

BIBLE COURSE LESSON 20

TO RULE WITH JESUS!

When Jesus Christ returns as Supreme Ruler to establish the world-ruling Kingdom of God, will YOU be one of His assistants? How can one be TRAINED to rule with the returning Messiah?

The SAVIOUR of mankind came to earth more than 1,900 years ago with a message-the, good news of the coming Kingdom of God. We call that message the "Gospel"-an old English word that means "good news." The Kingdom of God will rule over all nations. and the Supreme Ruler on earth will be Jesus Himself. But Christ will not rule over thousands of millions of people all by Himself, while Spirit-born Christians take an eternal vacation and playing on harps with nothing to do! The Bible shows they will rule the earth with Him !

BORN TO RULE

When you, if you are a Spirit-begotten child of God, are destined, when born of God's Spirit into the ruling Family of God, you are to reign as a far greater and ETERNAL KING than any earthly king of this world today! You are the heir of a spiritual King ! (Rom. 8:16-17).

And as the royal heirs of God's kingdom, the Christian life is the preparation and training necessary for ruler-ship in the eternal Kingdom of God'.

SAINTS TO RULE IN GOD'S KINGDOM

A kingdom is a nation as well as a government. The Kingdom of God is the divine nation or Family of God, presently composed of God the Father and God the Son (Christ) in heaven, and of Spirit-begotten sons and daughters--not yet born---on earth. God's Family is a ruling Family. And it is the Spirit-begotten children of God who will, at the first resurrection, be born of God and become part of that divine ruling Kingdom! Notice- "And the kingdom and dominions and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Daniel. 7:27).

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection... they Shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6). And after that? "They shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:5).

Those whom Daniel called "saints" will be resurrected or changed to immortality at Christ's return and given positions of ruler-ship in God's Kingdom. But who will they rule over? And where will they

reign? Notice Revelation 2:26-27: "And he that overcomes ... to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron." The Kingdom of God, with Christ as King (Rev. 11:15; 19:16), will rule over all mortals on earth (Rev. 5:10). And the law by which Christ and the immortal saints will rule is the law that expresses the loving nature and character of God - the Ten Commandments!

REWARDED ACCORDING TO OUR WORKS

God has an exciting future beyond imagination in store for those who willingly follow His way of life, grow and overcome spiritually. Not only will they inherit eternal life as the free gift of God and become eternal members of the God Family, they will also be rewarded-not with the temporary rewards of men, but with rewards of eternal responsibility. Every Christian's reward will be exciting and fulfilling for all eternity!

In God's government will be many important offices of responsibility. God will give these responsibilities to those who have qualified for them during their training period. In complete fairness, all will be rewarded according to the "works" they did during their Christian lives (Matt. 16:27). And because every member, when born into God's Family, will be completely yielded to God's government, everyone will be completely satisfied with the responsibilities and power God will give them.

Let's understand how God will reward those who have been freely given the opportunity to become His children. Let's see how one can prepare for exciting power in God's ruling Family!

But before we begin, get your Bible, some paper, and a pen or pencil. Look up the Bible verses given in answer to the questions and read them. You may also want to write these scriptures down. Many of our students have discovered that writing them out helps to increase their understanding and memory. Now let's begin.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS DUAL

God has a message for mankind that is so important He commissioned His own Son to be the first to deliver it. As we learned in Lesson 18, that supremely important message is the Gospel the good news-of the coming Kingdom of God (Mark 1: 14-15). That same message is being proclaimed to the world today by God's Church!

Actually, the central message of the entire Bible is the coming Kingdom of God on earth. The ancient kingdom of Israel was a physical type or forerunner of the Kingdom of God. Many of the prophecies of the Bible show how God's Kingdom will be established. Jesus' life and teachings, and His sacrifice and resurrection reveal how we may become members of God's Kingdom. Christ, the King of that coming Kingdom, and His apostles preached about many aspects of the Kingdom of God.

Let's briefly review, first, what the Kingdom of God is. Lesson 18 showed that God's Kingdom will be a

literal government ruling over the nations of earth. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image, as recorded in Daniel 2, makes that very clear. But the Kingdom of God is more than just the government of God. It is also the Family of God, into which humans may be born as spirit members. As a governing or ruling family, it will exercise jurisdiction over all nations on earth-and, ultimately, over the entire universe!

Let's understand more about these two aspects of God's Kingdom, beginning with the Family of God.

THE RULING FAMILY OF GOD

The coming government of God on earth will be administered by the ruling Family of God. When Jesus came preaching about the Kingdom of God, He was talking about the Family of God, and how humans, through Him, may be born into it.

