

IN MEDIO

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The People of God Part Three: “The Sons of the Kingdom”

In the first century CE, many Jews and others believed in and followed the Mosaic Law in association with the temple in Jerusalem, and as taught and practiced in synagogues throughout surrounding cities, did so believing wholeheartedly that their worship was in line with God’s arrangement. This includes Jesus, who referred to the temple of Jerusalem as, “the house of my Father” (John 2:16), while he went forth “teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23).

Despite these believers, God’s arrangement, including his earthly temple, had become corrupted (see Matthew 23:13–24:2). Jehovah’s arrangement was corrupted by those who became presumptuous (Matthew 3:7–10), by those who condemned the guiltless ones (Matthew 12:1–7), by those who taught human commands as if they were God’s commands (Matthew 15:1–9), by those who questioned the authority of others to teach, rather than the teaching itself (Mark 11:27–33), by those who “like ... to be called Rabbi by men” (Matthew 23:2–7), and by those who scheme by use of “crafty device” rather than stand up for their beliefs, even if it is in front of crowds (Matthew 26:3–4). In the first century CE, God’s arrangement had even become corrupted by people who feared losing their place and their position more than they feared God (John 11:45–48).

These problems were not new among God’s people back then, nor are they new today. God has had to deal with the same or very similar behaviors among humans, including his servants, since the beginning (Genesis Chapter 3). This is why God’s arrangement has been and is subject to corruption, because humans since Adam and Eve often decide what is good and what is bad apart from God. God’s arrangement is then corrupted when humans follow desire rather than the best available reasons when it comes to our teachings about God and how to treat others. See Part Two of this series for more on desire versus choices based on the best available reasons.

For example, consider the reasons people engage in homosexuality, which provides no demonstrable physical, emotional, spiritual, or any other benefit toward a long and healthy life. Additionally, it causes many physical problems as it is a form of abuse when the body is intentionally and repeatedly misused. Since homosexuality is physically abusive, it is therefore also emotional and spiritual abuse, as these three forms of abuse

(physical, emotional or mental, and spiritual) are usually manifest together when physical abuse is evident. Homosexuality also regularly leads to a life filled with disease, sickness, and early death. It also has no reproductive purpose, and it violates the obvious use of male and female physiology for sexual gratification at the expense of reproductive and excretory organ function and health. Yet, despite the obvious good reasons against it, many people have and do choose homosexuality. But this could only be desire *absent* any good reasons, because none exist. It is entirely a desire-based decision.

Eve chose to please herself before her husband and before her God (Genesis 3:6–7). Adam chose to please Eve and himself before his God (Genesis 3:12). Satan was only interested in pleasing himself, for he lied without regard for those whom he tempted and deceived. This is why he is referred to, not as the one who liberated mankind by giving them the knowledge of good and bad, but as the one who was “a manslayer when he began,” because he “did not stand fast in the truth” (John 8:44). One way or another, people frequently put themselves, or others, ahead of God. Yet, often the result is they are not motivated by God but by ‘fear for men’s commandment’ (Isaiah 29:13).

Now ask yourself: If you lived during the first century CE, just before or even during the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, who would you have followed? Would you have sided with the Pharisees, scribes, or with others who oversaw the temple, the synagogues, and Jehovah’s earthly arrangement of worship (John 7:13; 9:22; 12:42; 16:2)? Or would you have sided with a man who “had his clothing of camel’s hair and a leather girdle around his loins [and whose] food too was insect locusts and wild honey” (Matthew 3:4)? Would we have accepted Jesus who, though he could have borne witness to himself, told everyone he did not teach what was his but only what was from his God (John 7:16; 8:12–14)?

Whether we accept these things, those around Jesus in the first century could simply evaluate what he said, his teachings, and the “works [he was] doing in the name of [his] Father” (John 7:14–18; 8:13–14; 10:25; 12:49–50). They could then decide whether to believe in him. However, many chose to side with those who cared, not for the truth, but about whether someone disagrees with what they already believed. This is clear from the following account:

John 18:19–24 (NWT)

And so the chief priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered him: “I have spoken to the world publicly. I always taught in a synagogue and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. Why do you question me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them. See! These know what I said.” After he said these things, one of the officers that was standing by gave Jesus a slap in the face and

said: "Is that the way you answer the chief priest?" Jesus answered him: "If I spoke wrongly, bear witness concerning the wrong; but if rightly, why do you hit me?" Then An' nas sent him away bound to Ca'ia·phas the high priest.

Though it may seem like an easy choice upon reading such accounts, remember: If you would have sided with John the Baptist and/or with Jesus of Nazareth, you would have been expelled from the synagogues (John 12:42), persecuted (John 18:25–27), and even killed (Acts 7:54–60). None of these things would have been pleasant, obviously, yet we tend to forget or not think about the real difficulties involved with doing what they did. Still, if we were looking for the truth and seeking it on the basis of the best available reasons in the first century CE, and not simply for the conveniences of group association, probably we would have gone either to John and/or to Jesus and 'openly confessed our sins.'

