

The Kingdom of God Is Righteousness and Peace and Joy in the Holy Spirit

by John Piper

The kingdom of God is about the reign of God in our lives, producing righteousness, peace, and joy through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Duration: 42:57

Scripture: Romans 14:13-23, Hebrews 13:21

Topics: "Christian Living", "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the arguments presented in the Bible. The text being discussed is Romans 14, which addresses the relationship between the strong and weak believers. The speaker highlights various exhortations and commands found in the text, all aimed at promoting love and avoiding harm to one another. The sermon emphasizes that both the strong and weak believers are at risk of not loving each other, either through despising or judging.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.DesiringGod.org. The scripture text tonight comes from the book of Romans, chapter 14, verses 14 through 23. And if you would like to follow along in the Pew Bible, that passage can be found on page 949.

Again, it's Romans, chapter 14, verses 14 through 23. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.

By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then, let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God.

Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God.

Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Father, I ask that you would come and cause our church and everyone in the hearing of my voice not to think that the kingdom of God is merely a matter of eating or not eating, drinking or not drinking, having liberty to eat or being more confined. But rather, I pray that we would discover what it means in our minds and in our experience that the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit and that those who thus serve Christ have your pleasure and find sober approval among men. Lord, if you would just do this, just do this, what a difference it would make for the sake of our city as well as our church, our families, our children.

So I ask for your help in unfolding these few words and that you would do it. You would do the text in our church. I ask this for the glory of your name, the exaltation of your son, the reaching of the lost, the advance of missions, and every good thing that you might be pleased to do through this word.

In Jesus' name, amen. Romans 14 is mainly a word to the strong, how to love the weak. However, as you have been discovering, it is also the other way around.

Verse 3, you can see that. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats. So you've got both in danger of not loving each other.

The people who are more restricted, those are the weaker ones, Paul said. Their conscience is more sensitive on neutral matters. And then you've got the strong, and they're both in danger of not loving, either despising or judging.

So it's mainly about how the strong should not destroy the weak and hurt the weak, but it's also about how the weak should not judge or despise the strong. So there are numerous exhortations that we've been looking at, and I'll give you a few of them. Verse 13, decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Verse 15, at the end, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. Verse 20, do not for the sake of food destroy the work of God. Verse 21, it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

Verse 22, the faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. So you see those half-dozen exhortations, commands, those are simply spelling out how to love each other, how not to hurt each other. I left one out.

I left out verse 19, because it's the positive counterpart of verse 16 that we're going to look at, and I want to close with verse 19, but I'll read it anyway. Let us pursue what makes for peace and mutual up-building. In other words, when all is said and done, the opposite of destroying each other is build each other.

Build each other. Look for ways to build righteousness. Build peace.

Build love. Build joy. Build life.

Build perseverance. Think build, not destroy. See the opposite? The rest of the text is reasons.

Isn't it remarkable? It took me 23 years to learn that the Bible argues. My whole mindset for 23 years was a string of pearls. It's just a string of pearls.

Take one pearl, love it, do with it, or little balls of food that you can eat. Nobody ever showed me until I went to Fuller Seminary and was in Dan Fuller's hermeneutics class. The Bible argues, and evidently it wants us to trace the arguments, see the arguments, because evidently God wants our brains to be a means of our sanctification, and thus He argues with our mind.

He thinks we do wrong things because we think wrong ways. So here come the reasons. There's a lot of them in this text, and we've seen them all except one, and that's what we're finishing chapter 14 with in this service.

Let me summarize. Verse 9, you see one? Christ died to be Lord of the living and the dead. How much more the weak and the strong? Verse 3, second part of the verse.

Don't judge one another because God has welcomed your brother. Verse 10, don't judge because we'll all stand before the judgment seat of God. Verse 6, you wonder why I'm jumping around like that? Because in my mind I'm putting them in the order they happen in reality, in our heads, not the way they come here, but that's okay.

