

“The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (! Cor. 4:20).

The kingdom of God is a much talked about subject. Many able scholars have written volumes concerning it. There is also a considerable amount of controversy related to the meaning, extent, and so on, of the kingdom. However, it is not the intent of this message to deal with controversial issues but to take Paul’s simple statement found in 1 Corinthians 4:20 and deal with it.

Why would Paul make such a statement? Basically, it was because of the attitude of the recipients of the epistle. The people in the Corinthian church were almost everything Paul believed a Christian should not be. They were puffed up (v. 18), proud, and guilty of holding partisan opinions. This is characteristic of many modern-day Christians. Many fine people in current society think there is power in words, and thus many are spoken, and often very loudly.

It was also spoken to remind the reader about more important things. All Christians need to be reminded of the truth by being confronted with it. The truth needs to be held high and straight. The truth is that just words are an empty display, but the kingdom of God produces true faith, true confession, and true love.

So, what is the kingdom of God? Paul said it is power. The kingdom is the reign of God in and among people. It is presently among God’s people and within them. The very nature of the kingdom proves it is not in word. A kingdom implies authority exercised and obedience rendered. Such an idea is incompatible with mere words. It is action or activity.

The kingdom has a real secret. It is the working of God through his people in right living. Paul spoke of himself as being an example and exhorted the Corinthians to follow him (v. 16). He also spoke of Christ being the director of his life, which would indicate God’s power in action (v. 19). In the same verse, Paul makes a contrast between power and the words of those who are puffed up.

How, then is the kingdom of God manifested (v.21)? Sometimes it is in the form of discipline. Paul makes reference to the rod, which implies punishment of discipline. It refers to disapproval. God’s reign does denounce wrongdoing.

All the time it is in the form of love. Discipline does not exclude it, but includes love. Love is always God’s method and never involves such ideas as arrogance, false wisdom, and the like.

It also is in the form of kindness. In verse 21, Paul speaks of “the spirit of meekness.” This is kindness in word and action; it is how the kingdom works.

Each Christian ought to be careful about words. They can be good, or bad, but they are not the kingdom of God.

Praise be to God.