

## The Kingdom of God and the lies of Satan (by Graziano Crepaldi)

**"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ." (Col. 2:6-8)**

Have you ever come to a place of frustration in your faith? Doubting God and frustrated about the condition of the church? Have you ever wondered what is really going on? Or worst does church really have all the answers you have been looking for? Are your beliefs compromised?

The central theme of Jesus Christ's teachings was the Kingdom of God. The Bible also teaches us that **"...no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3)**. God's transforming work in our lives does not intent to make us participants of a new religious group, but instead, to make us citizens of His Kingdom, "a holy nation!" and "a chosen people" set apart for his purposes on earth. To understand the reality of Jesus being our King in today's world is difficult for most believers. Therefore, so many of us simplify things by thinking that He will be King when we get to heaven. Unfortunately, we haven't had yet the revelation that He is our King here and now - on earth. The temptations of the fruits of the flesh described in **Gal. 5:19-21** are difficult to resist unless we have the knowledge that Jesus is King over our life. The Bible says that this Kingdom of God is a real Kingdom with covenant rights for its citizens, statues, laws and even a Kingdom government. The Bible says this government, led by Christ the King and His true disciples (those who obey Christ), will rule over all the nations on earth for a thousand years. **"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ," (Rev. 11:15).**

That is why Satan loves religions, but hates the Kingdom. He doesn't want to let people know who they are in Christ and what a glorious destiny they have as sons and daughters of God. We know that what the enemy cannot stop he will try to join in, pervert, confuse and deceive so the truth would became hard to be found and consequently people will stop searching and knocking at the Father's door. Likewise our values are tested as we decide to walk in the reality of His Kingdom with Him as being the King of our lives. Jesus said that the false prophets would **"come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."** (**Matt. 7:15**). John said the antichrists and false apostles had come and had gone out from among them. Paul, Peter and Jude foresaw that false apostles and teachers would come, and they confronted the church directly (**Col. 2:5-8**) to remove any deception, human traditions and any other hindrances that separated them from the real message of Christ. In Revelations, John saw what the whole world would become after the false prophets and the false church would come. The false church in **Revelation is the prostitute of Babylon (Rev. 13:1-18)**, riding the beast of many names (there are about 41,000 denominations in Christendom), with horns like a lamb (that resembles the true church), but who speaks like a dragon (men with carnal minds, which is enmity with God, and evil imaginations) instead of speaking words inspired by the Holy Spirit, as both Jesus and the Apostles did.

Last year we travelled to visit our many teams and churches planted around the world and we have noticed the following Satanic appealing lies:

### 1) The hyper grace teaching

The hyper-grace teaching is one of the most dangerous lies that in current years have attacked the Church all over world. Many believers "saved by grace" have given away their passion for Jesus and instead of **"seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33)** have turned to a "cheap unmerited freedom" that created millions of lukewarm Christians.

Some of these people live in sin and ease their consciences by preaching about a God who is all love and who never condemns, a God who doesn't judge our behavior. These people have actually **"turned the grace of our God into lewdness" (Jude 4)**. This means that they have a license for immorality and are looking for a way to justify their sin. We have no doubt that these believers love Jesus, but they are simply preaching a sort of truth mixed with error. When we overemphasize a specific teaching from the Bible and presented it in such a form that nullifies all the warnings and even the same words of Jesus in order to fit in our lives we will miss the target completely. The leaders who trained us used to say: "Don't just go through the Word; let the Word go through you." The hyper-grace teachers emphasize that **we are saved by grace and not by works (Eph. 2:8-9), that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-8), that we are no longer sinners but saints in God's sight (1 Cor. 1:2), that God's love for us is not based on our performance (Rom. 5:9-10), that having begun in the Spirit we can't become perfect by human effort (Gal. 3:3)**. These scriptural truths should not take us to wrong theological conclusions. Jesus died for all our sins past, present and future, but it will be wrong to assume that as believers we no longer have to deal with sin. We still have to confess sin or repent of sin, and the Holy Spirit still convicts us of sin. Many people that misunderstood the message of grace have given their hearts to deception and slipped away from the wonderful freedom of holiness into the bondage of humanism.

