

Focus on the Kingdom

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Do Souls Go to Heaven?

The celebrated *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, a standard, recognized, expert authority: "No biblical text authorizes the statement that the soul is separated from the body at the moment of death" (Vol. 1, p. 802).

Christian Words and Christian Meanings, by John Burnaby: "Greek philosophers had argued that the dissolution which we call death happens to nothing but bodies, and that the souls of men are by their native constitution immortal. The Greek word for 'immortality' occurs only once in the New Testament, and there it belongs to none but the King of Kings...The immortality of the soul is no part of the Christian creed, just as it is no part of Christian anthropology to divide soul and body and confine the real man, the essence of personality, to supposedly separable soul for which embodiment is imprisonment...**Jesus taught no doctrine of everlasting life for disembodied souls**, such as no Jew loyal to the faith of his fathers could have accepted or even understood. But Jewish belief was in the raising of the dead at the Last Day" (pp. 148-149).

Why then do churches constantly say that disembodied souls have gone to heaven or hell?

In his *How to Enjoy the Bible*, E.W. Bullinger is entirely right to protest with indignation. He is discussing the massively popular abuse of Paul's phrase "absent from the body, present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8): "It is little less than a crime for anyone to pick out certain words and frame them into a sentence, not only disregarding the scope and the context, but ignoring the other words in the verse, and quote the words 'absent from the body, present with the Lord' with the view of dispensing with the hope of Resurrection (which is the subject of the whole passage), as though it were unnecessary; and as though 'presence with the Lord' is obtainable without it!"

Law and Grace, by Professor A. F. Knight: "In the Old Testament man is **never considered to be a soul dwelling in a body**, a soul that will one day be set free from the oppression of the body, at the death of that body, like a bird released from a cage. The Hebrews were not dualists in their understanding of God's world" (p. 79).

And Jesus was a Hebrew! Ought not churchgoers to consider following Jesus?!

Families at the Crossroads, by Rodney Clapp: "Following Greek and medieval Christian thought, we

often sharply separate the soul and body, and emphasize that **the individual soul survives death**. What's more, we tend to believe the disembodied soul has **escaped to heaven**, to a more pleasant and fully alive existence. We mistakenly envision the Christian hope as an individual affair, a matter of separate souls taking flight **to heaven**. But none of this was the case for the ancient Israelites" (pp. 95, 97).

None of this popular view of what happens when we die is found in the Bible, which Christians claim as their sole authority. (Please see at www.restorationfellowship.org our free *What Happens When We Die?*)

Protestant reformer Martin Luther said this: "I think that there is not a place in Scripture of more force for the dead who have fallen asleep, than **Ecclesiastes 9:5**: 'the dead know nothing at all,' understanding nothing of our state and condition — against the invocation of saints and the fiction of Purgatory" (*Notes on Ecclesiastes*).

"Heaven in the Bible is nowhere the destination of the dying" (Dr. J.A.T. Robinson, *In the End God*, p. 104).

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, Sermon on the Parable of Lazarus: "It is, indeed, very generally supposed that the souls of good men, as soon as they are discharged from the body, go directly to heaven; **but this opinion has not the least foundation in the oracles of God**. On the contrary our Lord says to Mary, after the resurrection, 'Touch me not; for I have not yet ascended to my Father.'"

While the Jehovah's Witnesses and others are disparagingly labeled cultists because they say that the soul does not go to heaven when a person dies, the records of early church history are testimony to the fact that "orthodoxy" is the real culprit. It is the "Church," both Protestant and Roman Catholic, who are sadly astray from truth on a basic Bible topic affecting us all!

The truth about death and what happens to us needs to be taught to children and everyone else. The biblical fact is that there is absolutely no escape from death apart from the future resurrection of the dead at the one future coming (return) of Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:23 states this fact clearly. Christians will be resurrected from the state of death at the coming of Jesus. The same truth is found all over the Bible, especially the New Testament.