1 . Did Jesus, in His conversation with Nicodemus, reveal the family nature of the Kingdom of God? John 3:3, 5.

Comment: Christ showed that the Kingdom of God is the Family of God into which we may be born as God Beings (no longer human beings, but divine beings)-literally BORN of God's Spirit into the very God Family! As previous lessons have shown, God is not a simple Personage. The Hebrew word for God is Elohim (Gen. 1:1), which is plural, meaning "Mighty Ones' " God is a family of Personages, or "kingdom" composed of more than one being. There is the mineral kingdom, the plant kingdom and the animal kingdom. Then there is an angel kingdom created by God and composed of spirit. And then, high above all, is the God Kingdom. In other words, the Kingdom of God!

2. What is the pattern of government God has set for the human family? Eph. 5:23-24; 6:1-2.

Comment: God created the human family to be a physical type of His own Family. Therefore God's Family has a ruling structure, with various responsibilities to be fulfilled by Spirit-born children of God, all organized into a world-ruling government!

GOD'S PERFECT GOVERNMENT

In the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam the opportunity to replace Satan as world ruler. Adam failed by making the wrong choice. Four thousand years later, Jesus Christ came as the second Adam and, by obeying God perfectly, qualified to rule the earth. But Christ did not immediately begin ruling. He returned to heaven and established His Church on earth through God's Spirit, thus making it possible for many to qualify to rule with Him. It would be nearly 2,000 years later that Christ would return from heaven to restore the government of God over the entire earth (Acts 3:19-21).

Let's review some basic scriptures covering the governmental aspect of the coming world-ruling Kingdom of God.

1 . When the Kingdom of God is established on earth, will it take over the governments of this world?

Rev. 11:15. Who will become King over all the earth? Same verse; Zech. 14:9; Rev. 19:16. How long will He reign? Rev. 11:15. Did Christ clearly state that He was born to be a king? John 18:37.

Comment: These scriptures reveal that God is Supreme Ruler, and that the government of God will take over the governments of this world at Christ's return. The Bible tells us in the plainest of language that Jesus Christ was born to be King of the earth. He will rule all nations and His government will last forever!

2. What did Christ say to Pilate to show clearly that His Kingdom had not yet been established on earth? John 18:36.

Comment: Christ's Kingdom is not part of this world's civilization. It will not begin to rule on earth until His Second Coming.

3. When Jesus Christ is ruling from Jerusalem, what will the world be like under His government? Micah 4:1-4; Isaiah. 11:6-9.

Comment: When the Kingdom of God takes over the governments of this earth and the 1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ begins (commonly called the Millennium), His rule will bring peace, happiness and joy to all mankind. Notice that in the Millennium there will be babies and young children on earth. They will be mortal, flesh and blood human beings-not spirit beings. And since Spirit-begotten Christians will have already been made immortal Sons of God at the resurrection, there will be both mortals and immortals living at the same time throughout the Millennium.

4. Where will Satan be during the 1,000 years? Rev. 20:1 3.

Comment: Satan will be put away where he can do no harm. He will be gone and Christ will be here! Instead of the evil spirit or attitude of Satan pervading the atmosphere, influencing everyone and causing evil as it does today (Eph. 2:2), the Holy Spirit of God will infuse the atmosphere! The Holy Spirit, represented by "living waters" (Zech. 14:8; John 7:38-39), will flow out from Christ and begin to heal the spiritual problems of mankind. The government of the world tomorrow will be based on God's law of love. With the help and inspiration of God's Holy Spirit given to them, people will begin to truly love one another-to have godly concern for fellowman. God's government will not be a democracy. It will not be socialism, communism or fascism. It will not be human monarchy, oligarchy or plutocracy. It will not be man's government over man. Man has proven his utter incapability of ruling himself!

It will be divine government-the government of God. It will not be government from the bottom up. The people will not vote their leaders into office. No time or money will be wasted on campaigning and elections. It will not be government of or by the people-but it will be government for the people. It will be government from the top (God Almighty) down. In the world tomorrow, all officials will be members of God's Family-divine spirit beings, appointed by Christ Himself even down to the level of mayors over cities. The Bible tells us that under the leadership of Jesus Christ, God's government will produce a utopian paradise on earth. As we learned in Lesson 4, God will begin to work first with the descendants of the children of Jacob. Using them as a model and example, God will rebuild and bless all

nations!

COMPLETELY NEW CIVILIZATION TO BE BUILT

The Kingdom of God includes much more than bringing this world's governments under God's rule. A completely new civilization will have to be built! Let's understand.

