

Focus on the Kingdom

Vol. 16 No. 1

Anthony Buzzard, editor

October, 2013

Following on from last month's *Focus on the Kingdom*, our intention is to provide a "One God, One Messiah, One Gospel of the Kingdom Translation."

The introduction continues as follows:

Using the standard Greek manuscripts as base (i.e., the text edited by Bruce Metzger) my hope is to bring into clear focus the very uncomplicated NT definition of God as the Father of Jesus and certainly not as Triune. We want to emphasize constantly the definition of the saving Gospel as the Gospel **about the Kingdom of God**, of which Jesus was the original and authoritative preacher (Heb. 2:3; Luke 4:43). I have of course gained immensely from all of some 60 modern translations, in various languages, available on the standard software used by scholars. These translations mostly convey the sense of the Greek in varied but entirely acceptable ways. However in certain key passages they misrepresent the Greek text, in an effort to portray Jesus as God the Son, second member of an eternal Trinity.

This second major objective, to define the saving Gospel as Jesus defined it, means restoring the voice and mind of Jesus to our Bible reading. At present the public never gets a clear concept of what Jesus preached as Gospel. I believe that the "Gospel about the Kingdom," with which Jesus laid the foundation of all sound belief (Mark 1:14-15), is virtually absent from contemporary tracts, books and websites offering "salvation."

In place of the Gospel as Jesus preached it to the public we hear offered a very "washed out" version of the Gospel, geared largely to psychological self-improvement, or as Dallas Willard calls it, "gospels of sin management." Popular evangelicalism has been emptied of its vivid, apocalyptic flavor, announcing the future of human society and warning of the future return of Jesus in judgment and to rule on a renewed earth. The Gospel announces God's future revolutionary government which will put an end to all war!

Without grasping the proper starting point, following Jesus himself, Bible readers are left with a hazy conception as to the definition and content of the saving Gospel. Paul is then often twisted by a selection of a few verses taken without regard to context. Romans 10:9-10 is typical, and Jesus' version of the Gospel is bypassed in the process. Paul did not contradict Jesus' insistence on the necessity of believing the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 1:14-15). Paul concludes Romans 10 (v. 17) by saying that faith comes by hearing and believing the "word [Gospel] of Christ," that is, the Gospel **Christ**

himself preached. Paul is misunderstood (with the NIV, not the more accurate NASU) when he is made to say that one needs only to "hear of" Jesus, i.e. about him, when in fact one must "hear Jesus," that is, hear and respond intelligently to his own Gospel of the Kingdom message.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-3 Paul should not be pitted against Jesus! Paul did not say there that the death and resurrection of Jesus comprise the *whole* Gospel. Those facts were items "amongst things of first importance."

My conviction about the absence of the center of the saving Gospel from popular preaching, as the Kingdom, is trenchantly stated by a professor of missiology. Dr. Mortimer Arias observed:

"We seem to be faced with **an eclipse of the Kingdom of God from the apostolic age to the present** particularly in our theology of evangelism. The Kingdom of God is God's own dream, His project for the world and for humanity. He makes us dreamers and He wants us to be seduced by his dream. It is not we who dream but God who dreams in us...**When I left the seminary I had no clear idea of the Kingdom of God, and I had no place in my theology for the Parousia (Second Coming). I had no concerns about the future.** Thousands of books are printed and circulated every year on evangelization. Most of these fall into the category of 'how to' manuals for churches (devising plans, strategies, methodologies, goals)...Our traditional mini-theologies — 'the plan of salvation,' 'four spiritual laws' — do not do justice to the *whole* Gospel. Not all this activity or activism is a sign of health or creativity. The Good News of the Kingdom is not the usual way we describe the Gospel and evangelization. The Kingdom of God has practically disappeared from evangelistic preaching and has been ignored by traditional evangelism.