The Earliest Post-Biblical Believers

Did the early Christian church teach the separation of a conscious soul from its body at the moment of death,

and its immediate departure to heaven? (I am not here discussing the condition of the soul as church fathers understood it, but only the question of its immediate *location* at death.)

Here are the words of Irenaeus of the mid-second century:

“Some who are reckoned among the orthodox go beyond the prearranged plan for the exaltation of the just, and are ignorant of the methods by which they are disciplined beforehand for incorruption. They thus entertain heretical opinions. For the heretics, not admitting the salvation of their flesh, affirm that immediately upon their death they shall pass above the heavens. [Note that it is the ‘heretics’ who teach that the soul goes immediately to heaven at death. Today, according to present orthodoxy, it is the heretics who teach that souls do not go immediately to heaven or hell. This makes Irenaeus as well as John Wesley a heretic — see quotation above!] Those persons, therefore, who reject a resurrection affecting **the whole man**, and do their best to remove it from the Christian scheme, know nothing as to the plan of resurrection. For they do not choose to understand that, if these things are as they say, the Lord Himself, in whom they profess to believe, did not rise again on the third day, but immediately upon his expiring departed on high, leaving His body in the earth. But the facts are that for three days, the Lord dwelt in the place where the dead were, as Jonas remained three days and three nights in the whale’s belly (Matt. 12:40)...David says, when prophesying of Him: ‘Thou hast delivered my soul from the nethermost hell (grave).’ And on rising the third day, He said to Mary, ‘Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my Father’ (John 20:17)...How then must not these men be put to confusion, who allege...that their inner man [soul], leaving the body here, ascends into the super-celestial place? [Irenaeus thus reckons today’s teaching as shameful!] For as the Lord ‘went away in the midst of the shadow of death’ (Ps. 86: 23), where the souls of the dead were, and afterwards arose in the body, and after the resurrection was taken up into heaven, it is *obvious* that the souls of His disciples also...shall go away into the invisible place [Hades, ‘gravedom,’ where all the dead are]...and **there remain until the resurrection**, awaiting that event. Then receiving their bodies, and rising in their entirety, bodily, just as the Lord rose, they shall come thus into the presence of God. As our Master did not at once take flight to heaven, but awaited the time of His resurrection...so we ought also to await the time of our resurrection...Inasmuch, therefore, as the opinions of certain orthodox persons are derived from heretical discourses, they are both ignorant of God’s dispensations, of the mystery of the resurrection of the just, and of the **earthly kingdom** which is the beginning of incorruption;

by means of this **kingdom** those who shall be worthy are accustomed gradually to partake of the divine nature” (*Against Heresies*, bk. 5).

Irenaeus thus condemns the whole “orthodox” tradition about what happens at death, the tradition, that is, which eventually swamped the biblical teaching, from the third century onwards.

The second-century protest of Justin Martyr against what *later* became orthodoxy (“correct” belief) and remains so to this day, is no less incisive:

“They who maintain the wrong opinion say that there is no resurrection of the flesh...As in the case of a yoke of oxen, if one or other is loosed from the yoke, neither of them can plough alone; so neither can soul or body alone effect anything, if they be unyoked from their communion...[i.e. the soul can have no separate, active existence]. For what is man but the reasonable animal composed of body and soul? Is the soul by itself man? No, but the soul of man. Would the body be called man? No, but it is called the body of man. If then neither of these is by itself man, but that which is made up of the two together is called man, and God has called man to life and resurrection, He has called not a part, but the whole, which is the soul and body...Well, they say, the soul is incorruptible, being a part of God and inspired by Him...Then what thanks are due to Him, and what manifestation of His power and goodness is it, if He purposed to save what is by nature saved...but no thanks are due to one who saves what is his own; for this is to save himself...How then did Christ raise the dead? Their souls or their bodies? Manifestly both. If the resurrection were only spiritual, it was requisite that He, in raising the dead, should show the body lying apart by itself, and the soul living apart by itself. But now He did not do so, but raised the body...Why do we any longer endure those unbelieving arguments and fail to see that we are retrograding when we listen to such an argument as this: That the soul is immortal, but the body mortal, and incapable of being revived. For this we used to hear from **Plato**, even before we learned the truth. If then the Saviour said this and proclaimed salvation to the soul alone, what new thing beyond what we heard from **Plato**, did He bring us?” (*Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 80).

