

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Study Guide

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON 11: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Discipleship Essentials module titled Christian Doctrine. This series of lessons examines doctrines which are foundational to our faith, with an emphasis on how incorrect doctrine can negatively impact true faith. Doctrine is the set of beliefs that determine how we practise our faith. It is critical that Christians understand correct doctrine about the nature of God and salvation, especially if they are engaged in teaching and discipling. This module examines scriptures related to a number of core doctrines of the Christian Church, and also some of the areas of confusion and error associated with each doctrine.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.



CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

LESSON 11: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This lesson explores our citizenship being heaven, the Kingdom of God both now and in the future, and our allegiance to God over and above our earthly rulers.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

This is the last lesson in this series on doctrine, and we end with a topic which was central to Jesus' teaching and the consummation of all we have presented so far. Living as a citizen of the Kingdom of God impacts our daily perspective on life as well as our hope for the future. Knowing who we are, and to what kingdom we owe our allegiance, greatly impacts how we live our lives. This is an important lesson on Christian identity, and also one in which we celebrate the promises of God and His love for us!

GETTING STARTED

1. What comes to mind when you think of the word "kingdom"? What makes being a citizen of a kingdom a good or bad way to live?
2. What is our identity as Christians? To whom do we belong? What is expected of us? Whom do we represent?



STUDY

❖ **CONSIDERING THE KINGDOM:** John the Baptist and Jesus both preached that the time had arrived for the Kingdom of God to be announced. They said that this announcement was good news! In fact, proclaiming what the Kingdom was like and how one can enter it was the central message of Jesus’ teaching on earth. Within the study of the Kingdom of God we discover our identity as a Christian, a greater knowledge of the God we serve, His plans for this world, and a clearer picture of the mission of the Church. For these reasons, understanding this doctrine is essential for strong and consistent faith.

➤ **Who We Are:** While we use the word “Christian” to describe who we are and what we stand for, the Bible actually uses that term only a few times. There are other ways that the Bible describes those who belong to God. Read each of the verses below and write down the title used for Christians there.

Verse	Title
John 1:12	
Ephesians 1:7	
Ephesians 4:12	
John 10:25-27	
Acts 14:21-23	
Acts 9:2	
Acts 5:14	
Ephesians 2:19	

In these verses we can see that the Bible defines who we are, to whom we belong, and where our true citizenship is if we belong to Jesus Christ.

➤ **What is the Kingdom?** In this lesson we will consider what it is to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God. First, we must understand that this Kingdom is a good Kingdom. A Kingdom is the realm of influence that a King has – and our King is Jesus. Jesus rules over everyone and everything that submits to His authority. So wherever we are and whenever we live, Jesus’ Kingdom is within us. We become citizens of this Kingdom when we become Christians. The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are the same; they are used interchangeably in the Bible and refer to a new government that is under Jesus’ rule. **The doctrine of the Kingdom of God can be stated this way: Jesus is our King and all believers are citizens of His Kingdom. This Kingdom is presently a spiritual Kingdom, as Jesus has authority over all believers. Someday it will culminate in a physical Kingdom where Jesus will rule over the heavens and the earth. The Gospel is the good news that the Kingdom has come, and the Church is the embassy of this Kingdom on earth.**

❖ **JESUS IS OUR KING:** Long ago the people of God asked for a king to lead them. We still long for good leadership today. But our world is full of sin, rebellion, and hatred. The world is broken. We are all touched by poverty, sickness, disease, death, war, famine, injustice and evil. And we



are not able to fix it regardless of our best efforts. But God is capable and has a plan, first to renew His people, and then the world.

- **God's Plan for a King:** To understand the significance of Jesus as our King, we must look back through the Bible to see God's plan unfold for His people.
 - When God first created man and woman, His intent was that He should reign as their King. He would be a good and loving King, protecting and prospering His people both individually and as a whole.
 - But people sinned and would not submit to the authority of God as their King.
 - God continued to pursue those who would willingly submit to Him. Through the Covenants, God began to establish a people set apart who would follow Him (Exodus 19:5-6).
 - What did the people ask God to give them? Read 1 Samuel 8:1-7.

- God gave them their desire, but warned them that it would not satisfy them, and they would find life difficult under a human king.
- The second King was David, a man after God's heart. Who did David consider to be the true ruler of the people? Read Psalm 47:7-8, a Psalm of David:

- Under David and his son, Solomon, the nation of Israel was great. What instructions did David give to his son who was to become the next king? Read 1 Kings 2:1-4:

- The people were not faithful to God, and the kingdom of Israel was split in two. The prophets urged the people to come back to God and obey Him, and reminded them of God's promise to one day restore them with an eternal King (Ezekiel 37:24-25, Daniel 2:44, Zechariah 9:9). These predictions foretold the coming of Jesus, born in the line of David.
- God's intent to rule over His people was fulfilled in the coming of His Son, Jesus (God Himself), to be an eternal King for the people who were in submission to Him.



