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Sermon Notes

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## **The Kingdom of God: Righteousness, Peace and Joy**

### **Romans 14:17-18**

All around the world, the church is struggling with a complex problem: how do we maintain purity from the defilements of the world while at the same time engaging the non-Christians in the world with the gospel?

How do we “Come out from the world and be separate” while at the same time become all things to all people so that by all possible means we may save some?

How can we be pure and friend of sinners at the same time?

Jesus seemed to be able to eat with tax collectors and sinners without being dragged down to their level

1977: Franco Zeffirelli’s TV Miniseries *Jesus of Nazareth* premiered... six hour, sixteen minute presentation of the life of Christ remains the best loved and best critically acclaimed film depiction of Christ

For me, especially powerful is the scene when the newly converted Peter, a burly fisherman who hates Matthew, his blood-sucking tax collector enemy, tries to persuade Jesus not to enter the home of a tax collector. Jesus had arranged to have dinner at Matthew’s house that evening, and Peter and the other disciples spend the whole day trying to convince Jesus that He’ll be polluted if he enters Matthew’s house... never mind the fact that He’ll never live down the scandal it will cause to His reputation. Jesus didn’t listen, but went anyway

Jesus is accompanied right to the door of Matthew’s house by Peter, John, and Andrew and others, but they refuse to cross the threshold into Matthew’s defiled house. But Jesus never hesitated, and entered right in.

When He entered Matthew’s house, there was a party already in progress... the flickering lights of the oil lamps cast an orange and seedy glow, and there were women and men reclining at table comfortably together. Though nothing immoral was going on, it was clearly a place of pleasure and laughter in which holiness was not the first thought

Matthew is stunned that Jesus actually fulfilled His promise and came. He was used to being shunned by all religious people. Matthew introduces Jesus to his lounging friend, and one happy partier lifts his cup and says “I drink a toast to you in the name of all here!”

Matthew doesn't quite know what to do with Jesus, so he barks at a loose-looking woman to move so Jesus can sit down. Jesus says, "No... I'll sit over here." Some suggest music, some suggest more wine or some food for Jesus. Jesus smiles pleasantly and says, "No, I'd like to tell a story." With Jesus' shocked disciples listening at the threshold of the door, with the partiers equally quiet, He captivates everyone's imagination with the compelling story of the Prodigal Son. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the Prodigal Son represents these tax collectors and sinners who are wandering far from God. But they see in Jesus a love unlike anything they've ever seen before. They listen to the powerful parable right to the climax, as the Father runs to the sinful son, embraces him and welcomes him back. Jesus doesn't merely tell the story... he stands and paces around, gesturing and involving Himself totally in it. The party is totally captured by the parable of Jesus.

***"Quick, bring a robe for my son! Put a ring on his finger and shoes for his feet. Kill the fattened calf and let's have a feast... let's celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."***

But then the second part of the parable occurs.... Jesus describes the older brother, who is angry that the father has welcomed this sinful, straying son back so lovingly.

"I slaved all my life for you, all these years... and you never once gave me a goat to celebrate with my friends."

At this moment, speaking as the Father, Jesus looked right at self-righteous, hateful Peter... who refused to defile himself in Matthew's home

***"Please, my son, listen to me. You are always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."***

As Jesus was speaking these words, Jesus' eyes searched into Peter's heart and Peter was drawn irresistibly like a magnet across the threshold into Matthew's defiled house. Jesus led Peter to embrace Matthew, and from then on they were best friends.

### **Now... how can the church do the same thing?**

How can we step into a sinful mess, where Prodigal Sons and Daughters are squandering their lives on riotous living... how can we transform the situation and speak the words of the gospel, without being ourselves defiled

Is it possible for us to Advance the Kingdom of Christ as He did... with total purity from sin and total immersion in the lives of sinners?

Is it possible for us to maintain balance in the three themes we have seen here in Romans 14:

- Gospel freedom from legalism
- Gospel purity from sin
- Gospel unity among different believers

The question before us: How can we advance the Kingdom in a way that is both pleasing to God and acceptable to people?