"The evangelistic message has been centered in personal salvation, individual conversion, and incorporation into the church. The Kingdom of God as a parameter or perspective or content of the Gospel has been virtually absent. Those interested in evangelism have not yet been interested in the Kingdom of God. Why not try Jesus' own definition of his mission — and ours? For Jesus evangelism was no more and no less than announcing the Kingdom of God."¹

¹*Announcing the Reign of God*, 1984. For further quotations from leading authorities about the almost total absence of the Kingdom of God from church Gospel teaching,

My translation attempts to restore to the Gospel of the Kingdom the central prominence it always enjoys throughout the NT.

It is clear that Jesus was a Jew as the descendant of David. The most spectacular of his teachings — and all of his teachings will be our judge (John 12:44ff; Acts 17:32, etc) — is his impassioned affirmation of the *Shema* of Israel, found in Deuteronomy 6:4. This belief in the one and only single-Person God, the Father, is enthusiastically affirmed and agreed to by a Jewish scribe in Mark 12:28ff. On no account should any reader of the NT in its own context imagine that Jesus believed in the Trinity of post-biblical councils! In this translation I make a concerted effort to remind readers of the unitary monotheistic faith of the NT, the definition of the Son of God as the lord Messiah, who was born (Luke 2:11), and not a second Person of a Triune Godhead. God cannot be born and the immortal God cannot die.

A great deal of refreshing simplicity and peace of mind results from reading the writings of the NT community in their Jewish, first-century context. We are touching base with the original roots of the faith, and the NT comes alive in a brilliant way. Ignorance of the Bible produces a disastrous alienation from God (Eph. 4:18).

Evidently a lot of my fellow countrymen have abandoned the Bible entirely, since they go to Church regularly in the UK only at the rate of about 5%, and the rest only to be “hatched, matched and dispatched.”

The confusion caused by the later (from the early second century) fall from the original faith is gargantuan in its effects. It will take time to clear the air and defog our minds. We have been drinking toxic theology and the church needs to be decontaminated. But the effort is well worth it, although revolutions are never without pain.

Religion from the second century developed its own “improved version” of the biblical drama presented in Scripture. The Bible itself is a gripping drama, portraying the great Plan of God to bestow on human persons the gift of indestructible life, immortality. There will be peace on earth when the nations are required to beat swords into plowshares and learning to make war will never again be permitted. No one will be permitted to take a gun and shoot his neighbor! This sounds like good sense to me!

From the second century, the emerging Catholic Church created its own embroidered version of the Bible’s original plot and thus lost the plot for itself and its billions of followers. At the same time the “improved version” created a powerful and wealthy hierarchy designed to suppress the ignorant and guarantee a huge

prestige to its priest leaders. They capped this effort finally by declaring the chief leader, the Pope, to be infallible when speaking officially.

The spectacular drama of the *origin* of the unique Son of God, Jesus Messiah, provided in the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke was given an additional tabloid twist when Mary, a teenage virgin, was said to be herself always sinless (the doctrine of “the immaculate conception”) and permanently a virgin, without sexual experience for her whole married life. Jesus’ half brothers had then to be denied that status and turned into cousins (or children of Joseph by a previous marriage). Mary was said to have been assumed to heaven bodily without dying.

The Roman Catholic Church assumed power over the secular state as the Kingdom of God coming in advance of Jesus at his future Second Coming. In Scripture the nations of this present world system are never the Kingdom of God. The saints are *not* ruling at present (though they will), and Jesus is the only ultimately legitimate King and world ruler. The system of faith promoted by the “new improved version” of the biblical drama elevated priests as the only ones educated to minister the mysteries of the new faith. The laity were put under guardians. The control of millions of minds was ensured and theological education was denied to all but leadership. The permanence of this massively powerful tradition was thus guaranteed.

The Protestant reformation in the 16th century was provoked by the obvious abuses of the inherited system, to call for change, but its reform was partial. The same mysterious Triune God continued to replace the single God of the Bible, the Father of Jesus. Jesus’ unitarian heritage and definition of God, long suppressed by tradition, was not permitted in general to resurface from under the rubble of tradition which held the minds of the masses under its sway.