However, acting in accordance with the best reasons for belief would have put us at odds with the existing temple arrangement and with the existing Jewish sects and their worship, as overseen and administered by the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the chief priests, the older men, and their scribes as these had "made the word of God invalid because of [their] tradition" (Matthew 15:6). Despite their religious work and their position in Jehovah's arrangement they were disapproved, as John the Baptist himself made clear:

Matthew 3:7–10 (NWT)

When he [John the Baptist] caught sight of many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to the baptism, he said to them: "YOU offspring of vipers, who has intimated to YOU to flee from the coming wrath? So then produce fruit that befits repentance; and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'As a father we have Abraham.' For I say to YOU that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Already the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree, then, that does not produce fine fruit is to be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Though "many of the Pharisees and Sadducees" who came to John could have accepted what he said and then repented, for the most part as groups and as individuals they assumed their legitimacy as God's people solely because of their lineage, not because of their faith or their works. Apparently, they did not realize God would cease to tolerate their failure to live by truth. They also failed to realize that "the kingdom of God [could] be taken from [them] and be given to a nation producing its fruits" (Matthew 21:43).

It appears these same hypocrites also believed that once a person or a group is chosen by God then that means they are *always* chosen by God, regardless of what they choose to do after being chosen. They forgot God chose Abraham because of the faith he showed by his works (Genesis 22:9–12; compare James 2:21–24). They also forgot that God would consider others to be Abraham's children only if they 'did the works of

Abraham' (John 8:39). Truth is not an inheritance, nor is it something you can confer upon someone. You cannot appoint someone to the 'office of the truth.'

A person either believes what is true or most likely true based on the best available reasons, or a person does not. A person either acts in accordance with beliefs that are true or that are most likely true based on the best available reasons, or a person does not. That is why in the Bible the "sons of the kingdom" are described by Jesus in two very different ways. The first is (with underlining):

Matthew 8:11–12 (NWT)

But I tell YOU that many from eastern parts and western parts will come and recline at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens; whereas the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the darkness outside. There is where [their] weeping and the gnashing of [their] teeth will be.

The second description is from Jesus' illustration of "the kingdom of the heavens." Notice how he speaks of "a man that sowed fine seed in his field" (Matthew 13:24) in contrast to the "sons of the kingdom" in Matthew 8:12 (with underlining):

Matthew 13:37–39 (NWT)

The sower of the fine seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; as for the fine seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; but the weeds are the sons of the wicked one, and the enemy that sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is a conclusion of a system of things, and the reapers are angels.

God threw the first "sons of the kingdom" into the darkness outside because they 'rejected the chief cornerstone' of the kingdom, Jesus Christ (Matthew 21:42). These "sons" did not 'produce fruit that befits repentance' (Matthew 3:8). Subsequently, God's Son came and sowed "seed" (= the "word of God" [Luke 8:11]) in the field of the entire world, creating the opportunity for new seed to be sown and for new "sons of the kingdom" to grow in place of the rejected ones.

According to Jesus (Luke 8:4–15), during this new sowing some of the seed "fell alongside the road and was trampled down, and the birds of heaven ate it up." Jesus describes these as "the ones that have heard, then the Devil comes and takes the word away from their hearts in order that they may not believe and be saved." Jesus also said some seed "landed upon the rock-mass and, after sprouting, it dried up because of not having moisture." Jesus describes these as "the ones who, when they hear it, receive the word with joy, but these have no root; they believe for a season, but in a season of testing they fall away."

Then there is the seed which "fell among the thorns, and the thorns that grew up with it choked it off." Jesus said these are "the ones that have heard, but, by being carried away

by anxieties and riches and pleasures of this life, they are completely choked and bring nothing to perfection.” Finally, “some other fell upon the good soil, and, after sprouting, ... produced fruit a hundredfold.” Jesus describes these as “the ones that, after hearing the word with a fine and good heart, retain it and bear fruit with endurance.” It is the last “seed” mentioned by Jesus which grows into “the sons of the kingdom,” “the righteous ones [who] will shine as brightly as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43).

In addition to the types of seed mentioned by Jesus in this illustration of the kingdom, there is even more “seed,” seed sown not by Jesus but by his “enemy,” the Devil (Matthew 13:39). Satan’s seed grows into “the sons of the wicked one.” They exist in among the seed sown by Jesus so that the two “grow together until the harvest” (Matthew 13:30). This means the “ones with a fine and good heart” are not only surrounded by the weaker seed sown by Jesus, but also by evil seed sown by Satan. This is why it is often so difficult even for the right seed to grow (compare Mark 13:18–20).