You don't need to think about that. I just thought, why is he jumping forward and backward? Verse 6, don't judge because it is possible to glorify God both ways, by abstaining and eating. Let's read that one.

The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God. So, don't get on each other's case here, because both are glorifying me through their exercise of conscience on these matters. There is one more argument, one more reason for why we shouldn't destroy each other, why we shouldn't use our liberty to hurt anybody else.

It's in the paragraph 16 to 19, or the unit of verses. Verses 16 to 19, that's what we're going to be working with mainly. So, here's verse 16.

See another exhortation before the argument. So, do not let what you regard as evil, I mean as good, don't let you regard as good, be evil spoken of. Spoken of as evil.

And then verse 19 puts it positively, as we've seen. So then, let's pursue what makes for peace and for mutual up building. And between those verses, 16 and 19, there is another argument or reason why we should treat each other that way.

Verse 17. For the kingdom, see the word for at the beginning there? Argument. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

And then verse 18 confirms that somebody who serves Christ like that is pleasing to God, and therefore, clearly, the kingdom of God is not the opposite. It's that. It's righteousness and peace and joy.

Verse 18. For whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So, that's where we're going.

We want to unpack 16 through 19, especially the argument. If you wonder why in this series on Romans 14, there has been less nitty gritty application to try to think of all the ways, all the ways that wine and food

and days might apply here, and more focus on the reasons, it's just because I think that's the way it works. There are so many possible applications.

I want you to get the reasons, because if the reasons go down to the deep part of your soul, the Holy Spirit will use them to apply this text helpfully. But if you don't get the reasons, if you don't get the kingdom issues, the righteousness issues, the peace issues, the love issues, the joy issues, all the application in the world is going to become list, list, list. And what we saw last time was clearly getting your list right is not the issue, because everything on your right list can be sin.

Remember that? Verse 23. Whatever is not from faith is sin, including all the right things you do. So, it's not about getting the application perfect.

It's about getting the heart right. And that happens with these arguments. But let's start at verse 16 with the exhortation.

So, do not let what you regard as good be evil, be spoken of as evil. So, he has just said in verse 15, I want to pick up this word so at the beginning of verse 16. And to do that, I need to go back a verse.

Verse 15. If your brother is grieved by what you eat, you're no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

And then, therefore, so, don't let what you regard as good be evil spoken of. In other words, if you take your good faith and your good liberty and your good clean food and you use your good faith, good liberty and good clean food to destroy a brother, your good should be evil spoken of. And don't let that happen.

Why? If you take all this good, I got faith to be free. I can eat what I want. And I'll take my good faith, my good liberty and Paul says all foods are clean.

And man, you're not getting in my way. Your good will be and should be spoken of as evil. Why? It is evil.

Liberty has become lovelessness. Faith has become licensed to hurt. Food has become unclean since whatever is not from faith is sin.

So he's saying in verse 16, don't let that happen. These are good. Faith is good.

Liberty is good. Food is good. Don't let what is good become evil and thus be blasphemed as evil.

Don't do that. And now comes the reason. Why? Why should you not do that? And verse 17 explains why it makes no sense to elevate eating in liberty, drinking in liberty, elevate them so high that they become more important than the brother.

And here's his reason. Verse 17, because don't you know that the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Spirit. So when you think about this, your mind, if you're using these good things indifferently to the good of your brother, you've got a theology problem.

You've got a kingdom problem. You don't get it. You don't get one of the most fundamental issues the Lord Jesus brought into the world, the kingdom of God.

You're not getting it. That's what he says. So what is it? Kingdom.

It's used only here in the book of Romans. It's the only place he uses the word in the entire letter. It's not a common word in the epistles of Paul.

It's an unbelievably common word in the teachings of Jesus. Nevertheless, he uses it often enough. We know what he's talking about.

And I'm going to give you four clarifications of the meaning of the word kingdom of God. So here we go. Number one, he means reign or rule, not realm.

We tend to think of a kingdom as a place, but not Paul or Jesus. It never has that meaning, almost never. It might once or twice in the dozens and dozens of times.