Heaven (or hell) at death for “immortal souls” continued to replace the biblical vision of resurrection into the Kingdom of God on a renewed earth, which was the heart of the Hebrew dream of peace on earth, as well as the heart of the saving Gospel of the Kingdom announced by Jesus and the NT community.

A smaller more radical wing of the Reformation was cruelly suppressed when it challenged the theology of the major Reformation led by Luther and Calvin. Englishman John Biddle, a school-master who exposed the error of the Trinity, had the “honor” of having an act of the British parliament passed against him and he died in prison. His crime was merely to have pointed to the unvarnished simplicity of Jesus’ own definition of God in the *Shema*, the “Hear O Israel” of Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29. The brilliant Spanish scholar Michael Servetus was burned at the stake at the instigation of Protestant

see my *The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah* (free at our website, restorationfellowship.org). For an excellent treatment of the NT Gospel of the Kingdom, see *The Gospel of the Kingdom* by Wiley Jones also at our site.

reformer John Calvin, in an act of mindless brutality. Servetus' "crime" was having shown that the Trinity is not a biblical doctrine. Does the public know of this atrocity in the name of religion?

The emerging Church achieved an enormous success by adding a number of show-stopping features to its version of the biblical drama. However the casualty in this unfortunate development was the original divine drama of Scripture in two acts, offering to suffering mankind the hope of immortality and a place of responsibility in the future Kingdom of God on earth, when Jesus returns to take up his position on the restored throne of David. The original storyline and plot of the divine drama in the pages of Scripture was replaced with a dazzling but perverted story, a mixture of paganism and Scripture. Once we lose the plot of the astonishing drama, Scripture becomes confusing, Church tradition takes over and intelligent Bible reading is obstructed.

Professor J. Harold Ellens makes our point, based on the clear testimony to what the Church has done with its central figure:

"It is time therefore for the Christian Church to acknowledge that it has a very special type of material which constitutes its creedal tradition. **It is not a creedal tradition of biblical theology.** It is not a unique inspired and authoritative word from God. It is, rather, a special kind of Greek religio-philosophical mythology...It should be candidly admitted by the Church, then, that **its roots are not in Jesus of Nazareth**...not in the central tradition of biblical theology...Its roots are in Philonic Hellenistic Judaism and in the Christianized **Neo-Platonism** of the second through the fifth century. Since this is so, the Church should acknowledge to the world of humans seeking truth and to the world of alternate religions, that the Christian Church speaks only with its own historical and philosophical authority and appeal and with neither a divine nor a unique revelation from Jesus Christ nor from God" (*The Ancient Library of Alexandria and Early Christian Theological Development*).

The "complication" of God through the addition of two other Persons to the God known to Jesus led inevitably to the complication of the Messianic personality of Jesus. Once he became God, true monotheism was violated. The result: "Jesus Christ was now no longer a man of flesh and blood like ourselves, but a [preexisting] heavenly being of supernatural origin in human form. With the help of a metaphysical system taken over from Greek philosophy, Christological dogma came into being, and an attempt was made to describe the person of Jesus Christ in the form of the so-called 'doctrine of two natures.' 'Jesus Christ, true man and true God.' So men said...From the very beginning right up until the present day the Church has been tempted to stress the 'divinity' of Christ so one-sidedly that his

'manhood' threatened to become a mere semblance. In this Jesus Christ was made an historical abnormality...What happened to this Christ was no longer the fate of a man, but the fate of a remarkable shadowy fairy-tale figure, half man and half God...Man has woven a golden veil of pious adoration, love and superstition and spread it over the rugged contours of God's action in history" (Zahrnt, *The Historical Jesus*).

