

# Focus on the Kingdom

Vol. 14 No. 3

Anthony Buzzard, editor

December, 2011

## Recovering the True Gospel of the Coming Kingdom of God

by Robin Todd

**W**hy did God create human beings? For what purpose did He make us? You would expect that everyone would be pondering, discussing and debating this most basic of all issues. But they are not! The public and even the church mind is on other things. Such is the deception which Satan has worked in human society.

And if indeed God has a purpose, what is His plan for carrying it out? Could there possibly be any more foundational information for you to possess than that of knowing your destiny? All other knowledge and effort surely pales by comparison. Use this, perhaps, as an opening for discussion with those close to you, or others you encounter day by day.

It is not surprising to learn that a prominent biblical figure, one who God says was a man after His own heart, put the highest priority on the question of his existence. King David, one of the most powerful men in history, was humbled by the realization of his (and our) ultimate destiny. Looking up into a starry night some 3,000 years ago this king of Israel proclaimed his awe and amazement at what the Creator of the vast universe has planned for us seemingly insignificant human beings on this tiny planet:

“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You crown him with glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet” (Ps. 8:3-6).

Just over 1,000 years later, the writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews repeats this encouraging and positive statement of David’s, but reminds us of a temporary setback: “For in subjecting all things to him [mankind], He [God] left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we *do not yet* see all things subjected to him” (Heb. 2:8, emphasis mine).

The writer goes on to show that to date only one man, Jesus the Messiah, has achieved the glory which all of humanity was designed to have. This same unique and godly man, Jesus, who was murdered by the religious leaders of his day 2,000 years ago, is the one who said of

himself that he would one day return to this earth and share that glory with others: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. All nations will be gathered before him; and he will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep on his right...and say to those... ‘Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Matt. 25:31-34).

Indeed, at the foundation of the world God *had* prepared a kingdom for men and women, just as Jesus said. In the beginning of human history we find God our Father encouraging us with these words: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28).

Yet, as the writer of Hebrews said, the creation is *not yet* subjected to man as intended. We have failed to rule God’s creation in a way that brings it into the godly subjection that becomes a blessing for all nations. In fact, the creation has ruled us (with thorns and thistles) and has overcome us (our fate is that must return to the dust from which we came). How then will Jesus one day cause us to inherit the Kingdom prepared for us, and begin to rule it rightly, using us to assist (Dan 7:27)? Ah, that’s the incredible PLAN of how God’s amazing PURPOSE will be fulfilled! The fact that we will by God’s grace inherit this Kingdom on earth prepared for us from the beginning *is the overarching story of the entire Bible*. As author John Bright astutely points out: “The Bible [Old and New Testaments] is one book. Had we to give that book a title, we might with justice call it ‘The Book of the Coming Kingdom of God.’”<sup>1</sup>

If we were to jump to the end of the story found in the pages of the amazing book we call the Bible, we’ll find encouraging confirmation for the successful future completion of God’s immortality plan for human beings: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ [Jesus], and he will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). And speaking of the international believers from all times, “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign upon the earth” (Rev. 5:10).

<sup>1</sup> *The Kingdom of God*, Abingdon, 1981, p. 197.

The above is, in fact, confirmation of what God showed the prophet Daniel over 2,500 years ago about what was to occur at the end of this present age, when He promised: “The God of heaven will set up a Kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that Kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put to an end all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever” (Dan. 2:44). And that Kingdom is to be right here on the earth where the saints of Christ will rule with him in love: “Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the **kingdoms under the whole heaven** will be given to the saints of the Highest One. Their kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and all the dominions will serve and obey them” (Dan. 7:27).

This inheritance and destiny will come about for us at Christ’s return in power and glory, at which time he will raise the faithful dead from their graves. This happens following the final time of tribulation. At that time these believers will be awakened from their sleep and receive eternal life (literally “age to come life”) in the Kingdom of God. Enjoy and be strengthened by the biblical vision of how this will occur:

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: “For the Lord [Jesus] himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the **dead in Christ will rise first**. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

So, the inheritance we are to receive, this Kingdom of God of which we are to be a part one day in the future, is what the entire Bible strains toward from beginning to end. It is this very gospel message (good news) of the coming Kingdom that Jesus came 2,000 years ago to proclaim (Luke 4:43; Mark 1:14, and many other verses). Belief in *this* gospel message and the things concerning Jesus as the King, persuaded people to be baptized in his name, and thus be saved (Acts 8:12; Acts 2:38). Belief in this coming inheritance on the earth under Jesus the Christ (Messiah, King) is the prerequisite to healthy living even now, and eternal salvation in the age to come (Matt. 13:11-15; Luke 8:10-12).

