

## Chapter 2

# A Submissive Spirit

**W**e are more familiar with anarchy than monarchy. That makes it difficult to understand biblical language about a kingdom. Modern man has forgotten how to relate to kings. As the deposed Egyptian King Farouk once said: "There are but five kings left on earth: the King of England, and the kings of clubs, hearts, spades and diamonds."

This is the age of rebellion. The pressure on young people is enormous. In their music, they are bombarded with role models which breed rebellion. The rock band "Twisted Sister" is typical of the destructive influence. They have produced a song called "We're not gonna take it." The video for the song shows a rock-loving son throwing his father into doors, down a flight of steps, and through a window.

We saw in the previous chapter that the throne of God takes central place in the whole universe. Given that, we can be sure that our relation to his throne will determine every issue in life. The Kingdom of God is built on a submissive attitude towards the throne, so it is no surprise to find that in these days, Satan is putting increasing pressure on people to lead them to rebel.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul is quite clear that the climax of this present age will be characterized by lawlessness. The principle of lawlessness is already at work. In contrast to this, Jesus is described in this same time

authority. What frightened Pilate was the fact that Jesus claimed to represent a higher authority (Jn 19:8-11). So even in Jesus' kingship, the powerful element was that, in his submissive attitude, he had an authority that had been given him from above. He was not grasping after power for his own sake.

Barabbas, on the other hand, is characterized as the one who refused to recognize higher authorities. He had taken part in a rebellion (18:40). As such he represented the opposite choice: rebellion, not submission. His name tells you why. It was about the most unimaginative name that anybody could be given – its meaning is simply that this child is the Son (Bar) of his father (Abba)! Unlike other names, it says nothing prophetic about the character of the child. But in another sense it tells us everything about the character of the child! He was a son of his father. That was a phrase John quoted Jesus using when he had told some Jews that their attitude betrayed the fact that they were sons of their father, the devil.

There is no middle ground. Jesus said that whoever is not for him is against him. This goes against our modern love of tolerance, but it is a black and white issue. Somebody once said, "The only thing I ever saw in the middle of the road was a yellow stripe with dead skunks." Everybody has to make up their mind which side of the road they are on, and in which direction they are travelling.

The choice is between rebellion and submission. These are not merely conflicting principles. The conflict is personified. To be a rebel is to be a Barabbas, a son of your father. To have a submissive spirit is to be a son of the Father.

## To Be Like God

To choose the Kingdom of God is a choice to be submissive. It is a decision to be part of a kingdom which genuinely reflects the heart of God. The character of a kingdom ultimately reflects the nature of its sovereign. The more we look at the Kingdom of God, the more we shall see it as a revelation of God.

period as being engaged in the task of bringing all things into submission to his government (1 Cor 15:24,25). The conclusion of history will come when all his enemies are beneath his feet.

Here we see the conflicting ideologies of the two kingdoms. As we have said, there is no doubt about the outcome of the conflict; but the two strategies are diametrically opposed. Satan is a rebel, leading men into rebellion. Jesus, who exemplified a submissive spirit, is leading men into submission to his loving government.

### Who's your Father?

It is important to understand the contrasting natures of God and Satan. They are not both self-centred tyrants clamouring for the allegiance of men. Satan is like that; but the character of God is entirely different. God, by nature, is submissive. We know that Jesus came to reveal to us the character of God. He is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15); the exact representation of his being (Heb 1:3).

As we look at Jesus, we see a clearly submissive person: he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will" (Heb 10 5-7). The nature of authority in the Kingdom of God is different to any other kind of authority. It is the authority that is earned by serving rather than forced by coercion (see Mt 20:25,26). Jesus was not coerced into obedience. His was a willing submissiveness based on a relationship with a Father who loved him.

The tyranny of Satan demands allegiance to his rebellious cause. For as long as the two kingdoms co-exist on the earth, humanity faces the basic choice that the two kingdoms offer: to be submissive or to be rebellious. God's authority is not in question, but our response to it is. We all have to make the choice.

It is the same choice men had to make when Jesus was on trial. Then they were given the choice between Jesus and Barabbas. John's account of the story highlights the nature of the decision that had to be made (Jn 18:36-40).

