

Intercontinental Church of God

13. Kingdom of God

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The Kingdom of God is the family of God ruling as the government of God. It is a future world ruling government to be set up on earth by Christ at His return, with Jesus as King and the resurrected spirit-composed saints in positions of corulership with Him. The Kingdom of God referred to as a "mystery" in the New Testament—was first preached and explained by Christ, then by His Church; it shall be established on earth for a thousand years following Christ's return; and shall be completely fulfilled when new Jerusalem and God the Father come down out of heaven to dwell on the new earth.

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Kingdom of God is, in its most narrow sense, the immediate family of God, composed now of only two beings (the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ). In a more general sense, it includes every being and every thing which is under God's sovereignty, governmental control and influence. Within this definition, the entire universe can be considered under God's sovereignty and hence part of His empirical Kingdom. But in a prophetic sense, the meaning of God's Kingdom is much more specific. It is the world-ruling government of God to be set up on earth at Jesus Christ's return. Christ, together with the resurrected saints, shall rule over all nations and peoples. Even more specifically, the strictly *spiritual* Kingdom of God shall comprise only the spiritual members of this world government—died, born again, spirit-composed sons of God who rule with Christ as members of His family over the physical earth during the thousand year period and eventually over the entire universe. This spiritual Kingdom of God is the goal of all true Christians.

The story of the Bible, in a very real sense, is the record of God's working with man so that he might learn to understand and obey and, as a result, qualify to enter God's Kingdom and family. The Old Testament prophets spoke at great length concerning that Kingdom (Isaiah 2: 11; Mic.4; Zech. 14).

"It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob: that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Likewise, the patriarchs envisioned it and waited for it as "strangers and pilgrims" (Heb. 11:13) on this earth, since they knew God's government would replace man's. They sought this Kingdom just as many men might seek a land—country or homeland—of promise (Heb, 11: 14-15).

"These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11:13-16).

Jesus Christ was a member of God's family, of the godhead, and hence of God's Kingdom, from eternity. But He divested Himself of His godhead and rulership to become human, in order that He might announce the coming Kingdom of God and qualify as its chief executive officer, as both King and Lord. Jesus—as the primary messenger of the coming Kingdom and the heir to its throne—was in a sense the personification and embodiment of that Kingdom on earth during His physical lifetime and ministry. This is why He stated, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of *God is at hand*; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). The Kingdom of God was indeed "at hand" because Jesus Christ, as its King and Lord, was right there. Jesus, in fact, spelled this out when He told some that His being among them was equal to the Kingdom being in their midst. "Being asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God was coming, He answered them, The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, Lo, here it is! or there! for behold, the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20-21).

The message of "good news" or gospel which Jesus brought to this world has, as its focal point, the announcement of the coming Kingdom of God, the description of how it shall be established on earth and the explanation of how mankind might enter it as sons of God. Christ through His death and resurrection became the "firstborn" member of this prophetic spiritual Kingdom.

Christians who follow in the footsteps of His life will likewise follow in the reality of His resurrection. They shall be raised from death to rule with Him in His Kingdom. Through this process God shall increase or build His Divine family and spiritual Kingdom from the present two members to multiple billions (and perhaps, ultimately, even more).

In one sense, those begotten of God's Spirit are part of the Kingdom of God already, since they actually have the essence of that Kingdom, God's Holy Spirit, dwelling within them. Furthermore, Christians today, like Jesus during His physical human life, are representatives of that Kingdom since they, like Jesus, shall be kings and priests. Paul wrote that God "has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1:13), indicating that Christians are already considered part of God's Kingdom. Obviously, no human being can really be a part of God's Kingdom since "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" (1 Cor. 15:50); this must wait until the resurrection when "the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality" (v. 54). Paul is thus just reiterating what Jesus Himself had told Nicodemus.

"Jesus answered him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John. 3:3-7).