Unfortunately, this has not been the message generally taught and proclaimed as gospel over the course of the past 2,000 years following the death of Christ and his apostles. And obviously, one cannot believe in something that has not been heard. Not only has there been deafening silence about this gospel of the Kingdom, but a different gospel has replaced it, so that it becomes even more problematic to recover the truth of man’s ultimate destiny. That which has replaced the truth of the gospel must be unlearned first, and this means overturning deeply entrenched traditions. Until this is done, these traditions stand as a roadblock to understanding and believing the things that lead to

salvation and the achievement of what God originally created us to become.

Rather than the plain biblical teaching of the resurrection of the dead at the *end of this age*, tradition has taught that man’s destiny is to live elsewhere as a disembodied spirit being (some say a “soul”) *immediately upon death*. The good news/Gospel of our reward in a literal Kingdom of God on this earth has been replaced by a “heavenly kingdom,” something completely unheard of by the Hebrew biblical writers. In his book *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Paul Althaus tells us that the 16<sup>th</sup>-century reformer had no agreement with the false idea of disembodied souls going to heaven at death:

“Luther generally understands the condition between death and the resurrection as a deep and dreamless sleep without consciousness and feeling. When the dead are awakened on the Last Day, they will — like a man who wakes up in the morning — know neither where they were nor how long they have rested...Luther therefore says **nothing about souls without their bodies enjoying true life and blessedness before the resurrection**. They sleep in ‘the peace of Christ.’ Later Lutheran Church theology did not follow Luther on this point...Seventeenth-century Lutherans moved away from Luther’s idea that souls sleep in death...only the body sleeps, the soul remains awake” (pp. 414, 417). The return to paganism is obvious!

Althaus himself agrees with Luther’s assessment: “The hope of the early church centered on the resurrection of the Last Day. This resurrection happens to the man and not only the body...**The original biblical concepts have been replaced by ideas from Hellenistic Gnostic dualism**. The New Testament idea of the resurrection which affects the whole man has had to give way to the immortality of the soul. The difference between this and the hope of the New Testament is very great” (pp. 413-414).

To achieve a successful return to the real Kingdom message of the Hebrew Scripture (your task!), this false Greek philosophical concept of disembodied life must first be ripped from the minds of all would-be followers of God and Christ. There is much more detail to the story of how God’s promise to restore His Kingdom to this earth has been and will be worked out, but this story must be told within the framework of a right understanding of what the Bible says about death, specifically what happens when we die. We must eliminate the confusion that results when we subconsciously mix two completely dissimilar ideas (resurrection at the end of the age vs. disembodied existence immediately upon death). This is not hard to do, if we just allow Holy Scripture to be the final word on this subject. We will find that the New and Old Testaments are perfectly unified in their teachings.

In the Old Testament, it is enlightening to learn that we have no thoughts or consciousness in death:

Ecclesiastes 9:5: “For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing.”

Ecclesiastes 9:10: “For there will be no work, nor **reason**, nor **knowledge**, nor **wisdom** in the grave where you are going.”

Psalms 146:4: “When his spirit departs he **returns to his earth**; on that day his thoughts **perish**.”

Furthermore, while dead we do not remember God nor can we praise Him. This is a strange situation if we are in fact alive as disembodied souls in heaven (or hell for that matter):

Psalms 6:4-5: “Return, O LORD, save my life; rescue me because of your kindness, for in death there is **no remembrance of you**.”

Psalms 115:17: “It is **not the dead** who praise the LORD.”

In the New Testament, the idea that the dead are dead until the end of the age at resurrection time, gives absolute confirmation of what the Christian belief on this subject must be:

John 5:28-29: “Do not be amazed at this, because the hour is coming in which **all who are in the tombs** will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good deeds to the **resurrection** of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation.”