## **2) Abounding lawlessness and covenant free relationships**

Lawlessness pervades our society from the highest levels of governments to the lowliest suburbs of our great cities. We see an incredible attack on the covenant of marriage. Our nations and families are no longer united around biblical values and we must coexist with elements that are not reflecting at all the Kingdom of God. Lawlessness or being "against law" is a form of rebellion against God's authority that even many followers of Jesus and communities have adopted as their lifestyle. This is a direct consequence of the overemphasis on grace message and many believe to be free since they rejected spiritual leadership and covenant responsibilities in their life. The main issue is that Jesus didn't set us free to sin; He set us free from sin. **"Jesus died for us and broke sin's power on our lives so that now, by the Spirit, we can live out the righteous requirements of the law" (Rom. 8:1-4)**. These wrong teachings fail to realize that Jesus calls us beyond the requirements of the law. Jesus explained that **adultery refers to adultery of the heart and not just the physical act (Matt. 5:27-28)**. Our sinful flesh is the problem and it will take us farther than we ever wanted to go. Sin will cost us more than we ever wanted to pay and it will promise us everything but leave us with nothing. In these days we have decided to study again in our churches the commandments of Jesus. Christ is not only our Savior and healer, but also a law giver and a King of the country he rules, the Kingdom. The sum of foundational laws of His country is a constitution. This is the law about which the Apostle Paul says: **"I am under the Law of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21)**. The last command of Jesus was: **"Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20)**. The radical message of Christ has been turned by many believers into a superficial and emotional suggestion. This is how Christianity drifted more and more into practical lawlessness and kinglessness (spiritual anarchy).

## **3) The Prosperity gospel**

In current years the message being preached in some of the largest churches in the world has changed from the gospel of the Kingdom to a "new prosperity gospel" based on physical health, material wealth, and personal happiness. The teachers of the prosperity gospel encourage their followers to pray for and even demand material blessings from God. This philosophy reflects the idea of personal freedom, self-reliance, and individualism of the "American dream". It is well known that this kind of mentality have failed to bring valid solution for the political, economical and social challenges of our times. Are we really sure that this "positive confession theology" is the answer that Jesus gave to the world? Sadly, many sincere leaders in need of financial breakthrough embrace this message and started to preach Jesus as a means of financial profit, something Paul rebuked in the strongest possible terms, speaking of men **"of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that**

**godliness is a means of gain" (1 Tim. 6:5).** In the frame of the covenant, God has promised to Israel for their obedience financial prosperity (**Deut. 28:1-13**). The verses of Proverbs and Psalms connect financial prosperity to generosity, hard work, godly living and faith (**Ps.112**). In the New Testament we find as well specific promises from Jesus's teachings of **"give, and it will be given to you" (Lk. 6:38). He warned against us storing up treasures on earth (Matt. 6:19-24) covetousness (Lk. 12:15) and he emphasized caring for the poor (Matt. 25:31-46).** Jesus did not die to make us rich but to **save us from our fallen condition (Matt. 1:21).** Paul wrote about the principles of **sowing and reaping (1 Cor. 9; 2 Cor. 8-9; Phil. 4:11-19)** and he told Timothy that: **"Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness" (1 Tim. 6:9-11).** In other words God is not against us having money but He is definitely against the idea of money owning us. **God chose the poor to be rich in faith and kingdom heirs (James 2:5).**

#### **4) Worship of man & personality cult**

The false religions are often initiated when man takes the place of God. Paul shared the message of the gospel to the Romans starting from God and then going to man. It was clear in his foundational teaching that God is holy and righteous and we are not; we are under His judgment and in need of mercy that comes through the cross. The preaching of the gospel, especially in the west, has a very different focus; rather than being all about God, it's all about people and their problems. Just as it is in our culture we want everything to be bigger and better, and many leaders preach that Christ came to make us into bigger and better people. Jesus shared to His disciples a completely different idea: **"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:24-25).** I am surprised to observe how much words like messiah, lord, savior and anointed one have been used in politic, media and sport's clubs. Many christians are running after some well-known pastors and ministries rather than seeking God. **"At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it"(Mt. 24:23).** This is a perfect setup for the antichrist; as we become so used to worshipping man, it will be a simple step for the him to move into his ruling position.

#### **5) Challenging the authority of the Word of God**

In the Garden of Eden the serpent started to challenge the Word of God saying: **"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1).** The challenge that Satan brought up was: **Did God really say that? And than God didn't really mean what He said.** In other words... **don't worry you won't die if you eat from the tree (vv. 1-5).** Many books and film authors tell us that the biblical text isn't reliable and the story of Jesus as we read it in the NT is not complete. Some people instead of tuning their life on the values of the Kingdom of God try to make the Kingdom adapt to their broken lives. They work very hard in ignoring all the commandments of Jesus that they are unwilling to obey and apply in their lives and if they don't manage to change the Word they try to discriminate and accuse those who believe and teach the Bible as it is written. The Scriptures often contradict our emotions and we need to crucify our feelings and bow down before God and His Word. John warned us that **"...if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (Rev. 22:19)**