But how can we make sure we are the seed that ‘retains [the word of God] and bear fruit with endurance’? How can we identify those who are doing the same things and ‘growing’ in this way today? How can we recognize “the sons of the kingdom” who are the “fine seed” sown by Jesus, those who have a “fine and good heart”? The answer to these questions is as simple and as difficult as the questions asked at the beginning of this article about the first-century Jewish system of worship, John the Baptist, and Jesus: We must look at the fruit (resulting teaching about God and Jesus [compare Revelation 6:10–11]) produced by each “seed” and then respond to what is based on the best available reasons or evidence. Note how Jesus cautioned people:

Matthew 7:15–20 (NWT)

Be on the watch for the false prophets that come to YOU in sheep’s covering, but inside they are ravenous wolves. By their fruits YOU will recognize them. Never do people gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles, do they? Likewise every good tree produces fine fruit, but every rotten tree produces worthless fruit; a good tree cannot bear worthless fruit, neither can a rotten tree produce fine fruit. Every tree not producing fine fruit gets cut down and thrown into the fire. Really, then, by their fruits YOU will recognize those [men].

But what “fruits” come from the “good trees” of Christian seed? Since not “everyone saying to [Jesus], ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of the heavens” but only those who ‘do the will of his Father,’ what is ‘the will of Jesus’ Father” (Matthew 7:21–23)? Also, how can many who call on Jesus as “Lord” not know him and instead be considered “workers of lawlessness” (Luke 13:27)? We might similarly ask how Adam, Eve, and many who followed the God of the Old Testament also ‘came near with their mouth and glorified Jehovah merely with their lips, only to remove their heart itself far away from

him' (Isaiah 29:13)? Since today this question involves the types of "fruits" displayed by "fine" Christian seed, as taught in the Bible, specifically in the New Testament, it is there we should look first for answers when seeking to identify "the sons of the kingdom."

"By Its Fruit the Tree is Known"

After reading the above selections from Jesus' illustration regarding the sower of seed, one might think anyone in whom the "seed" of God's word is sown will be of one kind or another of the described "seeds." Or that a person can only be one kind of seed during his or her life. But that is not the case, as Jesus made clear here when addressing the Pharisees (with underlining):

Matthew 12:33–37 (NWT)

Either YOU people make the tree fine and its fruit fine or make the tree rotten and its fruit rotten; for by its fruit the tree is known. Offspring of vipers, how can YOU speak good things, when YOU are wicked? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure sends out good things, whereas the wicked man out of his wicked treasure sends out wicked things. I tell YOU that every unprofitable saying that men speak, they will render an account concerning it on Judgment Day; for by your words you will be declared righteous, and by your words you will be condemned.

There are times when we all say words or teach things we later regret. But realization and regret and by changing what we said or taught we can "make the tree fine and its fruit fine" (compare Matthew 21:28–32). Conversely, we might have at one time 'sent out good things' only to later "make the tree rotten and its fruit rotten" (compare Hebrews 6:4–8). But since fine trees are only fine if they are 'made fine' and stay fine by producing fine fruit, and since rotten trees are only rotten if they are 'made rotten' and stay rotten by producing rotten fruit, then we have good reasons to believe that no one, not even those who are right now 'fine trees,' will always be viewed as such regardless of what we 'send out.'

'Fine trees' can be made 'rotten' and 'rotten trees' can be made 'fine' all because of what comes "out of the abundance of the heart." Therefore, whether it was the original "sons of the kingdom" or those who were 'sown' after the first sons were rejected, whether it was the Jewish people of God, or the first-century Christian people of God, or the later nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty-first century people of God, "by [our] words [we] will be declared righteous, and by [our] words [we] will be condemned." By our "fruit," the words, the teachings, and the deeds we 'send out,' we will be "known."

Still, in view of the different teachings which "Christian" groups 'send out,' how can the people of God be identified today? What "fruits" does the New Testament clearly teach

would be produced by “the sons of the kingdom”? While there are many clear teachings given in the New Testament, many important teachings which describe the “fruits” of Christianity, we will now consider those “fruits” which, collectively, should help us recognize “the ones that, after hearing the word with a fine and good heart, retain it and bear fruit with endurance” (Luke 8:15). This is not a complete list, only a partial review of some “fruits” which belong to the produce of ‘good trees’ or genuine Christians:

1) “Witness work” (Revelation 6:9):

And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those slaughtered because of the word of God and because of the witness work that they used to have.

The “sons of the kingdom” have the “work” of “bearing witness to Jesus” (Revelation 12:17). In doing so, they also bear witness “that the Father has sent forth his Son as Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14). This “work” is directly and fiercely opposed by “the dragon,” Satan, who at some point “went off to wage war with [those] who observe the commandments of God and have the work of bearing witness to Jesus” (Revelation 12:17). This “witness work,” and the opposition to it, should be evident to those who are the people of God, especially since it can eventually lead to being “executed with the ax for the witness they bore to Jesus and for speaking about God” (Revelation 20:4).

This also appears to be how Babylon the Great is “drunk with the blood of the holy ones and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus” (Revelation 17:6), for she rides atop the wild beast whom the “sons of the kingdom” refuse to worship (Revelation 17:3). Her ride continues until this “beast” and the “ten horns” destroy her according to God’s will (Revelation 17:15–17). These witnesses of Jesus and of God are not overly concerned with “knowledge of the times or seasons which the Father has placed in his own jurisdiction” (Acts 1:7).