When Jesus returns, that’s when the dead come back to life, and not until then. It will be a spectacular event:

1 Corinthians 15:22-23: “For just as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the firstfruits; then, **at his coming**, those who belong to Christ.”

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: “For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the **dead in Christ will rise first**. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

It appears from historical accounts that it wasn’t long after the death of Jesus and his apostles that the biblical teaching of the resurrection began to be replaced by the false, pagan Gnostic notion that the dead go immediately to heaven or hell as spirit-like beings without bodies. Justin Martyr, one of the early “church fathers,” protested in 150 AD that this was already taking place: “For if you have fallen in with some who are called Christian, but who do not admit the truth of the resurrection and venture to blaspheme the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; who say that there is no resurrection of the dead but that their souls when they die are taken to heaven: Do not imagine that they are Christians” (*Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 80). The alarm has gone unheeded.

Revelation 20:4-5 sums up well the bright future for those who now sleep in death, and the good news of when the destiny of humankind will begin to be realized in a fullness that has not yet been seen. Speaking of the saints, the faithful believers of the gospel and Jesus Christ, we read, “They came **to life** and they **reigned with Christ** for a thousand years. The **rest** of the **dead** did not come to life until the thousand years were over.”

We now have enough background information so that we can proceed with the rest of the story: what God has already done and what He will yet do to fulfill His great purpose for mankind. Can you teach God’s plan to others — our part in the Great Commission?✧

## Reflection on Who God and the Son of God Really Are

by Ken Lokken

1. **Unitary Monotheism** (God is one divine Person, the Father) — not a Trinity. Nor is there a rival second divinity, God the Son. This is the united message of Scripture.

2. The **man** Christ Jesus (I Tim.2:5) shares the same dust and breath as we — yet he was without sin. The notion of his conscious **preexistence** denies his humanity altogether. The uniqueness of his begetting/birth and his godly parents inclined his free will to act Godward from the very beginning.

3. Man is composed of dust and breath — both very good in themselves. Sin is not genetic, nor hereditary. Yes, it is an innate disposition to go our own way. It is a byproduct of free will. Free will gives its consent to it. Free will so practiced leads to bondage of ignorance, impairment; add the forces of spiritual darkness and the struggles and poisons of life, and you have a formidable opposition to doing good, even though free will to do good remains intact. *Total* depravity is a myth.

4. Grace allows simply for the exercise of free will towards God. God continually allows us to choose to respond to His grace. As long as man has breath, he has grace and free will. Grace permits us to exercise our own choices to do good or evil. “Choose this day...To those who seek godliness...Now we are the Sons of God.” To those who thwart goodness, “Get behind me, Satan.” Every step of the way, man’s sovereignty to choose remains intact. And he remains *accountable* for what he is. Grace is God’s unmerited favor for man to act as man — as God intended man to be. Man’s dignity or humiliation is determined by his own free will. Calling upon the name of the Lord is the acknowledgment that God rules in our lives. This knowing gives us an overall strength to overcome all things. There is none greater than God. Jesus identified his own work and will with that of God, his Father. This of course does not mean that the

Son *is* God, which would make two Gods, and polytheism results.

5. As refined dust was given breath and called “man,” so at the expiration of breath (death) man returns to dust. This state of death leaves no existence, no consciousness whatever, to the man whose breath has departed. God’s *future* act of resurrection, at the future arrival of the Son, Jesus, means the return of breath to a dead person, whereby man lives again. This resurrection will result either in immortal life for some, or a future renewed death for incorrigibly wicked ones.

6. Immortal, renewed man will live in the new heavens and earth. Mortal man dies on the earth. Grave, gehenna, death, hell, sheol, lake of fire all involve the cessation of existence. Hence woe to those who die the second death, and blessed indeed are those who are accounted worthy to live forever in the Kingdom on earth.

7. God has revealed enough of Himself in Scripture to enable us to orient our lives to Him and to His purpose for us. We do not need to probe further, beyond what is revealed. It is enough that God is revealed as a single, not *triune*, Self, or Person. He is a Father-figure who delights in producing, “begetting” His own children, starting with Jesus, by miracle in Mary (Luke 1:35).

