

Focus on the Kingdom

Volume 2 No. 10

Anthony Buzzard, editor

July, 2000

Which Son of God Are You Confessing?

Three main — and differing — views of Jesus and his status as Son of God have been held since New Testament times. The public is largely unaware of the centuries-long theological and political warfare which occurred in connection with arguments over the Bible's teaching about who Jesus is and was. (A "must-read" is *When Jesus Became God*, by R.E. Rubenstein, Harcourt Brace and Co., 1999.) Many churchgoers seem complacent, unconcerned, when invited to consider the biblically crucial matter of identifying the Jesus of the Bible — as distinct from any "other Jesus" (II Cor. 11:4) who may be offered as a savior. For some, such questions fall into the awful area of "doctrine," and in pragmatic America have little or nothing to do with real Christian life. The anti-intellectual mood of our times erects a barrier against Berean-style searching (Acts 17:11), meditation and progress towards saving Truth (II Thess. 2:10-13). As Christians, however, we cannot afford to be lethargic. The stakes are too high. Easy-going compliance with "what we have always believed," "the majority which cannot be wrong," may be the signal that our powers of discernment have been dulled. Jesus and Paul recognized no division between "right doctrine" and "right practice." Believing falsehoods, doctrinally or otherwise, is dangerous, and theological falsehoods are especially pernicious. The battle for the minds of men, as Schaeffer said, lies in the world of ideas.

Jesus, we repeat, knew of no such compartmentalizing of "doctrine" and "Christian living." For him Truth mattered supremely. We either believe what is true or what is false, and it requires effort and investigation to establish Truth to the best of our abilities. If ever a verse urged a solution to "the present distress," it would be this one: The Bereans were warmly commended when they "searched the Scriptures daily to see if what they were hearing was true" (Acts 17:11).

Though Jesus confirmed the love of neighbor as a cardinal duty of all his followers, that was not all he taught. He came as the bearer of *the Gospel about the*

Kingdom of God. That Gospel was his "core belief," since it was the reason for his Commission: "I must preach the Gospel about the Kingdom of God to other towns also. That is the reason why God commissioned me" (Luke 4:43). Here it may be useful to take one's spiritual temperature by comparing one's own sense of mission with that of Jesus. He mandated that his followers continue the same Kingdom Gospel work (Luke 9:60; Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 8:12; 20:25, 28:23, 31, etc.).

Jesus also came to found his Church. It was to be built on the solid rock, not of agreement with the Golden Rule (important as it is), but on an enlightened understanding of *who Jesus is*. It was Jesus as Master-Rabbi who probed the intelligence of his students. "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" (see Matt. 16:13-16). This utterly correct response was greeted with enthusiastic praise from Jesus. "Congratulations, Peter, because flesh and blood [human wisdom] did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter ["rock"], and on this rock I will found my Church, and the gates of the realm of the dead will not prevail against it."

The whole point of the New Testament is that Jesus is the Messiah. This backbone doctrine, this central conviction appears repeatedly. "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ/Son of God..." (I John 5:1, 5, 9, 10, 12; 4:2; 2 John 7).

Luke and Mark do not fail to include in their reports the watershed event by which Jesus established that his chosen team knew beyond any doubt that he, their lord and master, was indeed the Messiah. According to the version given us by Matthew, Peter identified Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." The latter part of the title interestingly identifies the model Christian believer with the ideal Israelite as predicted in Hosea. The time is coming when the now apostate people will be entitled to be called "Sons of the Living God" (Hos. 1:10). Jesus demonstrated that

In This Issue

"Destroy This Temple": The End of the Mosaic System.... 4
Comment..... 7

ideal status to perfection. Mark records Peter as identifying Jesus as “the Christ” (Mark 8:29), Luke as “the Christ of God” (Luke 9:29). Clearly, then, since each writer makes a solemn and clear point, “Messiah and Son of God” are virtual synonyms. It is sufficient to declare Jesus to be “the Messiah.” “The Son of the Living God” describes the Messiah’s relationship to his Father. But Messiah and Son of God are the essential, defining titles of the true Jesus. Any “Jesus’s” who do not fit the biblical picture of Messiah are imitations.

