KINGDOM SPIRIT



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"SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD"

Matthew 6:33



Issue 1301

ISAIAH 56-60

In our last issue we discussed the fact that man needs to learn to think like God to understand His overall plan for mankind. That plan included Israel leaving the land of their Assyrian/ Babylonian captivity and moving west. Chapter 56 continues with instructions on how God wanted Israel, which means us today, to think and act. (Read Isa. 56:1-2) It is interesting that God does not tell these people to keep all of His rituals and ceremonies, but rather to keep justice and live righteously. This is the thing that is missed so often. My wife and I knew a man that became a Catholic because he said that he could do whatever he wanted to and then go to mass and confession and be absolved of all of his wrong doing during the week. The Jews even have a special prayer that if they repeat the prayer once a year, it absolves them from any wrong doing that they may want to engage in during the next year. In this, people are not much different from the people of Isaiah's time that felt that they could do whatever they wanted so long as they offered the proper sacrifice at the specified times. In Hosea 6:6, God says, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." Man has it backwards. John tells us in I John 3:7, Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." God is saying through Isaiah to be righteous because His salvation, i.e. Jesus Christ, is near or soon to come and His righteousness will be revealed.

Blessed is the man that does this, keeps the Sabbath, and keeps from doing evil.

(Read Isa. 56:3-8) God makes it clear that salvation is not genealogical, but open to all people who agree to live by God's law, which incidentally requires a blood sacrifice for sin. So the sacrifice by Christ on the cross was in keeping with the law, but made by God for us instead of the sacrifice of bulls and goats. Verse 8 makes it clear that there will be others other than Israelites that will be a part of His kingdom, no one should rely on his genealogy, but on Christ alone.

(Read Isa. 56:9-12) Having a knowledge of God and His way requires some effort. One cannot be lazy and assume that there is no plan, that God is merely a convenience should one need Him in the future. God calls on the beasts of the field to devour such people. I don't think this necessarily means that He wants the beasts of the field to literally devour those who are lazy and refuse to study and to try to know God and His way, but in effect, they destroy themselves by their laziness. One can be a very ambitious person, but if he or she refuses to tune themselves to God and His way, they are not better off than one who is literally lazy and slothful.

(Read Isa. 57:1-2) Though I believe these verses are directed toward Israel, I take personal comfort in them, especially when someone that I believe to have been a righteous person, dies an untimely death. We never know how that person would have dealt with events that were yet to come. I believe this is what happened with Enoch in the book of Genesis.

The next few verses are words of condem-

nation for Israel for their sins of idol worship and disobedience to God's law. (Read Isa. 57:3-13) In verse 13, the word "companies" has a marginal rendering in my Bible that says, "collection of idols." God points out that those who put their trust in their idols are putting their trust in nothing. However, he that puts his trust in God "shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain." "Mountain" is symbolic of kingdom, so he that puts his trust in God will inherit His kingdom.

(Read Isa. 57:14-21) After several wonderful promises to those who put their trust in God, He says in verse 16, "For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth." Because of Israel's idol worship and disobedience, God is putting them into the Assyrian captivity, but He is promising that He will not always be angry with them. He goes on in the rest of the chapter assuring them that He will heal them, but for those who remain in their wickedness, He also promises that there will be no peace.

(Read Isa. 58:1-7) Isaiah is instructed to spare not in an effort to show Israel their sins and transgressions. God acknowledges that the people appear to seek Him and to know His ways. He then uses fasting as an example of their appearing to seek Him while at the same time transgressing His law. They are blaming God for not hearing them when they fast and afflict themselves. God says the problem is that they actually take pleasure from their fasts and exploit their labourers. He says they fast for strife and debate. He then asks if this is the type of fast that He has chosen. He asks in verse 5 if they consider a fast to be "a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? He continues to ask if that is what they consider a fast and an acceptable day to the LORD? God then gives an example of what He considers a fast—"to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke, to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house, when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh."

