are both kings and priests (Rom. 5:17, 1 Pet. 2:8-9). In religion, only those trained in seminary and who are employed in church ministry are considered priests.

4. The kingdom sees the Spirit poured out upon all flesh. Religion sees the Spirit move only during Sunday services.

The apostle Peter made it clear that the Resurrection inaugurated the kingdom age, which was seen when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon every culture, tribe, kindred, tongue and nation (Acts 2:17). Two of the results of the outpouring was that God was no longer restricted to the religious Jews, and His Spirit was not limited to the most holy place in their temple. Despite this, many in the body of Christ continue to restrict the Holy Spirit to moving only within the four walls of a building during mass or church services.

5. In the kingdom, the Scriptures have primary ecclesiastical authority. In religion, second-tier religious tradition has primary ecclesial authority.

This second-tier religious tradition is an issue not only for the Roman Catholics, who put custom and canon law on equal terms with Scripture, but also for the Orthodox Church. Many people place the writings of the apostolic fathers on the same level as the Holy Scriptures. Many evangelical Protestant denominations, Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal churches also have second-tier traditions that they regard as primary authority as they relate to Christian practices.

6. In the kingdom, the presence of God is wherever the believer goes. In religion, the presence of God is at the altar of their church building.

In the kingdom, the power and presence of God that heals, delivers and saves the oppressed were commonly manifested in the streets. God wants to unleash an army of believers who will turn the world upside down, but religion wants to keep believers closeted inside church buildings.

7. In the kingdom, the fivefold minister equips the saints to do the work of the ministry. In religion, the fivefold minister does the job of the ministry.

Traditional religious systems keep people dependent upon professional clergy to pray for the sick, counsel, preach and represent God to the world. In the kingdom, fivefold ministry gifts are focused not on doing the work of the ministry but on equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-12).

8. In the kingdom, the ministry focus is Monday to Saturday. In religion, the ministry focus is Sunday.

People participating in kingdom-focused churches cannot wait

until Monday comes. Whereas those who are trapped in religious systems will only see purpose and meaning during church services.

- 9. In the kingdom, the church is sent to serve its community. In religion, the church strives to get the community into the church.**

Kingdom-focused churches equip believers to be the problem-solvers of society. They provide them with a biblical worldview to frame their service in every vocation that affects communities. In the kingdom, it is not about how many people attend church services; rather, it is about how many people in the church are sent out to transform their world!

- 10. In the kingdom, the focus of concern is for the whole body of Christ. In religion, the primary focus is only on the denomination/local church.**

Any person with a kingdom agenda will be concerned about the health of the entire body of Christ. Those with a religious mindset are sectarian and only care about the health of their denomination or church.

- 11. In the kingdom, every sphere of life is integrated under King Jesus. In religion, the church stays out of the public square.**

The kingdom of God prophetically speaks to societal structures such as law, politics, economics, families, art and business. In religion, the view is that such things are unimportant, unspiritual and therefore should be left to the concern of the world.

- 12. In the kingdom, Jesus is the King of kings. In religion, He is merely the symbolic leader of the church.**

In the kingdom, Jesus is not only the head of the church, but He is also the King of kings (Rev. 19:16). This is the most politically charged statement anyone can make about Jesus!

Jesus is the political head of every president, politician, governor and mayor. It obligates every believer to be politically active by voting and doing their part to speak truth to power, as well as elect candidates who best represent kingdom values.

13. In the kingdom, the church is the salt of the earth. In religion, the believer is the salt of the church.

Jesus called His followers to reflect His character and values. He called them to be the salt of the earth and light of the world, not the salt of the church and light of religion.

14. The kingdom participates with Christ in the renewal of all things. Religion is focused on perpetuating its traditions in the church.

Every person in a kingdom-focused church should understand that the Great Commission involves influencing people groups and subcultures, not just individuals (Matt. 28:19). People stuck in religious systems work only to perpetuate the second-tier traditions of their church members.

15. The kingdom engages culture, while religion escapes the earth.

The nature of religion is that it wants to create an enclave of safety from the unpredictable realities of the unredeemed world; religion is mystical, not practical or spiritual. However, disciples of the kingdom view every global challenge as an opportunity to be a problem solver and seek to reflect Christ to the surrounding culture.

May God help all of us discern whether we are primarily informed by the kingdom or by a religious tradition and system!