1. Is God's Church compared to a building? I Corinthians. 3:9; 1 Pet. 2:5. What foundation is it built upon? Eph. 2:19-22. Just how important is a solid foundation to any building? Matt. 7:24-27.

Comment: The Church of God is built on God's rock-solid spiritual foundation-the teachings of Jesus Christ, His apostles and prophets. Their teachings are based on God's law of love-God's way of co-operation, unselfish giving and serving. But this present world has been built on a different foundation.

The civilization of this world was founded nearly 6,000 years ago in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve, influenced by Satan, rejected God's government and chose se/f-government instead. They ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which represented Satan's way of life. Consequently, this world's civilization has been built on the foundation of sin!

And so it was that at the very "foundation" of this present world (Rev. 13.-8), when Adam and Eve sinned, God decreed that Christ, the "Lamb of God" (John 1:36), should come and be sacrificed to pay the penalty of their sins and the sins of their descendants. This present evil world is built on a foundation of "sand" (Matt. 7:26)-on Satan's way of vanity, covetousness, envy and jealousy, competition and strife, violence, rebellion, contention, unhappiness, suffering and death. This world is therefore doomed to crash. And as Jesus said, great shall be the fall thereof! (Verse 27). The foundation of this world's civilization is faulty because it is of Satan the devil. This is Satan's civilization, started through Adam when he sinned. Therefore this world's superstructure-its systems of government, law, politics, education, economics, religion and social customs-is faulty, having produced the discontent, unhappiness and strife that has led to the violence and destruction, the anguish, suffering, poverty and death in the world today. The superstructure of the building that is this world is fast crumbling and will soon be completely destroyed by God at the return of Jesus Christ! God says, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Ps. 127:1). Satan, not God, built this house. God is not trying to repair this decaying and rotting civilization. Instead He sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, as the second Adam, to start anew-to begin building a totally different new structure of civilization. The new civilization will be built on God's foundation-His way of life. As we learned in the previous lesson, God's Church is the beginning, in "embryonic" form, of that government on earth when He began His Church in the first century A.D.

The Church started with about 120 on the day of Pentecost A.D. 31, when its first members were begotten by the Holy Spirit. God's Church has continued to exist through the centuries to this day. Many more have been and are now being trained to help rule in the world tomorrow. (More about God's training program will be covered later in this lesson.)

2. Will many nations go up to Jerusalem-the worldwide government-of Jesus and ask to be taught His ways? Micah 4:2. Will the earth become full of the knowledge of God? Isaiah. 11:9.

Comment: Soon mankind will begin to be taught how to live God's way of life, with God's religion, God's education, God's social customs, God's economic, industrial and merchandising systems. The millions who have lived in this satanically influenced world and are still alive at Christ's return will be taught the knowledge of God. His truth will be taught throughout the Millennium. Eventually, the whole earth will be following God's way. But who will teach the people in the world tomorrow? Certainly not the educators and theologians of this world!

CALLED TO BECOME RULERS AND TEACHERS

Jesus is coming again, this time to restore the rule of God on earth and to teach the way of salvation to mankind. But Christ will not rule and teach all by Himself.

1. Exactly what will Spirit-born Sons of God do for 1,000 years? Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4, last part; Dan. 7:27. Will many be mayors over cities? Luke 19:16-19.

Comment: The Bible plainly shows that those who will be born into God's Family at the first resurrection (which includes all Spirit-begotten saints of God through the centuries) will rule this earth's mortals under Jesus Christ! But some doubt whether they could ever rule, while others have no desire to rule whatsoever. Perhaps you have thought: I don't want to rule in the world tomorrow. I just want to serve God. The problem is that few people have ever really understood what it means to serve.

2. Did Jesus explain the difference between the kings in God's Kingdom, and the kings or rulers of this present world? Mark 10:42-45.

Comment: Rulers in God's Family will not be like most of this civilization's rulers. They will not be harsh dictators. Those occupying positions of ruler-ship in the world tomorrow will be servants, having opportunity to do great good in truly SERVING mankind by governing God's way. God's world will be built on a completely new foundation-His way of life, which is the way of His law of love. The divine kings of the Family of God will be servants of God and humanity. Each divine ruler will serve his subjects by ruling in genuine love and concern (I John 4:16), never acting selfishly. They will rule for the benefit of others, not themselves! Yes, they will have the power to stabilize the world and enforce peace when necessary, which will be especially needed at the beginning of the Millennium. They will also have the compassion required to help the survivors of the Great Tribulation-to heal them, teach them the causes of the evils of the world they lived in, and teach them God's way to peace, happiness and salvation.

