

Focus on the Kingdom

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Try Something Simple

Last month we suggested to our readers, now in about 75 countries, that the Bible was not meant to produce the tangle of divided denominationalism we presently find in what is called the Christian church. The varieties of the faith, ostensibly based on the same recorded teaching of Jesus and his Apostles, cannot surely all represent Jesus faithfully. Paul urged his readers “above all to say the same thing and be perfectly united in one judgment” (see 1 Cor. 1:10-13). It is surprising to us that church members seem to be quite unperturbed by the fragmented religion which now appears as Christianity.

The half-brother of Jesus, Jude, even in the first century was calling on his audience to “return to the faith once and for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). No doubt Jude remembered his brother Jesus praying that “they may be one, even as the Father and I are one” (John 17:11).

Again, where is the concern or outrage over the splintered church? Is it sufficient just to be brought up in one of the many brands of Christian belief and practice and assume that “this will do”? Does not the New Testament rather warn that only a whole-hearted and single minded pursuit of truth at all costs will suffice to make us real disciples of Jesus? Did not Jesus sound very “narrow” and demanding when he said that “unless you give up everything for my sake and the Gospel’s,” we cannot really rate as true disciples at all? (Mark 10:29). Note the important parallel recording of this statement: “Unless we give up everything for the Kingdom of God...” (Luke 18:29). The Gospel is about the Kingdom of God.

The Non-Complicated Concept of God

The simplicity of a child appealed to Jesus as the model of good discipleship. “Unless you get converted and accept the Kingdom of God as a little child, you won’t enter it at all,” that is, you won’t be saved (Luke 18:17).

With these uncompromising demands on us, ought we not be in constant search for truth, to ensure that we have not been somehow diverted from the faith as Jesus and Paul taught it?

Last month we suggested three simple concepts as the solid basis of true faith in God and in Jesus. Firstly we suggested defining the true God, the God who demands worship in “spirit and truth” (John 4:26), as the obvious first priority. “There are,” Paul observed to the Corinthians, “many gods and lords.” He was referring to

the pagan world. But for Christians, “there is no God except one.” Who is that? “But for us [Christians] there is one God, and He is the Father” (1 Cor. 8:4-6). “One God, the Father.”

I want to suggest that this proposition is remarkably un-complex. “There is no God except the One God, the Father” is the combined sense of Paul’s creed. By no stretch of the imagination did Paul sound like a good Trinitarian who declares confidently that “there is no God except the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Paul did not say that and could not have believed in what today is considered to be the hallmark of correct belief, that God is a triune Essence consisting of three coequal Persons. Paul (and Jesus) were Jewish-Christian unitary monotheists believing that the Father of Jesus belonged alone to the class of absolute, unbegotten Deity. Jews continue to believe this.

Jesus, we pointed out last month, was an inflexible adherent to belief that the Father was “the only one who is truly God” (John 17:3), and at the same time belief in himself as *Son* of God, not God, was in harmony with his definition of the Father as “the only true God” (John 17:3). Jesus makes eternal life dependent on this lucid concept of God as one Person, and of himself as a separate individual, the Messiah, Christ, whom God commissioned as mediator.

This is not complex or difficult at all, until one sets one’s mind against it. 1300 times in the New Testament the Father is called “the [one] God” (*o theos*, “the God”). Never does the word God refer to “three Persons as one God.” Is it not clearly an impossible task to maintain that writers who never mean the triune God when they say “God” actually believed that God was a triune God?! Where is the common sense in the pew, when no one seems to be concerned at all about a definition of God as three, a view never represented anywhere in the Bible? Could the Bible really teach us that God is three, when with thousands of references to “God” under various titles, the writers never convey the sense of a triune God? To say otherwise seems to us to be a demonstrable departure from plain sense and ordinary logic.

Jesus the Messiah, Son of God

Our second suggestion was this: that our rapt attention be directed towards Jesus’ foundation statement about the church: It was to be firmly and securely built on the proposition that “Jesus is the Messiah, Son of God” (Matt. 16:16-18). Never did Jesus

speak of any church based on belief on himself as God Himself!