## I. What Is the Kingdom of God?

***Romans 14:17-18 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, <sup>18</sup> because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.***

### A. Kingdom of God: Central to Christ's Ministry

1. Christ began His preaching ministry with this central call

***Mark 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"***

2. Christ taught His parables around this central theme

***"The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed...."***

***"The Kingdom of heaven is like a man sowing seed..."***

***"The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field..."***

3. Christ organized His healing ministry to display this central reality

***Matthew 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.***

### B. A Rare Mention by Paul

1. Amazing: the first mention of the Kingdom of God in the Book of Romans
2. Paul does, however, develop the theme in other places in his writings

### C. Defining the Kingdom of God

1. First, God is a King (whether we serve Him or not)

***1 Timothy 1:17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.***

2. God's Kingly Rule Extends Everywhere... Even Over Enemies
3. Yet, There is a "Kingdom of God" Which Sinners Can Enter
4. What Is the Kingdom of God?

It is the place where repentant sinners are cleansed from their sin by the blood of Christ and prove their repentance by gladly obeying the rule of God the King

### 5. What Is Life Like in the Kingdom of God?

That is the question Paul is seeking to answer... is it a life of legalism in which our every action is fenced in by some rule or regulation? NO!

Well then, is it a life of total freedom, in which I can live however I want without concern for the law of God or other people? NO!

What is life in the Kingdom like? That's what Paul is answering

## II. Negatively: The Kingdom of God Is Not...

### ***Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking***

#### A. The Mind of the Legalist: Missing the Grand, Glorious Picture

1. Every area of life covered by some regulation, some rule
2. Christ battled it in the teachers of the law and the Pharisees

***Matthew 23:23-24 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices-- mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law-- justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. <sup>24</sup> You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.***

You can picture them in your mind's eye... counting out nine mint leaves for themselves, one for God... nine dill for them, one for God... nine cummin for them, one for God

All the while they were neglecting the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness

They were living harsh, judgmental lives, considering themselves pure and in no need of grace, and calling other people sinners... ready to condemn even to death a Sabbath breaker when they found him

3. What's the problem? Focusing on details and missing the transcendent truths

#### B. The Kingdom is All-Encompassing... But First Things First

1. Paul would say the Kingdom of God IS a matter of eating and drinking

Jesus did say this about tithing mint, dill, and cummin:

***You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.***

It isn't wrong to give a tenth of your spices to God... but it is wrong to do that while seeking to kill God's only begotten Son

So also in Romans 14 in the matter of eating and drinking:

- a. What we eat and how we eat it matters to God
- b. If these things weren't important, Paul wouldn't be discussing them at all

***1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.***

- c. There is nothing in all creation over which the Lord does not claim total sovereignty

Abraham Kuyper, **“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry ‘Mine!’”**

2. BUT what Paul is saying: “NOT MERELY” a matter of food and drink
3. Paul is saying the Kingdom of God involves far weightier issues than food and drink

#### C. Eating and Drinking Rules Not Sufficiently Weighty

1. Think of the Solar System, with nine planets revolving around the massive center which is the sun
2. The sun is massive enough to hold the whole system together... for the sun contains 98.5% of all the mass in the solar system; the sun is 333,000 times more massive than the earth
3. The sun can hold tiny, distant Pluto orbiting around itself... along with 8 other planets and twenty of their moons, and dozens of large asteroids, and hundreds of smaller chunks of rock that orbit the sun
4. If we were to take small, lightweight earth and put it in the center of the solar system, most everything else would fly away from it... it's not weighty enough to hold it all together
5. WHAT IS? The Glory of God... at the center of everything
  - a. The Hebrew word for glory is “cabod” which means “weight”
  - b. To glorify God means to regard Him as weighty, massive... to see that He outweighs all other considerations
  - c. Rules about eating and drinking and debatable issues are lightweight and ought not to occupy center stage

So... the Kingdom of God is not ULTIMATELY a matter of eating and drinking

Paul has defined it negatively...