3. In addition to being rulers, will the Sons of God also be priests? Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6. What is the function of a priest? Mal. 2:7.

Comment: Just as ancient Israel's priests taught God's way, Spirit-born members of the God's Family will also be teachers of God's way of life, helping to eventually bring the knowledge of the way to salvation to everyone in the world tomorrow. In addition to being the Supreme King over all nations,

Christ will also be the Supreme Educator. To bring mankind to repentance, Christ will re-educate the world to God's way of life-the way of God's law of love-so the people may, of their own free will, decide to follow His way. Re-educating mankind to God's way of life will receive top priority. Under the direct supervision of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God will restore the laws and rule of God to the entire earth. As the world becomes re-educated, people will begin to experience the blessings that result from obeying God's law of love. There will be peace, co-operation, vibrant health, abundance and joy. And the whole world will come to understand God's purpose and Master Plan for mankind. But God will not begin saving the entire world until He first has teachers trained to help Him teach the way of salvation.

As we learned in the previous lesson, God will not save millions until He first has thousands of teachers. This is why God is training the thousands He has called into His Church today. While on the earth, Christ was a teacher, as well as a messenger and announcer of the good news of the coming Kingdom of God. He personally instructed His apostles in the way of God. He then commissioned them to teach others what they were taught (Matt. 28:19-20). Those whom God has called to be members of His Church and who have been taught by His ministers down through the ages will have been trained to become rulers and teachers during the Millennium! True Christians today should have a burning desire to bring God's way of life to the entire world-to teach God's wonderful way to peace, joy and abundance. And they'll be able to do just that when Christ returns to set up the Kingdom of God and they are born of God! But to qualify-to be properly trained-to serve and teach in the world tomorrow, true Christians must learn to serve and teach now. The only reason any person is called to salvation now is to QUALIFY to help in ruling and teaching in the world tomorrow-to help call and save those alive then. God hasn't selected certain ones today for special favours; He has called them for a special purpose-a tremendous JOB to do! Spirit-begotten Christians are now in training for significant roles in helping to teach the world God's way and to administer the government of God for the good of all mankind. The rest of this lesson will clearly show that the Christian life is one of preparing for great service in tomorrow's world!

GOD'S TRAINING PROGRAM

True Christians are now in training for responsible positions in God's soon-coming, world-ruling government. This training comes through living the Christian life, which is following the way of God's government! It is the training God's Spirit-begotten children must receive to administer His government in the Kingdom of God.

God Himself laid out the plan of salvation and the method by which humans may be trained and prepared to become, through the free gift of God, Spirit-born members of His ruling Kingdom. God's divine Family will be highly trained and superbly organized, having learned God's pattern of mutual teamwork and cooperation to function perfectly together. The initial steps to salvation are actually the beginning of one's preparation for God's Kingdom. Let's understand.

1 .To eventually be born into God's ruling Family, we must first be begotten by His Spirit. What conditions must we fulfil before God will beget us as His free gift? Mark 1:14-15; Acts 3:19.

Comment: Repentance and belief are the first steps. Belief involves believing what Jesus taught about the coming Kingdom of God, as well as believing on Him as personal Saviour. To repent means to turn around and go the opposite direction-to forsake our own way, which is contrary to God's law and turn to God's way, which is the way of His law. It means rejecting our previous sinful way of life and willingly yielding ourselves to God's government. Before we can be allowed to govern others in the world tomorrow, God must know that we will submit to His rule now! Since there will always be a chain of authority from God the Father through Jesus Christ and on down, we will always be under authority. So learning to rule begins with submission to God's rule.

2. What is the next step toward one day becoming a member of God's ruling Family? Acts 2:38.

Comment: Baptism is the outward symbol of our faith in Christ as our Saviour, and of our turning from our past life of sin to a life of obedience to God. It symbolizes our rejection of Satan's way-the way of this human civilization he has inspired-and turning our allegiance and loyalty to God and His soon-coming Kingdom. Baptism and the laying on of hands of a minister of God for the receipt of the Holy Spirit also shows our recognition of, and submission to, the authority God has placed in the called and chosen ministers of His Church. And through the consequent begetting of God's Spirit, we become part of His government-in-training-His Kingdom in embryo, which is His Church (I Corinthians. 12:13).

