

Context for Ministry

The purpose of mankind is to have relationships with God. God offers this relationship, but humans must consciously choose it – or not.

The nature of a relationship with God is individual. God didn't make any two people alike, and neither are any two relationships involving humans alike. One of the clearest pictures relating Christians with God is found among those who overcome at the church at Pergamum in **Rev.2:17: “.....To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.”**

We each have a unique identity before God, that no one besides God and ourselves will understand.

Our individual uniqueness is then joined with others to form a corporate structure. I love the way Peter put it in **1Pet.2:5 ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

As stones, we are parts of a building, yet unique. No two stones are exactly alike, and as living stones we are constantly changing. In Mat.16, Jesus refers to Simon as “Peter,” a stone, a loose rock, building material. But he then goes on to use another word for rock meaning bedrock (in reference to revelation from the Father). Upon this bedrock of revelation from the father, Christ would build his church. So this guy they now call Peter described how this works as a church in his first letter.

The apostle Paul clarifies this further in **Eph.2:20 “..being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone;”** So we see that the foundation for this church consists of those who receive corporate revelation from the Father as Jesus did. Jesus is not the bedrock upon which the church is built, but the cornerstone (the reference rock) of the foundation that sits upon it. In connecting this in with the above-mentioned individuality, part of our identity is revealed to each of us secretly by Jesus.

We see a second analogy in 1Cor.12. There we are described as unique-yet-interdependent parts of a body. Christians can relate to each other either as the organs and cells of a body, or as living stones in the temple of God. Each member has a unique place, gifting and mutual benefit within this growing organism and structure. Should we need yet another analogy, in Rev.1:6, tells us that Jesus has made us a kingdom of priests. These analogies empower individuality, to provide a beautiful variety within the garden of God.

In the Old testament, Ideal conditions of society refer to people enjoying the private ownership of their own vines, fig trees, and cisterns. Later, in the more complex times of greater populations, we continue to see private enterprises, Such as Paul and Aquila as tent makers, and Lydia in the fabric business.

Individuality can only flourish within an environment of empowerment, so we need a little caution: The Bible is to be taken quite literally, but parables and analogies that teach truths have sometimes themselves been replicated as liturgies. But beyond religious structures, secular structures of control are by far the greatest threat to individuality

In Genesis eleven, mankind did not want to obey God by spreading throughout the world, so they chose to build a centralized structure to hold them together. Quite appropriately, they chose uniform manmade bricks for their structural material, rather than unique natural stones.

The more totalitarian governments of today assign tight regulations upon work quotas, housing, travel, and even family size. Much can also be said about the rampant censorship in avenues of social media, and in major news networks. Such measures remove all incentive to perform work that is not essential to life itself.

There are cases even in America, where we may have to negotiate – or even defy government edicts. I recall a situation in the eighties when federal funding was being used to murder unborn children. I had a good job that was adequate to support my wife and four children. But rather than pay for abortions, I quit and got a lesser job so we could receive earned income credit each year, and take money out of the federal coffers instead of contributing.

The most frightening trend for me is the pressure to not use cash. This way, the details of every personal transaction individuals make become visible to those who control the monetary systems. Ultimately, absolute control is prophesied in Rev.13, in which a Satanic global government will try to use this system to deprive, locate and kill everyone who will not worship the devil's image.

The kingdom of God is a separate culture within the world, and is first mentioned in Daniel chapter two.

Because of the chronic corruption in Israel, Ezekiel saw the Spirit of God departing from the temple, and then from Jerusalem. With God's protection removed, Nebuchadnezzar and his army were free to level Jerusalem and the temple, extracting anything of value. Even the ark of the covenant would never be seen again. With the destruction of the temple and the second wave of exiles being hauled off to Babylon, spiritual guidance would no longer be provided through Israel.

But the Spirit of God does not go away; it continually sifts through humanity to anoint those who yearn for God's righteousness and purpose in their lives.

