

The Kingdom Of God

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The Bible speaks considerably about a realm known as the Kingdom of God. Just as certainly, God's Word assures us that we can be a part of His Kingdom and clearly points out the means of entrance into it. For many people, however, the requirements for admission are either unknown or clouded over by various man-made ideas and beliefs. This brief study is a simple approach designed to make you aware of the biblical requirements for entering the Kingdom of God.

Before we begin, ask yourself this question: "How does one enter into the Kingdom of God?" Write down your answer; you may wish to refer to it later.

To determine what the requirements are, it will be helpful to examine exactly when the Kingdom of God, as it is described in the New Testament, began. Here again, ask yourself a pertinent question: "When did the Kingdom of God begin?" Record your answer.

Now to continue, let's consider the following points:

◆ John the Baptist lived prior to the time of the Kingdom.

Matthew 3:1-2

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

"At hand" indicates the time was near, though it had not yet arrived. Jesus confirmed the fact that John lived prior to the time of the Kingdom in Matthew 11:11.

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

◆ Jesus spoke of the imminence of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' message concerning the Kingdom was similar to John's. He emphasized that it was soon to take place.

Mark 1:14-15

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

We draw from this passage of Scripture the fact that, in Jesus' time, the Kingdom of God was not yet present, though certainly about to happen. It was, as Jesus described it, "at hand".

◆ **Peter was given the keys to the Kingdom!**

The Apostle Peter played a unique role in the Kingdom of God, one that is often overlooked. Jesus, in anticipation of the close of his earthly ministry, gave Peter the "keys to the Kingdom of heaven". This is an extremely important fact. These "keys" signify a means of access into a realm that would otherwise be impossible to enter.

Matthew 16:15–19

15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Notice the authority handed to Peter in verse 19. He was given power to make things binding on earth and in heaven.

Next we want to see how this exclusive authority given to Peter was carried out.

◆ **The Kingdom of God began the same day the Church was born.**

Fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus and ten days after His ascension, about one hundred and twenty close followers of Christ, including the Apostles and Mary, were gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem following instructions of Christ to wait for the promise of the Holy Ghost. While prayer was being made, unprecedented circumstances took place which marked the birth of the Christian Church.

Acts 2:1–4

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Word of this event was circulated among the Jews who were gathered in Jerusalem from all parts of the world to keep the Jewish feast of Pentecost. While multitudes assembled to witness this curious event, Peter addressed their wonder and amazement by stating that what they were witnessing was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy concerning the outpouring of God's Spirit upon all flesh. He concluded his message by declaring that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was now both Lord and Christ, fulfilling the Messianic Psalm (Psalms 110) and denoting the beginning of Christ's Kingdom. While conviction and condemnation gripped their hearts, the anxious crowd asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (V. 37).

The significance of Peter's reply cannot be overemphasized for several reasons.

1. He was the man who possessed the "keys to the Kingdom of heaven".

2. He had authority from Jesus to bind and loose.

3. The occasion added to the significance.

This was the day the Church was born— the commencement of the Kingdom of Christ and the very first day of Christianity.

In the next verse, Peter used the keys to the Kingdom of heaven and made the means of entrance plain and accessible to everyone.

Acts 2:38

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

As Peter continued in verse 39, he made it clear that the keys which gave entrance to the Kingdom on the birthday of the Church would continue to give entrance throughout the Church age.

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

God hasn't changed the means to acquire Kingdom access. Neither should any man attempt to change the keys. And should any person seek to use a different means of entrance, let him not be surprised when his attempts to enter result in failure.

We have just read about the Kingdom of God being opened to men for the first time on the day of Pentecost. Let's examine these keys in Acts 2:38 again.

- Repentance

- Water baptism in Jesus' name (not titles Father, Son, and Holy Ghost)
- Reception of the Holy Ghost with the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues, or, languages

◆ **Jesus and Peter agreed on the terms of entrance into the Kingdom.**

These requirements for entrance into the Kingdom of God stated by Peter in Acts 2:38 match perfectly Jesus' description of new birth into the Kingdom of God, involving water and Spirit, in **John 3:5**.

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Acts 2:38 is clearly the New Testament plan of salvation. It was spoken by the Apostle that Jesus authorized with the keys to the Kingdom. It was spoken on the very day the Kingdom was made accessible to men. It was said in response to the question, "What shall we do?" And it was precisely what Jesus said entrance into the Kingdom would involve: water and Spirit.

◆ **The plan of salvation was universal in scope.**

The same means of salvation was universally applied throughout the period of Church history recorded in the New Testament. Converts to Christianity were all saved the same way regardless of who they were or where they lived. Notice in the following examples how every class of people was born into the Kingdom of God by the basic elements of water and Spirit, as prescribed by Jesus and the Apostle Peter.