Rather, it means the reign of God, the rule of God. And here you see it linked with the Holy Spirit. The kingdom is righteousness, joy, and peace in, by the Holy Spirit.

So I conclude that the kingdom is the reign of God by the Spirit. Where the Spirit is holding sway, the kingdom is being expressed, the rule, the reign of God. That's number one.

Number two, it's not all of his reign that is the kingdom of God. It's the saving, redeeming reign which is called the kingdom of God. God reigns over all things by his providence.

But all things are not the kingdom of God. God reigns over the devil. The devil is not the kingdom of God.

So when you say it's the reign of God, you've got to get more specific. And you say it's the specific exercise of his rule and exercise of his reign in overcoming evil, establishing righteousness, bringing his salvation to bear upon people. And eventually it will fill the earth like the waters cover the sea.

And everything that is not his saving reign will be banished from the new heavens and the new earth. When Jesus said, pray like this, Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The preceding word and following word explain the coming of the kingdom.

Hallowed be your name. We want your name to be treasured, hallowed, admired, loved, trusted, sanctified. That's the coming of the kingdom.

Where that happens, the kingdom is moving. And we want your will to be done, not just sovereign will like he governs all the earthquakes, but rather the way the angels do it in heaven. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

How is it done in heaven? Perfectly, joyfully, energetically. Not like the devil does the will of God, which he does. He does his sovereign will, but the angels do his revealed will of command with joy.

And so wherever that's happening, wherever righteousness is happening in people's lives with joy, you've got kingdom power being displayed. So the second clarification is, it's the exercise of his reign or rule or power, savingly, purifyingly, sanctifyingly, Christ-exaltingly, God-centeredly, Bible-saturatedly. Number three, this kingdom is present and future.

It is present in some measure of fulfillment. Now, it will be fully present in consummation when the age comes, the new age of Christ comes. Paul says to unbelievers, for example, in 1 Corinthians 6-9, those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom.

That means someday the full consummate kingdom will come with the return of Christ and those who are now living in this way won't go in. So it's future. But, he says in Colossians 1-13, he has delivered us, has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us, has transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

So it's present. I'm already in my inheritance. And all of you who are believers are already in your inheritance.

The consummation of it isn't here yet. That's why we die and get sick and sin. But we are already in the inheritance.

The transfer has been decisively made. You've passed from darkness to light. There is no judgment.

There is no condemnation. The judgment is over. It happened where? Tell me where the judgment happened.

The cross. We sang about it. So you've already passed through the decisive judgment and you've inherited the kingdom and you're living in the reign of Jesus Christ savingly over your life.

That's clarification number three. Here's clarification number four about the kingdom. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ are the same kingdom.

Don't divvy these up. Ephesians 5-5 says, Everyone who is sexually immoral or impure or who is covetous has no inheritance in the kingdom, singular, the kingdom of Christ and of God. So when we talk about the kingdom of God or you read about the kingdom of Christ, don't think two kingdoms.

There's one reality, kingdom of God and of Christ. So those are the four clarifications. Reign, not realm.

Saving, reign, not all of his providential reign. Three, present as well as future. Future as well as present.

And it is Christ's kingdom as well as the Father's kingdom. And now Paul, back to verse 16, says, Don't use your good faith, good liberty, good food to hurt anybody because the kingdom of God, the reign of God, is not eating and drinking. It's righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The saving, redeeming, sanctifying rule of God, kingdom of God, has broken into this world in Jesus, the Messiah, the King. He's come, the King has come. And the evidence of that in your life isn't merely what you can eat, what you can drink.

It's how you govern what you eat and what you drink. It has to do with righteous, peaceable, joyful handling of what you can eat and what you can drink. Kingdom issues are not merely your list of eating and drinking.

It's about what's going on in here in the Holy Spirit. The supernatural reality the kingdom is, it's not just the arrival of a behavioral norm. It's the arrival of power by the Holy Spirit.