8. There will be life for those “accounted worthy of the ‘life of the age to come’” (Kingdom life, Acts 13:46), and there will be no more death. All those worthy of death will cease to exist. The second death is pictured as final. There will be no further death beyond that. We must all make our choice now and continuously until the resurrection brings us blessed immortality. ✧

## James Yates: *Vindication of Unitarianism, 1816*

“The Unity of God, as one individual person, is...denoted throughout the Bible by the almost constant use of **singular pronouns**, whenever any thought, action, attribute, or condition is ascribed to the Supreme Being. In all languages the personal pronouns of the singular number are understood to apply only to **one person**. Thus, if I were writing a letter, by employing the pronouns of the *first* person and singular number, *I, Me, My*, I should confine my assertions to myself as one individual person. By using the pronouns of the *second* person and singular number, *Thou, Thee, Thy*, I should indicate that my assertions were addressed to my correspondent as one individual person. By introducing the pronouns of the *third* person and singular number, *He, Him, His*, I should denote that it was one person only whom I was speaking of. If, on the contrary, I were writing a letter in conjunction with any other intelligent being, we should use the pronouns *We, Us, Our*; or, if I were addressing in my letter more persons than one, I should say, *Ye, You, Your*; and, if I were writing any

thing of more than one person, I should say, *They, Them, Their*.

“Such being the universal application of pronouns, it is evident, not only to those who have studied Greek and Hebrew, but to all who know the use and meaning of human speech, that throughout the whole Bible God is almost *uniformly* mentioned as one Person, this being implied in the almost **constant use of singular pronouns**.

“When God appears to Abraham, he thus speaks: ‘I am the Almighty God; walk before *me*, and be thou perfect, and *I* will make *my* covenant between *me* and thee’ (Gen. 17:1, 2). To represent the address of more persons than one, the following language would have been employed: ‘*We* are the Almighty God (or, Almighty Gods); walk before *us* and be thou perfect...’ The Levites...uttered the following language of adoration: ‘*Thou*, even *thou*, art Lord alone; *thou* hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all things that are therein...and *thou* preserve them all; and the host of heaven worship *thee*’ (Neh. 9:6)...As an example from the New Testament, and of the use of the pronouns of the *third* person, we may take Hebrews 11:6: ‘But without faith it is impossible to please *him*; for he that comes to God must believe that *he* is, and that *he* is a rewarder of those who diligently seek *him*’...

“The other passages which assert the Deity to be one Person by applying to him singular pronouns extend from the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of the Revelation. Like the sands on the seashore, they cannot be numbered for multitude.

“The testimony of the Scriptures is therefore consonant to the voice of reason in teaching that there is but one Supreme and Infinite Mind, the uncreated Yahweh, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, who is alone Eternal, Independent, and Immutable, the sole original fountain of life, perfection and happiness...

“That doctrine [of the Unity of God] is implied in every passage in which the personal pronouns of the singular number are used to denote the Supreme Deity...Thousands and tens of thousands of passages...imply by the use of *singular* pronouns that God is one Person” (pp. 66-68, 152-153).

... plus thousands and thousands of similar passages throughout the Bible. **Singular personal pronouns prove that God is a single Person or Self.** In 4 passages, God says “Let us...” These passages tell us that He was speaking to someone(s) **other than Himself**, just as when we say “Let us...” we are referring to someone other than ourselves. In the Bible there are about 11,000 occurrences of the various words for God (YHVH, Adonai, Elohim, theos). Ask your friends which of these 11,000 appearances of “GOD” mean a Triune God. There are none. ✧

## An Astonishing Admission by a Leading Scholar on Who Jesus and God Are

**D**r. Murray Harris wrote a full study on God and Jesus in his famous *Jesus as God* (Baker, 1992). On page 47, in footnote 112, we find this shocking, but to us exciting admission:

In the mind of the author of Hebrews, “It was **not the Triune God of Christian theology** who spoke to the forefathers by the prophets. That is to say, for the author of Hebrews (as for all NT writers, one may suggest) ‘the God of our Fathers,’ Yahweh, was no other than ‘the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (compare Acts 2:30 and 2:33; 3:13 and 3:18; 3:25 and 3:26; note also 5:30). Such a conclusion is entirely consistent with the regular NT usage of *o theos* [God]. It would be inappropriate for Elohim [GOD] or Yahweh ever to refer to the Trinity in the OT when in the NT *theos* [GOD] regularly refers to the Father alone and apparently **never to the Trinity.**”

I trust that readers will share this candid admission with everyone. Talk about it far and wide. This Trinitarian scholar documents the amazing fact that “GOD” in the Bible never refers to the Triune God. This of course is because neither Jesus nor the prophets nor any of the biblical writers were Trinitarians! They would all therefore be unwelcome in contemporary churches. This needs to be pondered and acted upon with all urgency. Are we not to be judged by our belief and practice of the words of Jesus? And what was the creed of Jesus? He believed in the God of Israel, his own God, and nowhere in his teaching did he speak of a Triune God. And that Triune God is conspicuous by his complete absence from Scripture.

