

Text: Romans 14:17-19

Title: “The Kingdom’s Attitude”

I’m praying that the Spirit of God will awaken us to our life in the Kingdom of God. So we pray to the Father as Jesus taught us, “Your Kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” We’ve learned that the Kingdom of God has already come. God’s reign is eternal. Then there is the sense in which the Kingdom continues to come. It broke on to the stage of this earth when Christ came. He said, “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is here.” Then there’s the sense in which it will come in the future when Christ returns in greater power and glory than we can hardly imagine. In the meantime we live in a world that is a battleground between two rival kingdoms ... the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. We are by nature citizens of the dark kingdom, but Christ came to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness and to deliver us into the Kingdom of Light when we are born again through faith in Christ. We become citizens of the Kingdom.

QUOTE: The old evangelist Vance Havner used to say, “If you are a Christian, you are not a citizen of this world trying to get to heaven; you are a citizen of heaven making your way through this world.”

This teaching about the Kingdom of God wasn’t just a novel side note for Jesus. He mentions the Kingdom nearly 90 times in the Gospels. When Jesus calls us to follow Him as disciples we learned from Him how to *live in* and *live out* the Kingdom while we are in this world. We are indwelt by the Spirit of King Jesus and through the power of Spirit we live as His agents in our world.

ILLUSTRATION – I think about Ethan Hunt, that character played by Tom Cruise in the *Mission Impossible* movies. He’s an agent of the IMF, the Impossible Missions Force, an agency of the US government designed to keep the world safe for democracy. Wherever Ethan Hunt goes in the world, and whatever he does, he acts as an agent of the US government on an assigned mission.

And as Kingdom citizens we get our assignments from King Jesus. We are sensitive to the voice of our King as He prompts us to do His will and to press His Kingdom into the circles where we live out our lives. The church is our “safe house.” But our assignment is lived out in the world.

Now today I want you to see yet another facet of the Kingdom of God. There’s an attitude, a mindset, that permeates the Kingdom and its citizens. That attitude flows

from the very heart of the King. It is the attitude of love. In fact, it's the supreme law and the official language of the Kingdom.

James 2:8 - If you really keep the royal law (the Kingdom law) found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

So when we enter the Kingdom of God we become agents of the love of our King. Turn to Romans 14:1 where we see how the Kingdom of God is manifested in the life of believers and how they live out the love of the King in our relationships with others in the church and in the world. We're headed to v.17 where we have some important information about the Kingdom, but before we get there we need to see the context. The Apostle Paul picks up on a weakness in the church in Rome. **Read Romans 14:1-4.**

First, notice there's a lot of judging going on ... looking down on others ... condemning others. And sadly there's a lot of that kind of attitude in believers. We are known more for what we are against than for Who we serve and worship.

Second, notice that what is at stake here are what Paul calls in v.1 "disputable matters." So these are not so much moral imperatives where the Word of God is clear ... like abstaining from sexual immorality or from lying or from stealing or from gossiping or dishonoring our parents. Those are moral imperatives and we don't compromise on the clear commands of God in the scripture. We don't compromise on the holy life we are called to live. We aren't ashamed of Jesus or the Gospel.

But when Paul talks about "disputable matters" he's not talking about moral imperatives. It's about personal convictions or opinions. You see, in the church in Rome there were believers who had been saved out of different backgrounds and they brought certain convictions with them into their Christian life.

For some their attitude was, "Hey, food is food. As long as I give thanks to God for it, I can eat anything that appeals to me ... meat or vegetables." Other believers say, "No, no, no. That meat you bought in the market may have been part of a pagan offering to an idol. We should have nothing to do with anything like that." For some their attitude was, "Every day is a day to love and serve God." Other believers say, "No, no, no. There are some days that are more holy than others and we need to respect those days." For some their attitude is, "Wine is fine. I am free in the Lord and it's perfectly innocent to have a glass of wine with my dinner."

Others say, “No, no, no. It’s not fine. I can’t think of any good reason to drink wine.”

Again, these are not moral imperatives but “disputable matters,” of personal opinions. Each one of us is accountable to our Lord and will answer to Him not to other people. The important thing is for us to follow our consciences on these matters because...

Romans 14:12 - Each of us will give an account of himself to God.

So in these particular matters follow your conscience on them. But don’t judge others if they see it differently.

Romans 14:13 - Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.

So my main concern in life then is not to be an obstacle to anyone else growing closer to God. My highest aim is to live in such a way that inspires others in their devotion to God.

So in Rome they open up a new Whataburger and you’re the first in line. You don’t mind anyone seeing you eat your Triple Meat, Jalapeno Cheese Burger with extra sauce. Now they bought their meat from a wholesaler who got the meat from a pagan temple where part of that cow had been offered as a sacrifice to a pagan god. But that’s no big deal to you because meat is meat; those gods really don’t exist. But say you have a good friend who is a new Christian and before she was saved she participated in those pagan sacrifices. And now her new devotion to Christ won’t let her have any part of that old life. She thinks it’s wrong to eat that meat that was offered to a pagan god. So what are you to do?