One Lord God and one Lord Messiah. Two Lords but only one true God. Since one of the two Lords is God the Father, “who is alone the true God” (John 17:3) *the other lord cannot also be God*. This would add up to two Gods, a biblical impossibility. Psalm 110:1, cited in the NT more than any other verse from the OT, gives us exactly what we expect, the detail of the two Lords. The first is the Lord God, Yahweh, who speaks in an oracle here to another lord. That second lord is not another God! With beautiful precision the rabbis pointed the word ADONI (pronounced *adonee*) for the second lord, the one to whom Yahweh addressed His oracle. That second “lord” in the Hebrew is invariably a title of someone who is not the Lord God! Some 195 times in the Hebrew Bible *adoni* designates a non-Deity superior. When the Lord God is described the word (449 times) is ADONAI.

The rather frantic attempts of Trinitarians to get rid of this umbrella text do not convince. They say that the vowel points of the Hebrew text have been falsified! But there is no shred of evidence for this. And the Greek translation of *adoni* as “my lord” simply proves that when the Greek translation of the OT was made in BC times, the text read exactly as it still does today. The Jews were scrupulously careful with the text. The inspired NT Scripture equally confirms that ADONI was in the Hebrew text, and it means “my lord [Messiah],” not the Lord God.

Again we ask, is this concept of one Lord God the Father and one Lord Jesus the human Messiah so difficult to grasp? Did not Paul summarize exactly what we have been trying to explain when he said, “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the MAN Messiah Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5)? We invite our readers to relax for a moment and breath a sigh of relief at the sublime simplicity of the Bible when it comes to the basics of true faith. The Trinity as a concept is a nightmare of complex language and obscurity. That is why sermons are almost never preached on it!

The Saving Gospel of the Kingdom Preached by Jesus

Thirdly, last month, we invited readers to start their discipleship with Jesus where he started, at the beginning of his ministry. In Mark 1:14-15 we find a summary command from the Messiah encapsulating the heart of his Gospel Message. Remember that the words of Jesus are saving words. We are to pay attention to them, understand them, if we expect to be saved. Salvation is offered to “all those who obey Jesus” (Heb 5:9; John 3:36). It is quite insufficient to expect a relationship with Jesus on the basis of vague “acceptance of Jesus in the heart,” in the absence of a proper response to Jesus as required by him in his first command to us: “Repent and believe the Gospel of the

Kingdom” (Mark 1:14-15). The Gospel is something we are to believe and obey.

Mark 1:14-15 is Jesus’ own directive to all of us. Jesus’ own tireless evangelism is preserved for us in three corroborating accounts. These are Matthew, Mark and Luke. They contain the Gospel of the Kingdom according to Matthew, the Gospel of the Kingdom according to Mark and the Gospel of the Kingdom according to Luke. Yes, the saving Gospel according to these three writings, and of course John dedicated his writings to the same Gospel of the Kingdom, using different terminology to describe the same truth and painting, deliberately, a different portrait of the same Jesus, choosing his own particular emphases.

The apostle Paul obeyed the commission of Jesus to preach the same Gospel of the Kingdom. Paul identified the Gospel of the Kingdom as the Gospel of grace (Acts 20:24-25). It is indeed very gracious of God to offer us immortality in His future Kingdom, if we respond to the Gospel of the Kingdom announced as “God’s Gospel” by all the NT writers. God invites us graciously, if we believe His Son’s Gospel of the Kingdom and his death on our behalf, to *be* the Kingdom of God, the royal family in training that is, being groomed now, and in the future to function as executives with Jesus. The whole point of Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah is that he will be in charge of God’s Kingdom which will take office worldwide, with its capital in Jerusalem, when Jesus returns. For three simple texts making our point, please consider Daniel 7:18, 22, and 27.