Theologians lost themselves in a maze of obfuscating language, and indignation at this lamentable exercise was well expressed by Harvard Professor Andrews Norton in 1833, in his *Statement of Reasons for not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians*. He begins with a scathing attack on the complex issue of how Jesus can be 100% God and 100% man at the same time: "The doctrine of the communication of properties, says Le Clerc, 'is as intelligible as if one were to say that there is a circle which is so united with the triangle, that the circle has the properties of the triangle, and the triangle those of the circle.' It is discussed at length by Petavius with his usual redundancy of learning. The vast folio of that writer containing the history of the Incarnation [and Trinity], **is one of the most striking and most melancholy monuments of human folly which the world has to exhibit.** In the history of other departments of science we find abundant errors and extravagances; but orthodox theology seems to have been the peculiar region of words without meaning; of doctrines confessedly false in their proper sense, and explained in no other; of the most portentous absurdities put forward as truths of the highest import; and of contradictory propositions thrown together without an attempt to reconcile them. A main error running through the whole system, as well as other systems of false philosophy, is that words possess an intrinsic meaning, not derived from the usage of men; that they are not mere signs of human ideas, but a sort of real entities, capable of signifying what transcends our conceptions, and that when they express **to human reason only an absurdity** they may still be significant of a high mystery or a hidden truth, and are to be believed without being understood."

From Cambridge in recent years comes an impressive analysis of the disaster that occurred when the Jewish Jesus was replaced by a pre-existing Eternal Son. The consequences of the process of reinterpretation by which the Son of God became identified with "God the Son" are far-reaching indeed. Professor Lampe points out that when the Son was projected back on to an eternally existing pre-human Son, and when the holy spirit was turned into a third "hypostasis": "The Christian concept of God then becomes inescapably **tritheistic**. This is because three 'persons' in anything like the modern sense of the word 'person' means in fact **three Gods**...The effects especially in popular piety have been even more

far-reaching than this. The Nicene Creed speaks of ‘Jesus Christ’ in person, not the Logos as preexistent...It is thus the Jesus of the gospels whom the imagination of the worshipper pictures as pre-existing in heaven and descending to earth.” There is “the absurdity of the picture of Jesus reflected in much traditional devotion which is essentially that of a superman² who voluntarily descends into the world of ordinary mortals, choosing, by a deliberate act of will, to be born as man...God the Son is conceptualized as Jesus, Son of God; the obedience of Jesus, the Servant of God and Son of God, the true Adam indwelt and inspired by God’s spirit, is attributed to God the Son; God the Son becomes eternally the subject of Jesus’ self-dedication to his Father’s will, and eternally the object of the Father’s love...This means in effect the **abandonment of monotheism**, for such a relation between God the Son and God the Father is incompatible with the requirement of monotheism that we predicate of God one mind, one will and one single operation.”

Professor Lampe was a specialist in the post-biblical development of the Trinity and observed also that “the interpretation of Jesus as preexistent Son and of the Son as a pre-existent Jesus causes inconsistency and confusion...The doctrine which follows from the identification of Jesus with a pre-existent personal divine being is ultimately **incompatible with the unity of God.**”

Christianity is defined by God’s purpose. The divine Plan is discovered in the purpose statement of Jesus in Luke 4:43. There he stated that the One God had commissioned him for the express purpose of announcing the good news or Gospel about the coming Kingdom of God. The purpose could have a frightful negative outcome. Jesus expressed this in Matthew 8:11-12. He warned his fellow countrymen that they ran the risk of a colossal failure. “When you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God and yourselves being rejected there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” To avoid this appalling negative outcome Jesus exhorted the people to pay the closest attention to his teachings, which provide the only route to rescue and salvation.

Jesus’ first and last words are critically important. He begins by issuing a first and fundamental command, that we are to repent and *believe the Gospel about the Kingdom of God* (Mark 1:14-15). Jesus’ last words summarize and reemphasize the all-important matter of obedience to his teachings. These are found for example at the conclusion of his public ministry in John 12:44-50. The words, Gospel of Jesus are the criterion for our future judgment. We neglect them at our peril, since the words of Jesus are the words of God who commissioned and inspired him”

²Very much like a Hindu avatar.