3. What is the next step in God's training program for ruler-ship in His Kingdom? 2 Pet. 3:18; 1:5-11.

Comment: Upon our receipt of God's free gift of the Holy Spirit, we have been begotten of God. But we are only spiritual embryos, not yet born again as God Beings-not yet developed for the purpose God has called us, not yet trained to be divine rulers and teachers in His Kingdom. To become properly trained, spiritual growth-character development as a result of obedience to God-must occur within us!

God has supreme spiritual character. He is holy, righteous and perfect. We, to be actually born of Him-born into His ruling Family as His divine children-must be changed not only from human flesh and blood to divine spirit, but from our sinful human nature into God's divine nature (1 Pet. 1:4), which reflects His holy, perfect character (1 Pet. 1:16; Matt. 5:48). God's spiritual character must be in the process of development in us throughout our Christian lives! What, precisely, is the character God wants His begotten children to be developing? It is a combination of knowledge, attitude and action: the knowledge of what God defines as right as opposed to wrong-knowledge learned by studying God's Word-and the desire and actual DOING of the right, despite temptation to do wrong. Godly character is the possession and practice of love, patience, mercy, faith, kindness, gentleness, meekness, temperance, self-restraint and right self-direction. This kind of character involves knowledge, wisdom, purpose and ability, all properly controlled and developed through independent choice. Holy, righteous character is something that is developed only through experience. Experience requires time and circumstances. Therefore God allows the time and circumstances that enable us to develop this character. But this is not our character. It is actually the character of God-holy, righteous character motivated by Him, inspired by Him, and built by Him in us through our willing obedience to His law.

4. In what one word can God's character be summed up? I John 4:16. And exactly what is God's part

in building His character in Spirit-begotten Christians? Rom. 5:5; 13:10.

Comment: The Holy Spirit, which the Father freely gives to those who repent, believe and are baptized, enables God's children to understand the Word of God-the foundation for character development. God's Spirit also supplies the spiritual love and faith needed to obey God's law of love, which is the basis of His government. But God's Spirit does not force one to obey God. God's character cannot be forced upon people. It can be developed only through willing, voluntary choice-by those God calls to be Christians (John 6:44) actively choosing to be led by God's Spirit throughout their mortal lives (Rom. 8:14). That is the spiritual training that prepares us for ruler-ship in the Kingdom of God!

And when we are born of God at the resurrection, we shall be perfect as God is, for God will have developed in us, with our yielding, perfect character. It will then, by nature, be established in us forever. (I John 3:9). We will then be ready to assist Christ as holy and righteous co-rulers in the world tomorrow.

5. Jesus Christ overcame the temptations of Satan the devil (Matt. 4:1 -11). He was severely tempted, yet through the power of God's Spirit, He resisted and overcame Satan, and remained faithful to God and His way until death. Must Christians, to be able to assist Christ, also overcome? Rev. 3:21.

Comment: Jesus had to qualify to replace this world's present ruler. Functioning as a human being, He had to resist and overcome the intense temptations of the devil. And all who are called by the Father to rule with Christ when He restores God's government on earth must also qualify to rule-must turn from Satan's way, resist and overcome his temptations. They must strive to root out Satan's attitude and way, and learn to obey God's law of love, which is the way of His government. Christ resisted all evil influences perfectly because He had the will and full measure of God's Spirit (John 3:34). Though we do not have the fullness of God's Spirit now, we can, with the help of the measure of the Spirit God grants us, begin to resist and overcome Satan, this world and our own carnal nature. Through the process of overcoming the sinful pulls and impulses of the flesh, the world and the devil, and submitting to God and His way, spiritual character is being developed. We are yielding to God to build within us His very character. Thus we are preparing and qualifying to rule and teach the nations with Jesus Christ! But no one can overcome for us. No one can produce spiritual works for us. It requires putting forth effort on our part, together with the power of God's Holy Spirit, to become the spiritually minded and motivated persons God can use in His Kingdom.

HOW RESPONSIBILITIES WILL BE DETERMINED

As our Saviour and elder brother-"the firstborn among many brethren"-Jesus Christ has already qualified for the highest office under God the Father in the world tomorrow. No one else can ever receive the position of authority the Father has promised to Him in the government of God. Certain other individuals have also been promised particular positions of responsibility in God's Kingdom. King David will rule over the 12 tribes of the reunited nation of Israel (Ezek. 37:21-22, 24). Each of the 12 apostles will rule over one of the tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:27-28). And God has alluded to other positions of ruler-ship for other over-comers who have lived before us and are to be in His Kingdom (Heb. 11:4-40). They have already been trained and will be given responsibilities in God's ruling Family, though God has

not revealed what their positions will be. In the Kingdom or Family of God there will be various positions of responsibility, for an entirely new civilization must be built on earth-built this time to God's specifications. It will take many different, vital jobs to recreate world society as it ought to be. You, if you are a Spirit-begotten child of God, are now being judged for your future job in God's Kingdom (I Pet. 4:17). You shall be rewarded with an office in God's government according to your works in this life! Let's thoroughly understand this important principle.