Pointing to the future new society of the Kingdom of God, Daniel wrote: “Then the sovereignty of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the saints of the Most High God and all nations will serve and obey them” (RSV, etc.). Echoing this promise, Jesus assures his followers: “Blessed are the meek; they are going to inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). Is that a difficult concept? Surely not. But note the devious and misleading departure into vagueness and dishonest translation in the Good News Bible, when it wrote, “Blessed are the meek for they will inherit what God has promised.” And what, the reader is left wondering, is that? Jesus, as the Greek says unambiguously, did not leave his audience in a haze of uncertainty. He named the inheritance — the earth. Later in Revelation 5:10 we read that Jesus has died for an international royal family who are going to “rule on the earth,” a text which Jehovah’s Witnesses at your door are unable to receive and believe. They cannot seem to grasp that the reward of all the faithful is to rule with Messiah on a renewed earth.

As we did last month too, we call to our aid the powerfully effective words of leading evangelical commentator, the Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright. In his interesting book *Surprised by Hope*, he shares our

complaint about the stupor which so easily comes over uncritical and unanalytical churchgoers. "God," says the bishop, "is not going to take us all off to heaven. He is going to remake heaven and earth and bring them together." Then he observes: "Most Christians today, I fear, never think about this from one year to the next. They remain satisfied with what is at best a truncated and distorted version of the great biblical hope. The popular picture is reinforced again and again in hymns, prayers, monuments, and even quite serious works of theology and history. It is simply assumed that the word heaven is the appropriate term for the ultimate destination, the final home, and that the (biblical) language of resurrection, of the new earth as well as the new heavens, must somehow be fitted into that. What we see in today's church is, I think, a confused combination of several things...This many-sided confusion plays out in the hymns we sing, in the way we celebrate the Christian year, and in the type of funerals or cremations we have" (p. 10). The bishop speaks of the "blatant Platonism" and "paganism" in some hymns and he mentions the line "and fit us for heaven, to live with Thee there." The bishop notes that these misleading words, so beloved by churchgoers, say nothing of the biblical hope of resurrection and a new heaven and earth.

The bishop is perhaps too generous in his criticism. Can "a truncated and distorted version of the great biblical hope" of the Kingdom of God, the heart of the Gospel as Jesus evangelized it, really qualify as saving faith? Peter is much severer in his judgment when he bewails the fate of those who distort the Scriptures of Paul "to their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16). Paul spoke of any obscuring of or confusion over the resurrection of Christians in the future as a "cancer" in the church (2 Tim. 2:17, 18, where Paul names the perpetrators of this dangerous error).

What makes things more amazing is the fact that the Reformer Martin Luther was clearly and rightly in favor of the simple notion that the dead are not now conscious but "asleep" until the resurrection. Here are some of his words:

"We Christians," he said, "should train and accustom ourselves in faith to despise death and regard it as a deep, strong, sweet sleep; to consider the coffin as nothing other than a soft couch of ease or rest. As truly before God it is just this." Jesus testified, Martin Luther said, "Lazarus our friend sleeps but I go that I may awaken him out of his sleep" (John 11:11). Then Luther pointed to Matthew 9:24 where Jesus said about a dead young girl: "The maiden is not dead but is sleeping." And he woke her up.

Here are some more words of Luther the Protestant Reformer about what happens when we die:

"After death the soul goes to its bedchamber and to its peace and while it is sleeping it does not realize its sleep." We should learn to view our death, Luther said, "in the right light so that we need not become alarmed on account of it as unbelief does, because in Christ it is indeed not death, but a fine, sweet and brief sleep, which brings us release from this vale of tears...and we shall rest securely and without care, rest sweetly and gently for a brief moment as on a sofa until the time when he shall call and awaken us together with all his dear children...For since we call death a sleep, we know that we shall not remain in it, but be awakened and live and that time during which we sleep shall seem no longer than if we had just fallen asleep." Finally Luther said, "Scripture everywhere affords such consolation and speaks of the saints as if they fell asleep and were gathered to their fathers, that is had overcome death through this faith and comfort in Christ and awaited the resurrection, together with the saints who preceded them in death."