Jesus was on trial as a king. But the point emphasized here is that his kingdom was from another place. This meant that he was under a higher

But the Father is not a self-seeking, power-hungry megalomaniac. He has freely chosen to be submissive within himself. He has chosen to limit his actions to those which are consistent with his ways. The exercise of his omnipotence is limited by and submitted to his holy, loving and wise will and nature. God can do anything, but he will only do what infinite holiness, love and wisdom dictate. He is not capricious, arbitrary or inconsistent. He has spoken and will always act according to his revealed ways.

Secondly, we can see an equally clear revelation of the ideal response to authority when we look at God the Son. Jesus came as the one sent by the Father, and with the specific intention of doing the will of the Father. God the Son submits in all things to the headship of the Father. In fact, his own testimony was that the Father is greater than the Son (Jn 14:28).

On that basis Jesus recognized that he was powerless in himself. He could only do what his Father gave him to do (Jn 5:19,20,36). He only said what the Father told him to say (Jn 8:28,29). Thus, all that he has achieved will ultimately be handed over in submission to the Father (1Cor 15:24-28), because its authority is derived from the Father.

We can also see this in the Holy Spirit. He never operates alone, but only in the authority that has been given to him. He comes as sent by the Father. He does not speak on his own authority, but only speaks what he has been told (Jn 14:26; 16:13).

All of this is enough to show us that the principle of submission is not merely a convenient tool to help build a secure church. It is not taken from the leadership manuals that General Patton imbibed at West Point. It is not even an organizational philosophy that undergirds the structure of the Kingdom of God. It is part of the nature of God.

We are made in the image of God, so everything we do should seek to reflect God's likeness. We must try to find ways in our search for the kingdom, in which we can practically work out the submissiveness that we see in God. The relationships within the Godhead must be the model of our relationships on earth. Hearts which do not reveal the submissive character we have seen in the Godhead tend to be the reflection of sons of a different father.

Herman Ridderbos has drawn attention to this. He wrote: "The coming of the kingdom is first of all the display of the divine glory, the re-assertion and maintenance of God's rights on earth in their full sense. ... In the coming of the kingdom, God first and foremost reveals himself."<sup>1</sup>

Man has been made in the image of God. Man's original purpose was to rule the earth on behalf of God and in God's ways. We must see what God is like if we are to do things his way again. His likeness in man has been so marred that our natural understanding of government is likely to bear little resemblance to his kingdom.

If the Kingdom of God has to do with God's government, it is particularly important for us to see how God exercises authority. As G.E.Ladd has written, "If the Kingdom is the rule of God, then every aspect of the Kingdom must be derived from the character and action of God."<sup>2</sup> The surprising thing for modern man to discover is that the keynote of Biblical revelation is the meekness of God's heart, not authoritarianism.

Of course, God has final authority. But his nature is not despotic or tyrannical. This can be seen in his dealings with men, but it is even more significant when seen in the relationships within the Trinity.

We are introduced to the notion of man being made in the image of God in the context of the plurality of persons within the Trinity. God says, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen 1:26). From that we deduce that an essential part of the image of God that we should be reflecting is to be seen in the relationships within the Godhead.

Man is a social being because God is a social Being. The Kingdom of God has to be manifested in a social dimension. If we are looking for a model of government on which to base our understanding of the Kingdom of God, we should find it in the relationships in the Trinity. We must consider how the Persons in the Godhead respond and relate to authority, and then seek to emulate that as we seek first the Kingdom of God.

First, let us consider God the Father. Ultimately the Father has all authority. The climax of history will be seen in the manifestation of that fact, when he will be "all in all" (1Cor 15:28). His authority clearly has priority over that of the Son who receives his authority from the Father.

to discover that whenever the Bible speaks of an authoritative relationship the same emphasis on honouring appears. Wherever obedience is required, more importantly so too is honour.

In the home, children are instructed to obey their parents. But that instruction is based on the prior commandment, “Honour your father and mother” (Eph 6:1,2). Similarly wives are required to submit to the headship of their husbands, but in describing that relationship of headship Paul explains the underlying principle: “The woman is the glory of man” (1Cor 11:7,8).

Similarly, in the church there is to be clear leadership, which is expected to be obeyed (Heb 13:17). But behind and beyond that, those same leaders are to be deemed worthy of honour (1Tim 5:17).