“And Jesus **cried out and said**, ‘Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. **If anyone hears my words and does not keep them**, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who **rejects me and does not receive my words** has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment — what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me” (John 12:44-50, ESV).

Christianity is based on our making a choice between two different ways. The principle is beautifully encapsulated by John 3:36, where belief in Jesus is equivalent to obedience, and unbelief with refusal to obey. These stark alternatives are laid out for us in the introductory Psalm one. Two contrasted lifestyles are depicted here, the one leading to disaster, an extinction of life, and the other to indestructible life, immortality in the future Kingdom of God on a renewed earth. We all have to choose. ✧

“The Obedience of Faith”

There is an easy way to present the Christian faith to your friends. It means choosing those texts which are *primary and fundamental*. Much preaching, it seems to us, avoids these lucidly clear framework texts! This results in a vagueness and lack of clarity. You can prove almost anything from the Bible if you ignore the primary verses, those verses which provide a skeleton and backbone of the one faith of the NT.

I suggest that “the obedience of faith” is a brilliant phrase from Paul which beautifully defines the faith as Jesus presented it.

Paul, outstanding teacher of the faith as he was, framed the book of Romans with this fascinating and easy summary of Christianity. He spoke of the “obedience of faith” in Romans 1:5 and again at the end of the book in Romans 16:26. This phrase, “the obedience of faith,” acts as a sort of book end to the whole of Romans. There is no true faith, belief, without obedience and no obedience is possible without believing the words of the NT Covenant. These words begin with the teachings of Jesus and continue with those of Paul and the other writers, ending with the words of Jesus to John in Revelation (another “framing” in this case of the whole NT). The latter book contains a solemn and terrible warning that those who in any way take away from the words of the Book of

Revelation will forfeit their place in the coming Kingdom (Rev. 22:18-19).

If the obedience of faith, believing obedience, begins with the recognition of the teachings and words of Jesus, then it makes sense that we begin with obedience to his words and teachings starting in Mark 1:14-15.

Here we have the opening and summary command from Jesus himself. Jesus began his saving ministry by uttering this amazing piece of instruction to us. He announced God's program for world history and our immortality in the coming Kingdom. "The Kingdom of God is coming. Repent [a command] and believe [a command] the Gospel of the Kingdom." This is where Christianity begins, since Jesus, the master teacher and rabbi, begins here. Note the all-important remark of Hebrews 2:3: Jesus was the one who was the first to preach the saving Gospel. It is a great mistake to begin with Paul. Now Paul of course preached the same Gospel as Jesus had. If he did not, he would have put himself under his own curse for preaching a different Gospel! (Gal. 1:8-9).

What then is this first command of Jesus to us in Mark 1:14-15? In the light of the prophetic declaration that the Kingdom of God is at hand, we are ordered by the Lord Messiah Jesus to respond by believing that Gospel of the Kingdom. At this stage there is no reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus. That vital part of the Gospel began to be announced only later (see Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31). The beginning of the Gospel as Jesus preached it is clearly "Repent and believe in the Good News/Gospel about the Kingdom of God."

Our first task is then to define the Kingdom of God as Jesus announced it. The meaning of Kingdom of God (or in Matthew the synonymous expression Kingdom of Heaven, i.e. the Kingdom which has its origin in God) must be clearly grasped if we are to repent intelligently in obedience to Jesus' first command. One cannot repent and believe the Gospel about a Kingdom which one does not understand! The obedience of faith necessitates that we fully grasp the Gospel about the Kingdom and embrace that vital saving message which instructs us about the great Plan of God in human history and how we may gain immortality in that coming Kingdom.