Justin thus implies that teaching an immediate survival of the soul in heaven or hell is Platonism, not Christianity!

Justin is here refuting the arguments of Gnosticism (a form of **false knowledge** warned against by Paul in 1 Tim. 6:20: *gnosis*) which denied the resurrection of the flesh. Traditional Christianity has taken a similar, but slightly different tack by including in the creed a belief in the resurrection of the body, *while also teaching* an immediate salvation of the soul, at death, alone in a conscious, disembodied state. This is said to be the real

person, albeit disembodied. Such an idea is flatly contradicted by Justin and Irenaeus and is identified by them as pagan. The false notion now taught so widely is a hodge-podge and compromise with paganism (as is also the wrong doctrine of God as Triune — which Jesus did not believe: Mark 12:29; Deut. 6:4).

Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, a Jew

Surely the Bible needs to be heard and understood, as a correction of our traditional errors. Truth on this point was known even by writers of the second century:

Trypho: “Do you really admit that this place Jerusalem shall be rebuilt? And do you expect your people to be gathered together, and made joyful with Christ and the patriarchs?”

Justin: “I and many others are of that opinion, and believe that this will take place, as you are assuredly aware; but on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong¹ to the pure and pious faith think otherwise. Moreover I pointed out to you that some who are called Christians, but are godless, impious heretics, teach doctrines that are in every way blasphemous, atheistical and foolish...I choose to follow not men or men’s teachings, but God and the doctrines delivered by Him. **For if you have fallen in with some who are called Christians, but who do not admit the truth of the resurrection...who say that there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls when they die are taken to heaven, do not imagine that they are Christians...**But I and others who are right-minded Christians on all points are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and **a thousand years** [millennium] in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned and enlarged, as the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah and others declare...We have perceived, moreover, that the expression, ‘The Day of the Lord,’ is connected with this subject. And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the Apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation that was made to him that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a **thousand years** in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general and the eternal resurrection of all men would take place.”

Justin’s statement on the Intermediate State (in full) (ca. 150 AD):

“For if you have fallen in with some who are called Christians, 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, and that their souls when they

die are taken to heaven: do not imagine that they are Christians; just as one, if he would rightly consider it would not admit that the Sadducees, or similar sects of the Genistae, Meristae, Galilaeans, Hellenists, Pharisees, Baptists, are Jews, but are only called Jews, worshipping God with the lips, as God declared, but the heart was far from Him. But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned and enlarged, as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare” (*Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 80).

The Latin church father Tertullian (often known as the father of Western Christianity) is another who would disagree strongly with modern “orthodoxy” about what happens to the soul at death. He protested against the idea that the soul leaves the body at death and goes to heaven:

“**Plato**...dispatches at once to heaven such souls as he pleases...To the question, whither the soul is withdrawn [at death] we now give the answer...The Stoics place only their own souls, that is, the souls of the wise, in the mansions above. Plato, it is true, does not allow this destination to all the souls, indiscriminately, of even all the philosophers, but only those who have cultivated their philosophy out of love to boys [homosexuals]...In this system, then, the souls of the wise are carried up on high into the ether...All other souls they thrust down to Hades.