Much confusion has arisen about the Kingdom of God because of human reluctance to take the term "kingdom" literally. The prophet Daniel was very clear in his statements to Nebuchadnezzar that the Kingdom which God would eventually set up would be an actual kingdom on earth in the same sense as the previously world-ruling kingdoms had been. "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a Kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to other people. It shall break in pieces these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44).

Scripture reveals that God's Kingdom on earth is indeed to be a kingdom in every sense—having territory, laws, subjects and rulers. At Christ's return the saints shall be changed from physical flesh or be resurrected from the dead to spirit bodies.

"But we would not have you ignorant brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we

who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:13-17).

The resurrected saints shall sit with Christ on His throne (Rev. 3:21), and rule under Christ on earth with power over the physical nations. "...and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall *reign on earth*" (Rev. 5: 10). "He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him *power over the nations*" (Rev. 2:26).

In another sense, God's Kingdom shall have two parts: the ruling body of spirit beings and the physical nations under that government and control. This combined physical-spiritual Kingdom shall replace man's governments. It shall conform to God's laws and commands and over a period of time introduce and establish His way of life in every nation for every person. The entire fabric of society shall be eventually changed and reformed to comply with the precepts and concepts of God Almighty. It shall be a government under which all human beings can lead a happy, healthy, prosperous life. All persons alive at that time shall have an opportunity to be saved and to have God's Spirit living in them. God shall make a new covenant with His people through which He shall change mankind's very nature by writing His law in man's heart.

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: *I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more*" (Jer. 31:31-34).

In God's Kingdom, warfare shall finally be eradicated and the implements of war shall be turned into farm tools because "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

"It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us His ways and we may walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations afar off; and *they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken*" (Mic. 4:1-4).

Christ shall judge with "righteousness" and "decide with equity for the meek of the earth"—Indeed the whole earth shall be dramatically altered by the rulership of Jesus Christ—even the nature of wild animals shall be changed.

"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of His roots. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what His eyes see, or decide by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth, and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of His waist, and faithfulness the girdle of His loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the

calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; Him shall the nations seek, and His dwellings shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:1-10).

Food and drink shall be in abundant supply (Isaiah 25:6), the lame shall walk, and the nations who were previously staunch enemies shall live at peace. Israel, Egypt and Assyria shall even set the example of peace and godly harmony for others to follow (Isaiah 19:23-25). Throughout this time, many humans shall be qualifying to enter God's spiritual Kingdom and family. Using Israel as the example, God's spiritual laws for worshipping Him shall be taught to, and followed by, all nations. "From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord" (Isaiah 66:23).

"And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and *to keep the feast of tabernacles*. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the Lord will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zech. 14:16-19).

Biblical revelation has very little description of daily life during the thousand year period. Although Micah's description seems to assign every man to sit under his own vine and his own fig tree (Mic. 4:4), we should not therefore conclude that the only food available will be grapes and figs. Likewise, we should not conclude that the Kingdom of God will be a primitive, wholly agrarian society devoid of education, arts and sciences. Surely Micah's symbol should be understood as showing human beings to be both free and fully at peace (though it may be highly likely that the larger proportion of people shall be involved in agriculture).

Based on our knowledge of God, who is the Creator of the human mind, the Kingdom of God shall employ high technology, in its most sophisticated expression, in every sphere of that society—including the areas of manufacturing, energy, transportation, communication, information processing, architecture, city planning, etc. Yet, this technology, under God's direction, will not produce the debilitating by-products characteristic of today's world—energy will be clean and inexhaustible; waste products will be recycled; cities will be safe and sane; the ecology will be respected and the environment protected. Growth will not be wildly uncontrolled and encouraged for its own sake, but rather organized and ordered in accord with God's master plan for the entire earth.

Increasing levels of scientific knowledge, technological application and consumer consumption shall, no doubt, take place. Yet the fundamental spiritual values of life shall always predominate. Growth shall never eclipse the importance of individual human beings and human families. Indeed, more people will probably find their occupations in or near the home environment. Education at all levels and in all areas shall be a primary activity for all people.