This perspective destroys any form of authoritarianism which demands blind obedience. Yet it does not detract from the need to work out the implications of a submissive spirit in practical ways, both towards God and to those whom he has placed over us in society. The balance is found in the fact that where there is a desire to honour, the issue of obedience ceases to be an overbearing problem. It becomes more of a delight.

As the desire to honour one another is the predominant attitude among the members of the Trinity, it must become that in all our relationships. This is one of the ways in which we reflect the image of our Father. To fail to be honouring is reminiscent of a different kind of father. Satan’s character, reflected in his seed, is always to expose, to condemn, and to hold up to ridicule – as is illustrated in the story of Noah and Ham in Genesis 9:22,23.

Secondly, as well as being based on honour, authoritative relationships as God intended them to be are founded on voluntarism. As Jesus makes plain in Matthew 20:25,26, the Biblical approach to authority is very different to the domineering attitude that is prevalent in the world.

The French Revolution was typical of how man grasps authority. When the opportunity presents itself, man rises up to take over. One form of authoritarianism replaces another. The identity of the tyrants may change, but human nature remains the same. Those with power enforce their will on the rest.

## Responding to Authority

On this foundation, we may proceed to see another crucial aspect of the nature of the Kingdom of God. Because it is a kingdom, it is an expression of authority. If we are to take our place in the kingdom, we must learn how to handle and how to respond to authority. I would like to suggest that there are at least two elements in the ways in which the persons of the Trinity relate which it would be helpful for us to recognize.

In the first place, when the scriptures speak of authoritative relationships, the emphasis is on honouring more than obedience. Certainly the Son came to do his Father's will; he came to be obedient. But that obedience was motivated by something even more fundamental. Jesus was obedient because he wanted to glorify his Father.

As he faced the issue of obedience to the Father's will with all that it entailed in the imminent suffering of Calvary, Jesus brought all his emotions under control with the exclamation, "Father, glorify your name!" (Jn 12:27,28). He had come to the conclusion that this was the reason for his coming.

This is why he was able to say, "I delight to do your will." Obedience is a delight to a heart that is set on honouring or glorifying the one to be obeyed. Exactly the same attitude is described in the Holy Spirit's activities when he is sent by the Son. His one desire is to bring glory to Jesus (Jn 16:13,14).

The outworking of this principle has been seen countless times in military conflicts. Troops have gone into battle out of obedience: if a commanding officer says "Charge!" you charge - or face the prospect of court martial. But the battles are won by troops who do not merely charge out of obedience. When a company of soldiers holds their commanding officer in high honour, they will do far more than obey. They will conquer their fear and do whatever it takes to win the battle. As the soldiers under General Waverly sang in the movie *White Christmas*, "We'll follow the old man wherever he wants to go ...because we love him!"

As we have seen, the relationships in the Godhead are to be the model for relationships on earth. It should therefore come as no surprise

ated the Roman Empire, the church lost sight of voluntarism. Verduin has written, “The Constantinian change caused the technique of coercion to be imported into the affairs of the church. Because of it, the cause of Christ lost the dimension of voluntarism, which is native to true Christianity, ...and picked up the dimension of coercionism which is foreign to the true faith.”<sup>3</sup>

Verduin goes on to illustrate this point both from the era of Constantine and from the time of the Reformation. With the emergence of a State Church men were forced to become Christians. Augustine made coercion theologically respectable by his dubious use of the verse which says, “Constrain (or compel) them to come in” (Lk 14:23).

Augustine used that argument against a group called the Donatists. These followers of Donatus believed that the church had lost its purity, and as such were probably correct. For that reason they were planning to withdraw from the established church and start their own church. Augustine promoted the legitimacy of force to bring such people into religious conformity. His prestige was later used to justify the ruthless acts of the Inquisition against Christian dissenters.