In the Bible, witnesses for God and for Jesus as Messiah do not add to the “good news of the kingdom [that] will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations” (Matthew 24:14; Galatians 1:6–9). They also do not require that others accept uncertain interpretations about when “the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ” has or will “come to pass” (Revelation 12:10). Promoting required interpretations of Bible chronology or prophecy apart from what we know about the “good news” of the New Testament is not a part of the “witness work” described in the Bible.

However, the New Testament Christians did frequently write about God’s day when Jesus returns “as a thief” (Matthew 16:27; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 12:39–40; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3; 16:15). Therefore, God’s people today should be doing the same thing, especially since protection from an unknown but real danger should be enough to motivate any Christian to be ‘on the watch’ (compare Revelation 3:2). It does

not fit the “sons of the kingdom” to require a false motivation such as end-time predictions, for serving God and Jesus or bearing witness to them (compare Revelation 12:17). This is because they “are all sons of light and sons of day” who ‘need nothing to be written to them’ concerning “the times and the seasons” (1 Thessalonians 5:1–5).

Anything beyond this, anything beyond clearly taught New Testament doctrine about God’s day and Jesus’ return, such the cry of “Peace and security!” or other clear descriptions of those living in the “last days” (for example, 2 Peter 3:13; 2 Timothy 3:1–7), is beyond “the teaching of the apostles” (Acts 2:42; 16:4). This includes uncertain beliefs associated with the “seven times” of Daniel Chapter 4, which times are nowhere in the entire Bible said to represent anything but Nebuchadnezzar’s removal from and return to his kingdom (Daniel 4:23–26).

If others want to consider possible applications of a prophecy like what we read in Daniel 4 or elsewhere, then it should be kept private and not used to elevate any person or group of people, or even motivate anyone, since it is an interpretation not given by God or clearly taught in the accepted authority (the Bible). “Sons of the kingdom” do not force others to accept chronological speculation, or even possible or even probable interpretations of chronology, because that is not what we are taught in the New Testament nor how the New Testament Christians acted, as doing so can cause others to stumble (Matthew 18:6). Though “sons of the kingdom” might teach certain applications of prophecy with care and caution, they never allow uncertainty or speculation infect people’s motivation. Only disappointment and improper motivation result from trying to figure out what is not ours to figure out (Genesis 40:8).

Where it concerns groups like the Watchtower Society, though world conditions since 1914 may indicate the trapped presence of Satan and his demonic angels, the “good news of the kingdom” to which the “sons of the kingdom” bear witness does not include a requirement that people accept uncertain interpretations of Bible chronology. After all, uncertain interpretations of Bible chronology are hardly “good news”! That is why the “witness work” by the “sons of the kingdom” focuses on what has been “ordered us to preach to the people ... to give a thorough witness that this is the One [Jesus] decreed by God to be judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42). Related to this, they also “bear thorough witness to the good news of the undeserved kindness of God” (Acts 20:24) as they bear witness “to the truth ... [and they] go on walking in the truth” (3 John 3).

2) “No part of the world” (John 17:15–19):

I request you, not to take them out of the world, but to watch over them because of the wicked one. They are no part of the world, just as I am no part of the world.

The “sons of the kingdom” are those who “belong to Christ; Christ, in turn, belongs to God” (1 Corinthians 3:23). None of them have anything to do with what makes this world “the world,” namely, “the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one’s means of life” (1 John 2:16), together with other “worldly desires” (Titus 2:12). Of course, the “sons of the kingdom” are tempted like anyone else, perhaps even more so because of the “war” that the Devil wages against them (Revelation 12:10; compare 1 Peter 5:8). Still, though we suffer at his hand in this world, we keep fighting. We are in the world, but we resist becoming one with the world, for we are and can only be one with it or with God and Christ Jesus (John 17:20–26).

We do not accept the weakness of the flesh as something approved, but as sign or our need of forgiveness through Jesus’ sacrifice so that ‘after we have suffered a little while, the God of all undeserved kindness, who called us to his everlasting glory in union with Christ, will himself finish our training’ (1 Peter 5:10). The “kingdoms of the world,” their authority and their glory, belong to Satan the Devil (Matthew 4:8–9; Luke 4:5–6). At the same time, God can establish who rules the earth and he does influence the hearts of kings (Proverbs 21:1; Daniel 4:17; Revelation 17:17). But the “dragon” is also able to give “its power and its throne and great authority” (Revelation 13:2). Therefore, being no part of the world would have to include not ‘worshipping’ its kingdoms with such words as, “Who is like the wild beast, and who can do battle with it?” (Revelation 13:4).

As “witnesses to the people” (Acts 13:31), the “sons of the kingdom” do not ‘worship the wild beast nor its image and they do not receive its mark on their forehead or upon their hands’ (Revelation 20:4). For this reason, they are persecuted by being ‘delivered up to local courts and scourged in their synagogues,’ even “haled before governors and kings for [Jesus’] sake, for a witness to them and the nations” (Matthew 10:17–18). Yet, the “sons of the kingdom” are also submissive to the “superior authorities” that in one sense ‘stand placed by God,’ for they are part of “the arrangement of God” in the earth today (Romans 13:1–2). Thus, the full extent of any Christian’s political involvement would have to be decided by each Christian.