### III. Positively: The Kingdom of God Is...

***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***

Paul gives a strong statement on what the Kingdom of God is like IN THIS WORLD

He gives three words that capture life in the Kingdom of God, and the order is vital, as is the source

First righteousness, then peace, then joy... and all of them “in the Holy Spirit”

These words solve all the problems related to “debatable issues”

- Righteousness protects us from license
- Peace protects us from legalistic quarrels
- Joy describes the end result of a life free from both license and legalism
- The Holy Spirit is the only power and source of all three

#### A. Righteousness

##### 1. Great debate

- a. Is this the “righteousness from God by faith” that Paul has been describing everywhere else in Romans... the IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST
- b. Or is this the practical righteousness of a Spirit-filled Christian life... a righteousness lived out in daily holiness, in love for God and His commandments, in love for others and their needs?
- c. A case can be made for both, and I will speak about the importance of imputed righteousness first
- d. BUT I think Paul is speaking about daily life in this world... the life and experience of the Christian... righteousness a Christian lives, peace a Christian experiences, joy a Christian feels in this world

##### 2. Imputed righteousness

- a. This is the righteousness Paul has already spoken so much about

***Romans 1:17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."***

***Romans 3:21-24 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.***

***Romans 4:3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."***

This is the glowing center of the gospel... the basic concept that wicked sinners like you and me can be righteous in God's sight

The idea is that God can impute Christ's righteousness to us by faith... he can "reckon" or "count" us righteous simply because of our faith in Christ

- b. This glorious truth essential to everything else that follows in the Christian life, and it would be impossible to understand any human righteousness that God accepts apart from this gift
- 3. BUT there is another kind of righteousness in the gospel: our practical daily righteousness in Christ
  - a. This second kind of righteousness is mentioned in Romans 6:13-23

***Romans 6:13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.***

***Romans 6:19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.***

- b. These are sanctification verses... verses describing a pattern of godly living hemmed in by the commands of God which is called "righteousness"

Donald Grey Barnhouse: "A butcher was once asked what difference it made to him when Christ entered his life. He replied, 'I stopped weighing my thumb.' He then told how, before becoming a Christian, he put meat on the scale in such a way that his thumb trailed down, approximately the weight of an ounce. He included that thumb in the weight of beef, pork, lard, and every other item of merchandise. But after Christ came into his heart, he stood away from the scales and gave a full sixteen ounces of meat. And when he served customers whom he had formerly cheated, he added an ounce to make up for his past [cheating]."

That is a practical righteousness that is essential to Kingdom life; The Kingdom of God is about righteousness... about doing what's right

***Psalm 15:1-5 LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? <sup>2</sup> He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart <sup>3</sup> and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, <sup>4</sup> who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, <sup>5</sup> who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.***

#### 4. THIRDLY: Yearning for righteousness

- a. Finally, the Kingdom of God is a matter not just of being positionally righteous through faith in Christ
- b. Nor is it only also seeking daily to live a righteous life by the power of the Holy Spirit
- c. BUT it is also a deep yearning for a finish in our own righteousness... a yearning to be done with sin forever

***Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.***

Only in heaven, when our salvation is done, will we be totally satisfied with our righteousness... when sin shall be gone forever

#### 5. Righteousness essential to protect us from LICENSE

- a. A true child of God will not be flaunting his freedoms and violating his conscience and roaming free as though the law of God had nothing to do with him
- b. Thus is the firm barrier erected against using grace as a license to sin

THEREFORE: The Kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking but about righteousness

#### B. Peace

##### 1. The second statement is peace

- a. Paul says that peace is of the essence of the Kingdom of God
- b. As with righteousness, there is an objective peace and a subjective peace

- c. There is the STATUS of being at peace with God, and there is the EXPERIENCE of peace that fills the heart with quietness, and that makes harmony between brothers and sisters possible
- d. As with righteousness, I believe this is talking about the EXPERIENCE of peace in the daily life of the Christian, although that is also based on the objective reality of being at peace with God through faith in Christ

## 2. The STATE of Peace

- a. Clearly the result of Christ's blood shed on the cross
- b. This is "peace with God" so prominently mentioned in Romans 5

***Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ***

- c. Previously we were enemies of God in our minds and by our sinfulness
- d. But now we are reconciled with God, and God is at peace with us