But it was not just dissenters from within the church who were forced to conform. Force became an evangelistic tool. When Amandus came to what is now Flanders, early in the seventh century, he began his missionary efforts with a visit to the local king, Dragobert II. The king’s assistance included the royal decree: “If anyone does not of his own accord have himself regenerated by baptism, he shall be coerced to it by the king.”<sup>4</sup>

Defeat in war by a “Christian” army resulted in an enforced “conversion.” Winston Churchill chronicles the Christianization of England as King Alfred defeated the pagan Vikings. He writes:

“But Alfred had longer ends in view. It is strange that he should have wished to convert these savage foes. Baptism as a penalty for defeat might lose its spiritual quality. The workings of the spirit are mysterious, but we must still wonder how the hearts of these hard-bitten swordsmen and pirates could be changed in a single day.

“Indeed these mass conversions had become almost a matter of form

In the French Revolution, power was symbolized by the guillotine. This notorious weapon of the executioner was the voice of those in authority. It said, in effect, "You will have to lay down your life in order that I may have what I want." What a contrast with the symbol of Jesus' authority, the cross! In the cross, Jesus said, "I will lay down my life in order that you may have what you want."

Charles Dickens portrayed this contrast in "A Tale of Two Cities.":

"Above all, one hideous figure grew as familiar as if it had been before the general gaze from the foundations of the world - the figure of the sharp female called La Guillotine.

"It was the popular theme for jests; it was the best cure for headache, it infallibly prevented the hair from turning grey, it imparted a peculiar delicacy to the complexion, it was the National Razor which shaved close: who kissed La Guillotine, looked through the little window and sneezed into the sack.

"It was the sign of the regeneration of the human race. It superseded the Cross. Models of it were worn on breasts from which the Cross was discarded, and it was bowed down to and believed in where the cross was denied. It sheared off heads so many, that it and the ground it most polluted, were a rotten red. It hushed the eloquent, struck down the powerful, abolished the beautiful and the good."

The authority of the Kingdom of God is seen in the cross, not in the guillotine. The death that made it possible for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven was his own death in his Son. As the cross is lifted up on high, men are drawn to freely submit to God.

This is the nature of God's authority. There is no question about the fact that he is sovereign, omnipotent, the Lord over all. His authority is not in question. But when we reflect on how he deals with us in our own lives, we marvel at the way in which he respects the integrity of our wills. There is no reason why he should have to do so. But in his gentle way he waits for us to yield our rights to him. He waits for us to acknowledge freely the Lordship that is already his by rights.

Sadly, after early success, when the message of the kingdom perme-

the responsibility of child-raising to the state. It merely makes us more careful to accurately define what parental authority is.

There are practical ways in which we can guard against a kind of authority which degenerates into authoritarianism. One key is to avoid speaking on our own behalf. No man can ever demand obedience to himself.

Only God has the right to demand obedience, and even He looks for a willing rather than an enforced response. So the Biblical approach for those in any position of authority is first to let somebody else speak on their behalf, and then to wait until people recognize their authority.

This can again be illustrated from the nature of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Jesus is our example. Although many people constantly pressed Jesus to make statements about who he was, he consistently resisted the pressure to make claims for himself. Even when he was on trial for his life, he was reluctant to speak on his own behalf, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy about not opening his mouth, but being led like a lamb to the slaughter. He knew that any testimony he made about himself would be invalid (Jn 5:31,37). As he had been sent by his Father, it would be his Father who would speak for him. That is the significance of the times when there was a voice from heaven saying, "This is my Son; listen to him."

The same can be seen in the Holy Spirit. We are told, "When he comes...he will not speak on his own" (Jn 16:13). Again the one who sends him speaks on his behalf. So, when Jesus heard people attributing the things that he had done to the power of Satan rather than the Holy Spirit, he was quick to speak in defense of the Spirit. He said, in effect, in Mt 12:32, "You can say what you like against me, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit is beyond forgiveness."

Every leader knows how great is the temptation to defend himself when others question his leadership. But an out-burst of self-defense does nothing to instill confidence; it often betrays the deep-rooted insecurities of the leader in question. It is far better to wait to be vindicated. General Patton used to tell his men, "If you run into any problem, tell them I sent you. You are acting for me. I'll back you up all the way." With that kind of authority behind him, a man can be secure. Our confidence

for defeated Viking armies. It is reported that one old veteran declared he had been through this washing twenty times, and declared that the alb [vestment] with which he was supplied was by no means up to the average standard.”<sup>5</sup>

This coercive view of authority has dogged the church repeatedly since those early centuries. It was behind the tyranny of the Catholic Inquisition. It was equally present in the thinking of the Reformers who used the military force of nation States to back their religious principles.