I really think that there can be no doubt that Martin Luther fully endorsed the biblical idea that death is like sleep and that resurrection is like waking up. There is no need to confuse this simple biblical pattern by introducing the idea that souls never die and that people remain conscious and active the moment they die. That scheme would mean that the *future* resurrection of the dead would be virtually pointless. If you can attain to glory the moment you die, why in the world would you have to be resurrected in the future? It makes no sense at all.

You may like to know that the great William Tyndale, who was martyred for his faith and who accomplished the marvelous task of translating the New Testament into plain English for the public, ran into opposition from the established Church precisely on the issues we have been discussing. Along with Martin Luther, the German Reformer, Tyndale the Englishman also went on record to oppose the popular idea that the dead depart to heaven as disembodied souls.

The English political leader Sir Thomas More had objected to Luther's teaching that "all souls die and sleep till the judgment day."¹ Here are the remarkable words of Tyndale as he sought to prove his understanding about death and the resurrection from the Bible: "You [church leaders] by putting departed souls in heaven, hell and purgatory, destroy the arguments by which Christ and Paul prove the resurrection. The true faith speaks of the resurrection, which we are warned to expect at every moment. The heathen philosophers, denying the resurrection, said that souls cannot die. And the Pope joins the spiritual doctrine of Christ and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers together; things so

¹ Froom, *Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 94.

contrary that they cannot agree, no more than the spirit and the flesh do in a Christian man. And because the Pope agrees to heathen doctrine, he corrupts the Scripture to establish it. Again, if souls go to heaven, tell me why they are not in as good condition as the angels. And if so, what possible reason is there for the future resurrection?"

With the simple creed of Jesus and Paul in place — that the Father of Jesus is “the only one who is truly God,” and that Jesus is the Lord *Messiah*, as announced to the shepherds (Luke 2:11) and worthy of the title Son of God precisely because of the miracle worked in Mary (Luke 1:35) — we are able to read the Bible in a Hebrew frame of mind. Hebrews knew about “legal agents,” where an emissary or representative spoke on behalf of his principal. Angels could speak as God and for God. Moses was to be “God to Pharaoh” (Exod. 7:1), meaning that he was God’s agent in a mission to Pharaoh. Jesus constantly claims to be speaking as God, and for God, while at the same time emphasizing that far from being God Himself, he is the Son of God. As Son he was begotten, procreated supernaturally in time some 2000 years ago. He can of course thus not *be* God Himself. God cannot be born and God cannot die! Jesus did both. He was begotten, brought into existence (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35) by the one God who is in the NT called “God-Father” (*theos pater*).

Jesus, as Son and agent of the One God, was sent on a mission, occupied always with his Father’s business. That task was to “preach the Gospel about the Kingdom of God” (Luke 4:43), which is the name of the new government which Jesus as Messiah will introduce worldwide at his Second Coming. “Kingdom of God” is a thoroughly political term. It means, firstly, God’s new society to be governed by Jesus and the saints of all the ages. The Kingdom of God is in fact the land of Israel, over which the Israelite and Jewish kings ruled (1 Chron. 28:5; 2 Chron. 13:8). A kingdom is a territory to be supervised by a king. The capital of that Kingdom will be Jerusalem, the city which will then be purged of all wickedness and unbelief. At that future time the Kingdom of God will produce a situation in which the “earth will be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9). The true knowledge of the true God will be universally accepted as the Kingdom of God makes itself dominant worldwide after Jesus is back here presiding as the first successful world governor. His faithful will compose his cabinet officers and they will minister justice and peace to all (1 Cor. 6:2; Matt. 19:28).

The “Kingdom of God” has been currently dropped from Gospel language, almost always. This is a fundamental mistake in Bible study, since the Kingdom of God, understood as Yahweh’s Kingdom on earth, provides the central core of the Christian Gospel to be

believed. So Jesus commanded, and we are to obey him and his Gospel (Mark 1:14-15). The death and resurrection of Jesus of course confirmed the promise of the Kingdom, which could never be reality unless Jesus was brought back from death and is now waiting his time to return.