“By ourselves the lower regions of Hades are not supposed to be a bare cavity, nor some subterranean sewer of the world, but a vast deep space in the interior of the earth, and a concealed recess in its very bowels; inasmuch as we read that Christ in His death spent three days in the heart of the earth, that is, in the secret inner recess which is hidden in the earth, and enclosed by the earth, and superimposed on the abysmal depths which lie still lower down...This being the case you must suppose Hades to be a subterranean region and keep at arm’s length those who are too proud to believe that the souls of the faithful deserve a place in the lower regions. These persons who are ‘servants above their Lord, and disciples above their Master’ would no doubt spurn to receive the comfort of the resurrection, if they must expect it in Abraham’s bosom. But it was for this purpose, say they, that Christ descended into hell, that we might not ourselves have to descend thither. Well, then [they say], what difference is there between heathens and Christians, if the same prison awaits them all when dead? [But I say] How, indeed, shall the soul mount up to heaven, where Christ is already sitting at the Father’s right hand, when as yet the archangel’s trumpet has not been heard by the command of God? When as yet those whom the coming of the Lord is to find on the earth, have not been caught up into the air to meet Him at His coming, in company with the dead in Christ, who shall be the first to arise? [I

¹ A number of commentators believe that the text has been corrupted here and that Justin wrote “who do *not* belong...” The alteration was made to make Justin less condemning of Amillennialism.

Thess. 4:13ff.] **To no one is heaven opened.** When the world, indeed, shall pass away, then the kingdom of heaven shall be opened” (*Treatise on the Soul*, ch. 55).

Another “church father,” Hippolytus (ca. 170-236), certainly did not think that souls were in heaven:

“But now we must speak of Hades, in which the souls both of the righteous and the unrighteous are detained...The righteous will obtain the incorruptible and unfading **Kingdom**, who indeed are at present detained in Hades...Thus far, then, on the subject of Hades, in which the souls of all are detained until the time God has determined; and then He will accomplish a resurrection of all, not by transferring souls into other bodies, but by raising the bodies themselves” (*Against Plato, on the Cause of the Universe*, 1, 2).

Modern scholars realize that the view of death which has prevailed (and is now promoted and reinforced in church constantly) is not biblical. Far from it, it is, amazingly, actually “pagan” and “Gnostic.” Moreover as the above quotations from the early apologists for Christianity show, the idea of going to heaven or hellfire immediately at death was a novel, heretical doctrine not taught by the church for some three hundred years after Christ. In a standard text of *Christian Dogmatics* we read this:

“The hellenization process by which **Christianity adopted many Greek [pagan] thought patterns led in a different direction as the eschatological [future Kingdom] hope came to be expressed in Hellenistic categories.** Irenaeus said: ‘It is manifest that the souls of His disciples also, upon whose account the Lord underwent these things, shall go away in the invisible place allotted to them by God, and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event. Then receiving their bodies and rising in their entirety, that is bodily, just as the Lord arose, they shall come into the presence of God.’ Irenaeus’ statement contains the concept of an abode or purgatory in which the soul of the dead remains until the universal resurrection. We should not denounce this as a deviation from biblical teaching, since the point of the assertion is anti-Gnostic. Irenaeus wanted to reject **the Gnostic idea that at the end of this earthly life the soul immediately ascends to its heavenly abode.** As the early fathers fought the pagan idea that a part of the human person is simply immortal, it was important for them to assert that there is no rectilinear ascent to God. Once we die, life is over.”²

There is a further impressive protest against the popular idea that the dead survive as conscious “souls” in heaven. One might expect that such protest would initiate

² Braaten/Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, p. 503, section written by Hans Schwartz, Professor of Protestant Theology, University of Regensburg, Germany.

a wide-scale reform amongst the clergy. Alan Richardson writes in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*:

“The Bible writers, holding fast to the conviction that the created order owes its existence to the wisdom and love of God and is therefore essentially good, **could not conceive of life after death as a disembodied existence** [as millions of believers are now week by week taught in church to think of it!] (‘we shall not be found naked,’ 2 Cor. 5:3), but as a renewal under conditions of the intimate unity of body and soul which was human life as they knew it. Hence death was thought of as **the death of the whole man**, and such phrases as ‘freedom from death,’ imperishability or immortality could only properly be used to describe what is meant by the phrase eternal or living God ‘who only has immortality’ (1 Tim. 6:16). Man does not possess within himself the quality of deathlessness, but must, if he is to overcome the destructive power of death, receive it as the gift of God who ‘raised Christ from the dead,’ and put death aside like a covering garment (1 Cor. 15:53-54). It is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that this possibility for man (2 Tim. 1:10) has been brought to life and the hope confirmed that the corruption (Rom. 8:21) which is a universal feature of human life shall be effectively overcome” (pp. 111-112).

The fundamental confusion and “double-talk” about life after death which has so permeated traditional Christianity is brilliantly described by Dr. Paul Althaus in his book *The Theology of Martin Luther*:

“The hope of the early church centered on the resurrection of the Last Day. It is this which *first* calls the dead into eternal life (1 Cor. 15; Phil. 3:21). This resurrection happens **to the man** and not only to the body. Paul speaks of the resurrection not ‘of the body’ but ‘of the dead.’ This understanding of the resurrection implicitly understands death as also **affecting the whole man...**Thus [in traditional orthodoxy] **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 Last Day also loses its significance, for souls have received all that is decisively important long before this. Eschatological tension is no longer strongly directed to the day of Jesus’ Coming. **The difference between this and the Hope of the New Testament is very great.**”³

That difference and departure from Scripture may be witnessed in contemporary preaching at funerals which, though claiming the Bible as its source and standard, reflects a **pagan Platonism** which the New Testament, the early church fathers, and many modern informed scholars clearly reject.

³ Fortress Press, 1966, pp. 413-414, emphasis added.

Can belief in **pagan ideas**, promoted in the name of Jesus, result in a knowledge and love of the Truth which leads to salvation (2 Thess. 2:10)? Is not this obvious **paganism** of non-biblical Christianity a cause for alarm and a reason for returning to the Truth of the Bible?✧

Do You Believe in a Real or False Jesus?

I begin with a significant quotation which speaks loudly to the important fact that the Jesus of history and the Bible has been buried under centuries of tradition and myth. The real Christ has been supplanted by an imaginary Jesus — what the famous church historian, Adolf von Harnack, called the “the imagined Christ.” Our subject is of the most vital importance to all our readers. It is a matter of urgency that we all, and the children we teach, not be deceived by what they may falsely be learning in Sunday School or church, by well-meaning but ill-instructed teachers.

“The story of how Greek philosophy with its synthesis of rationalism and mysticism persuasively penetrated and permeated the Christian tradition, forever **altering the Christian faith, is virtually an open secret insofar as it oozes out of the pores of the literature of Church history and theology. The open secret continues to be kept, no doubt, due to its staggering implications.**”⁴

“Many scholars claim that the early church literally stole Jesus from his original followers, hijacking his human message [the Gospel about the Kingdom, Luke 4:43], shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power.”⁵

Prominent British Bible scholar Tom Wright adds his voice of warning against the disaster that we have all inherited in Church: “It is not only possible but actually highly likely, that **the Church has distorted the real Jesus, and needs to repent of this and rediscover who its Lord actually is.**”⁶

How the Fatal Obscuring of Truth Happened

A leading British Bible scholar wrote: “When John presents the eternal Word [John 1:1] he was not thinking of a Being in any way separate from God, or some ‘*Hypostasis*’ [the Church creed’s word for ‘Person,’ the meaning of which remains foggy!] The **later dogmatic Trinitarian distinctions** should not be read *into* John’s mind...in the light of a philosophy which was not his...We must not read John in the light of the dogmatic

⁴ Robert Hach, *Possession and Persuasion: The Rhetoric of Christian Faith*, 2000, p. 120, emphasis added.

⁵ Cited from Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, by Greg Deuble in *They Never Told Me This in Church*, p. 15.