The declaration of Jesus is our judge: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.” Jesus affirmed this central, fundamental guide to Christianity, agreeing with a Jewish scribe who echoed Jesus’ words, “there is no other besides Him,” the One God and Father. Jesus enumerated one Lord, not two or three. Jesus claimed for *himself* the special oracle given to David in Psalm 110:1 where God is clearly distinguished from “my lord,” the Messiah. The Hebrew word here *adoni* (not Adonai!) refers invariably (all 195 times) to a *non-Deity* superior, the king or other authority figure, or very occasionally an angel.

Ponder the fact that in churches belief is based on allegiance to a God who “exists in three Persons.” That Triune God is found nowhere in the Bible though there are 11,000 occurrences of the various words for God: YHVH, Adonai, Elohim and Theos.

Jesus must be allowed to determine the definition of the only true God, and he defined Him as the Father alone

(John 17:3). Jesus was the begotten (=brought into existence) Son as 1 John 5:18 (not KJV) states, along with Psalm 2:7, Psalm 110:3 in many Hebrew manuscripts and the LXX, and Luke 1:35 and Matthew 1:20 (“begotten in her”). The Father is the “begetter” in I John 5:1

Greek philosophically minded “church fathers” lost themselves in a morass of complex, technical non-biblical jargon, asserting that the Son was “man but not *a* man” and that as Son he had “a beginningless beginning.” Invite your pastor to preach on these issues, comparing this strange non-language with the lucid words of Gabriel defining quite explicitly the meaning of Son of God in Luke 1:35.

The church departed into a crypto polytheism when it ceased to believe that the Son of God **came into existence (=was begotten)** by miracle in Mary. Reading the Son back into a pre-human, actually *non-human* existence as “God the Son,” God was turned into two (and later three). Jesus ceased to have his origin in the human family. He was dressed up as man, but not really man, and therefore not the Messiah of biblical expectation. Jews naturally took fright at this disturbance of the monotheistic, unitary creed of their ancient heritage, shared by Jesus. Muslims reacted also against this odd “three in one” God. And so vast blocks of humanity were, and are, set at odds with each other.

Revival means a return to the teaching of Jesus, his Gospel about the Kingdom and his rock solid belief in the one-Person God of Israel and of Scripture. It is *that* God, *the God of Jesus*, we are to love with all our hearts. A compromise is unacceptable when it comes to the words of Jesus. Jesus’ complaint with the religious authorities of his day was their failure to pay attention to his teaching and claims. The ever-present danger was and is “tradition” mounted against the words of Scripture. The vice-like grip of the status quo in church tradition requires a miraculous deliverance for those in its clutches. ✧

### From the Fourth Century: Traditional Views of God Originate in Gnosticism

“Now with the heresy of the Ariomaniacs, which has corrupted the Church of God...These then teach **three hypostases**, just as Valentinus the [Gnostic] heresiarch first invented in the book entitled by him, ‘On the Three Natures.’ For he was the first to invent **three hypostases and three persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit**, and he is discovered to have filched this from Hermes and Plato.” — Marcellus of Ancyra<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in A.H.B. Logan, “Marcellus of Ancyra, ‘On the Holy Church’: Text, Translation and Commentary,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, Vol. 51, 1, April 2000, p. 95.