Among the spoils of Jerusalem were intelligent young men who could be trained to serve the king as administrators and advisors. But some of the captured slaves had already pledged in their hearts to serve the God of Abraham. Could there have been less likely heroes than neutered teenage slave boys from a culture that had been obliterated by conquest?

This was a pivotal point in history, in which God would ordain a series of global empires to reduce international conflicts, as the population density continued to rise. For instance: Even while under the heel of Rome, historians call the era “Pax Romana.”

During the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, the kingdom of God would begin to separate from the main mountain of global government. It is described there as a stone cut without hands, and it would become a mountain in its own right. The first conflict came when a teenage slave and his friends objected to defiling themselves with the king’s delicacies. But they were soon granted this departure from the Babylonian culture.

In the second chapter of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar is given a prophetic dream in which he is seen as the first of a series of five global empires that would serve humanity until the close of the age. When God empowered Daniel to recite and interpret the dream, the king bowed before his slave and acknowledged the growing kingdom of God. Another phase of growth was recognized in the next chapter when three of Daniel’s friends defied the Emperor to his face, and yet received protection from God.

With the birth of the Church, the knowledge of salvation through Jesus spread throughout the world. This eternal gospel had been received in centuries past through the symbology of animal sacrifices, but was then freed from this tradition by the sacrifice of Jesus Himself. This gospel now became available to anybody who was willing to repent of their sins, and embrace salvation through Jesus.

This repenting clause results in a different attitude toward past behavior, and is an alteration in the mores of one’s previous culture. This salvation creates a new identity and outlook on life. It is loving and accepting, forgiving and reconciling, helping and giving, moral and wholesome. It puts us on a different track and purpose than those who remain in the cultures of the world around us.

The New Testament refers to this kingdom of God with phrases such as “We are in the world but not of it...” During the mock trial of Jesus, he declared: “My kingdom is not of this world.”

Living as ambassadors in an increasingly hostile world

While having adventures in Guatemala as a young man, I felt it important to visit the embassy with regards to my military status. American laws and culture ruled within this small enclave of embassy grounds; there, the laws of Guatemala no longer applied. As believers, we are called to be at peace with the surrounding world when possible. But ultimately we serve God’s kingdom rather than the world in which it grows.

So while we live our lives as believers in a hostile world, we need to be alert to the threats and opportunities in the world around us. Wisely lived, we should minimize dependencies and entanglements by which we could be controlled. This would optimize resources and opportunities to minister to others.

The Christian Culture

On the day of Pentecost, the church exploded into evangelism and benevolence. As thousands of pilgrims from all over the world became believers, converts among the native Jews began inviting the pilgrims into their homes. The joy of fellowship and sharing was contagious. Besides the miracles of love and conversions, other miraculous signs and wonder were a daily occurrence.

As the pilgrims returned to their respective native lands, they carried the gospel and the warmth of Christian love with them. A little later, when persecution scattered the believers at Jerusalem across the planet, their former guests were available to provide refuge and assimilation to their previous hosts.

Today we have opportunity to extend Christian hospitality and culture to believers among our homeless friends. One good “for instance” would be making backyard space available for homeless believers to begin growing their own food along with discreet secure facilities for sleeping. In some cases, there could also be a gathering place in which food could be prepared and shared.

In living our faith to the greatest level possible then, we should optimize the efficiency and economy of our own lives so that we could better serve others.

Early in our marriage my wife and I hung out with a communal household of Jesus people. They survived on various construction related and handy man contracts. They witnessed constantly, and held regular fellowship meetings in their home.

There was also a period when my wife and I fellowshipped with a small order of the Anglican church called The Mustard Tree. They had communal buildings and gardens, and likewise received income through various cottage industries.

These types of operations could begin to navigate between homelessness and mainstream society. They could also enhance the options and survivability of us all, in the midst of increasing economic and political turmoil.

In a world of increasing persecution and chaos, individual households will be better postured to survive and prosper than corporate entities. The church was never intended to be a corporation, but rather a living breathing household of God.