- **Jews. Acts 2:38** Plan of salvation was initially and formally stated:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

- **Samaritans. Acts 8:16-17**

16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

- **Gentiles. Acts 10:44-48**

44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

*46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,
47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received
the Holy Ghost as well as we?*

*48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they
him to tarry certain days.*

• **Disciples, or, “Christians”. Acts 19:5-6**

5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

*6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and
they spake with tongues, and prophesied.*

This last reference in Acts 19 is important because it deals with men who had already believed in Christ, having been taught by John the Baptist. Although they had previously received John’s baptism, they had not yet been born into the Kingdom of God. Their experience with Christ began while the Kingdom was still, “at hand”, and not yet open to men. They were unaware of what was made binding on the birthday of the Church. However, upon learning the message from the Apostle Paul, they immediately complied with the terms of new birth.

It is very significant that God has included these four examples of conversion in His Word, because they involve every class of humanity. Everyone is either a Jew, a Samaritan, or a Gentile. God couldn’t make it any clearer or emphasize it any stronger that the means of salvation He has provided in His Word is for everyone alike. And the example of conversion provided in Acts 19 of people who already believed in Christ emphatically points to the necessity of fulfilling the plan of salvation to the letter. It speaks loudly to the multitudes of people in our world who already believe in Christ and have expressed faith in him but, for some reason or another, have not learned the exclusive means of entrance into the Kingdom of God. To these people, it provides a powerful example to fulfill New Testament requirements of salvation and not remain outside the Kingdom clinging to something less than the fullness of the Gospel message. Jesus’s words make the means of entering his Kingdom clear, but also narrow. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God”.

Through repentance, water baptism in Jesus’ name, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost, we are born into the Kingdom of God and become members of His Church. Paul wrote to the Church at Colosse, saying, “giving thanks unto the Father... Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the Kingdom of His dear Son”. (Colossians 1:12-13). To the Church at Rome, he wrote, “For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17).

◆ **Copies of Peter’s “keys” were handed to all New Testament ministers.**

Acts 2:38 was the singular message of salvation taught by all the Apostles and ministers of the New Testament Church.

• **Peter— Acts 2:38; 10:44-48**

• **The rest of the 11 Apostles— Acts 2:42**

What Peter had enjoined in Acts 2.38 became the “Apostles’ doctrine”.

• **Philip— Acts 8:12,16-17**

• **Ananias— Acts 9:17-18**

This is the man who told Paul (formerly, Saul) what he “must do” (Acts 9:6). See also Acts 22:16.

• **Paul— Acts 19:1-6**

Paul preached to the disciples at Ephesus about 21 years after Peter’s message on the day of Pentecost, yet the conditions he stated for New Testament salvation were identical to Peter’s keys.

• **Apollos— Acts 18:24-27**

Prior to meeting Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos apparently believed similarly to those in Ephesus, “knowing only the baptism of John”. But Aquila and Priscilla took him unto them and “expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly”. No doubt, it involved the same enlightenment that Paul shared with those in Acts 19 regarding Christian baptism and the infilling of the Holy Ghost. Verse 27 says that the Christian brethren wrote to those disciples to where he was going to “receive him”. And we also know that he came to be a companion of the Apostle Paul, who corrected the incomplete faith of those in Ephesus.

◆ **There is no other Gospel message of salvation.**

As we have pointed out, all the New Testament ministers of the Gospel preached the same message of salvation. There are no Biblical examples of anyone preaching anything differently in the early Church. In fact, the Bible condemns anyone preaching another message. Note the emphasis for true salvation doctrine in the following Scriptures.

Galatians 1:6-9

6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

9 As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

Verses six and seven define “another gospel” as a perversion, or, alteration, of the true Gospel of Christ, thus, rendering it false, so as to remove one from Christ (v.6).

Romans 16:17-18

17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

1 Timothy 1:3

As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine.

Matthew 7:15

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Ephesians 4:5

One Lord, one faith, one baptism

◆ Only the proper “keys” can assure entrance into the Kingdom of heaven.

As we stated previously, the keys that provided entrance into the Kingdom on the day of Pentecost are the very ones that give us access today. Peter said, “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are a far off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). Nothing short of repentance, baptism in Jesus’ name, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost will provide residence in the Kingdom of God.

Sometimes keys can be close, even fit the lock, and yet not be precise enough to turn the knob. For this reason Jesus solemnly warned of "many" religious people who live their lives expecting to enter the regions of glory beyond but who will only meet with grave disappointment.

Luke 13:23-24

23 Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, 24 Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

Matthew 7:21-23

21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

The startling expression, "I never knew you", implies that, though these people obviously had some knowledge of Christ and a religious experience involving his name, they had not met the requirements of new birth to enter into the Kingdom of God, or did not live up to it. Jesus would never say to those that have been truly his children, "I never knew you".

The evidence is sobering and staggering that those who embrace false messages of salvation, like obtaining a non-identical key to the Kingdom, have no hope of entering. What else can be drawn from the scriptural statements that follow?