- **The Promised King:** The Gospel of Matthew establishes Jesus as the heir to David’s throne, and the collective Gospels demonstrate how Jesus came to fulfill the role of King. He was not a king who demanded power and authority, but rather invited people to follow Him. The people of Jesus’ day were waiting expectantly for a political leader to free them from political oppression. But Jesus came as a spiritual leader to free them from their spiritual oppression. Consider what Jesus says about His Kingdom:

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Mark 1:14-15	
John 18:36	
Luke 17:20-21	
Matthew 25:34	

- **The Location of the Kingdom:** When we talk about the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven, we do not mean that Jesus’ sphere of authority is only in heaven, or that it is merely spiritual. His Kingdom is extended as individual people are saved from sin. The location of the Kingdom is therefore here and now! When we refer to Jesus as ‘Lord’ we are calling Him our King, and acknowledging the authority He has on our life. It will someday cover the whole earth and all of creation when everyone will acknowledge the authority of Jesus (Philippians 2:9-11, Romans 14:11).

❖ **JESUS’ DESCRIPTION OF THE KINGDOM:** Jesus taught His followers through miracles, teaching sessions, and parables. He described the Kingdom of God so they would be able to understand it.

- **The Sermon on the Mount:** Jesus’ ministry often focused on correcting wrong beliefs. Matthew chapter 5 is the account of Jesus teaching His disciples on a hill away from the crowds. During this time of teaching, He taught them the values of the Kingdom of God.
 - o **Blessings of the Kingdom:** (Matthew 5:1-12) Jesus taught that it is not the rich, powerful and wealthy that are the greatest in His Kingdom, but rather those who seek and obey God. What blessings does God promise us in the Kingdom?



- o **Citizens of the Kingdom:** (Matthew 5:13-48, 6:1-34, 7:1-12) Jesus corrected the idea that keeping the previous law was enough to qualify us for the Kingdom. Jesus emphasized the difference between outward obedience and inward change. Kingdom citizens experience a change of heart. What does living as a citizen require us to do? For instance, whom are we to love and do good to?

- o **Entrance into the Kingdom:** (Matthew 7:13-29) Jesus taught that it was difficult to enter the Kingdom and few actually do. He used the parables of a tree and its fruit and a wolf in sheep's clothing, to show that not everyone who claims to be in the Kingdom is a true citizen. Those who bear good fruit (not merely good works) accept Jesus as their Lord and spread the message of the Kingdom to others.
What do you think is the difference between merely doing good things and producing good fruit?

- **The Kingdom Parables:** Matthew 13 gives us a series of parables which specifically challenge false beliefs about the Kingdom of God. These truths were understood by those with faith, and concealed to those without it. Each parable addressed concerns that the audience had about the Kingdom of God. Read Matthew 13 and answer the following questions:

- o What do you observe about the Kingdom of God from these stories?

- o What false beliefs about the Kingdom of God was Jesus correcting?



- o **The parable of the Sower:** This parable explains why more people don't follow Jesus after they hear the Gospel message. Jesus explains there isn't a problem with the sower (Himself), or the seed (the Gospel), but rather the soil (the receiver of the message).
 - o **The Parable of the Weeds:** This parable addresses the question about God's judgement against false teachers. Jesus taught that there will be false believers mixed with true ones until the judgement. Jesus will purify His kingdom at the right time.
 - o **The Parable of the Mustard Seed:** This parable addresses the question of what difference the Gospel makes. It explains that the Kingdom begins very small, but will grow to change your entire life, and will one day change the whole world.
 - o **The Parable of the Treasure:** This parable addresses the question of the foolishness of the message of the Gospel. This parable teaches that it is not foolish to leave all you have to gain something of greater worth!
- ❖ **LIFE IN THE KINGDOM:** From the teachings and parables of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, we are admonished to be people who live under the rule of Jesus Christ now. This was the central message of the Gospel. Jesus Himself told His disciples that he came to "preach the good news of the Kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43).
- How do we live as citizens of a Kingdom that has begun but has not been completely fulfilled? The answer is to acknowledge the reign of Jesus every day, and await His return with joyful expectation! The doctrine of the Kingdom of God is essential because it was the central message of Jesus.
 - o **Jesus is the King of the Kingdom** (John 18:36).
 - o **The Gospel is the message of the Kingdom** (Mark 1:15).
 - o **Disciples are the citizens of the Kingdom** (Philippians 3:20).
 - o **Discipleship is the work of the Kingdom** (Matthew 28:18-20).
 - o **Church is the embassy of the Kingdom** (2 Corinthians 5:20).
 - o **Our mission is the spread of the Kingdom** (Acts 28:31).
 - o **Love is the mark of citizens of the Kingdom** (John 13:34).
 - o **Our hope is the coming of the Kingdom** (Matthew 6:33).
 - These examples indicate that an understanding of the Kingdom of God is essential to identify who we are as Christians. When we define ourselves by worldly standards, we fail to live as citizens of the kingdom. Whether we are rich or poor, educated, successful or powerful, or none of those things, we have a place of belonging and identity in God's Kingdom. This Kingdom defines our life purpose and work.
 - How do our actions and ministries advance the Kingdom of God? How are we identified as citizens of the Kingdom through our everyday life and work?