1. How does God judge true Christians? I Pet. 1: 1-7; Rom. 2: 5-10.

Comment: Everyone has "works"-either good or bad. Those who do good works will receive good rewards. Those who do evil works-who commit SIN (I John 3:4)-will be punished, unless their evil works are repented of and covered by the blood of Christ. Note that our works determine our rewards, not whether we receive eternal life-immortality is a free gift from God for which we cannot work. But unrepentant sinners will receive the "wages"-payment or reward-for sin which they have earned - DEATH for all eternity! (Rom. 6:23). This also applies to any spirit being that has sinned.

Let's be sure we understand the meaning of the word "works" as used in the Bible.

The word "works" is translated from the Greek *ergon*, which means deeds, actions, business. The Bible uses this word primarily in two ways, and there is a vast difference between the two.

When joined with "law," as "the works of the law" (primarily in Romans and Galatians), it refers to the hard work required in performing the rituals of the law of Moses. These rituals involved repetitive physical labour. These laborious physical rituals, or "works of the law," were a substitute for the work of the Holy Spirit, and were in force only until Christ's death.

But where the word "works" appears alone, it usually refers to acts of righteousness or of evil - that is, the good works of keeping God's spiritual law (Ps. 119:172) or the evil works of disobedience (Col. 1:21). In this lesson we are concerned with spiritual "works" (righteous conduct), not rituals of the law of Moses.

2. What will Christ bring with Him when He returns? Rev. 22:12. Who will be rewarded then? Rev. 11:18. Will the reward be according to each person's works? Rev. 22:12; Matt. 16:27; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21.

Comment: When the glorified Christ returns to earth to rule all nations as King of kings,

He will assign positions of authority in His government (the "reward") to those who are freely saved by His grace- those who will have, through grace, been given God's gift of eternal life by a resurrection or change to immortality at Christ's Second Coming. However, most professing Christians confuse the "reward of the saved" with eternal life. Eternal life is a gift, not a reward. The Bible clearly defines both.

3. Can we "earn" eternal life? Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9. Yet what must we do if we expect to receive God's gift of eternal life? Matt. 19:16-19.

Comment: A "gift" is something granted as a favour, something given freely. God's gift of eternal life

comes by His grace and favour. It is unmerited. There is absolutely nothing we can do to "earn" it. If it were earned it would not be a gift. However, God has set certain terms or conditions that we must meet before He will give us immortality. Compliance with these conditions does not "earn" eternal life, but non-compliance will result in death! (I Corinthians. 6:9-10; Rom 6:23; Rev. 21:8). God will not give eternal life to anyone who insists on living Satan's way.

What are God's conditions? As we saw earlier, they include: repentance, belief, baptism and obedience to God-in other words, cooperation with His plan of salvation.

Those who are given immortality at Christ's return will receive a reward in addition to the free gift of eternal life. The "reward of the saved" is not eternal life, but ruler-ship with Jesus Christ over the nations of this earth! But not all positions of ruler-ship will be equal. How will God decide which of His Spirit-born children will be given which positions in His ruling Family? Let's notice several parables of Christ that explain this.

4. Should Christians constantly be using God's Holy Spirit to produce much spiritual "fruit"? John 15:1-5, 8, 16.

Comment: Using an example of a grapevine and its branches, Jesus said He is the vine and Christians are the branches. The branches do not join themselves to the vine-receive God's Holy Spirit-by their own efforts or 'works'. It is the Father's doing (John 6:44; 17:9, 11; Acts 2:38-39) His GIFT it comes by GRACE. But once joined on, with the sap flowing from the vine into the branches (a picture of Christ's Spirit flowing into and empowering us), we must produce spiritual fruit throughout our lives. If we don't then the Father will remove us from the vine (verse 2, first part)-cut us off from Christ-and ultimately cast us into the lake of fire! (Verse 6).

5. Does Jesus' parable of the sower show that some bring forth more "fruit" than others? Matt. 13:23.

Comment: The Spirit of God is given to us so we can produce good fruit. The fruit is simply the result of following God's way of life-of keeping God's law. We must be doers of the law, not hearers only (Rom. 2:13). This doing produces fruit-develops the spiritual character of God.