The “sons of the kingdom” do not make rules about whether a person can vote or salute the flag, neither of which involve any kind of worship or admiration for any political “beast.” It is only an acceptance of the laws of the country (depending on the wording of any pledge or salute, or course), and an attempt to better the nation or location in which a Christian lives. If clear *worship* of a flag or symbol is involved, that is a different situation. Specific situations in which we are tested are for each Christian to decide based on what the Bible clearly teaches and with consideration for each person’s conscience (Compare Romans Chapter 14). Since politics is not something on which Christians always agree, it is not part of Christian “witness work” unless Christianity or the “witness work” itself is at issue (Acts 19:23–20:1).

Each 'son of the kingdom' must stand before Christ and God, both of whom will determine whether the individual was a "part of the world" in a disapproved capacity or 'a son of the kingdom' (John 5:22–30; Revelation 20:11–13). The "sons of the kingdom" know the "wisdom of the world" is "foolish" according to the Bible and by our own experience (1 Corinthians 1:20–29). Still, that does not mean all knowledge in this world is the "wisdom of the world" or entirely "foolish," that is, without any useful benefit. There are a variety of professional trades and endeavors that a person may be involved with which require education of some kind. It is not for anyone to judge how a person educates him– or herself for life in this world. Christians should be supportive of other Christians in their ministry, work, school, and in every other aspect of life that is a part of this world so long as a person is also committed to 'God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind' (Matthew 22:37).

The "sons of the kingdom" do not over-define "the world" to include the things that may be necessary or simply desired but not sinful for a satisfying life in this system. They also do not seek to enforce their own opinions on matters such as the extent of one's secular education in this world. We are supportive and encouraging, leading by example, knowing that so long as Christians do not 'love the world or the things in the world' and they do not develop a 'friendship' with it that compromises our faith. Instead, with love for God and for Jesus, they "conquer the world" through our faith while also living in it (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15; 4:4–5; 5:4).

3) Caring for those in need (Luke 10:25–37):

[Jesus said:] "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jer' i · cho and fell among robbers, who both stripped him and inflicted blows, and went off, leaving him half-dead. Now, by coincidence, a certain priest was going down over that road, but, when he saw him, he went by on the opposite side. Likewise, a Levite also, when he got down to the place and saw him, went by on the opposite side. But a certain Sa · mar' i · tan traveling the road came upon him and, at seeing him, he was moved with pity. So he approached him and bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine upon them. Then he mounted him upon his own beast and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two de · nar' i · i, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and whatever you spend besides this, I will repay you when I come back here.' Who of these three seems to you to have made himself neighbor to the man that fell among the robbers?" He said: "The one that acted mercifully toward him." Jesus then said to him: "Go your way and be doing the same yourself."

That's what Christians do! They teach truth (John 18:37). They follow God and bear witness to Jesus (Revelation 6:9). They 'keep themselves without spot from the world' (James 1:27). They show compassion to those who are weak and "render judgment for the fatherless boy" and "plead the cause of the widow" (Isaiah 1:17; James 1:27;

compare Galatians 2:10). This is not limited to those “related to [them] in the faith” (Galatians 6:10) but also shown to those who might even be our “enemies” (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:20). Yet, in what ways can we ‘prove ourselves sons of the Father who is in the heavens’ while he “makes his sun rise upon wicked people and good and makes it rain upon righteous people and unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45)? According to Jesus:

Matthew 5:46–48 (NWT)

For if YOU love those loving YOU, what reward do YOU have? Are not also the tax collectors doing the same thing? And if YOU greet YOUR brothers only, what extraordinary thing are YOU doing? Are not also the people of the nations doing the same thing? YOU must accordingly be perfect, as YOUR heavenly Father is perfect.

The “sons of the kingdom” are like Jesus in this respect, as much as possible (see 1 John 2:6), but without ‘practicing their righteousness in front of men in order to be observed by them’ (Matthew 6:1). They advocate for others to follow Jesus’ example. They do not put restrictions on the extent to which such work could or should be done, that is, beyond what the apostles themselves taught (compare Acts 2:42; 15:20–29; 21:25; Ephesians 2:20). This includes, “[L]et us work what is good toward all, but especially toward those related to [us] in the faith” (Galatians 6:10; underline added).

4) “Love among yourselves” (John 13:34–35):

I am giving YOU a new commandment, that YOU love one another; just as I have loved YOU, that YOU also love one another. By this all will know that YOU are my disciples, if YOU have love among yourselves.”

The “sons of the kingdom” are like their Father, and like their “brother” (Matthew 5:45; Hebrews 2:11), in showing love to others. This love is supposed to be especially obvious ‘among Christians’ (John 13:35). To better understand just how love can be identified as an outstanding quality of Jesus’ disciples, consider how love is defined here:

1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (NWT)

Love is long-suffering and kind. Love is not jealous, it does not brag, does not get puffed up, does not behave indecently, does not look for its own interests, does not become provoked. It does not keep account of the injury. It does not rejoice over unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

There are many important aspects to “love” mentioned here, all of which show how the “sons of the kingdom” should be treating their fellow Christians in all things. They would never mistreat others and be unkind by requiring things to be done for approval by God or Christ but which neither God nor Jesus or the Bible clearly require. “Sons of the kingdom” are not jealous over Jehovah’s or Jesus’ use of any Christian as he or she goes

on “walking as children of light, for the fruitage of the light consists of every sort of goodness and righteousness and truth” (Ephesians 5:8–9). Instead, they support those used by God or by Jesus “for the sake of the good news” (1 Corinthians 9:23).