Romans 14:15 - If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

The motivation for this is the Kingdom attitude (the royal law) of love ... acting for the highest and the best for another person. Why? Well here’s where the Kingdom of God comes in:

Romans 14:17 - For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

The evidence that the Kingdom is in me and I am in the Kingdom is not that I eat or don't eat certain things, or that I drink or don't drink certain things. It's not just about being a religious rule-keeper. The Kingdom of God produces in us something much greater ... a freedom that is lived out in love for God and for others. And v.17 shows what that Kingdom attitude of love looks like. It is...

1. PRACTICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

Romans 14:17a - For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness...

Basically there are two kinds of righteousness described in the Bible and yet they are both connected. There is what we call *positional* righteousness and there is *practical* righteousness. So in our salvation God imparts to us this *positional* righteousness. We are in the position of being right with God based not on our merits, but on the merits of Christ who died for us. Then God works this positional righteousness into us by the Holy Spirit and it is lived out through our *practical* righteousness every day. And it is this practical righteousness, this living rightly, that Paul has in mind here. This is the official law and language of the Kingdom.

Now let's dig down a little more. What does this practical righteousness look like? Well we get a little hint of this in Matthew 25 where Jesus talked to His disciples in these terms: One day King Jesus will be sitting upon His throne and all the nations will be gathered before Him. He will separate people ... the righteous from the unrighteous. The King will say to the righteous, "Come and enter the eternal Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you took me in. I needed clothes and you gave me clothes. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you visited me." And then the righteous will answer Him, "Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink, or a stranger or in need of clothing or sick or in prison?"

Matthew 25:40 - "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

The “least of these brothers of mine” are the ones that others would ignore. So the Kingdom of God is not about fussing over rules. It’s about loving engagement in the needs of others. Jesus isn’t saying that these are requirements to get into heaven. He’s saying that people who are truly righteous are regularly engaged in loving people in these practical ways.

And there are going to be some who stand before God one day and have to say, “Wait a minute. You expected me to do that? I thought I was just supposed go to church and, if I’m real dedicated, to Sunday School.” Jesus teaches us that truly righteous people are lovingly engaged in meeting the needs of others. It’s the evidence that we have been infected by the attitude of the King ... the Kingdom law of love.

The Kingdom of God is a matter of practical righteousness.” But it is also a matter of...

2. RELATIONAL PEACE

Romans 14:17 - For the kingdom of God is ... righteousness, peace...

Now the Bible describes different kinds of peace. There is peace *with God* through a right relationship with Him. Then there is the peace *of God* that we possess as believers. And there is also peace *with others* that is an overflow of our peace with God. And that is what Paul seems to have in mind here.

Remember there are disputes people were having over whether or not to eat meat, or observe holy days or drink wine. But these disputes are settled when our aim becomes this ...

Romans 14:19 - Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Peace, in this context, means tranquility in relationships. Edification is building up others, not tearing them down.

Remember there was all this judging and condemning going on. And Paul comes down on the side of restraint. Look at v.21. If you’re spiritually mature and your greatest concern is love for your brothers and sisters here’s your guiding principle ...

Romans 14:21 - It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

Technically speaking you may have the freedom to do those things, but not at the expense of the spiritual wellbeing of others. Why? We're governed by the royal, Kingdom law of love.

And this peace also includes the idea of reconciliation. Kingdom citizens must be champions of reconciliation. Listen to what the Bible says about our King:

Psalms 89:14 - Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.

God is all about moral righteousness and He's also all about social justice. God created all human beings equal. He is opposed to any kind of favoritism or prejudice or racism that causes some people to feel they are better than others and to treat others as anything less than human beings made in the image of God. And as Kingdom citizens infused with the Kingdom attitude we will always stand up for those who are not being treated justly ... because of the color of their skin, or the part of town they live in, or their economic circumstances. Why? Righteous and justice are the foundation of the throne of our King.

Kingdom people are permeated with the attitude of King Jesus who laid down everything for us and we must lay down everything for one another. But this Kingdom mindset also includes...

3. SPIRITUAL JOY

Romans 14:17 - For the kingdom of God is ... righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

This is a gladness that is produced by the inner working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And it requires a choice to rejoice as we consider all that we have in Christ. The fruit and evidence that we are living under the control of the Spirit of King Jesus is love, joy, peace and more. It's a delight that is produced in us as our affections are set on Christ.

Matthew 13:43 - The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

This Spirit-inspired joy is the polar opposite of the judging, condemning and looking down on others that Christians have come to be known for. There are a lot of joyless Christians; they're just angry all the time. But there's nothing that causes Kingdom citizens to stand out more than this joy. People around us won't understand it and will want to know how we can have this much joy, gladness and delight even when we're going through trials.

Romans 14:18 - because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

We pray, "May Your Kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and this is what that means. This is how we serve our King and do what is pleasing to Him and what wins the amazed approval of others.

Matthew 13:43 - The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near. So what kind of adjustments is this calling for? Is the Kingdom of God the highest priority for my life and my family? Is the Kingdom of God more important than my political persuasion? Do I think about the Kingdom of God when I'm out for dinner with some friends at a restaurant or walking the halls of my job? Am I telling others the Gospel of the Kingdom? Am I showing mercy to hurting people in practical ways?