Confessions are all very well. But they depend for their truth on *the meaning* we attach to the words we confess. We may “make the right sounds” and say “I believe that Jesus is the Son of God.” But if perhaps we have been misled into a false idea of what “Son of God” means in the Bible, our confession will lack authenticity. When we say “Jesus is the Son of God,” we must mean what Jesus and the Apostles meant by “Son of God.”

Church history is a stormy affair. Professing Christians have attacked each other unmercifully both by word and physical force. They have excommunicated each other, anathematized each other, banished each other and even killed each other precisely over the issue “Who is Jesus?” Which of the various Jesus’s offered to us by different Christian groups is the real Jesus — the one who lived and lives?

Here are the major available options:

1) “Jesus is the Son of God” means belief that the Son existed from eternity. There was never a time when the Son did not exist. He was “eternally generated” (few, if any, can offer a clear idea about what that puzzling phrase might mean). There was no beginning to his generation.

2) “Jesus is the Son of God” means belief that the Son was generated by God, his Father, sometime before the Genesis creation. This generation occurred in time. There was a time when the Son of God did *not* exist.

3) “Jesus is the Son of God” means belief that the Son of God came into being when Mary conceived a child supernaturally under the creative influence of the spirit of the Father. The Father caused the Son of God to be begotten in history, in Palestine some two thousand years ago.

Which of these differing views will stand up under careful examination from the whole range of Scripture?

It is interesting to note that view 1 (the so-called Trinitarian, orthodox view) has been held by a large

majority since the time of the famous Councils of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381) and Chalcedon (451). Prior to that time (from the second century), view 2 (the so-called “Arian” view, held today by Jehovah’s Witnesses) was either predominant over or in fierce competition with view 1. Few know that a major church council (actually a bigger council than at Nicea) decided that the Arian view was the correct one, and that everyone should accept it in order to remain a Christian in good standing. This happened at the Council of Rimini-Seleucia (359).

View 3 existed alongside the other two views. It had many adherents in the pre-Nicene period, though their writings were often suppressed by the party — view 1 — which eventually gained the theological victory concerning the identity of Jesus. Nevertheless view 3 is well known enough to have been given a label: “Dynamic Monarchianism.” This view was insistent that God was a single Monarch and that His Son was subordinate to Him. It was held by a Bishop Paul of Samosata and (in principle) by those like Marcellus of Ancyra who denied that there was a “Son of God” before the birth of Jesus, and clearly by his pupil Bishop Photinus of Sirmium. It was held by early Jewish Christians known as Ebionites (that section of them which also held to the Virginal Conception). This view 3 was revived by Michael Servetus (whom John Calvin authorized to be burned at the stake in 1553 — because Calvin thought that view 1 was the only view to be permitted). View 3 was held heroically by John Biddle (1615-62) in England, by the Italians Faustus and Laelius Socinus and their followers, by Polish Anabaptist brethren (documented in their Racovian Catechism), and by a number of well-known 19th-, 20th-century and contemporary scholars. View 3 can be usefully labeled as “Socinian.”

Trinitarian, Arian or Socinian. Which of these understandings of the meaning of “Son of God” can claim to match the Bible? We can begin by simplifying the question: All three views agree that Jesus is the Son of God in a special sense, the unique Son of God. The question is: Did this “Son of God” have a beginning, and if so, when was that beginning? The question is thus about origins. Is the Son of God of the Bible an eternal, uncreated Person equal to God the Father? Is he a created Person in the category of angel? Or is he a human being originating by miracle in his mother’s womb?

A reasonable way to proceed to an answer is to ask: What light does the Hebrew Bible throw on our question? The Old Testament, as all agree, has much to say about the Messiah before he arrived. What sort of

Son of God were the Jews expecting? Do any texts in the Hebrew Bible instruct us to expect “the Son of God” to give up a conscious life in heaven in order to enter the womb of a Jewish woman and be born as a man — or rather God-Man or Angel-Man?