#### **6) Christian mysticism and new age spirituality**

In these years we have observed an increase of mysticism and new age teachings both outside and inside the Church. Many people are looking for a mystical experience with God and it is the popular trend to borrow what one wants from a different religions and use it in their own spiritual belief system. This is what we observe inside certain groups where meditation, yoga

and other religious practices are "Christianized" for use in the church. It shocks us to see many good believers neglecting the call of making disciple of Jesus and getting involved in ancestral traveling, trance experience, angel encounters, prophetic tattooing and soaking the anointing of dead people on graves. Paul was very clear and direct when he said to the Galatians: **"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!"** (Gal. 1:6-9) and again he warned his disciples that the **"time will come when [believers] will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables"** (2 Tim. 4:3-4). We are convinced that many people have never really understood how powerful it is to belong to the Kingdom of God and when they start to grasp and to put into practice the King's message, there will be no need, no time and no desire for any other gospel.

### **7) No more preaching about hell**

In God's Word we see that Jesus talks very clearly on the subject of hell and future punishment. He used strong language as He describes it: **about the fire of hell and about people weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth (Matt. 8:12)** And He taught that **"it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell"** (Matt. 5:29) When we give away an unbalanced gospel— focusing on God's love and mercy and ignoring His wrath and justice we are no longer in the truth. Why so many writers in New Testament warn us repeatedly about the wrath to come (Eph. 5:1-6)? Can it be that our Father of love is concerned about the future of his people and doesn't want us to perish and be punished for rejecting the gospel? In his second return Jesus would come back as a mighty King with a **sword ready to strike the nations (Rev. 19:11-16)** and the Bible clearly warns us about **the coming of the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15)**. It is a deception when christian teachers erase hell from their message and avoid to mention the real end of our history!

### **8) Wrong apostolic foundations**

We have entered into a season of huge challenges, uncertainty and shaky structures and the Church stands in great need of **prophetic and apostolic foundations (Eph. 2:20)** with men of that calling leading the church into necessary transformation. Jesus gave to his apostles the keys of the Kingdom and he opened their minds to understand how the **Scriptures all pointed to Christ (Lk. 24:27)**. He prepared them to receive the Holy Spirit to further guide them into the truth. **"and in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues"** (1 Cor. 12:28). Apostles are placed first in the body of Christ because something must be built. Prophets are placed second because what is built will need to be functioning in spirit and adjusted to the current flow of heaven's supply and strategy. Without the apostles, the prophets would continue focusing on the current flow of heaven without seeing enough of the final blueprint implemented now. Without the prophets, the apostles will continue to focus on building now without flowing with the supply and strategy of heaven necessary to remain strong and stay on track. Apostles are like builders, while prophets are more like designers. This team is not always working because apostles are often annoyed at the prophets slowing down their vision and the prophets are terribly afraid to be controlled from dominating immature apostles. The church needs to recognize any corrupted apostolic foundations and discern the fruits of false apostle and prophets **"which say that they are apostles, and are not, and has found them liars"** (Rev. 2:2).

## 9) Overemphasis in charismatic revivalism

In a time of spiritual desert most of the churches of all denominations started to pray for revival and spiritual renewal. The careful readers of the NT might have notice that actually Jesus never prayed for a revival, not even once! Jesus brought revivals wherever he went and he taught his disciples that: **"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."**(Lk. 10:2). This powerful prayer is a call and a strong exhortation for all disciples (specially men) to get involved in the work of the Kingdom and it is very far from a plea to God to do something that we are not really willing or available to do ourselves. God needs faithful workers that do the same ministry of Jesus, reaching out to our neighbors, opening our houses for those who have never heard the gospel and loving the ones who are difficult to love. We have seen too many sensational and emotional meetings focused on people and manifestation that brought little or not fruit at all. Many believers invested incredible amounts of resources in their pilgrimage to revival locations with the hope to get a token of blessing to bring home and continue to live the same way. Jesus taught us: **"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."** (Mt. 6:6). Revival starts in our home when we seek first the Kingdom of God in our daily life!

## 10) Poor discipleship vision

In the midst of the different streams of our time we are faced with the questions: What does it mean to be a true disciple of Jesus? Why are missing spiritual fathers and mothers? Discipleship is about how to align our lifestyle to Jesus and be an example to others. Paul says: **"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ"** (1 Cor. 11:1). Discipleship is the process in which a mature disciple of Christ sees the potential in a less experienced person and starts a close training relationship. **"Go and make disciples - this is the mission Jesus gave us"** (Mk. 16:15). This mandate is not limited to conversion, but is telling us to become followers of Jesus. True, healthy discipleship is the basis, the starting point of any healthy community. If the DNA of a disciple is founded on the Bible, then the church formed by strong disciples will be healthy. Without discipleship we prevent the growth of newborn spiritual babies. The church is suffering today from the lack of God's truths into His people. The urgency of discipleship grows as we understand that God's people tend to fall away from the faith in just a generation or two. Everybody in general agrees with these statements, but they excuse themselves saying: "we don't have time for discipleship, it takes too much energy, it doesn't create money, we are not ready to help others, we don't like to commit, we might be rejected and disappointed from people, we rather sing songs, we want normal church services, we will do it when God tell us, we are waiting for a real mature leader that will teach us properly". Can you see the problem?