From the third century the Church lost its grip on the “concrete” and “political” Gospel of the Kingdom and it retreated into a very different concept — that the Church now is really the Kingdom. This empowered ecclesiastical authorities to tell nations what to do, even using methods of extreme cruelty to enforce their dogmas. By the middle of the second century the Messiah, Son of God, who originated in the womb of his mother as the blood descendant of David, was being exchanged for a curious, so-called “preexisting” figure. Someone who antedates his own birth is strange indeed and very foreign to the identity of the biblical Messiah. The Son of God of Matthew and Luke definitely does not enter the womb of his mother from outside and emerge disguised as human! That would not be a begetting, bringing into existence, at all. It would be an odd transformation from one state of existence to another — more like a transmigration. The New Testament never ever suggests that the descendant of David’s royal family, the Messiah, is in fact billions of years older than his ancestor! The Bible spares us all such convolutions. “Preexistence” is a foggy term thrown about but seldom analyzed.

In 150 AD Justin Martyr was promoting a Jesus who had been begotten as Son *within time*, but long before Jesus was born to Mary. This innovation contradicted Luke 1:35 and Matthew 1:18, 20. It subsequently developed into the GOD the SON of later orthodoxy, enshrined in creeds permanently.

Once the Son of God was given a new origin, before his *real* origin in Mary (Luke 1:35), the true biblical hero and the biblical story were radically altered. Jesus was no longer really human and despite John’s strong warnings about a non-“coming in the flesh,” i.e. human Jesus (1 John 4:2-3), that *less than human Jesus* became in fact the new center of devotion. This was not the end of the evolution of doctrine. When the preexisting Son of God was finally “promoted” a stage further and made “co-equal God,” “Jesus” was even less human and, worse still, the One God was now two Persons — a God the Father who remained in heaven and a God the Son who walked the earth. In horror, Islamic and Jewish monotheists were forced to reject Christianity in that form, believing that God could not be two or three. A deep rift then developed between these three religions, Islam, Judaism and “orthodox” Christianity, and it remains to this day. Beating a path back to the simplicity of Jesus’ own creed in John 17:3 and Paul’s in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 will signal a giant step

towards recovery. The Bible will be allowed to speak in new and brilliant terms.

Here is a matchlessly simple conversation between Jesus and a blind man who had recovered his sight. "How were your eyes opened?" the skeptical Jews asked him. "A man called Jesus made some clay and anointed my eyes...He is a prophet...If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." For this witness to the truth the man was kicked out of the synagogue! Jesus then found him and asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" The blind man answered, "Who is he, Lord, so that I might believe in him?" Then came the reply: "You have both seen him and it is he who is talking to you." "Lord, I believe," said the man who had regained his sight (both literally and spiritually). He then worshiped Jesus as the Lord Messiah and Son of God (John 9).

Without a firm foundation in Scripture we have nothing to found any religious views on. The New Testament attests over and over again that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord Messiah, "the Lord, son of David" (Matt. 15:22; 20:31). It says nothing about Jesus being God Himself. Yes, the Bible claims he is the final and perfect agent of the one God, who is his sponsor. Jesus speaks for God and in seeing and hearing him, one hears God, who commissioned him. But to say that Jesus IS God, makes two Gods and moves us into a form of polytheism.

Worse still, the paganized version of Christianity which became standard "orthodoxy" had the gall to accuse Jews of deicide, killing God. This was a further step into darkness and cruelty, since the immortal God (1 Tim. 6:16) cannot die!

In conversation with a Samaritan lady (John 4), Jesus said in reply to her observation that "we know that *the Messiah* is coming," "I who am talking to you am he." The original reads "I am — the one speaking to you." I am who? I am the Messiah. This is the cry of all the New Testament books, and the same lesson in the identity of Jesus as Messiah was given to the blind man: "He is the one talking to you." Messiah, Lord Messiah, Son of God. These are the identifying labels of the true Jesus. The Greek "I am" is the idiom in these interchanges for "I am the one, I am he." This is positively not the Greek of the statement of God in Exodus 3:14, where God said "I am the self-existing one" (*Ego eimi o ohn*). It is a falsehood to argue that the "I am he" of John's Jesus means "I am God." It means "I am the Messiah, the Son of God." That is the stated purpose for the composition of the whole of John's Gospel (John 20:31).