Matthew 15:9

But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Matthew 15:13-14

13 But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. 14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

2Corinthians 4:3-4

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

◆ The devil's Job

Since Apostolic times, the devil has not ceased to tamper with the Gospel message of salvation. In his determined effort to keep humanity out of the Kingdom of heaven, he has worked relentlessly to alter the keys required for entrance. After all, what could more effectively accomplish his goal?

The devil alters the keys by supplanting the words of Peter on the day of Pentecost either with words from another context or words of men (For example, "Accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior."). What makes this sly act of deception so cruel is the fact that those who are deceived in this way walk through life believing they are saved and trust that the keys handed them will provide them entrance into heaven. But the sad fact remains that they have received altered keys and not those originated by Peter on the birthday of the Church. And, since they have not fulfilled the exclusive New Testament requirements for salvation, they will be sadly disappointed at the last day. Jesus never promised eternal life with Him outside of the means He has provided in His Word to obtain it. That is why He solemnly warned us to "beware". Read the preceding passages of Scripture again and notice the emphasis that is laid upon following Christ according to the correct precepts.

What human nature often fails to realize, and what the devil would love to keep us oblivious to, is the fact that we have a spiritual enemy whose chief concern is to block entrance of souls into the realm of God's Kingdom and truth. The devil's job in this earth is to do exactly what he is doing— prevent souls by whatever means possible from attaining heaven. And nowhere is his energy more concentrated, or more effective, than in the subtle area of deception where he offers a substitute means of salvation, or, to continue the use of this practical metaphor, non-identical keys to the Kingdom.

The devil's combination of truth and error is his most successful and deadly tool. Most people who accept the enemy's substitutes for the original keys are deceived by the religious nature of the substitutes. They often sound too "Christian" to arouse suspicion of being incorrect. They may even be Scriptures themselves, such as John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9; Ephesians 2:8,9; etc.. As great as these individual Scriptures are in the truth they teach, they do not contain all that is required for new birth. A sincere person can eliminate all doubt as to which is the correct formula for salvation by simply matching various keys with the keys Peter presented on the day of Pentecost. We know Peter's keys were correct because he received them from Christ.

◆ The parable of the wheat and the tares

Jesus wanted us to be aware of the devil's involvement in this business, so He left us a graphic illustration in His parable of the wheat and the tare. Please read Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43. In this parable, Jesus described the condition that would exist through the Church age in which His true Gospel message of salvation— wheat seeds — and false messages of deception— tare seeds— would coexist. The Lord's interpretation of this parable reveals the devil as being the true source of error and brilliantly unveils his purpose and activity in the earth.

First of all, we learned that, while executing his evil schemes, the devil endeavors to remain undetected by men (“while men slept”). He would like us to forget he even exists. An awareness of his presence would naturally alarm his would-be victims to guard against anything amiss and, therefore, frustrate his efforts to plant erroneous teachings.

It is also significant to note that the devil, as portrayed in the parable, did not pull the wheat out of the field. That would have presented an insurmountable task. He knew the most feasible means of diminishing the Lord's harvest was to slyly sow a substitute. And the most striking and dangerous aspect of this deceptive act is that the substitute he planted resembled wheat. This is exactly how people become fooled by false doctrine. It is often the case that ministers and churches which teach them appear true and respectable in men's eyes. This is the “sheep's clothing” referred to by Jesus. Suspicion of erroneous teaching, then, never occurs.

But how does this parable teach us which “seeds”, or, doctrines, are wheat, and which are tares? The answer is simple. You will notice that the wheat was sown first and the tares later. The Apostles and first ministers of the Church sowed the wheat in the book of Acts, beginning on the Day of Pentecost. The plan of salvation, involving repentance, water baptism in Jesus' name, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost was universally taught by all the ministers of the early Church from the beginning. Jesus confirmed the fact that the Apostles held the words of salvation when He prayed, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word” (John 17:20). The facts in this matter are so clear a child need not be confused. Anything that is not identical to the teaching of the first ministers of the Church, as revealed in Acts, came later and is, therefore, tare.

◆ Conclusion

In light of all the material covered regarding the Kingdom of God, it is evident that certain requirements exist for gaining entrance. It is also evident that many false concepts exist, none of which can provide entrance. It, therefore, behooves us to heed the admonition of Paul, who said, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith”. The stakes are high. Eternal life rests upon obedience to the plan of God. The devil

has offered substitutes since the Garden of Eden and not one has been accepted by God. Heresies, false doctrines, and alternatives to serving God exist that man may exercise his God-given power of choice (1Corinthians 11:19). It is only through the exercise of choice that one manifests his true character and is thereby approved or disapproved of God. To choose correctly is to manifest an earnest desire to be right with God.

Paul's words to Timothy provide a fitting conclusion.

1Timothy 4:16

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.