God wants them to understand that what He wants is a heart in tune with God, not a show of piety. This is something that is still not understood by most people today. Church attendance, tithing, various ritual and rites, adherence to certain dress codes, missionary work, etc., though they may all be good things to do, are of no value in God's mind if one's heart isn't tuned to God and His ways. If we don't have a genuine concern for those around us, whether rich or poor, we aren't in tune with God's heart. Keep in mind what Christ considered the second greatest commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matt. 22:39)

(Read Isa. 58:8-12) If the people would take to heart what God says He considers a fast and practice it, God says that their light would break forth as the morning, and their health would spring forth speedily, their righteousness would go before them and the glory of the LORD would follow them. If they wanted God to hear their prayers, being attuned to God's heart would assure His hearing. This would assure that their children would build up the waste places. They would raise up foundations of many generations, i.e. if the people would get their heart right with God, the results would be evident for many generations. They would be called the repairer of the breach and restorer of paths to dwell in.

(Read Isa. 58:13-14) If they would turn away from doing their own pleasures on the Sabbath and honor God instead, He says they will delight themselves in the LORD which will be rewarded by God.

(Read Isa. 59:1-8) It appears that the people are blaming God for not saving them saying that His arm is shortened or He can't hear them in their prayers. But God assures them that He can hear and His arm is not shortened, but it is their own iniquities that separate them from God. He then lists a number of their sins that cause this separation. They have been guilty of murder, lying, cheating, destroying, etc., and never calling for justice. There is no peace without there first

being justice.

(Read Isa. 59:9-15) Isaiah answers and confesses that justice is far from them as is right-eousness. He says they wait for the light, but only have darkness. He says that they roar like bears and mourn like doves and look for justice, but there is none. They seek salvation, but it is far from them. The reason is that their transgressions are multiplied before God. Because of these sins and transgressions, justice is turned away backward for truth is fallen in the street. Isaiah says that if a man turns from this evil, he becomes a prey. God saw it and it displeased him that there was no justice. Keep in mind that this was what caused God to put them into captivity to the Assyrians.

(Read Isa. 59:16-19) Because God saw there was no intercessor, we're told that God's arm brought salvation to Him and His righteousness sustained Him. I believe this is telling us that God is preparing to carry out His plan concerning Israel. He is going to protect her from her enemies as well as punish those who hurt her. In verse 19 He says, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him." Then the ultimate answer comes. (Read Isa. 59:20-21) "The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD." This had a short term fulfillment and I believe it also has a long term fulfillment. Christ came to Zion, the old Jerusalem, but I believe it is also a reference to His second coming to the new Zion, or the new Jerusalem. In coming to the old Jerusalem. He also came to those who turn from transgression in Jacob. As we have pointed out before, immediately after Pentecost following the crucifixion and resurrection of our LORD, the apostles and disciples began going to the people who were descended from the Israelites who had been in the Assyrian captivity and it was these people who have taken the message of Christ to the world as God said would happen in verse 21.

(Read Isa. 60) This whole chapter is looking at the time when God's kingdom will be established here on the earth. We're looking at the new Jerusalem. Compare verse 11 with Rev.

21:25-26, "And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it." The apostle John tells us in Rev. 21:2 that he is speaking of the new Jerusalem which is really the governmental structure of God's kingdom. It is not a literal city as was the old Jerusalem.

I presume that it is Scripture like this chapter that has led today's Jews to believe that they are superior to other peoples. Even if they were who they claim to be, which most are not, this should not give anyone a superiority complex. Again, if we look at the big picture, Israel has been richly blessed by God, but they have also been severely punished for their sins. In fact had it not been for the promises to Abraham, they would have been completely destroyed many centuries ago because of their sin. When we understand the heart condition of the people who are part of His kingdom, i.e. that their thinking and feeling are in tune with God's thinking and feeling, even if they are a part of this kingdom, that heart condition will prevent them from having a feeling of superiority over other people. Their attitude to other people will be that of love. This can be difficult for us to understand, but I believe the closer we come to God, the greater our understanding of these people will be. Verse 15 points out that Israel has been forsaken and hated, but God says he will make them an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. There cannot be this joy if they are always trying to lord it over others because of a feeling of superiority. JRL

A Study of the Book of **REVELATION**

The next church we want to look at is Sardis. Sardis means "precious stone (i.e., the sardius stone), or remnant." Since a precious stone is rare, it carries the idea of a remnant, something not commonly found. Jesus introduces Himself as "He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars."