Now notice the parable of the pounds in Luke 19. It shows that the degree of reward each Christian will receive will be according to how much he grew and overcame spiritually in this life how much good fruit he produced by his effort and the power of God's Spirit in him.

In this parable Christ pictures Himself as a nobleman going to a far country (heaven) to receive a kingdom and to return to earth (verses 11-12). But before leaving, He gave an equal amount of money to each of His ten servants (verse 13).

6. Having obtained the Kingdom and returned, how will Christ judge His servants? Luke 19:15.

Comment: These servants represent Christians (I Corinthians. 7:22) to whom God has given His Holy Spirit. Each "pound" (a unit of money symbolizing spiritual value) corresponds to the beginning unit of God's Spirit we receive after baptism. God has given each Christian His Spirit to be USED to serve

others, overcome, develop spiritual character, and help accomplish the work of God's Church.

At His return, Christ will call His servants to see how much each "had gained by trading." Christ will want to see how much each Christian grew spiritually!

7. Will each servant's reward be proportional to his growth-his spiritual overcoming and godly character development? Verses 16-19.

Comment: The Christian life is a "spiritual school"-our training to be rulers, priests and teachers in God's Kingdom. But some learn more and accomplish more spiritual works with the Spirit they have been given than others. Some overcome and develop more spiritual character than others, producing more spiritual fruit. Thus, in the Kingdom or Family of God, each will receive greater or lesser positions of responsibility based upon the degree of his or her spiritual overcoming and how much of God's character was developed in this life. Each will be rewarded "according to his works" (Matt. 16:27). As explained earlier, our good works cannot gain us entrance into God's Kingdom of immortals. We are born into the Kingdom of God by His grace. But once we are born into the God Family, our spiritual "works" during our Christian life DO determine what office, position, rank or degree of glory each of us shall have! So it is not a matter of grace or works, but grace and works! Now turn to the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, verses 14 through 30. This parable illustrates the fact that we will be rewarded according to our works. But it also illustrates another aspect-God's complete fairness in rewarding us, taking into consideration our own natural limitations.

8. In this parable Christ compared Himself to a man travelling to a far country (verse 14). In what way did the man divide up his goods? Verse 15.

Comment: The Greek word translated "talent" is talanton, which was a measure by which gold or silver was weighed.

9. This time are all the quantities equal, or were amounts given according to each servant's natural physical aptitude or ability? Same verse.

Comment: These units of money, like the pounds in Luke 19, symbolize the Holy Spirit given to each Christian (servant). But they also picture spiritual gifts given to each based on his own natural ability! God knows some have more hereditary ability, greater innate aptitudes, more personality or more physical strength than others. Some also have more education and better opportunities in life.

10. In this parable, what did the servants do with the money given to them before Christ came back to "reckon" with them-to judge their works? Verses 16-19. How were the first two judged? Verses 20-23.

Comment: In the parable of the pounds, all 10 of Christ's servants (Christians) appear to have had equal ability, and each was given an equal portion of Spirit from God at the start. But in the parable of the talents, God gave spiritual gifts to each, at the start of his Christian life, according to his natural ability. To one He gave five talents, to another two, and to another only one-according to the natural ability of each. The person who was given five talents doubled his spiritual stock-in-trade. Likewise, although the man with two produced less in number than the one with five, he also doubled what he

started with. He did as well in proportion to his ability! Consequently we find it revealed that to whom much is given, much is required; and to whom little is given, less is required (Luke 12:48). In other words, God judges each Christian according to how well he overcomes, yields to God, develops and grows spiritually, according to what he has to do with!

11. Does this parable reveal that each servant who is faithful "over a few things"-that is, over his or her limited abilities and opportunities of this life-will be rewarded with "many things" when Christ returns? Matt. 25:21, 23. Isn't it clearly ruler-ship that Christ promised? Same verses.

Comment: We learn to responsibly rule for the good of ourselves and others in the world tomorrow by learning to better manage the affairs, responsibilities and powers in our control today, no matter how small they may presently be. There are many opportunities to grow and develop right on the job, at school or in the home-in whatever circumstance we may find ourselves.

12. What will happen to those who fail to overcome and grow even a little-who fail to increase their spiritual usefulness and effectiveness? Luke 19-20-24; Matt. 25:24-30.

Comment: The one who did nothing with his spiritual gift-the pound or talent corresponds to a Christian who did not overcome and grow spiritually. He developed no character.