Finally Thomas, who had failed to grasp the unique position of Jesus as God's agent, came to the truth. He addressed Jesus as "my lord and my God" (John 20:28). On this one text, evangelicals believe that the rest of the Bible is overthrown! It is not: John goes on to say that

every word of his book points to the identity of Jesus as Son of God (John 20:31), not God, which would make two Gods. The fact is simply that Thomas, who had up till then not seen God in Jesus (John 14:5-7), finally does so. "My God" (i.e. "I now see, Jesus, what you said earlier about seeing Jesus = seeing the Father"). The repetition of the Greek article in "my Lord and my God" suggests that two individuals are here meant. But if this is not so, it is possible for the agent of God, as in Genesis 18:3, to be addressed as the Lord God, Adonai. This is because the agent carries the personality of his sponsor and is identified with him. This is the beautiful Jewish and Christian concept of agency.

There is no "progressive revelation" in the Bible as to how many the One God is. This is proven by Jesus' express repetition of the unitarian creed of the Jews (Deut. 6:4) in Mark 12:29. Mark wrote his gospel to evangelize us and help us to believe truth. He includes a clear statement about the creed of Jesus, which ought to be our creed as his followers. Here it is: "The Lord our God is **one Lord**." Count the lords, and see that two Lords are out of the question. One is not two! Jesus is the Lord *Messiah* (Luke 2:11), "the Lord Jesus Christ (Messiah)" over and over again. He is never God Himself who is 1300 times in the NT designated as "*the* God." Jesus is also the Lord's (God's) Messiah (Luke 2:26).

The Bottom Line

In the Gospel of the Kingdom according to John, Jesus repeatedly and passionately urges his audience to *believe his word*. John 5:24 is typical of a series of verses which emphasize and summarize the heart of true Christian faith. "Truly I tell you that he who hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and has passed from death to life." What an amazing saying! Obviously all depends on hearing and believing the word(s) of Jesus. Many readers are unable to define that "word" which is the condition of true belief. The word of Jesus is of course the Gospel about the Kingdom of God, as Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us. John assumed that readers had already grasped the proper definition of Jesus' Gospel, which certainly was not at this stage a message about his death and resurrection.

Most Bible readers are so conditioned to think of the saving Gospel as *only* about what Jesus did (died and rose) and not about what Jesus *preached*, that they do not hear the words of Jesus in John accurately.

John 5:24, the heart of true believing, takes us back to the opening words of Jesus in Mark 1:14-15 where Jesus commands belief in God's immortality program through the saving Gospel about the Kingdom. "The word" is simply the code word and abbreviation for the Gospel of the Kingdom, Jesus' Gospel, on which the true faith is to be based. Insofar as the phrase Gospel of the Kingdom is absent from the vocabulary of the

churches, Jesus' voice has been silenced. A return to the language of Jesus himself would transform the Church's present fragmented condition. Christianity is certainly not about souls going to heaven. It is not about God, who cannot die, dying! It is all about Jesus coming back to the earth to reside here and inherit the land/earth with the faithful, and to supervise the Kingdom of God from its capital Jerusalem where the restored throne of David will provide the world with just government and a new society.

God is one Person; Jesus is the Messiah, the very expression of the One God and His uniquely begotten Son. The Gospel is about getting prepared for the coming Kingdom of God on earth at Jesus' return. The Torah of Messiah is about truth and love, not about strict compliance *in the letter* with the Law of Moses. There is no "God the Son" in the Bible. There is the Son of God whose origin is in the womb of his mother. The One God generated His Son, as the new Adam, the head of a new race of human persons destined for immortality and participation in the coming Kingdom.