## Instructions on How to Be Saved

by Terry Robinson

Some omit **water baptism** entirely when they instruct on how repentant people are initially to respond to the saving message of the Gospel/Good News of the Kingdom. Often, too, in their account of how to be saved, very little or no emphasis is placed on repentance. If you examine today's offers of "salvation" a major problem is obvious. It centers on a misuse of Romans 10, "calling on the name of the Lord." Paul's words are taken out of context. Paul intended a *continuing* discipleship to maintain a right relationship with our Father (and with Jesus). Many writers omit this need to continue to the end, while emphasizing only an *initial* forgiveness of sins. True disciples must persist to the end, confessing the truth of who Jesus is, who the biblical God is, what that God did through His Son, and what they expect of us. Rom 10:17 is bypassed: We must believe the "word/Gospel of Christ," what Jesus preached, and we must "hear him," not just hear *about* him (the NIV is mistranslated in 10:14).

The popular Romans 10 passage is an exhortation to look forward to the resurrection and thus the coming Kingdom. "Salvation" occurs ultimately at the future resurrection when we receive immortality in its totality. Often, popularly, the emphasis has shifted, and the impression is given that "all is over" once an initial confession is made. Yes, indeed we have already passed from death to life (John 5:24). There is an "already" and a "not yet." Ephesians 1:7, 10-14, 1 Corinthians 15:51-58, Galatians 6:8, Romans 2:7, and Hebrews 5:9 show both present and future emphases. **But Romans 11:22 startlingly threatens loss to those Christians who do not "continue in God's kindness."** And of course, in Romans 10, as well as much of the New Testament, the emphasis is on *persevering* in the faith. This warning was written to Christians (those who were already believers).

We should point to Romans 6:3-5. It says that those to whom Paul was writing *have been baptized* into Christ and are *now* renewed and *will also be raised* with him because of their continuance in the repentant walk manifested in baptism. New life begins now but is not yet complete.

Romans 10 does indeed emphasize confession that bears the fruit of obedience. To see this, compare verses 10 and 16 (and look in different translations. Some translate "did not all obey" and others "did not all believe.") But don't stop there. Read the transitional verses in between! This makes it clearer. The type of confession that a Christian makes is the confession of *the truth* of the one they've put their trust in — that he is Messiah or Christ, and the declaration (confession) of their faith (the whole Gospel message which also

embodies our future Kingdom hope). This declaration must be evidenced by their lives as disciples (under discipline like a soldier). A demanding level of obedience is required for salvation (**Heb. 5:9**; John 3:36). And this is not obedience to Moses, but to Jesus.

Some writers and speakers misuse John 3:16 and lift it out. Some versions say "should not perish," some "shall not perish," and some "will not perish." The word commonly used for "belief" or "faith" is from the root "*pisteo*" and involves fidelity and obedience. "Semper Fi" expresses this concept exactly — from the Latin words "Semper Fidelis" meaning "Always Faithful" or "Always Loyal." I was not a United States Marine, though they have made these words their motto. It's a good motto when applied to Christian faith, teaching us to be always faithful to the Father and His son, Messiah Jesus.

The biblical faith or belief is the type of trust that will manifest itself in our actions, as the book of James teaches. James is really discussing faith as the root of the plant. If the root is alive it will support a living plant (actions). So James is saying if the roots (faith) are alive (real), then the plant will be productive and living (actions). "Faith without works is dead...You see, brothers and sisters, that a man is saved by works and not by faith alone." James has to offset a twisted "easy-belief" and misunderstood version of Paul!

People get hung up on "works" thinking, mistakenly, "works of merit." But all works are not to earn something. Some works are manifestations of our love for and trust in God. Some are initial steps of obedience, not to *earn* salvation but reaching out to receive it. This is much like going to the bank (an action or "work") to cash a check on a gift deposit made for us there. Such an action is simply to receive the gift — not to earn it. The Israelites were commanded to march around Jericho. They had to render obedience in this case. They were told, *When you do this* the walls will fall; then *YHWH gave them* (gift) the city! (Josh. 6:16).

Galatians 3:26-27 ties **baptism** to a faith response: "children of God by faith...**baptized** into Christ [Messiah — recognizing his appointed kingship and our future role as kings and queens with Jesus]...have put on Christ." We want to come to Jesus the way the early believers were instructed, after we believe the redemptive Kingdom message which they believed. And **water baptism** was part of the necessary obedient response when the message was gladly received. Repentance was part of the process too. We want to have right behaviors ("works" or "actions") because we are redeemed and have a hope that is living.