A very impressive and clear statement about the meaning of the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven was given us by a professor of OT at Oxford. As you will see "Kingdom of GOD" has firstly to do with the future intention of God to intervene in human history, to bring to an end the present chaos of human misgovernment and inaugurate peace on earth under the kingship of Messiah Jesus who will have the authority and power to command the nations to beat their swords into farm instruments. Jesus is the Prince and Leader of Peace and only in him is peace attainable for us now as believers and for the whole

world at the future Second Coming of Jesus. Here then is the key meaning of the Kingdom of God as required for obedient faith in the Gospel as Jesus preached it (Mark 1:14-15).

W.C. Allen, MA, Professor of OT at Oxford, on the Kingdom of God

The objective **analysis of the Kingdom of God** in Matthew, provided by *The Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ought to serve as a much-needed guide to all our thinking about the Kingdom of God. The Gospel as Jesus and Paul preached it is about the Kingdom, and so an inaccurate understanding of the Kingdom leads automatically to an inaccurate Gospel. Here is how Jesus understood the term Kingdom of God, the great future announced by all the prophets of the Hebrew Bible and affirmed as a final challenge to repentance and faith from us who desire to believe and gain salvation:

"The Kingdom — **the central subject** of Christ's doctrine. With this **he began** his ministry (Mt. 4:17) and wherever he went he taught it as Good News [**Gospel**] (4:23). The Kingdom he taught was coming, **but not in his lifetime**. After His ascension he would come as Son of Man on the clouds of heaven (16:27, 19:28, 24:30; 25:31) and would sit on the throne of His glory...Then the twelve Apostles would sit on twelve thrones judging [managing] the twelve tribes of Israel (**19:28**). In the meantime he himself must suffer and die and be raised from the dead. How else could he come on the clouds of heaven? And the disciples were to **preach the Good News [Gospel] of the coming Kingdom** (10:7, 24:14) among all nations, making disciples by [water] **baptism** (28:18). The body of disciples thus gained would naturally form a society bound by common aims. Hence the disciples of the Kingdom would form a new spiritual Israel (21:43; [cp. Gal. 6:16; Phil 3:3]).

"In view of the needs of this new Israel of Christ's disciples, who were to await his coming on the clouds of heaven, it is natural that a large part of the teaching recorded in the Gospel should concern **the qualifications required in those who hoped to enter the Kingdom when it came**...Thus the parables convey some lesson about the nature of the Kingdom and **the period of preparation for it [sowing before harvest]**. It should be sufficiently obvious that if we ask what meaning the parables had for the editor of the first Gospel, the answer must be that he chose them because...they taught lessons about the Kingdom of God **in the sense in which that phrase is used everywhere in the Gospel of the Kingdom which was to come, when the Son of Man came upon the clouds of heaven**.

"Thus the Parable of the Sower illustrates the varying **reception met with by the Good News [Gospel] of the**

Kingdom as it is preached amongst men. That of the tares also deals not with the Kingdom itself, but with **the period of preparation for it.** At the **end of the age,** the Son of Man will come **to inaugurate His Kingdom...** There is nothing here nor elsewhere in this Gospel to suggest that **the scene of the Kingdom is other than the present world renewed,** restored and purified.”³

The challenge of Jesus’ first and foremost command to us, a command given us as the first step in gaining biblical faith, was that we undergo a complete reorientation in our thinking and lifestyle. We are to be informed of the great immortality Plan of God in human history. God intended a political (in the best sense!) revolution by which existing very inadequate systems of government will be replaced by the Kingdom of God which will be under the direct supervision of Jesus who is going to return to the earth. He is currently at the right hand of the Father as the *adoni* (my lord [Messiah], Ps. 110:1) waiting until God sends him back to bring in the Kingdom of God. At that time Jesus will rule and reign on the restored throne of David in Jerusalem, the city of the Great King.

Where do you and I fit into this scheme? Quite simply like this: Many of the parables of Jesus illustrated our responsibility in the obedience of faith. All-important is the development of your talents, God-given talents, inherited too from your ancestors. We are individually responsible for the use of these talents in the service of the Gospel of the Kingdom, in the service of Jesus Messiah, the head of that coming Kingdom and presently the head of the church. Those who have understood the Gospel of the Kingdom and the great plan of the one God the Father in the Messiah, to establish a lasting peace on this very troubled earth, will be charged with supervising that future society.