The Millennium shall be a time of the greatest advances in every field of human creativity, fields such as the arts and in every sciences. The human mind shall be freed from the inhibitions of evil—no longer shall warfare and competition dominate the enormous developmental time, energy and financial resources of countries and individuals. All efforts shall be devoted to the peaceful edification of society. The most artistic and dynamic works of human history, the most magnificent musical compositions and performances, the most beautiful paintings, the most expressive literature, etc.—shall be created under God's laws.

Although the administration of the Kingdom of God shall enforce a uniform law for all nations and peoples, and there are indications that there shall be a universal language (Zeph. 3:9), this does not mean that cultural differences between people shall be eliminated. On the contrary, the diverse and unique personality, culture, music, art, dress and habits of each nation shall be preserved and encouraged. God's laws are universal in scope and shall be applied to, and shall strengthen, all peoples in all cultures in all environments. Travel and cultural exchange shall exist, with the primary intent—at least initially—of teaching all nations to follow the example of God's people, Israel. To accomplish this, all nations shall send representatives to Israel to learn of God's ways and laws (Isaiah 66:18-21, 23; Zech. 14:16-19), and Israel shall send teachers to all countries to help them apply these new concepts and put them into practice in their daily lives.

All through the thousand-year rule of Christ, God shall continue to add to the number of those eventually to be in His kingdom. At the end of the Millennium all who have ever lived and died without having a full, first chance for salvation shall be resurrected as physical beings to live in God's perfect society (Rev. 20:12). Those who qualify for salvation shall be inducted into God's spiritual Kingdom while those of this and previous eras who have not followed God's way shall burn in the lake of fire. Immediately thereafter, the physical aspect of God's Kingdom on earth shall disappear and be entirely replaced by the spiritual Kingdom whose population shall have increased into the billions by this time. Thus, we find God's Kingdom expanding in steps and growing dramatically from only two beings to an innumerable multitude through the process begun and made possible by and through Jesus Christ and His resurrection.

Ultimately, following the thousand-year rule of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment, God shall replace the old earth with a "new heaven and new earth" (Rev. 21:1). This reformation of heaven and earth is part of the "restitution of all things" spoken of by Peter (Acts 3:21). The Father shall come to this earth to rule with Christ who shall then be second in command at His Father's side (1 Cor. 15:27-28), and God's entire family shall rule the entire universe. (Christ shall deliver the Kingdom to His Father, 1 Cor. 15:24.)

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them; He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away. And He who sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. Also He said, Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true. And He said to me, It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son" (Rev. 21:1-7).

"And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations" (Rev. 21:22-26).

"Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall worship Him; they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:1-5).

Revelation 21 and 22 are surely a complex amalgam of literal description, awesome imagery and representative symbolism. Yet with all of this, the Bible only gives us a hint of what God shall do after His plan for mankind

has been completed and He has added so dramatically to expand His family and Kingdom. But indications are that God shall in one way or another continue to expand His family forever.

"For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. *Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end...*" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

The scope of God's family shall literally be "all things"—that includes the whole universe. "Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet. For in that He put all in subjection under Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him. But now we see not yet all things put under Him" (Heb. 2:8).

The incredible majesty of God's Kingdom—the fact that man is to become part of God's family and rule the entire universe—is called a *mystery* in the New Testament. Jesus called it the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" in Matthew 13:11, and "the mystery of the kingdom of God" in Mark 4:11. This mystery includes several concepts "which [have been] kept secret since the world began" (Rom. 16:25) and "hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to His saints" (Col. 1:26)—for example, the opportunity for gentiles to participate in the Kingdom of God (Rom. 11:25) and become fellow heirs of the promise of Christ (Eph. 3:6); the uniting of all things in heaven and earth in Christ according to God's plan and purpose (Eph. 1:9); the relationship of Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32). But the most important aspect of the mystery of the Kingdom of God is the fact that *man has literally become God* (I Cor. 15:51 ff). This mystery, "which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27), is ordained for "our glorification" (1 Cor. 2:7) and shall be fulfilled at the resurrection when the seventh trumpet, sounds (Rev. 10:7).