The popular proposition "the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God" names *three* who are each God and is a veiled polytheism, offensive (rightly) to Jews and Muslims. It is a confusion of the New Testament proposition that Jesus is the Son of God, the human Messiah. And it obstructs our understanding that God is a single Divine Person. ✧

Try Something Simple on the "Rapture"

Jesus gave a very full account of the events leading up to his spectacular **arrival** (not "invisible presence" as advocated by Jehovah's Witnesses) at the end of the present evil age. Jesus based his whole ministry on the conviction that as Messiah he was God's chosen agent appointed to rule the world as the first effective world President and King. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God announces this future world event. Just look through all the Kingdom statements in Matthew, Mark and Luke and see how almost all refer to that future climactic event, which will bring peace and order to our very troubled present societies.

What about the so-called "rapture" of the church? First note this simple point: There is no *noun* "rapture" in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:13-17). He speaks of the faithful believers in the Gospel as Jesus preached it, in this way: They will be "caught away" ("raptured") to meet the descending Lord Jesus. Jesus will be on his way towards the earth at this future coming (*Parousia* in Greek). As is the proper protocol for arriving dignitaries, the believers will go out to meet him as he descends, and they will then accompany him in the direction in which he will be headed — towards the earth, of course. If Jesus were to do a "U-turn" and go back into heaven, then the Second Coming (not "drive-by"!) is denied. The Messiah is coming *back* to

the earth to take up his royal position on the throne of David in Jerusalem.

A very confusing innovation occurred in the 1830s when under the influence of a trance-like condition a lady in Scotland launched the new idea that the Second Coming will be in *two* distinct stages. She introduced an idea which later became massively popular, propagated by millions of books and some movies. The concept was that Jesus will return "secretly" and remove true believers from the earth to heaven for seven years. Then he will return again to deal with his enemies publicly.

This concept is false, and Jesus' words should alert us to its falsity. In Matthew 24, the right chapter to begin end-time studies, Jesus announced a definite sign of his future arrival to establish the Kingdom. He said, in response to the question "What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?" (not "world" as wrongly translated in the KJV, 24:3), "**When you see the Abomination of Desolation** [desecrating horror], standing where **he**" [as Mark 13:14 informs us] ought not to be, then flee...For then there will be a tribulation unparalleled at any past or future time" (see Matt. 24:15-21). Now read on: "Immediately **AFTER** [= "post"] the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened...The Son of Man will be seen **coming** and he will gather his elect from the four points of the compass" (24:29-31).

You see here a lucidly clear statement from the words of Jesus as to the timing of the gathering of the elect, the true Christian believers. It is after — *post* — the great tribulation. Not a hint is given by Jesus here or anywhere else of a gathering of the elect before the great Tribulation. This fact is underlined by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 where he describes the point of time up to which believers must survive distress and difficulty. Christians, Paul asserts, will be relieved of their affliction "when the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed from heaven taking vengeance on their enemies — those who do not obey the Gospel [of the Kingdom]." This is dramatically clear information about the sequence of end-time events. There is no *pre*-tribulation rapture. There is indeed a "rapture," catching up of the saints, but it will occur after (post) the great tribulation (Matt. 24:29-31) and at the spectacular public, non-secret arrival of Jesus to punish a world that has rejected him and his Gospel. ✧

God Alone Deserves Our Worship

by Barron Parks

From the Billings, Montana Gazette, Nov. 7, 2009

Christ our Savior quoted Psalm 8:2 — "by the mouths of babes and infants" — when he gave a lesson to the chief priests and scribes.

In doing so, he brought forth a teaching to all the masses, that the understanding of God the Father and his works is not a complex issue but is so simple that even

the smallest of children can understand and voice their praise to the heavens in perfect form.

In modern terms, this has become known as the KIS (Keep it Simple) method. In that light, I'd like to try and reason with a lot of Christians on the role of Jesus in our lives.