These parables show that the Christian who does not grow spiritually will lose out! He could be compared to one who thought he did not need to overcome spiritually and grow in spiritual character. He thought he was "already saved." He didn't believe any "works" were necessary! By doing nothing, he lost not only the reward, but he lost out on the free gift of eternal life as well because he produced no spiritual fruit. He failed utterly in God's REAL PURPOSE for his life. God freely gives us salvation so we may serve others. If we do not prepare now to serve in God's coming Kingdom, we may have taken away from us even the salvation we thought we had!

ARE YOU IN TRAINING TO RULE?

Why will Abraham, David and the apostles be assigned positions of responsibility in the Kingdom of God? Simply because they prepared and qualified for those positions during their mortal lives. They learned to rule by submitting to God's rule. They were willing to do whatever God said. They grew in the holy, righteous character of God. Christ will not establish world rule until He has first trained His assistants. God will not entrust the incomprehensibly great powers of His ruling Family to those who did not, in this human life, strive to obey Him and learn to properly control the small powers we all have at our disposal. God wants to know that we would use His incredible power in love and self-control and according to His will for the good of all under our authority!

1. By what great principle can a person of ordinary ability and humble opportunity qualify for far greater responsibility in the Kingdom of God? Luke 16:10. Also notice verses 11-12.

Comment: We learn to rule by being faithful -conscientious and honest-in whatever we do as we strive to put into practice the principles of God's law we learn from His Word. Even the person who

considers himself or herself as having only a little ability and natural talent can be trained to rule-SERVE-in God's Kingdom! But can that really qualify you to rule a city-to tackle the complex administrative, organizational and personal problems that come up when several thousand families live together?

Yes, it can! God does not need to see you actually ruling 10 cities to determine whether you know how to apply and observe His law. He can see, by the simple decisions you make every day in your life, whether YOU will obey Him or go the way of this present evil world. The decisions required to live God's way are really very simple-they are basically a matter of saying "yes" or "no" to God's law.

The way you treat your wife, respect your husband, love your children and your friends shows Christ what kind of a ruler you would be. Are you short-tempered, hard to get along with, rebellious, uncooperative, unfair? Christ needs to know that now, before He entrusts you with a major responsibility over many people. The Kingdom of God is going to bring peace to the world, not more strife. Those who will rule must show God now that they are learning the way of peace. God wants us to learn to rule ourselves before He gives us authority over others! What about finances? Would you handle the finances of a city like so many rulers today, and enrich yourself at the expense of others? God can tell by the way you handle your employer's money and the time your employer pays you for. As Jesus said, "If ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" (Luke 16:12). If you learn to be faithful and loyal in the small things of life, God knows that you will be that way if given much greater responsibility! Every Christian who is growing and developing spiritually also has his heart completely in the work God has given His Church to accomplish. Our "works" include our part in doing God's work getting the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the whole world as a witness (Matt. 24:14; 28:19-20), thus preparing the way for Christ's coming. God's Spirit-begotten children are His instruments in fulfilling His great commission to His Church in the end time! Years of experience have shown that those who are self-centred, caring nothing for the work of God's Church, not having enough outgoing concern to want to help get Christ's message out to this blinded, deceived, dying world, eventually fall away. Those who centre their whole "Christian" life on themselves, whose hearts are not in or concerned about this great outgoing worldwide work of God, shrivel up spiritually and fall by the wayside!

Just as the Church has two primary commissions-1) to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to the world; and 2) to help the Spirit-begotten members grow spiritually as part of their training for that Kingdom-so the members also have two primary missions: 1) to actively support the Church in preaching the Gospel; and 2) to willingly and actively participate in God's training program for eternal ruler-ship as Spirit-born members of the universe-ruling Kingdom of God! Ask God daily for the understanding and wisdom to rightly use and direct the powers, abilities and responsibilities that are now yours so you can be a faithful and productive servant of God. Strive to be faithful over what God has already given you, so that one day Christ can say to you: "Well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over MUCH" (Matt. 25:21, RSV). This life is our time of training. It is only those who are obedient to the authority of God's government now-who learn its laws, who overcome every false way, who grow in God's holy, righteous character, becoming more like Him in preparation to being born into His Family and ruling with Christ-who will then be assigned a position of ruler-ship. Yes, you were born

with the potential to be an eternal king to RULE in the Kingdom of God! Your awesome destiny, once born of God, is that of helping to rule the earth, and the universe beyond, as a member of the Family of God!

It's a breathtaking, exciting, incredible calling!

A glorious, wonderful future! Have you begun to walk spiritually towards that goal? Are you in training to rule? May our Lord God help you in that goal!