The Bible states that the purpose of human life—the ultimate goal for all human beings—Is to eventually be born into the God family, to eventually become equal with the Creator of the universe. This remarkable fact is surprisingly easy to prove. There is no difficult exegesis involved. In one sense, all that is required is a four-step process:

- 1) The Creator of the Universe is the one who became Jesus Christ (John. 1:3, 10; Col. 1:16; Eph. 3:9; Heb. 1:2).
- 2) Jesus Christ is equal with God (John. 5:18; Phil. 2:6).
- 3) We are joint-heirs with Christ, and as a sure result, we shall all be glorified together with Him (Rom. 8:17).
- 4) Whatever glory God the Father has given Christ—the position of Creator—Christ shall eventually give to us (John. 17:11 and 22). In other words, every converted individual shall eventually enjoy the same relationship to Christ—God the Creator—as Christ presently enjoys with God the Father.

In another sense, all that is required is a word-by-word reading—without interpretation—of Genesis 1:26. Here God succinctly gives the purpose of human life: Whereas animals reproduce after the animal kind, man reproduces after the God kind! Or, more properly phrased, human beings are the instruments through which God is reproducing Himself.

Human beings shall always retain their individually distinct minds—they shall become individual personalities in the Father's God family. Man shall do what God does. Man will feel, act, enjoy and experience at precisely the same presently incomprehensible level of awareness at which God feels, acts, enjoys and experiences. And man shall not lose his unique awareness and his individual personality. "Man will not be diffused into the cosmic consciousness," man will not be absorbed by the "infinite intelligence," and man will not be swallowed up by "universal love."

As a matter of fact, just the opposite is true: The members of God's family in tomorrow's world shall be more distinct from one another than members of the human family are distinct from one another in today's world. All shall have their own individually specific memories, abilities, personality traits, jobs, responsibilities, preferences and ideas. But there won't be any competition or conflict. Because the old culprit—self-centered human nature—shall have long since been eliminated.

When mankind is promised to be made "equal with God," that of course means that individual human beings shall eventually become *qualitatively* equal with God—and obviously does *not* mean that individual human beings shall eventually become *quantitatively* equal with either God the Father or Jesus Christ. Being "equal with God" only means that we shall be in the same God family as the Father and Christ are in, and has nothing to do with an equality of power, authority, intelligence, etc., within the family.

In other words, those people who shall be resurrected or changed "in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52), shall share the exact qualities of life which today are only possessed by God the Father and Jesus Christ.

For example, one of God's qualities is that He has inherent life—He generates eternal life intrinsically within Himself, because God is life. "For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself" (John. 5:26). Consequently, since the two original beings in the God family created all mankind to grow to become qualitatively like themselves, when individual human beings are changed into new, individual God-beings, each of them shall generate eternal life intrinsically within himself (John. 3:16, 36; 4:14; 6:47; 7:38; 10:28; 17:2, etc.).

Every individual person has been created to grow toward divine sonship (Rom. 8:1-15)—to become a literal son of God—a son who is in every way qualitatively equal to his Father, yet a son who is always in thankful and gracious submission to his Creator Father.

But quantitatively, man shall never equal God the Creator, just as surely as God the Creator (Jesus Christ) shall Himself never quantitatively equal God the Father (John. 14:28).

These two original beings in the God family shall always remain in overall command. Their absolute authority will never be questioned—although they will delight in sharing progressively more of their responsibilities with their offspring as the God family continues to expand throughout space and time.

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This publication is intended to be used as a personal study tool. Please know it is not wise to take any man's word for anything, so prove all things for yourself from the pages of your own Bible.

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