⁶ *Who Was Jesus?* SPCK, 1992, p. 18.

history of the three centuries subsequent to the Evangelist’s writing. [But that is *exactly* what churchgoers do!]

“To understand John (and the rest of the New Testament) we must pay close attention to John’s cultural heritage which was **not the world of Greek philosophy in which the dogmatic creeds were formed some three hundred years later.** When John is read in the light of his Hebrew background he provides **no support for the doctrine of a Jesus who is ‘God the Son,’ an eternal uncreated Person in a triune Godhead.**

“An author’s language will confuse us, unless we have some *rapport* with his mind...The evangelist John takes a well-known term *logos*, does not define it, but unfolds what he himself means by it...The idea belonged to the Old Testament, and is involved in the whole religious belief and experience of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is the most fitting term to express his message. For a man’s ‘word’ is the expression of his ‘mind’; and his mind is his essential personality. Every mind must express itself, for activity is the very nature of mind...Thus John speaks of the ‘Word’ that was *with* God, and was *Divine*, to express his conviction that God has ever been Active and Revealing Mind. God, by His very nature, cannot sit in heaven and do nothing. When later in the Gospel Jesus says, ‘My Father works up till now’ he is saying what the Evangelist says in the first verse of the Prologue.

“**John’s language is not the language of philosophical definition.** John has a ‘concrete’ and ‘pictorial’ mind. The failure to understand John [in his prologue] has led many to the conclusion that he is ‘father of metaphysical [i.e., Trinitarian] Christology,’ and therefore responsible for the later ecclesiastical obscuration of the ethical and spiritual emphasis of Jesus...The evangelist did not think in terms of the category of ‘substance’ — a category which was so congenial to the Greek mind.”⁷

In an illuminating article in the *Bible Review*, Dr. J. Harold Ellens points out that “titles such as **Son of God**, as used at the time when the New Testament was written, were never meant to designate the figures to whom they were applied as divine beings. They meant rather that these figures were imbued with divine spirit, or the Logos. The titles referred to their function and character as men of God, **not to their being God.** Thinking of a human as being God was strictly a Greek or Hellenistic notion. Thus the early theological debates from the middle of the second century on were largely between Antioch, a center of Jewish Christianity, on the one hand, and Alexandrian Christianity, **heavily colored by neo-Platonic speculation**, on the other. For the most part, the

⁷ C.J. Wright, *Jesus: The Revelation of God*, p. 707, 711.

Jewish Christians' argument tended to be that they had known Jesus and his family and that he was a **human being**, a great teacher, one filled with the divine Logos...but that he was not divine in the ontological sense, as the Alexandrians insisted. The arguments persisted in one form or another until Cyril of Alexandria's faction finally won the day for a highly **mythologized Jesus of divine ontological being**. *Cyril was capable of murdering his fellow bishops to get his way.*

"By the time of the Council of Nicea in 325 CE, this Alexandrian perspective of high Christology was dominant but not uncontested by the Antiochian perspective of low Christology. From Nicea to Chalcedon the speculative and **neo-Platonist perspective** gained increasing ground and **became orthodox Christian dogma in 451 CE**. Unfortunately, what the theologians of the great ecumenical councils meant by such creedal titles as Son of God *was remote from what those same titles meant in the Gospels*. The creeds were speaking in **Greek philosophical terms**: the gospels were speaking in Second Temple Judaism terms...The Bishops of the councils should have realized that they had shifted ground from Hebrew metaphor to Greek ontology and in effect **betrayed the real Jesus Christ**."⁸

It is not difficult to understand that the Bible is abandoned when fundamental terms like "Son of God" are given new and unbiblical meanings. The church councils under the influence of Greek speculative neo-Platonism **replaced the New Testament Son of God with a God the Son fashioned by philosophy**. When a different meaning for a title is substituted for the original, a new faith is created. That new faith became "orthodoxy." It insisted on its dogmas, on pain of excommunication and damnation (the Athanasian Creed). Nicene dogmatic "orthodoxy" lifted Jesus out of his Hebrew environment and twisted John's Gospel in an effort to make John fit into "orthodoxy's" philosophical mold. And so it has remained to this day.