- ❖ **Errors in Doctrine of the Kingdom of God:** Despite how central the teachings of the Kingdom of God are in the Bible, they are not always prominently featured in the message of the Gospel.
 - **Error #1 — We can disregard earthly government:** Our true citizenship as Christians is the Kingdom of God, but that does not mean that we can disregard or rebel against authorities on earth. So far as their decrees and laws do not contradict the law of God, we are to obey our earthly rulers (Romans 13:1, 1 Peter 2:13-14,17). We can participate in political life, vote, work to improve our community as a matter of conscience, and we must pay our taxes (Matthew 22:17-21, Romans 13:5-7). We are also commanded to pray for our authorities (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Where earthly authorities conflict with the teachings of Jesus, our lives and reputations may be at risk. At that point we must choose Jesus as our higher authority (Acts 5:27-29).
 - **Error #2 — We can bring about changed hearts through the law:** The opposite of the first error is the belief that we can use government and law to turn people to God. A nation ruled by Christian laws may have peace and outward obedience, but it will not change people's hearts or result in their salvation. There is no such thing as a Christian nation until Jesus returns to set up His Kingdom. True citizens of the Kingdom are those who have been changed from the inside by Jesus Christ. Jesus did not teach that His followers should take over political power and bring in the Kingdom through that means – it cannot be done!
 - **Error #3 — False gospels:** Any gospel that does not include the Kingdom of God is a false gospel. If the message you receive from someone puts you at the center of your life, puts you in control, or suggests you have the authority to tell God what to do, it is a false gospel. The Kingdom of God is not all about us and what we want. It is about Jesus, and when we enter it, we are called citizens of heaven. It may mean loss of property, prosperity, or even our lives. Beware of any gospel that does not include the cost of following Jesus.
 - **Error #4 — Becoming a Christian is only a simple prayer:** It is false to believe that praying a simple prayer once in our life is all it takes to become a citizen of heaven and be rewarded with eternal life. Potential converts to Christianity are sometimes encouraged to pray what is called 'the sinner's prayer'. There is nothing wrong with these first steps of faith, but true conversion is always accompanied by change in behaviour and a willingness to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ. Otherwise our words are meaningless and we use the name of Jesus in vain.
- ❖ **Conclusion:** As Christians, our citizenship is not of this world, but we are like displaced people awaiting our true home (1 Peter 2:10-12). God's Kingdom has been announced and is coming, but in the meantime we can practise living under the reign of our King. Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of God is here! That's because the Kingdom of God dwells in each one of us! Remember your true citizenship, and act as a representative of Jesus. When He returns, all believers will be united and worship Him, our King forever!



SUMMARY

- ❖ Christians can be defined in many ways. References about us in the Bible include God's children, followers of Jesus, citizens of the Kingdom of God.
- ❖ The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are used interchangeably in the Bible to refer to the new government under Jesus' rule.
- ❖ Jesus is our King and all believers are citizens of His Kingdom. The Kingdom is presently a spiritual kingdom, as Jesus has authority over all believers. Someday it will culminate in a physical Kingdom where Jesus will rule over the heavens and the earth.
- ❖ God has always led his people as their King, sometimes giving them an earthly king as well. He promised Jesus as the eternal King whose throne would have no end.
- ❖ Jesus taught many parables about the Kingdom of God and how it would grow in the hearts of believers to extend to the whole world.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In Jesus' sermon in Matthew 5, He gives many promises. One of them is that we will experience persecution in the world if we act according to the values of God's Kingdom. Why would acting according to the Beatitudes cause us to be hated by the world?

2. If someone asked you how a person becomes great in the Kingdom of God, what would you say? What values and behaviours are praised in God's Kingdom?