Something deeper and larger is going on here in the kingdom activity in the church than just what you eat and drink. So what does it mean? What does it mean that the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit? What does that mean? The rule of God is righteousness. The rule of God is peace.

The rule of God is joy in the Holy Spirit. And here it's difficult because those words righteousness and peace, those two especially, are used by Paul in two very different ways. And I'm torn as to which one to apply here.

One is righteousness refers to the declaration and imputation of Christ's perfection to me, a guilty sinner, through faith alone so that I now stand counted righteous before God. It's called justification. And peace flows from that between me and God.

There's peace. And, of course, then joy abounds. That's one way he uses them, vertical peace and imputation of righteousness.

But he also uses the word righteousness to describe what we really do after that has happened to us. After you have been declared righteous, the Holy Spirit comes and he starts making you righteous. You actually begin to conform to the beauty of Jesus Christ, and there's peace this way as well as this way.

Now, which is it here in verse 17? I'm inclined to think he has in mind the second kind, but I'm also inclined to think he wants us to hear the echo of the first kind and build the second kind on it. I'm just not saying that because theologically I believe that's true. I'm saying it because I cannot escape how remarkably similar this righteousness, peace, and joy is to Romans 5, 1 and 2, which remarkably, Rick, you read for us.

You had read for us. We didn't work on that. It just happened, so let's read it again.

Go to Romans 5, 1 and 2, because I want you to see the evidence for yourself so you can struggle with me about this. I don't think we're going to go wrong here either way. I mean, it's going to be theologically right.

I'm just not sure which Paul has on his front burner. But look at Romans 5, 1 and 2. Since we have been justified. Now, that's declared righteous by faith.

We have peace. We've got righteous, declaration of righteous. You really can see it in the Greek.

In that word, English word justified, you can't see righteousified. We don't have a word like that, but it's there. Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through him we have obtained access by faith into the grace in which we stand and we rejoice. So when I see that righteousness, peace, joy, I say, whoa, I've got to at least include that. However, I am inclined to think that he had mainly in mind the righteousness that we do and the peace that we show and experience between each other and the joy that flows from that.

And my main reason is because of the phrase in the Holy Spirit. In verse 17, the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Looks to me like the Holy Spirit is bearing the fruit of joy, the fruit of peace, the fruit of righteousness.

Now, right now. So I'm going to simply suggest that we say let's be aware that this this righteousness, peace, joy is built on an objective righteousness, declared imputed a vertical, objective peace that is subjectively enjoyed. And the joy that comes from that and built on it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, poured out into our lives as five five says, poured out into our lives, producing real righteous ways of relating, real peaceful ways of relating and real joyful ways of relating. I think that's what the kingdom of

God is. The kingdom of God is when the Holy Spirit is holding sway in your life, conquering sin and producing righteousness, conquering ruptured relationships and producing peace, conquering joylessness and producing joy.

When that's happening, the kingdom is coming. The kingdom is coming. God extends his rule now by the work of the Holy Spirit built upon the objective, finished work of Christ on our behalf, on the cross.

So surely, surely you're not going to grieve any of your brothers if you don't have to. You're not going to destroy them if you don't have to. You don't have to because God is at work in your life.

Jesus said in Matthew 12, 28, to show you the link between spirit and kingdom. Jesus said, if it is by the spirit that I cast out demons, the kingdom of God has come upon you. So Jesus made the link between kingdom and spirit.

If the spirit of God is moving to triumph over the devil in this church, the kingdom is here. That's what Paul would say and that's what Jesus said. Now verse 18, whoever thus or in this way or in these things, referring back to verse 17, whoever in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

So why is serving that way so pleasing to God? What is it about verse 17 that would turn service from being unpleasing to pleasing? Hear that question? Since he says whoever thus, whoever serves in the verse 17 way, serves Christ in the verse 17 way, like there's another way that you don't want to serve Christ, whoever serves Christ in the verse 17 way, God be really happy about that. God will be really pleased by that and there will be sober approval among the believers if you serve Christ that way. What is it? What's the way to serve? Let me contrast it with there is a way to dishonor Christ in serving him.