The “sons of the kingdom” do not “brag” or “get puffed up” knowing we are all “nothing” (1 Corinthians 3:7; Galatians 6:3). They do not “look for [their] own interests” at the expense of truth, for love “rejoices with the truth”! “Sons of the kingdom” do not “rejoice over unrighteousness,” for they have love among themselves in a way that prevents injustice, and which love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, [and] endures all things” (see block quote above on pages 11–12). Preeminently, the “love” they have moves them to give their life, if necessary, on behalf of Jesus’ sheep, just as he did (Ephesians 5:2). This is the opposite of the “evil slave,” whom Jesus says ‘starts to beat his fellow slaves’ (Matthew 24:48–29).

While such love may help protect the “sons of the kingdom” from “oppressive wolves [who] will enter in among [them] and [who] will not treat the flock with tenderness,” since these “wolves” also “speak twisted things to draw away the disciples after themselves” something more is needed to resist and to remove them. The best if not the only effective weapon is the truth. Only by means of the truth will anyone know if the flock is being mistreated or misled, and only by means of the truth will the “sons of the kingdom” truly be “sanctified” as discussed in 5), below.

5) ‘Sanctified by means of the truth’ (John 17:17–19):

Sanctify them by means of the truth; your word is truth. Just as you sent me forth into the world, I also sent them forth into the world. And I am sanctifying myself in their behalf, that they also may be sanctified by means of truth.

The “sons of the kingdom” cannot, under any circumstance, lose their commitment to the truth for, if they do, how will they be “sanctified by means of truth”? People make mistakes, including serious ones. “Sons of the kingdom” acknowledge mistakes when presented with better reasons to believe something different, or which clearly show they are in error in some belief. If anyone was harmed by their previous error, “Sons of the kingdom” repent, apologize, and try to make things right. They are “provoked” by each other regularly (if ever), for they have ‘love among themselves,’ nor do they ‘keep account of injury’ after it has been resolved (John 13:35; 1 Corinthians 13:5). Based on these texts, neither those who become provoked because of the truth (and thereby refuse to accept it), nor those who ‘keep account of the injury’ after others who commit sin have repented, are “sons of the kingdom” (Matthew 6:14–15).

An important New Testament example of one who was appointed by Jesus to “feed [his] little sheep” (John 21:15–17), but who was instead found to be mistreating Christ’s flock, is none other than Peter. Despite his divine commission, Peter began “compelling

people to live” in ways that were not Christian (Galatians 2:11–14; 6:12). This forced others in the congregation, namely, the apostle Paul, to act in accordance with the truth. This type of courage, even against those appointed by Jesus where they need correction, helps prevent the truth from being sacrificed just for the sake of ‘getting along’ (compare Revelation 2:1–3).

Therefore, instead of accepting Peter’s actions and teachings toward others as something that, while not Christian, were still not to be openly confronted out of fear of causing disunity, Paul did what Jesus wanted him to do (John 18:27): He taught the truth and ‘resisted Peter face to face.’ Peter and those with him were “not walking straight according to the truth of the good news” (Galatians 2:11, 14). Here, though, to Peter’s credit, and unlike those called “liars” after being resisted by the Ephesians in Revelation 2:2, all indications show Peter aligned himself with Paul and proceeded with him in unity (2 Peter 3:15–18). Peter therefore teaches us much about humility and love, for by not “resisting the truth” Peter was instead ‘sanctified by it.’ Those who are unlike Peter, those who resist the truth when confronted by it, often become “completely corrupted in mind, disapproved as regards the faith” (2 Timothy 3:8).

No one who ‘resists the truth’ is exempt from this ‘corruption of mind.’ This is because a refusal to accept what is true or most likely true based on the best available reasons indicates a person does “not accept the love of the truth that they might be saved” but instead prefer “believing the lie” (2 Thessalonians 2:10–11; compare Romans 1:24–32). Others resist the truth since they do not base their beliefs on the best available reasons, often choosing instead to follow “misleading inspired utterances and teachings of demons, by the hypocrisy of men who speak lies” (1 Timothy 4:1–2). These ones act “in accord with their own desires, [and] accumulate teachers for themselves to have their ears tickled; ... [and they] turn their ears away from the truth” (2 Timothy 4:4).

The “sons of the kingdom,” by contrast, are ‘sanctified by means of the truth,’ which is shown by their “fruit” (Matthew 7:15–20). They know the “the judgment of God is in accord with truth” (Romans 2:2). They do not fear the coming judgment because they are “on the side of the truth” (John 18:37). In this world, if someone speaks wrongly, then like Jesus we can “bear witness concerning the wrong” rather than react abusively to those who speak rightly (John 18:23). But the New Testament describes the “sons of the kingdom” in other ways, too, ways which will help us to further identify them.