When describing the Gospel of the Kingdom, Jesus’ saving message which leads to our immortality, it is often good to begin with the great prophecies of Daniel 2:44. Following the evil kingdoms denoted as beasts, we read that “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed and it will crush in pieces all these previous kingdoms and last forever.” This is the core of the Gospel of the Kingdom as announced by Jesus and all the New Testament writers. This Kingdom will have the authority to subdue all hostility to the Kingdom of Jesus. You can read a prophetic vision of the clash which will occur when the Kingdom of God is visibly manifested at the second coming of Jesus. “Why are nations raging and

setting themselves up against the Lord God and his Messiah?” (Ps. 2:1-2). The world will not submit without resistance to this intervention by God, when He sends the Messiah back from heaven to rule the world. But Jesus will be empowered, as we read in Psalm 110, to overcome all opposition to his revolutionary Kingdom.

God is allowing the world to reap the reward of millennia of human opposition to the revealed truth of God. The results are demonstrated in world wars, widespread disease and the massive problems which now confront the human race. A solution to these intractable difficulties is on the horizon. No one knows when the great event will happen, but we are urged as Christian believers to prepare now by developing our talents day by day, in preparation for the time when we will help the Messiah to manage the world (1 Cor. 6:2). Paul was horrified that some Christians in Corinth would take each other to court, for various petty reasons. “Don’t you know,” he complained, “that the saints are going to manage the world?” He was appalled at their lack of basic understanding of the purpose of Christianity. This is Bible Study 101, not complicated, but repeated on nearly every page of the New Testament. Jesus is the promised Prince of Peace and he is inviting, through his Gospel message of the Kingdom, people of all nations, races and languages to prepare now for participation in that future Kingdom of God on the earth when he returns.

This is not a difficult concept, but it has been appallingly confused by counter systems which promise a vague continuation of life “in heaven” when we die. This is not the biblical hope at all, and hope is one of the great Christian virtues. Indeed faith and love are *built upon hope* as Paul said in Colossians 1:4-5. Without a clear grasp of the Christian hope there can be no progress in achieving the Christian unity demanded by the New Testament, and contradicted by the presence of so many differing denominations, all working apparently from the same Bible.

Show your friends Daniel 7:14, 18, 22 and 27. Translate the 27th verse with the RSV and other versions, which correctly predict that the *saints* will supervise the new world of the coming Kingdom. This is an overwhelming promise and should drive us on to the great goal to which we are invited by the Gospel of the Kingdom, preached by Jesus and then of course by Paul (Acts 19:8; 20:24-25; 28:23, 31; cp. Acts 8:12). These verses are some of the most frequently suppressed in popular evangelism. They are definitive for the Gospel.

The gospel as frequently heard in sermons and literature purporting to reflect the teachings of Jesus, never makes any reference to the Kingdom of God. It is a dramatically reduced gospel, about a “God the Son” who died and rose. But this is not the full biblical Gospel. Furthermore it presents us with an immortal “God the

³ Vol. II, p. 145, emphasis added. The same view of the Kingdom is expressed by the same author in his commentary on Matthew (*The International Critical Commentary, St. Matthew*, T & T Clark, 1907, pp. lxxvii-lxxi).

Son” who died — an inscrutable mystery which the Bible does not ask us to believe.

Turn with your friends to Luke 19:11-27. This beautiful parable from the lips of the master Rabbi illustrates both the fact of the future coming at his return, but also our responsibility now, in the present evil age, to make full use of our talents, aided by the spirit of Jesus, to help promote the Gospel of the Kingdom. That indeed is the great commission which Jesus laid upon all of us believers.