We need to be aware of this. There is a way to serve Christ in a way that dishonors him. Jesus said, Mark 10, 45, the son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

So beware that you don't serve him in a way he didn't come to be served because he said, I did not come to be served. So how how would you dishonor him by serving him? And how would you honor him? One other text before I answer. Act 17, 25, Paul says, God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

So if I put those two together, Mark 10, 45 and 17, 25, Jesus didn't come to be served, give his life at the ransom. God is not served as though he needed anything. I say, well, the service of Christ that I want to avoid is the service that puts God in the position of needing me.

If you serve Christ with the mindset of he needs me, then you dishonor him. He did not come into the world for you to be the needed one. He came into the world for himself to be the needed one.

And therefore, all the service of Christ that honors Christ makes him the giver in our serving of him, which is exactly what verse 17 says, does it not? What does what does it say? The kingdom of God, the reign of God. You want your service of Christ to be a demonstration of your power or his kingdom? If you want it to be a demonstration of his kingdom, your service, a demonstration of his kingdom, then you serve righteousness. You do righteousness, you do peace, you do joy in the spirit, by the spirit, led by the spirit, sustained by the spirit, carried by the spirit.

Not your strength. The prayer that we pray most often in preparation for service in this room before worship is 1 Peter 4, 11, which says, The one who serves, preaches, sings, plays, prays, reads. The one

who serves, let him serve in the strength that God supplies, so that in everything God may get the glory through Jesus Christ.

Oh, how dangerous to serve God as though our serving him were a giving to him instead of receiving from him. Every millisecond of your service is a receiving of sustaining grace, enabling grace, sanctifying grace, preserving grace, persevering grace. You know that, don't you? If you don't know that, then you will not be able to obey verse 18.

The one who serves Christ thus, thus, and the thus refers back to the totality of verse 17. The kingdom of God is not about food and drink. The kingdom, the rule, the power of God moving on your life is righteousness happening and peace happening and joy happening by the power of the Holy Spirit, not your own.

That's the only kind of service that will please God. One last text to confirm that. You get to the end of the book of Hebrews and he pronounces a benediction over the church in chapter 13, verse 21.

He actually uses the words of what is pleasing to God, like verse 18, and it's real clear what it is and where it comes from. Listen to this. Now, may the God of peace equip you with everything good.

That you may do is will working in us what is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. He closes his entire book by saying, oh, may the God of peace equip you with everything you need to do his will. All righteousness, all peace, all joy.

And then he adds working in you, working in you. This is kingdom power. This is holy spirit power working in you that which is pleasing in his sight.

And it's pleasing not only because it's righteousness, peace and joy, but because he himself produced it. God loves the work of his own hands. God stands in awe of his own workmanship.

We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. And when we do those works, his workmanship shines and nothing pleases God more than just the display of his own. Excellent.

The question is, will we serve him like that? Will we serve always in a mindset? I want to get glory to my God. I'm closing. The kingdom of God is not food and drink.

It's righteousness, peace and joy, which comes by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The one who serves this way in reliance upon the Holy Spirit to produce everything needed in the Christian life. Always crying out, oh, God, I despair of myself.

I'm not able in myself. I look to you. I need your spirit.

Based on your cross, your justification, I now plead for the kingdom power of the spirit to make me a more righteous person and a more peacemaking person and a more joyful person. I need you so bad. That talk really pleases God because he's the giver and we are the needy ones.

And that is the way it will be forever and ever. And that's the manifestation of the kingdom. So I close with verse 19.

Let us, Bethlehem, pursue what makes for peace and for mutual up building. This is what the Holy Spirit does when he's reigning. This is what the kingdom does when it's holding sway in the church.

It doesn't destroy people. It doesn't grieve people unnecessarily. It builds.

It's just got an eye. I'm filled with the Holy Spirit. I want to build.

I want to build. I want to help. Let's be that way.

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