***Romans 5:10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!***

- e. Like our relationship with Germany, Japan and Italy after WWII... once we were at war, now we are at peace; it is the STATUS of relationship
- f. BUT unlike politics, this objective reality of peace with God is UNCHANGEABLE... God was at war with us, now in Christ He is eternally satisfied, eternally at peace with us

## 3. The EXPERIENCE of peace

- a. There is a second level of peace in the Christian life... the experience of peace that flows by faith from us knowing God is at peace with us
- b. This life of peace is a sweet experience... it relates to a life free from a troubled conscience... a heart not troubled about judgment day
- c. It also relates to a life free from anxiety about life's problems
- d. AND it extends from a heart at peace with God and the world to a heart at peace with others... not a heart of strife or conflict

## 4. Here is the protection from legalistic strife and controversy

- a. God is constantly against factions, divisions, strife, and quarrelling over issues

- b. This is the very thing Paul is trying to head off in Romans 14
- c. People arguing about food, drink, debatable issues
  - Arguing about Sabbath observance, what you are allowed to do or not to do
  - Arguing about worship styles and Christian contemporary music
  - Arguing about Christian liberties... what we have the right to do
- d. Paul says the essence of the Kingdom of God is PEACE in the Holy Spirit
- e. This peace flows from BOTH **imputed righteousness** of Christ imputed to us by faith, AND the **daily righteousness** we see being worked out in our daily lives by the Holy Spirit
- f. This peace pours immediate buckets of water on strife and conflict

*Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

A Spirit-filled Christian is a peace-loving Christian... he doesn't argue or bicker

*2 Timothy 2:23-26 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. <sup>24</sup> And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. <sup>25</sup> Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*

### C. Joy

1. The Kingdom of God is also about Joy in the Holy Spirit
2. Joy may be the greatest barometer of Christian health there is
  - a. Joy is the human reaction of happy emotion based on the unchanging realities of the gospel
  - b. Joy flows from faith in the gospel promises
  - c. Joy is rooted in eternity... in the treasures of the gospel kept safely in heaven for you
  - d. Joy is killed by **sin**; it is impossible to feel genuine joy when we are willingly in sin; therefore joy cannot exist with license in sin
  - e. Joy is killed by **unbelief**; it is impossible to feel deep joy when we are disbelieving the promises of God

- f. Joy is also killed by **legalism**; Paul used the absence of joy to prove to the Galatians that their embracing of the legalistic “gospel” of the circumcision group was PROOF that they had gone astray

***Galatians 4:15 What has happened to all your joy?***

3. Joy transcends all circumstances

Barnhouse: “When all is chaos on the surface, deep down there is joy. There has never been a storm on the Atlantic, even though its waves were so great that they combed over the bridge of a battleship, whose roots were any more than on the surface. A submarine always finds the water fifty feet down as calm as a pond on a clear June day.”

Thus joy is an abiding element in every healthy Christian life

Since Christ has risen and holds your salvation in heaven’s fortress where moth and rust cannot destroy and where thieves cannot break in and steal, any lapse of Christian joy is caused not be bad circumstances but by bad choices

***Habakkuk 3:17-18 Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, <sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.***

4. Joy is the unique gift of Christ... Christ brought joy wherever He went, wherever He taught

***John 15:10-12 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.***

There is the protection from legalism and license...

5. There is nothing joyful about a bunch of Christians arguing over non-essentials... dividing over legalism or license
6. The Kingdom of God is a matter of joy in the Holy Spirit... not of rules and regulations you keep or don’t keep

D. In the Holy Spirit

***Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.***

1. I haven’t been able to stay away from mentioning the Holy Spirit in each of these categories

2. Righteousness is produced by the Spirit-filled life... it is the Spirit who guides us moment-by-moment through the twists and turns of life... it is the Spirit-filled life that the Christian lives in place of the life of legalism
3. Peace is a fruit of the Spirit... as the Spirit works in an individual Christian and in a church, the fruit of His work is peace and harmony
4. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit... the Spirit-filled life is a life of holiness, of unity and of joy
5. The Spirit produces both the personal holiness needed to protect us from sin, and the love and unity to protect us from legalistic strife and conflict
6. This is the Kingdom of God