Jesus’ “Sheep” and Jesus’ “Brothers”

The kingdom of God includes or relates to “a new heavens and a new earth” in which “righteousness is to dwell” according to God’s “promise” in the New Testament (2 Peter 3:13). But this promise of a kingdom was first given to the nation of Israel in the Old

Testament (Isaiah 65:17). Now it is extended to “a nation producing its fruits” (Matthew 21:43), which includes those “in every nation” who ‘fear God and work righteousness’ (Acts 10:35).

The ‘sons of this kingdom’ include those separated by Jesus’ angels during “the harvest,” the “righteous ones [who] will shine as brightly as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:36–43). The ‘harvesting’ of the “fine seed” or the “sons of the kingdom” illustrated by Jesus in Matthew 13 is also described by him as a ‘separation’ of different kinds of people based on the “fruits” they produce, which fruits show they have living faith (James 2:26). Here is what Jesus said concerning this separation work:

Matthew 25:31–40 (NWT)

When the Son of man arrives in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on his glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will put the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left. “Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, YOU who have been blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for YOU from the founding of the world. For I became hungry and YOU gave me something to eat; I got thirsty and YOU gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and YOU received me hospitably; naked, and YOU clothed me. I fell sick and YOU looked after me. I was in prison and YOU came to me.’ Then the righteous ones will answer him with the words, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and receive you hospitably, or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to you?’ And in reply the king will say to them, ‘Truly I say to YOU, To the extent that YOU did it to one of the least of these my brothers, YOU did it to me.’

Whether some distinction exists between the “sheep” and Christ’s “brothers” in terms of one group belonging to the “new heavens” and one group belonging to the “new earth,” the New Testament does not say explicitly. But as noted in 2 Peter 3:13 cited earlier, there are “new heavens” and a “new earth” promised by God and in *both* (“in *these*”) ‘righteousness will dwell.’ It is also true that Jesus’ ‘brother’ is “whoever does the will of [his] Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 12:50).

Since Jesus’ followers are to have ‘love among themselves’ (John 13:35), it also makes sense those approved by Jesus when he returns are the ones who show love and compassion to each other (Galatians 6:10). This is the heart of Jesus’ teaching in Luke 12:42–48 and Matthew 24:45–47, about the “faithful and discreet slave.” The account in Matthew 24:45–47 reads:

Matthew 24:45–51 (NWT)

Who really is the faithful and discreet slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time? Happy is that slave if his master on arriving finds him doing so. Truly I say to YOU, He will appoint him over all his belongings. But if ever that evil slave should say in his heart, “My master is delaying,” and should start to beat his fellow slaves and should eat and drink with the confirmed drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day that he does not expect and in an hour that he does not know, and will punish him with the greatest severity and will assign him his part with the hypocrites. There is where [his] weeping and the gnashing of [his] teeth will be.

In both the Matthew 24 and 25 accounts it is the treatment of one’s “fellow slaves” who do God’s will, Christ’s “brothers,” that is in view. In both accounts Jesus “arrives,” which is translated from a form of the Greek word for “coming” (*erchomai*). In both accounts there is a judgment followed by a ‘separation’ or an ‘assignment’ of each person to one group or another. One group is approved because they were faithful in taking care of their master’s “belongings.” The other group is punished for not taking care of their “fellow slaves” and because, though they ‘understood the will of their master, they did not get ready or do in line with his will’ (Luke 12:47).

It is also possible that the two groups are different, and that even the times indicated by the ‘comings’ are different. If they are different, and if Christ has already ‘come’ to appoint his “faithful and discreet slave,” and if this “slave” is a group that is considered by Jesus to be his “brothers” as described by him in Matthew 25:40, then those who are approved by Jesus at his Matthew 25 ‘coming’ judgment do not know these “brothers.” Because they answer the Lord Jesus with the words: “When did we see you a stranger and receive you hospitably, or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to you?” If the “sheep” today already know Christ’s “brothers,” and if they treat them like Jesus himself because of this prophecy, why do they still question the basis for their approval by Jesus (compare Matthew 5:46–48)?

It is only by Jesus’ answer that these brothers are revealed, just as the identity of “the faithful and discreet slave” is not given by anyone except Jesus at his ‘coming’ (Matthew 24:46; Luke 12:43). Therefore, being Christ’s “brothers” should never be something any person or group hold over people’s heads as if to say, “We are Christ’s brothers, so you must submit to us!” Nothing in the New Testament indicates this is how Christ’s brothers would act, and what we do find shows a far different attitude about themselves and toward others (compare Romans 14:4; 2 Corinthians 1:24). While a Christian might for a time ‘compel’ others to follow them due to imperfection (compare Galatians 2:14). But once presented with the truth Jesus’ brothers cannot resist it since truth is directly associated with Jesus, whom they cannot stop following (compare John 14:6; Revelation

14:4). For Jesus “brothers,” being “on the side of the truth” means ‘listening to Jesus’ voice’ (John 18:37).