Without "**the obedience of faith**," there is no true Christianity (Rom 1:5; 16:26). So perhaps the word for a live faith manifested, as discussed in James, should be "actions" instead of "works," since many hear

“meritorious” when they hear the word “works.” This is much like the problems some have with John 1:1 when they see “Jesus” or “the Son,” when it reads “the word [not Word].” The word became Jesus only in John 1:14.

Look next at Acts 10:47-48, and note that compulsory baptism in the name of Jesus the Christ is baptism in water. Compare Acts 2:38-39 where the first converts on the day of Pentecost were baptized in the name of Christ Jesus. 1 Peter 3:20-21 is not to be ignored. Here the language is clear: **Baptism in water “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ [Kingdom message] saves...**It is an appeal to YHWH for a clear conscience.” There is obviously a saving element in water baptism. There is no need for any to be in any doubt about this simple teaching. ✧

#### **Low points of disastrous misunderstanding from correspondence:**

“God is not a Person; He is a Role.”

“1+1+1=1: The Keystone of Our Theology” (Seventh Day Adventists).

“Satan ‘entering Judas’ means sin coming from the heart of Judas” (Christadelphian).

## **Comments**

“May I take this opportunity to thank you, as I constantly thank my Heavenly Father, that He is leading me/us into all truth, according to His word to us. And isn’t it exciting! It was by one of those “God-incidences” that about four years ago I found Greg Deuble’s book *They Never Told Me This in Church!* on Amazon, read a little of it and bought it. Just this year, by another God-incidence, I discovered that a brother and sister in the Lord who left my previous fellowship years ago had also found and read and accepted the truths in this book. In my small way trying to encourage others to read *They Never Told Me This in Church*, I have discovered the truth of the comment by Anthony Buzzard in its foreword that this book certainly ‘disturbs the comfortable.’ A close friend and brother in the Lord says he has started it, but it has been almost a year and he has made no progress. My brother read a little after much persuasion, but refuses to read more. Some still prefer the traditions of the elders rather than the truth. But we press on, nothing daunted.” — *England*

“All of your writings are beacons shining resplendently to this darkened world. I love your Restoration Fellowship.” — *Philippines*

## **21st Theological Conference May 3-6, 2012**

**Simpsonwood Conference Center, Norcross, GA**

Another year is becoming history, and we are not far from our 21<sup>st</sup> annual “Theological Conference.” (Do not for a moment let that title deter you. “Theology” has become a dirty word in some circles, but is only the study of God and His will.) The dates are May 3-6, 2012, in Atlanta. Do come, and bring your friends.

As I revisit some of the remarkable and very moving faith stories presented over the years, I am impressed with all the good things that have been reported by those from all parts of the world who have attended. The talents of wonderful, technically skilled believers allow us to film the proceedings. This enables the work of the conference to be *permanently* available on websites. The fruits of the conference stretch far beyond the brief time we have together at Simpsonwood. Please join this effort. **This year Dr. Dale Tuggy, Professor of Philosophy at The State University of New York (SUNY Fredonia) and a committed unitarian, has agreed to be among our speakers.**

The fact is that fellowship with others of the same faith is a vital necessity for our communal and individual growth. Please *do* make the effort (and sacrifice) to bless us with your presence at Simpsonwood Retreat Center in Norcross, Georgia. Transportation will be available to and from Atlanta Airport. The conference is, as in the past, from Thursday evening to mid-day Sunday.

You may wish to be baptized possibly. These have always been moving occasions for us all. You may wish to give your “faith story.” Some of you will be meeting fellow unitary monotheist, Gospel of the Kingdom believers for the first time. Others will renew long held friendships. We do hope that you will be able to make the trip and be inspired by the various speakers. Our emphasis is on presenting the faith to the world as our necessary participation in the Great Commission. The Kingdom of God must be preached worldwide, Jesus said, and only then will the end come (Matt. 24:14). We need to consider our individual part in that effort. The arrival of the astonishing tool of the Internet makes Matthew 24:14 possible in a way never possible before.

We have exciting new websites to report, and a gifted younger generation is adding their skills to the important issue of making public the saving truths we hold in common. Also, my 10-minute video “Jesus is Still a Jew” at **youtube.com** now has about 75 pages of comment in the form of concise statements of our common beliefs. Along with huge increase of public exposure, Abrahamic are increasing their influence, but we need to do much more. The Great Commission remains a large task!