#### IV. Serving Christ in This Way

***vs. 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.***

##### A. People Pleasing the Great Danger of Legalism

1. The great problem of legalism is that it inevitably leads to fear of man... people-pleasing
2. Our whole lives become geared to living for the praise of other people
3. Since legalistic laws are man-made, then all who seek to live by them will seek to please man
4. The great danger: forgetting to please God, to live to God, to love God

Jesus said to the great Jewish legalists of His day:

***John 5:44 How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?***

5. This is a wretched way to serve Christ

##### B. Remedy: The Spirit-Filled Life

1. The Spirit-filled life frees you up from being a people-pleaser
2. Your conscience is clean, your lifestyle pure
3. You have no secrets to hide, no fear of disclosure because the true audience is with you always... the indwelling Holy Spirit

4. You are consistently filled with the Holy Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit characterizes you
5. You are free to eat or drink or NOT to eat or drink, since your life doesn't consist in these things anyway

### C. Serving Christ "In This Way"

1. We can serve Christ legalistically... a life of strict rules and regulations
2. We can serve Christ sinfully... thinking we're

I've read of some young people in the "**emerging church**" movement, a movement dedicated totally to reaching lost people for Christ by reaching them where there at, in a way that most closely connects with their present lifestyle

They will go to bars, even to strip clubs, to reach sinners for Christ because they think Christ would go where the sinners were

I read one emerging church which rejected the idea of turning a bar into a church... they advocated buying a bar and running it themselves so they could witness to the lost

It occurred in Bradford, England, where some radical Christians bought a pub called the Cock and Bottle, and continued to run it as a pub, selling hard liquor to whomever came and seeking to lead them to Christ

Malcolm Willis, manager: "Jesus said to go into all the world. And this includes pubs. He didn't say sit in your church and wait for the people to come to you."

The book says: "The Willis and their staff, all Christians, have set about creating a loving, welcoming environment where locals are cared for, listened to and ministered to."

On the issue of selling hard liquor, Willis justified it this way: "Yes, we're selling booze to people who could do without it, but if we don't they'll just go somewhere else to get it. At least if we're here we can get alongside them... So I have to ask, 'What would Jesus have done? I think the Lord would have been here in the pubs.'"

In the margin of the book I was reading, I wrote, "Why not a Christian crack house, on the same theory?"

Some emergent Christians feel they are free to drink hard liquor, to smoke, even to watch the immoral dancing shows because they are not under law but under grace

AND they put the top priority on reaching the lost... not on purity from sin

BUT this is not serving Christ at all... they have no real message of freedom from sin to give

They are not "Serving Christ in this way"... in "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit"

3. By contrast: the Spirit-filled life approves of both the ends and the means
  - a. The Spirit-filled Christian is continually characterized by “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit”
  - b. That is a powerful setting for the gospel to be preached to unbelievers
  - c. That is a powerful glue for holding together the Body of Christ while it works through difficult, debatable issues

#### D. Result: The Pleasure of God and Approval of Others

1. People who serve Christ in the way Paul is commanding are the most attractive people in the world
2. They are living upright lives, but are not smug or self-righteous about it
3. They have a lasting peace about them, a serenity that is not tied to circumstances
4. Like Paul and Silas, they can sing at midnight in a dark prison cell after being publicly flogged
5. They are confident of God’s pleasure and of their final reward, so they are lastingly joyful while struggling through the attacks of the world
6. They are PLEASING both to God and to man
7. They are “approved” (literally, they are tested and have stood the test)
8. They are the kind of people who will change the world

#### V. Application

Do you know Jesus Christ as your Savior? Have you received His gifts of righteousness, peace and joy?

Are you walking the proper way between legalism and license? Do you realize that the Kingdom of God is bigger than any debatable issue like food, drink, clothing, lifestyle choices? Yet at the same time, are you constantly aware of the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who is leading you in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake?

Do you know the peace and joy of a clean conscience?

Are you serving Christ this way? Have you found a way to stay involved in evangelism... to allow your life to become enmeshed with the lives of unbelievers without becoming dragged down into their sins?