There are many ways to get involved now that the miracle of the Internet has made communication so available to us all. You can blog or tweet, or put up your own site and engage the public in many different ways. You can write to the local paper and invite comments on whether the Church has remained faithful to Jesus’ first and basic foundation for all true faith, in his confession, “The Lord our God is one Lord.” Is the Trinitarian creed of your church a creed which Jesus could subscribe to? Why is it that Jews and Muslims are aghast at the notion of three who are equally GOD? These are fascinating issues, and each believer can make a contribution to challenging Bible readers to consider the roots of their faith. ✧

The learned D.D. who wrote commentary on the Psalms in the famous series, *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, falls into the amazing trap of presenting us with two GODS. On Psalm 110:1 he notes rightly that this Psalm is more frequently cited than *any other single portion of the ancient Scriptures*. He then lists the verses including 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 in which Paul is supposed to have “split the *shema*” between God and Jesus. He then says: “Abraham had never called Isaac or any of his descendants lord. Why then had David done so? There could be only one answer: Because that Son would be David’s son as regarding his human birth, **his Lord as regarding His Divine Nature**. This answer however the Pharisees declined to make not through ignorance but through unbelief in our Lord’s Messianic claims. The crowds listened to him gladly, not merely in the general sense but with special reference to his Divine dignity” (p. 138).

Can you imagine this? The learned commentator wrote this as the translation of Psalm 110:1: “The Lord (Jehovah) said to my Lord (*Adonai*)...” How tragic that he did not bother to read the original which says *adoni*, my lord, a title **never once applied to Deity!**

The Messiah is not called ADONAI! The **whole** point of the NT’s favorite Psalm is that God spoke to an amazingly elevated *human* being, Jesus, who is to this day still there, waiting for the moment when the One God dispatches him back to the earth, for the purpose of inaugurating the Kingdom (Heb. 10:13). This is the

summary of the whole Bible story, an epic to outdo all epics!

Tell your friends to read and believe the fascinating oracle in Psalm 110:1 where the One True God, YHVH, addresses the Messiah who is *adoni*, “my lord,” not a second GOD! Many translations mislead their readers by writing “Lord” instead of “lord,” the human being, the man Messiah (1 Tim. 2:5).

“Jesus said in answer [to a Jewish scholar], ‘The first is, Give ear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord’” (Mark 12:29, BBE).

How many LORDS is the one God?

“There is for us only one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we are for him; and one lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we exist through him” (1 Cor. 8:6). “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father” (Eph. 4:5-6).

In the Greek version of the Old Testament (the LXX, Septuagint) there appears this beautiful affirmation of the non-Trinitarian creed of Israel. “For there is one God in the heavens, our **one Lord** whom we fear, who is able to bring us out of the fiery furnace and who will rescue us from your hands, O King” (Dan. 3:17).

This is the core Christian creed as well, of course. Jesus commanded it for us all (Mark 12:29). ✧

**2014 Theological Conference • May 1-4, 2014
Simpsonwood Conference Center, Norcross, GA**

Please mark your calendars now for what promises to be a quite exceptional gathering of passionate Kingdom and biblical unitarian believers!

Comments

“I just received *Focus on the Kingdom* and am really being solidified in the Faith as I read it and read the Scriptures referenced. I’m so excited to have the seed of God’s Word, His Gospel about the Kingdom of God, planted in my heart. That Blessed Hope is getting me through some hard times. I focus on God’s coming Kingdom and in THAT Kingdom there is going to be great JOY and no one will take it away from me. The old order of sin, death, pain, sorrow will all be done away with. Praise God! This is Good News indeed, and certainly a Kingdom I DON’T want to miss! It really touched my heart when I read ‘It brings God great joy [‘It’s your Father’s good pleasure,’ some translations say] TO GIVE YOU the Kingdom.’ Someone might ask, ‘What makes God happy?’ The answer is clear: giving His faithful children His GREAT Kingdom in which they will enjoy blessings beyond measure and enjoy it with indestructible life! THAT brings God happiness!’ —
Washington