Regardless of how the “sheep” on Christ’s right hand and his “brothers” are positioned relative to each other in God’s kingdom, it will involve the “new heavens” and the “new earth.” Those who ‘come to life and rule as kings with the Christ for a thousand years’ (Revelation 20:4) will be permanent “pillars” in the ‘temple of his God’ (Revelation 3:12). These ones become a radiant “bride” descending to the earth to restore “mankind” to life (Revelation 21:1–3). This is accomplished by what is described as “a river of water of life, clear as crystal, flowing out from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of its [= New Jerusalem’s] broad way” (Revelation 22:1). On each side of this river are “trees of life ... [a]nd the leaves of the trees [are] for the curing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2–3).

Though the “bride” of Christ which descends from God does not need any more ‘curing,’ the “nations” do, with the resurrection of the dead occurring “after the thousand years have ended” (Revelation 20:4–15). All of this relates to John’s vision of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1), “the kingdom prepared ... from the founding of the world” (Matthew 25:34), for “the sons of the kingdom” (Matthew 13:38), and for any others approved by God and Christ Jesus to be among them (Revelation 7:1–17).

Conclusion

The people of God cannot continue to be his people if they do not continue to do the ‘will of the Father’ (Matthew 7:21). This is accomplished by following Jesus and by remaining “on the side of the truth” (John 14:6; John 18:37). By contrast, the children of the Devil are those who practice the Seven Levens discussed in Part One of this series. If we follow them then, like Satan, we will not “stand fast in the truth” (John 8:44). On the other hand, if we ‘do nothing according to a biased leaning’ (1 Timothy 5:21), if we do not ‘speak according to our own originality (John 7:16–18), and if we do not ‘deviate from the truth’ (2 Timothy 2:16–18), or, worse, ‘turn away from it’ (2 Timothy 4:3–5; Titus 1:11, 13–14), we will believe ‘whatever is true’ and, therefore, whatever is based on the best available evidence (Philippians 4:8; compare Romans 1:16–21).

For Christians, believing what is true includes Jesus as “the Son of God” who “has come” and who “has given us intellectual capacity that we may gain the knowledge of the true one” (1 John 5:20), the Father, the one Jesus addressed as “the only true God” (John 17:3). The people of God do not treat as enemies those who teach the truth (compare Galatians 4:16). If they disagree with reasonable people then, like Jesus, they “bear witness concerning the wrong” (John 18:23). Once the people of God have the best available reasons for belief, we adjust or change however may be necessary to align with

truth since, for Christians, “if we practice sin willfully after having received the accurate knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice for sins left” (Hebrews 10:26).

Still, God the Father and Jesus know better than anyone we must face off with Satan, the Devil, whom the Bible describes as working hard to corrupt “fine seed” sown by Jesus (Matthew 13:38–39; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:13–17). Satan does this by sowing his “seed” in the same “field” as the Son of Man, namely, the world (Matthew 13:37–41). The Satanic “seed” includes “false prophets” and “false teachers” who cause ‘the way of the truth to be spoken of abusively’ (Matthew 24:11; 2 Peter 2:1–2; 1 John 4:1). If those “on the side of the truth” are not afraid, they can “resist” those who “compel” people not to “walk straight according to the good news” (Galatians 2:11–14). That is when Christians’ true intent will be revealed by the Master (compare Revelation 2–3). He is the one who will clearly separate one from another when ‘the righteous ones shine as brightly as the sun in the kingdom of their Father’ (Matthew 13:43; 25:31–33).

Who are the people of God today? Show me the people who are “bearing witness to Jesus” (Revelation 12:17), who are “bearing witness that the Father has sent forth his Son as Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14), and who are declaring the “good news of the kingdom” as a “witness to all the nations” without requiring belief on the part of others concerning “times or seasons,” things not within our “jurisdiction” (Matthew 24:14; Acts 1:7). Show me the people that are “no part of the world” just as Jesus was no part of this world (John 17:15–19). Show me the people who are caring for those in need the way Jesus did, and the way he taught that his followers would do also (Luke 10:25–27).

Show me the people who have ‘love among themselves,’ not by ‘beating their fellow slaves,’ but by laying down their life for each other, if necessary. Show me those who are ‘rejoicing with the truth’ as “love” is said to do (John 13:34–35; Matthew 24:48–49; Ephesians 5:2; 1 Corinthians 13:4–7). Show me those who are ‘sanctified by means of the truth,’ those who stand up for what is right without fear of anyone but God (Isaiah 29:13; John 17:17–19; Acts 10:35). Show me these people, and I will show you the people of God.

Greg Stafford

[04/20/2008 Update: The formatting of some of the paragraphs were revised without any other changes to the content or to the meaning of the original.]

[07/10/2026 Update: Several paragraphs were re-formatted to create more smaller paragraphs from several longer ones. Connecting sentences were also revised for these new paragraphs, as well as revisions to several sentences which were either too long or not as clear as they should be. Otherwise, the article overall remains unchanged as to the main points, captions, texts cited and discussed, and even the original formatting.]