Calvin wrote, “The principal purpose of the office of the magistrates is not this, to maintain their subjects in peace as to the body, but rather this, to bring about that God is served and honoured in their lands.”<sup>6</sup> There were those, like Servetus, who were burned as heretics, whose deaths can be directly attributed to Calvin and his belief in coercion.

But we are not to “lord it over people” as the Gentiles do (Mk 10:42). God’s authority is not like that. He waits for the willing response of people. Jesus was a unique kind of King. As Colson has written: “What king would ever sacrifice himself for his people? Kings sacrifice their subjects, not themselves.”<sup>7</sup> Likewise, we must discover a style of authority which is not coercive. Whether in the home, the church, the workplace, or in society at large, the godly authority of the kingdom does not ride arrogantly over the integrity of the individual. When true authority is recognized, people will freely and voluntarily submit to it.

### **Authority without Authoritarianism**

We began this chapter by commenting on how unfamiliar we are with handling the concept of monarchy in the modern world. We treasure our individual freedom and are fearful of being trapped in a kingdom if that implies authority. But the kingdom is to be treasured. We must overcome our inbuilt fear of authority. The fear is often based on abuses of authority which we have experienced: but improper abuse does not negate proper use. It is true that there have been abusive parents, but that does not mean we should discard the biblical role of parenting, and hand over

ism: it opens everything up, rather than locking it up in the person of the authority figure.

Most leaders and managers have a hard time delegating. They know how the job should be done – that’s why they are in charge! Why should they risk entrusting the responsibility to somebody with less experience? Elmo Zumwalt used to be Chief of Naval Operations, and he approached that role with a determination to change the prevalent reluctance to delegate. He had come to the conclusion that the predominant assumption in the Navy was that “everyone below the rank of commander is immature.” Given such reluctance to delegate in human organizations, is it not remarkable that God, the Commander of the Universe, would delegate to Adam the responsibility to subdue the earth and rule over its creatures?

The Father never seeks to grasp or to hold anything to himself. He is always wanting to entrust responsibility and the corresponding authority to others, and primarily to his Son. Thus we read of Jesus being entrusted, for example, with judgement (Jn 5:22), and with a kingdom (Lk 22:29).

The delegation continues as Jesus confers on us a kingdom, and gives to his church the opportunity to exercise rulership on his behalf (1Cor 6:2,3). As the Father sends the Son, so he in turn sends us. The privilege associated with this principle is that because delegation is part of the nature of God’s authority, we have been given spiritual authority and have been made kings in his kingdom (a royal priesthood).

## Qualified to Rule

Every privilege carries responsibilities with it. If we want the privilege of exercising spiritual authority in a delegated form, we must also be willing to maintain a submissive spirit towards spiritual authority as it comes to us in a delegated form. Jesus was clear that we had to learn to receive other men as those sent by him. In fact, the way we receive them and respond to the authority and anointing that he has given them is the measure of our response to him (Mt 10:1,37).

is in the fact that if we are genuinely acting on God's behalf, His authority will back ours. If we are not acting on his behalf, all attempts to bolster our own authority will fail in any case!

As well as never speaking on his own behalf, but waiting for the One who was over him to testify concerning him, Jesus also always refused to force his kingship on people who were determined to reject him. He was quite prepared to wait for people to recognize it for themselves. His authority was authenticated from above, and acknowledged from below. He himself never pushed it.

He longed to gather people under his wing, but they were not willing. With that in mind he sadly left Jerusalem for the last time, but looked forward to the day, in faith, when they would ultimately say from a responsive heart, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Mt 23:37-39).

That is how God always intended authority to be handled. The Kingdom of God assumes that government will be implemented on the earth. But men in leadership, in whatever sphere, should never be grasping for authority. If their calling is genuine, God will establish their authority, and see to it that there are those over them who will authorize them and speak on their behalf. Both Moses and David are classic examples of men whose leadership was established and authenticated by God, never by their own defense.

Furthermore, men in leadership, even if they are absolutely convinced of the validity of their calling, will do nothing without first receiving the recognition and willing submission of those whom they are seeking to lead.