(Read Rev. 3:1-6) This is the church of the Reformation period. Basically this age lasted

from 1517 to 1776 A.D. At the beginning of this age, the church, which was basically the Roman Catholic church, dominated the then known world both ecclesiastically and temporally, so certainly it had the name that it was alive. Yet Christ says it was dead. It had reached the point that it was dead spiritually. Coercion was the dominant means of maintaining obedience, rather than love as taught by Christ. The church is told to be watchful, and strengthen the things which it still had that were ready to die.

In 1517 Martin Luther nailed his famous "95 theses" to the church door in Wittenberg, Bavaria. This action of his is considered by most to be the spark that ignited the Reformation movement. Verse 4 of Rev. 3 says, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." There were a few, at first, that had studied for themselves and heard the voice of God and dared to make that voice known to the world. Most of these first few paid dearly for voicing what they were learning. Martin Luther is a good example of these few who began to hear the true voice of God as they studied.

The concept of imputed righteousness had virtually been totally lost over the centuries, but when discovered again by Luther, it became the heart of the Protestant Reformation. Following is a quote from a booklet titled "The Seven Churches" by Dr. Stephen Jones.

Martin Luther had tried long and hard as a Roman monk to be righteous enough to know the assurance of justification before God. He had been taught that one was saved when one was perfected. The Church had taught him that Grace was a gift that God gave us to enable us to be perfect in all our works. In other words, once God imparts Grace to a man, then he was supposed to have the innate ability to come into perfection. Once perfected, then he would know that he was justified and saved. In searching his own heart, Luther was honest enough to know that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:19) He tried very hard to eradicate all impure thoughts from his mind and heart,

for he had great faith in the idea that God had given him the Grace to be perfect. However, he found that he was a miserable failure. Finally, he discovered from Romans 4 that God imputes righteousness to the believer by faith.

Luther discovered that his justification came through the righteousness of Christ—not his own. He discovered that we are the righteousness of God in Christ (II Cor. 5:21), NOT in ourselves. Our righteousness is not really our own at all, but Christ's, and His righteousness is applied to us as though it were our own. We are imputed, or reckoned, righteous, not because we actually are so, but because Christ is righteous, We are in Christ, and therefore, God sees only Christ when He looks at us.....

This revelation of the Word removed a huge load of guilt from Luther's heart and mind, for now he knew that his righteousness was not based upon his own perfection, but Christ's. Once he knew he was justified and could approach the throne of God boldly by faith, then he could pursue holiness from the grounds of forgiveness, not from the standpoint of a sinner attempting to become righteous by spending many years in prayer and fasting, buffeting the flesh, or hiding in a monastery away from the world and from women.

This concept struck at the heart of the Roman idea of salvation by personal righteousness. A religion's doctrine of salvation is always the heart of the religion. So this is what actually sparked the Reformation, although many other issues were raised along with this central issue. If you haven't read Luther's "95 theses", I suggest that you take a look at it sometime. It is available on the internet. It has to do primarily with the selling of indulgences. As I understand it, if a person felt that he wasn't going to be able to become perfect before he died, or if he felt that a family member had died without becoming perfect, or totally righteous, he could buy pardons from the pope ahead of time in his own case, presumably the price was dependent on how bad one's sin was, or for the dead in the case of a family member that would take them out of Purgatory and into heaven. Luther apparently realized that the pope did not have the right to remit any penalties other than a penalty that he himself imposed. Remission of sin could only come from God.