Does a light bulb give light? Does a toaster brown bread? Does a computer perform millions of computations? If you answered yes, please try to think a little more deeply than the facade of man's inventions.

Electricity gives light when it meets resistance of a tungsten wire in a light bulb. Electricity toasts our bagels and bread through the wires, springs and sensors in the toaster.

The computer, despite all its complex hardware and software programs, cannot operate without electricity. The reality is electricity does many things through our modern gadgets and conveniences.

The same is true of God the Father.

Did Moses turn his staff into a snake in front of Pharaoh? Did Elijah bring fire to the bull sacrifice on Mount Carmel? Were the abilities to heal and raise Lazarus from the dead from the Christ Jesus?

Obviously, the answer is no because all the miracles and accomplishments listed in the Bible were not done by any man or even the Son of Man, but, rather, they were done by God the Father *through* His chosen men and His uniquely-begotten Son.

Jesus the Christ Son is quoted in John 12:49: "For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak."

Based on these simple principles, I am left to wonder how a complex belief such as the Trinity (one God in three equal members, but still one) can become mainstream, when such a belief completely flies in the face of the very first Commandment God gave through Moses: "I am the Lord your God and you shall have no other gods before me."

The simple truth is, God the Father is God alone. Jesus said that in John 17:3 and Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6.

His Son, the Christ Jesus, died and was raised from the dead by the Father. The ascension of Christ does not mean he is equal to God but, rather, Jesus is the most-high servant of God and is waiting for God the Father's command to return to earth. (Ps. 110:1 says it all.)

Even Jesus doesn't know when that will occur, but only God the Father (Matt. 24:36). Simply, this can only mean that God is God alone and not split into three equal "persons."

In conclusion, just as no invention can operate without electricity, no miraculous healing or salvation ever occurred without God the Father. But through many

men and Christ, God the Father has saved us, and, therefore, only He deserves our worship as truly God.

Barron Parks is a member of the Restoration Fellowship, a group dedicated to recovering the original teachings of Christ and his disciples. Find out more about the Restoration Fellowship at www.focusonthe kingdom.org and at www.kingdomready.org. Contact Parks at cubbymt@yahoo.com. The Faith & Values column appears regularly in the Saturday Life section of The Billings Gazette.

Comments

"I see you made it to the *Billings Gazette* this morning. I caught right away that you were a slippery Unitarian. I have read some of your works and unfortunately some will heed your calling. You along with your bed fellows Watchtowerism etc. will continue to burp out more anti-trinitarian garbage." — *email*

"Your masterpiece, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound*, is the most impressive and convincing dissertation I've read in decades — and it convinced me to change my views regarding the subject. An insurance salesman brought your book to my house after seeing a generous supply of Christian books lying around my living room. I read your book and will continue to read it again and again. I'm a former Lutheran minister having graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. My reflection and regret is that I as a student accepted as truth everything I was taught regarding the Trinity. There was never a thought of digging deeper and ultimately putting forth a challenge to the veracity of Lutheran theology..."

"I have since left the Lutheran Church because I explored in depth their doctrinal positions and found them wanting. After reading your book, I listened to a Baptist minister on the Internet preaching his heart out in defense of the 'Deity of Christ' and the Trinity. Your book helped me listen with intensity as he proclaimed orthodox definitions and recited the usual Bible passages to prove his position. The congregation numbering about 6000 got a good dose of Trinitarianism. Thank you for your wonderful work. I consider it the number one treatise on the subject.

"Oh yes, my question: I am about to purchase one of Randy Alcorn's books on the subject of heaven. I hear so many different presumptions about what happens after death and what activities are taking place presently before the throne of God. You seemed to espouse Luther's belief in 'the sleep of the dead' until the final resurrection. Have you written on this subject? I would like to peruse a text that treats the subjects of death, the rapture, the Tribulation, judgment, and, of course 'heaven.' A pastor friend lost his wife last year and is consoled in his grief and sense of loss by his presumption that she is now in heaven somehow aware of his grieving, and that they will soon be reunited. May God bless you richly!" — *Florida*