Given such a picture of authority as this, we may approach the Kingdom of God without fear. The submissive spirit that characterizes the true sons of the kingdom will be seen in a desire to be honouring and a willing response to the authority that God has instituted.

However, notice that we are saying that this response is not simply to God himself. It is also to be directed to those whom God has placed in authority on the earth. God's authority is, of course, absolute. But there are many indications that part of the very essence of God's authority is that it is delegated. Genuine delegation militates against authoritarian-

young man coming to terms with the fact that the authority of God came to him in a delegated form in the person of Joseph. That delegated authority was hardly perfect, but he submitted to it nonetheless.

Consider how abusive this authority must have seemed. Jesus is left behind in the Temple as his parents, oblivious to his absence, return home. This is the reversal of the movie “Home Alone” in which the neglectful parents go on holiday leaving the child at home alone. Here the parents go home alone, leaving the child on holiday! Social workers intervene in such instances today. Joseph’s parenting skills left much to be desired.

Luke’s account (2:40-52) seems to emphasize the humanity of Jesus at this juncture. He is depicted as a young man, zealous for revelation. Here he is not the teacher, but the disciple, keen to learn, even though he is the Son of God. He had emptied himself of all the special knowledge that was part of his divine glory, and he now submitted to the process of learning as a man.

It would seem it was here that he received the first clear revelation of the call of God on his life. He was still there three days after his parents had left. He was totally absorbed in the awakenings of mission and purpose stirring within him. Probably, as this was the Passover, discussions revolved around the Lamb of God celebrated in that feast. A sense of his own destiny emerged from the conversations. His awakened consciousness immediately thrust Jesus into two significant changes.

First, there is a significant change in relationships. We have here the first recorded words of Jesus, and they are very important. He speaks of “My Father.” Mary had been referring to Joseph when she said, “Your father” to Jesus. But from now on, Jesus’ reply indicates that he recognizes no father except his heavenly Father.

In a similar vein Jesus starts talking here about “his business.” From now on the hall-mark of his life is summed up in the phrase “I must....” His meat is now to do the will of the one who sent him. Everything becomes an act of conscious obedience to his heavenly Father.

What is surprising, however, is that at this point we are told that he went back to Nazareth and obeyed Joseph. There is no implication here that he had ever been disobedient at home before. The new develop-

The privileges and responsibilities of spiritual authority are not only inseparable; they are conditional upon one another. If we want to take our place in the kingdom with a mandate to rule on behalf of the king, we must first show our willingness to be ruled. Conversely, whenever a man shows himself to be submissive in heart, that God-like trait inevitably qualifies him for responsibility.

As with every spiritual principle, this is most clearly demonstrated in the life of Jesus. It is explained for us in Philippians 2:6-11; but the previous verse makes it clear that the principle has to be applicable to us. We are to have the same attitude that Jesus had. Let us therefore consider his attitude in this respect.

Jesus was not crowned King of Kings because he was the Son of God. When Paul says, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place" (Phil 2:9), the word "therefore" is emphatic. That which goes before explains why he was given pre-eminence. He was given a name above every name, not because he was God's Son, but because he was a perfectly obedient man.

The scriptures make it clear that the pathway to the throne which he walked as a man is a road down which we are expected to follow. Somebody has said that God has a strange sense of direction: He thinks that the way up is down! His intention is to bring many sons to glory. If we are to take our intended place in the kingdom, if we are to rule in the sphere allotted to us, we must follow the example of Jesus' obedience.

### Jesus Learned Obedience

While the example of Jesus' perfect submissiveness may seem to be daunting, we find encouragement in Hebrews 5:8. There we read that even for Jesus, obedience was a skill to be learned; it is a process, not instantaneous. Jesus was never disobedient. But at every point in his life he had to learn how to be obedient in the new circumstances. It was something he had to learn at every stage through his sufferings.

This is most aptly illustrated in the story of Jesus as a twelve year old boy going up to the temple with his parents. There we see Jesus as a

vides us with another example. As a young boy he learned to be obedient to his father. The Scriptures give us repeated references to his submissiveness to those the Lord placed over him - his father and the king (e.g. 1Sam 16:19,20,22; 17:20; 18:5,25,27). And all this was in spite of knowing (as Jesus had done) that he was destined to become king, and in spite of the misunderstandings of his brothers and the mistreatment by the king who was over him.