Unfortunately, it did not take too long before Protestants, who had rejected the Romanist authority and many of their doctrines, began to embrace once again the Roman idea of salvation by perfection. Under the pretense of preaching holy living, they crossed the line into teaching justification by works. The difference between "justification should produce holy living" and "holy living should produce justification" seems to be hard to understand. Luther realized the former was the correct view, but many protestant denominations have adopted the latter, which puts them back into the Romanist view that they rejected.

I recall when I was in my early teens, we went to a Baptist church in my home town. Baptists are famous for holding revival meetings and our church was no different. One of the preachers that they often had hold a revival meeting in our church was a preacher from California, but who had grown up in our area. What I remember about those revival meetings was that every time he made an altar call, his wife was one of the first ones to answer the call. I now realize why. If one believes that one has to be totally righteous to be saved, any time an impure thought crossed one's mind, or something was done that was considered a sin, then that person would have to be saved all over again. This to me would be a miserable life. I think we can see how, with this type of thinking, that a preacher or priest could basically become in control of one's life if the person believed that the preacher or priest had the power to forgive both at present and in the future. Realizing that one's sins have already been forgiven by Christ in His sacrifice on the cross sets man free from a real load of guilt. This realization then should cause a person to strive to live in obedience to the One who gave His all for each of us.

It was people who had this realization that Jesus is speaking of when He says, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments." That they would walk with Him in white indicates their attainment to the

position of priest, i.e. they will be in the first resurrection. (Read Rev. 20:6)

Sardis church:

Object to overcome-- The deception of believing justification is by works.

Reward—Be clothed in white raiment (priestly garments) and assurance of name in book of life.

(Read Rev. 3:7-13) Philadelphia means "brotherly love." This age was from 1776 until 1914. A great deal happened during this age, some good and some bad, but it is difficult to summarize everything without going into a lot of background necessary to understand it all, which is probably beyond the scope of this lesson. Some will need to be covered later in our studies, so we may leave some of it for then.

In the Greek, there are three words that are translated "love" in the English. They are actually three kinds of love. The Greek words are *eros*, *phileo*, *and agape*. *Eros* is the most selfish and immature form of love. It is best defined as NEED. Babies need their mothers, and their demands are based solely upon those needs. People need to mature in love as they mature physically. If they don't then their relationships are based upon mere physical attraction and self-gratification. They care little or nothing for other people and will violate the rights of others whenever it suits them.

Phileo is the kind of love a child learns in relating to their siblings. I have often referred to this type of love as heart love. It is more mature than eros but needs to mature into agape as one matures physically. As children grow and mature, they need to be taught to respect each other's property and space. They should be taught basic principles of justice and fairness as part of their maturing phileo type of love. It might be looked at as a judicial (legal) type of love. The natural love for ones siblings is there but it needs to, and is intended by God, to be trained that it might mature properly. By judicial decisions of the parents, the children learn to define basic human rights and responsibilities. I think we can see that the principles of maturing *phileo* type of love in children would apply in other cases as well.

When boys and girls are first afflicted with what we sometimes refer to as "puppy love", we are talking about *phileo* love. If this type of love is by-passed, with the necessary maturing, one would practice a lawless form of love, which, at his heart, would only be a free expression of his needs and desires. We see this today in what is called "free love" where sexual relationships are based upon love, rather than marriage. Homosexual love is a result of by-passing the *phileo* love stage of development.

Agape love is the unconditional love that characterizes mature people. I refer to this type of love as head love, it requires effort on our part. It is the term used most by John to describe the love of God toward us. When applied to people, it is a love that is unselfish, forgiving, understanding and unconditional. It is not free of discipline, as we are all, so long as we are living, still immature children. We never stop the process of maturing so long as we have only the earnest of the Spirit. When we are resurrected into the fullness of the Spirit, this is when we reach full maturity.

When the American founding fathers founded this nation, they referred to it as the American experiment. The factor that set this experiment apart from other nations was the belief in liberty in law. When Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal", to him this was with the understanding that "equal" meant equal in or under the law.