A revolution is needed to reverse this tragic process. It will come when Christians take personal responsibility for getting in touch with the Bible and investigating it with all the tools now, in the internet age, so readily at our disposal. A key to proper biblical understanding is to recognize that the Bible is a Jewish library of books and that Jesus was a Jew steeped in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament). It is time to insist on believing in the same God as defined by Jesus in Mark 12:29!

⁸ See "The Ancient Library of Alexandria," *Bible Review* Feb. 1997, p. 19-29 and further comments in "From Logos to Christ" ("Readers Reply"), *BR*, June 1997, p. 4-7, emphasis added.

The hidden paganism in Christianity needs to be exposed. The history of orthodoxy shows signs of a spirit which is far removed from the spirit of Jesus. Those who have questioned "orthodoxy" have often been roughly handled.⁹ One commentator asks:

"How is that the religion of love has been responsible for some of the worst cruelties and injustices that have ever disgraced humanity?...**The Church has persecuted more cruelly than any other religion**...Our religious beliefs are propped up on the traditional scaffolding, and many of us are intensely annoyed if the stability of this scaffolding is called in question. The average Catholic [and the same applies to many Protestants] relies on the infallibility of his Church, which he has usually accepted without investigation. To own that his Church has been wrong, and has sanctioned heinous crimes, is almost impossible for him."¹⁰

Monotheism

Neither Paul nor any other writer of the Bible ever stated anything remotely like the proposition that "there is One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit." No example out of thousands of occurrences of Yahweh and God can be shown to mean "God in three Persons." The Triune God is foreign to the Bible. The words of Paul need careful consideration: "There is no God but one...To us there is **one God, the Father**" (1 Cor. 8:4, 6). There is also one lord Messiah, Jesus (1 Cor. 8:6), but he is the lord *Christ* (Luke 2:11: "Messiah lord"; Ps. 110:1: *adoni*, "my lord," not "my Lord"), the *Son* of the One God, his Father (Mal. 2:10).

The two major players in the Bible are described in a precious divine oracle, provided as a golden proof-text, quoted in the New Testament more than any other verse from the Hebrew Bible — Psalm 110:1. There the One God "Yahweh" speaks to David's lord, who is addressed as *adoni* ("my lord"). *Adoni* in its 195 occurrences **never means the One God**. It refers always to a human or (occasionally) angelic superior, someone *other than* God. Jesus is therefore not God, but the lord Messiah (Luke 2:11, his birth certificate). Jesus is the lord of David of whom Psalm 110:1 speaks in an oracle. He was *appointed* lord and Messiah — appointed by God, his Father (Acts 2:34-36, quoting Ps. 110:1).

⁹For an illuminating example of misguided religious zeal and cruelty, see the account of Calvin's savage persecution and execution of the Spanish doctor and scholar who questioned the doctrine of the Trinity, in Marian Hillar, *The Case of Michael Servetus (1511-1553) — The Turning Point in the Struggle for Freedom of Conscience*, Edwin Mellen Press, 1997.

¹⁰Dean W.R. Inge, *A Pacifist in Trouble*, London: Putnam, 1939, p. 180, 181.