The crown is reserved for the submissive in spirit. The meek shall inherit the earth. Such submissiveness can only be learned through suffering. And it always has to be worked out in practical reality in the context in which God has placed us.

It would not have been enough for Jesus to tell his heavenly Father that he delighted to do his will. He had to demonstrate the reality of that submissive attitude in the way that he related to the fallible man who had been placed over him. David had the same desire in his heart. And he too had to show it, not in seizing the crown, but in serving the present unworthy bearer of the crown.

As we proceed, we shall consider how God's kingdom is worked out in every area of life. But before we can begin to look at how God's government is to be applied in external authority, we have to see that the kingdom is primarily a matter of the heart. Many of us need a spiritual heart transplant in order to make the transition from independent self-rule to dependent submissiveness. But such a transformation is what Paul means when he says we have been transferred from one kingdom to another.

The new kingdom requires a change of heart. By nature, we are rebellious - for we are descendants of Adam. In *King Henry the Fourth, Part 1*, Shakespeare describes the king's displeasure with the Earl of Worcester. Worcester maintained he only wanted a quiet life, and had done nothing to seek out trouble with the king. Henry then asked: "You have not sought it! How comes it then?" Falstaff's wise retort describes not only Worcester, but all of us in our natural relation to our king: "Rebellion lay in his way, and he found it."

The Kingdom of God is built on the foundation of submissive hearts. There is a place in the kingdom for all who will humbly bow the knee

ment here is that he was now being obedient to Joseph as a deliberate act of obedience to his heavenly Father. It marked the beginning of a life of conscious submission. It was the pre-meditated laying down of his life for his Father and his Father's will.

So even for Jesus, obedience had to be learned and worked out in the context of delegated authority. It cannot have been easy for him, in the knowledge that he was the Son of God, to submit to the fallible headship of Joseph in the family home. That was part of the suffering by which he learned obedience.

The second major change at this point is the beginning of people misunderstanding Jesus. As soon as Jesus committed himself to be about his Father's business he provoked misunderstanding. Being misunderstood was part of his suffering. It began here in Jerusalem (Lk 2:50).

It cannot have been easy to be a perfect teenager in a house of imperfect parents and siblings. Jesus' ability to be always obedient to the will of his Father must have created tensions with his sometimes rebellious teenage contemporaries. They must have been frustrated by a boy who never got into the same trouble that they all got into!

It was to be another 18 years before he embarked on any kind of ministry. In that we see one of the most amazing aspects of his obedience. He submitted to all those years of silent inactivity in spite of the sense of destiny burning inside him.

It has been said that "his doing nothing wonderful was in itself a kind of wonder." That is especially true when we imagine the pressure that he must have been under from a mother who was longing to see the fulfilment of her dreams. We see something of her feelings in the way she pushed him into prominence at the wedding in Cana where he performed his first miracle. But for years he successfully resisted all that pressure and misunderstanding. He learned to do nothing other than what his Father told him.

As such, he is a pattern for all of us. Every man of God has to follow in his footsteps. He has blazed a trail for bringing many sons to glory. The way into our inheritance in the kingdom is the pathway he took: the way of submissive obedience.

This is repeated in the lives of countless of God's saints. David pro-

in acknowledging the Lordship of the King of the Kingdom. But we dare not be too pietistic in our understanding of what such submissiveness means. The reality of our desire to be obedient has to be seen on earth. After all, the coming of the kingdom is God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Herman Ridderbos: *The Coming of the Kingdom*, p.21,22  
(Phillipsburg NJ; Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co.; 1962)
- 2 G.E.Ladd: *A Theology of the New Testament*, p.81  
(London: Lutterworth Press; 1975)
- 3 Leonard Verduin: *The Reformers and their Stepchildren*, p.63  
(Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1964)
- 4 *ibid* p.69
- 5 Winston Churchill: *The Birth of Britain*, p.86  
*A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, Vol 1  
(London: Cassell; 1974 paperback edition)
- 6 Verduin, *op cit.*, p.81
- 7 Charles Colson: *Kingdoms in Conflict*, p.85  
(Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Publishing House; 1987)