It was their intent to bring the Church into a *phileo* relationship among its citizens and among the nations. Before the Protestant Reformation, the only example of rulers, both civil and religious, that most people ever knew, were men with selfish interests who had not learned the basic principles of *phileo* love.

At the beginning of our nation, it was the American Dream to fulfill the prophecies regarding the House of Israel, that this new nation would be a light to the nations (Isa. 49:6), and that from the shores of this New World the Gospel of Jesus Christ would go forth into all the world. Our founders believed they were establishing the fifth kingdom of Daniel 2, the great Stone Kingdom

cut out of the mountain without hands, that was to smash the image on its feet—that is, the old corrupted world order in Europe that had been dominated by the Roman Church.

Jesus identifies Himself to this church as "He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." The "key of David" is a reference to Isa. 22:15-25 (Read). Hezekiah was king at the time and Shebna and Eliakim were both trusted officers in the king's cabinet. While we are only told in symbolic terms what Shebna did, it would appear that he had become quite corrupt and greedy. While this is also a Messianic prophecy, in this case the "key of the house of David" would probably be the equivalent today of being the President's chief of staff. Applying this to the Philadelphia Church, we see the Roman Catholic Shebna being replaced by the Protestant Eliakim. The keys to the Kingdom claimed by Rome are now being given to others whose motives are more consistent with "brotherly love" than the ones who conceived the Inquisition and the conquests of Cortez.

The open door that was set before the Philadelphia Church prophesied of the great missionarv effort that was made, not only from the United States but several countries of Europe as well. Great missionary societies were established in the 1790's and into the 1800's. This began the great missionary movements of the next 200 years. which spread the Protestant brands of Christianity into all parts of the world. The Bible has now been translated and printed in over one thousand languages. The One having the key of David opened a new door giving Christians of all denominations the opportunity to spread the Gospel to all parts of the world. Up to that time, only Roman Catholicism had had such opportunity, but they had spread their message primarily through conquest.

In King Hezekiah's day, he was spared from serious trial, or temptation twice that we have record of. First, when the Assyrians took the kingdom of Israel captive, their next target was the kingdom of Judah. King Sennacherib of Assyria successfully took all of the fenced cities of

Judah with the exception of Jerusalem, but when he sent his generals against the city of Jerusalem, Hezekiah took his cause before God and God destroyed 185,000 of Sennacherib's soldiers in one night, thus ending this attempt to take Jerusalem. A little later Hezekiah became very sick, and again he prayed to God and God extended his life by 15 years. However, he made a serious mistake. When the king of Babylon sent a delegation to see him with a get well card, so to speak, he showed them all of the treasure of his house and of the temple and of the city. Isaiah, the prophet, then brought word to him that ultimately the Babylonians would take all of the treasure they had been shown. This happened, but not in Hezekiah's life time.

When the churches of this Philadelphia Church age began to really prosper, they began to build huge buildings focused on building large religious empires, this accumulation of wealth came to the attention of the servants of economic Babylon. These people could not resist trying to take control of this wealth. If you read history, particularly of the time of Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, you will see that like Hezekiah, our nation escaped several major attempts to gain control of our whole economic system, primarily due to the machinations of Hamilton. However, they succeeded in taking control of the Church economy by taking over the seminaries and changing the Church's teachings to conform to Babylonian ideas. In so doing, they neutered the Church so as to accept the Babylonian captivity that took place in 1914.

In verse 14, Jesus says to those who have remained true to His Word, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." I believe we are now facing this "hour of temptation". Mistakes have been made, but to those who have "kept the word of my patience" they accomplished a great deal during the 19th and 20th centuries, often with very small numbers, but there has certainly been a remnant that has remained true to God. And if I am correct that this "hour of temptation" is upon us,

it will be this remnant that, through God's hand, will be the stabilizers, so to speak.