The answer we suggest allows for little doubt. What does the Old Testament say about the Son of God? Centrally important is the Davidic Covenant (II Sam. 7:14). Here we find a *promised* Son of God who is to arise from the family of David. This Son of God is certainly not alive in the time of David. He is the object of a divine promise. “He *will be* [not ‘he is’] my Son, and I will be his Father.” So also in Isaiah 9:6: “A Son *will be* born [to Israel] and he will be called Wonderful, Counselor, *el gibbor* [‘divine hero, reflecting the divine majesty,’ *Brown, Driver and Briggs Lexicon of the Old Testament*], Prince of Peace.” The Son is to be born when “a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son” (Isa. 7:14). No one can reasonably assert that this promised Son is anything other than a royal descendant of Judah and David, miraculously born, but obviously a unique member of the human race — the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15).

No one in Old Testament times could possibly have imagined (in view of all the other Messianic promises, Deut 18:15-18; Num. 24:17; Ezek. 21:27; 34:23 etc.) that this Son to be born of a virgin, would in fact be alive as an Angel or as God *before his birth* and then enter the world by passing through the womb of a woman and becoming a man. Expert commentators on the Hebrew Bible agree that the idea of an Incarnation (becoming man) of *an already existing Son of God* would be alien to the Hebrew Bible. In fact the Jews have never found any such non-human Son of God in the 75% of the Bible we call the Old Testament. Scholars of the Hebrew Bible have often gone on record to deny that the later doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son is found there.

Views 1 and 2 thus suffer an enormous blow at the outset of our investigation. What might proponents of these views offer in defense? They might answer that the promised Son of God was actually operating in Old Testament times under the title “Angel of the Lord.” They might contend that when God said “Let us make man in our image” (Gen. 1:26) that God was addressing His already existing (whether from eternity or just before Genesis) Son. But many now admit that these arguments are without solid basis. The Angel of the Lord was an angel and Jesus was never an angel (Heb. 1), and God did not say, “Let me and my Son make....”

Staying with our field of investigation in the Old

Testament we inquire, What is the meaning of the term Son of God? We have found the title in the Davidic Promise (II Sam. 7:14). But we find also that Israel was collectively the Son of God (Exod. 4:22; cp. Hosea 11:1). And in Psalm 2 we have the classic passage about the Son of God. He is “the Lord’s Anointed” (i.e. Messiah) (v. 2), “my [God’s] King,” (v. 6) and “My Son: Today I have begotten you” (v. 7). Here the Bible presents us with a trio of synonyms. The Son of God is the Messiah, God’s King, whom God personally begets — in time, “today.”

The fact that the Son is begotten “today” will rule out view 1 immediately. Obviously a “Son of God” who has no beginning will not match the Son of God, Messiah who has been begotten “today.” What’s more, the New Testament is very interested in that verse in Psalm 2. Does the New Testament use of Psalm 2:7, “today I have begotten you,” throw light on the crucial question as to *when* that begetting took place? It certainly does. Unfortunately the KJV confused the translation of Acts 13:33 (which cites Psalm 2:7) by leading us to believe that the begetting took place when Jesus was *resurrected*. There is an important point at stake here: In Acts 13:33 Paul delivered the essential facts of the faith: “And we declare the good news of how the promise made to the Fathers has been fulfilled by God to us their children: God *raised up* Jesus [note that the word “again” does not appear in Paul’s speech, but was wrongly added in the KJV], as it stands written in the second psalm: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten you.’” The next verse proceeds to tell us of God’s other great intervention in history: “And as for the fact that He raised him *from the dead*, never again to return to corruption, He said: ‘I will give you the sure mercies of David’” (Acts 13:34). So there are two events here: The begetting of the Messiah when God created him in the womb of Mary (v. 33), and secondly the Messiah’s resurrection to immortality (v. 34). The major point to be grasped is that Psalm 2, which predicts the begetting of the Son of God, declares that event to be an event in time. It is an event which marks the “raising up” of the Messiah — that is, his production and appearance on the scene of history (cp. Acts 3:26; Rom. 9:17, “raised up”). There is no reference to a begetting of the Son of God either in eternity (view 1), or in a time prior to Genesis (view 2). But there is a further supremely important scriptural testimony to the Son’s begetting, just as we would expect from the data we have presented, when Mary became pregnant. Matthew records: “Now the ‘genesis’ of Jesus was as follows...” (Matt. 1:18). The Greek word here is not the word which simply means