## 11) The rising on nationalism and the church fight over Israel

All over the world many of the nations that have been built on biblical values decided to take their distance from the message of the Kingdom that have so deeply influenced social justice and the principles of their constitution. This sin brought massive defragmentation of the western society which was combined to the economic weakness and a rise in inequality brought a disturbing growth in ethnic nationalism. Leaders today are often promoting their genetic, religious or linguistic heritage rather than ideals or values that could bring a significant change in their nations. Ethnic nationalism is a moral doctrine that move people to egoism and self-centered objectives and has been the inspiration for many conflicts in the world. The global rise of nationalism has not left the church untouched and has been visible since the times of Constantine. The church has been riding the horse of colonialism in order to sell their gospel and today many christian groups are still aiming to place their national flag in many different locations. Exactly this kind of spirit and the political and economical dominialism (Imperialism) has brought incredible damage specially to countries in Africa and Asia and we are all now paying a high price for such a sin! This is very far from the message of the Kingdom of God that Jesus brought to the nations when **"He saw Jerusalem and wept over it"** (Lk. 19:41) and when he said, **"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's**

**life for his friends" (John 15:13).** The apostle Paul made clear that **"... our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).** Another challenge in this time lays on which position should a disciple of Jesus take about Israel. We have seen believers and churches swinging from hatred and jealousy toward the Jews to an extreme religious adoration for Israel that moved Christians to place Jewish tradition at the same level of Jesus. Both extremes are very unbiblical and cause confusion and unnecessary quarrel among believers. There is no doubt on God's love for Israel and his encouragement for us to **"pray for the peace of the nation" (Psalm 122:6).** In the NT Paul said: **"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days. For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality." (Col. 2:16-17)** and we should not forget that **"Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).**

## **12) The Modern tolerance and the one world religion**

Tolerance has become a very important word in the media, institutions, and casual conversation. You can hardly open a newspaper or watch a TV show without being confronted with a call for a more tolerant society. The pressure is also on individuals to push the limits of personal tolerance and many feel guilty if they cannot tolerate the latest crazy trend or social change. There is a clear difference from the world and the biblical definition of tolerance. In the dictionary we read that tolerance is: a fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward those whose opinions, practices, race, religion, nationality, etc., differ from one's own. In the Word of God, the true tolerance is the heart attitude of showing patience, kindness, long suffering, and forbearance towards others. The new tolerance proclaims that all opinions are equal and that there isn't such a thing as an absolute truth. The new tolerance says that every form of behavior or misbehavior is to be accepted as normal. No matter how divergent or discordant someone's worldview is, we're expected to embrace them all and treat them all with equal respect. If we don't embrace Islam, gay relationships and abortion we will be labeled as intolerant people. We have observed many Christian leaders losing their focus on the absolute truth and authority of the Bible. Weekly, we meet humanist believers that are not taking any position on these issues and choose the easy path of compromising their beliefs. In every area of our lives, we must recognize the authority of God and stand for the values of the Kingdom as it is written: **"... sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15).** Did you know that the famous leaders of evangelical groups and top representatives of the many world religions were connected last year in the Vatican? Another popular deception in Christendom today is the teaching that God has revealed Himself in many different ways to different cultures and with that belief that all the religions worship the same God, but just using different names. This has led liberal churches and organizations leaders to condemn missionary activities as arrogant and anti-cultural. The Bible teaches that these leaders are eventually going to succeed, at least for a while, when the antichrist forms his one world religion and **"It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed"(Rev. 13:12).**

Unhealthy and dangerous teachings can enter the church through different ways. A biblical truth can be taught to the exclusion of other messages or might be exposed in an exaggerated manner. Often biblical warnings are ignored or reinterpreted so radically that they lose all their impact, leaving people confused and discouraged. The gospel of the Kingdom is the most wonderful and glorious news that give us peace of mind, purpose and real salvation. This wonderful gift only comes if we repent of our sins and are committed ourselves to become true disciples of Jesus. We are asked to **"seek first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33)** and **"it will be God's pleasure to give us the Kingdom!" (Lk. 12:32).**