Philadelphia church:

Object to overcome—Holding fast to the Gospel

Reward—Be made a pillar in the temple of God, have new name, will be a part of the New Jerusalem and will have God's new name.

(Read Rev. 3:14-22) Laodicea means "justice or judgment, or power of the laity." This age began in 1913-14. Some feel it lasts until the first resurrection. One writer in whom I have quite a bit of confidence says it ended in 1993 since this was the completion of 40 Jubilees, or 1960 years from Pentecost in 33 A.D. It is his belief that we are now in a transition period from 1993 until the first resurrection which would signal the beginning of the millennium of Rev. 20 that we have looked at briefly. Either way, this is the condition of the Church in our life time.

Jesus identifies Himself to this church as "the Amen", the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." "Amen" means "firm, trustworthy, or steadfast." Jesus said that He could only do what He had seen the Father do, i.e. He was witness to what the Father did, thus He says he is the "faithful and true witness" of God. John tells us in John 1:3, "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."

He says that the Laodicean Church is neither hot nor cold and Christ says that He would that it were either hot or cold. Being lukewarm He says He will spue it out of His mouth. then says that because the Church is increased in material goods, it says that it is rich, but Christ says that it is wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. We have all seen the huge church buildings that one finds in virtually every city; have seen or heard of the fortunes that many of the televangelists have accumulated; and know of the huge land holdings of some of the denominations, so we can see how the Church in general might feel it is rich. The problem is exemplified by an experience Laverne and I had several years ago in Mexico City. We were on a tour of the city

to see the things that were considered to be outstanding in the city. One of the stops was to a large Catholic cathedral. It was a magnificent building to see, but inside much of the walls was covered with gold along with all kinds of very expensive altars, statues, etc. But on the steps of the cathedral as you entered the building were a number of older women dressed in black begging for money to exist on. The apostle James tells us in James 1:27, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." large share of Protestant churches are no better than this Catholic church. Their congregations are rich in material goods, and even though many are generous so long as all they have to do is give money, they are very poor spiritually and in faith. The Bible is no longer taught. God's law has been done away with supposedly. They do not wear the white raiment of righteousness. They are blind to God's plan even though many of us may witness this age come to a close, there is no understanding of the times in which we live. We could give example after example of people who think that they are rich, who think they see, and who believe they are obedient yet are ignorant of God's Word, have done away with the law, and have virtually no faith.

This age started with two things that have contributed to this problem greatly. World War I started in 1914. This changed family life dramatically only to be followed by World War II that really changed things taking women out of their traditional roles as wives and mothers who pretty much held the families together. Men became more independent of responsibility and because material goods have become easier to obtain, people in general have come to rely on this supposed

riches, or their ability to obtain them, than they do on God.

The second thing that happened was the passage of the Federal Reserve Act in 1913-14. This in effect put us in captivity to the Babylonian system. Passed illegally, this act opened the door, not only to the pillaging of our economy, thus the world economy, by those responsible for the Act, but it opened the door to a credit society that is in direct opposition to God's law. Man's faith in God had deteriorated in direct proportion to man's ability to obtain material goods in ways other than direct exchange of labor for goods. Only now are we realizing that we cannot continue to rely on debt and usury or interest. The wars and other things like our entertainment industry have kept us from seeing what has really happened to our economy.

It would take books to list all of the collateral effects of these events. But the primary effects have been our blindness to God's plan, our repudiation of His laws, and our poverty of faith and Biblical understanding. Christ admonishes us, during this age, to buy of Him gold (faith) tried in the fire of tribulation that we might be rich, white raiment (righteousness) that we might be clothed and to anoint our eyes with eye salve (study to show thyself approved) that we might see. Expect to be chastened because God loves us. The problem is not God. He is ready to help us overcome our blindness, our poverty, and our nakedness, if we but ask Him.

Laodicean Church:

Object to overcome—spiritual blindness, nakedness of unrighteousness, and poverty of faith.

Reward—To sit with Christ on His throne, i.e. to rule with Him.

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