Out of respect and honor for Jesus, and as students of Rabbi Messiah, the Savior, Christians should adopt Jesus' Jewish-Christian creed in Mark 12:29: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is *one Lord*." God is *one* Lord. If Jesus were another who is Lord God, that would make *two* Lords, which is not monotheism! But the Bible's creed knows of only one Lord who is God (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29). That is the creed of Jesus and therefore the original and authentic Christian creed. It is also the creed of Paul. May we all joyfully embrace that creed and align ourselves with the Jesus Messiah of history. "Salvation is given to those who obey Jesus" (Heb. 5:9; John 3:36). ✧

Comments

• "I just want to say how much I am enjoying listening and learning from your many YouTube clips on various subjects! Your style is very clear and direct! I have not had such good teaching for many years — certainly not since I left the Christadelphians! Your arguments are terrifically backed up by your knowledge of the original words, before translation, and you use your gift to good purpose! It really made me think, when you were talking about our gifts — that we have no gifts that weren't given us by God; that we need to use them in His service; and that we are destined to become rulers and kings in the kingdom — that there will be no such thing as 'just scraping in' or being a mere doorkeeper! I have been wondering for some time what my gifts are, so that I might use them! When by now I ought to be a teacher, I am still needing to be taught! I am made to realize how much my faith and knowledge has lapsed, while spending so much time away from the Lord, and sitting in churches listening to watered down milk! So thank the Lord for your teaching, and encouragement, and the means I have of being able to hear it." — *England*

• "You so diligently and regularly send me this most precious free paper, and I have said 'thank you' many, many times — but only in my heart, and always, as I read the enlightened words. But THIS time, I just want to put my appreciation in black and white and earnestly tell you how much I appreciate your study, your effort and your faithfulness! Thank you, with all my heart! In Messiah's name, I thank our Father!" — *Canada*

• "I've just accepted the fact that Jesus is not God the Son but indeed the Son of God. I have also been brought to believe, in part by your writings, that the conventional 'orthodox' beliefs in hell and heaven, as well as those of a naturally immortal soul, are also extra-biblical as well as unbiblical. This was a long and painful road for someone who studied thomistic philosophy and went to a Catholic seminary. My question is simple: where do I go from here, i.e., notwithstanding the need to redefine my

education in the matter, where do I find a community of like-minded believers?" — *Montreal, Canada*

• "I hope you are doing well and that everything at the conference went well also. I watched it on Sunday morning as it was podcasted live and will watch some of the speeches on YouTube. Thanks also for your excellent, wonderful newsletter! All of the articles are full of good information and superbly written. I am especially grateful for the article 'I Was Forced to Abandon Orthodoxy' by Kevin George (May). I'd love to meet him. He had so many well-thought-out points. I am going to copy this article and give it to another science teacher, who, I think, is a part-time minister. I've been trying to get up the courage to approach him about the Trinity." — *Oklahoma*

Thanks to all who came to the recent 26th Conference. We are so encouraged and grateful for the very considerable efforts you all made to travel to Atlanta for the remarkable recent conference.

The faith stories and longer presentations were outstanding: in fact they took us to a new high level in terms of their impact. The obvious passion for truth (needed for salvation, Paul said in 2 Thess. 2:10) was so encouraging and inspiring for us all. Remember that all this was recorded and can be viewed again and above all shared with friends, now and in the future:

[youtube.com/AbrahamicMovement](https://www.youtube.com/AbrahamicMovement)

The presentations amounted to an important part of the Great Commission. They can have a profound effect on all who hear them. Do come again, please, and bring your friends! If you want to make suggestions and observations for how we might do things differently, do let us know too.

Southern California Meetings

Hello, everyone within earshot of southern California — Los Angeles to be specific. The new LA Church of God has decided to begin its life with meetings at the home of Nelvan and Sheri Evans in Sun Valley on Wednesday evenings at 7:00 pm. Their phone is 818-764-2664. Email is sherinelvan@dslextreme.com. Give Nelvan a call or send him an email for the address and other details.

Praise God and His Son, Jesus the Messiah! The Church of God is pleased and proud to sponsor this assembly. Thanks to Nelvan and Sheri for organizing this group as a light in the Los Angeles area. Thank you to Sir Anthony Buzzard and the Restoration fellowship for their work of evangelism which helps make this possible. — *Robin Todd, U.S. Missions Coordinator, General Conference Church of God*