birth. It has the more precise meaning of “origin.” It points to the beginning of the Son of God’s existence. “Before Joseph and Mary came together, Mary was found to be pregnant — a pregnancy having its origin (*ek*) in divine spirit...Behold the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and announced these words: ‘Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife, for what has been *begotten* [i.e. brought into existence] in her has its origin in the holy spirit” (see Matt. 1:18-20). It is important to observe that the angel refers (v. 20) not to Mary’s part in the creation of the Son, her conception, but to the action of the Father who begets the Son in her womb. This simple fact is avoided by the KJV when it mistranslates *yenneethen*¹ (begotten) as “conceived.” There is evidence here of bias by orthodox translators for whom the notion of a begetting of the Son in history is unwelcome. On the highest authority, that of Gabriel himself, Luke records the *beginning* (and he certainly does not hint that there is any *other* beginning) of the Son’s existence. In answer to Mary’s reasonable question about pregnancy in the absence of a physical father, Gabriel explains in a manner which should silence all objectors: “Holy Spirit [i.e., Divine creative energy reminiscent of the Genesis creation, Gen. 1:2] will come upon you; the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and it is *for that reason precisely* that the one being begotten will be called Holy, the Son of God.”

It hardly needs to be pointed out that the angel’s statement would be a very partial truth, if in fact that Son of God had been *already* in existence for millennia past. Gabriel’s succinctly stated point is that the cause of Jesus’ Sonship is the creative miracle by which God acted in Mary to beget His Son. As Raymond Brown admits candidly (*Birth of the Messiah*, p. 291), this statement of Gabriel has caused embarrassment both to orthodoxy (view 1) and to Arianism (view 2). According to these views the miracle in Mary’s womb is not the causal basis of Jesus’ right to be called the Son of God. If Trinitarianism or Arianism is correct Jesus would have been rightfully the Son of God long before his conception.

In the absence of any Bible verse hinting at a begetting of the Son (1) in eternity or (2) just prior to Genesis, we conclude that the Bible does not recognize as Messiah a Person other than the Son whose origin and inception are to be traced to the unique act of God

¹ Transliterating the Greek to follow modern Greek pronunciation.

in the reign of Herod the King. Just as the Father had produced from the dust of the earth Adam “the Son of God” (Luke 3:38), the first man, so now He inaugurates the new creation by bringing into existence miraculously the second Adam, the unique, virginally conceived, Son of God.

John of course describes this Son of God, who is the very expression of God’s mind and word (John 1:1) as the unique Son of God (John 1:18 — here we agree with that member of the committee who decided on a “D” rating for the very improbable reading “only begotten god”). That Son, Jesus, is the one also who keeps the Christian safe: “the one who was begotten by God keeps him and the wicked one is not able to touch him” (I John 5:18, note again the KJV’s inadequate text, corrected by modern versions).

Truly, as the distinguished systematic theologian and general editor of the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, observed: “The title ‘Son of God’ is not in itself a designation of personal deity or an expression of metaphysical distinctions within the Godhead. Indeed to be a ‘Son of God’ one has to be a being who is *not* God. It is a designation for a creature indicating a special relationship with God. In particular, it denotes God’s representative, God’s vice-regent. It is a designation of kingship, identifying the king as God’s Son” (*Ex Auditu* 7, 1991, p. 88).

On this magnificent truth, may we renew our confession of Jesus as Son of God. To do so is to place ourselves on the rock-confession which has the Savior’s vigorous approval (Matt. 16:16-18), as the hallmark of participation in his church. ✠

“Destroy This Temple”: The End of the Mosaic System by Charles Hunting

Towards the end of Jesus’ ministry and at the apex of his popularity Matthew records the following: “When he entered Jerusalem the whole city went wild with excitement. ‘Who is this?’ people asked, and the crowds replied, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee’” (Matt. 21:10-11; REB used throughout except where noted). John in his abbreviated account of Jesus’ startling interruption of commercial proceedings in the Temple records the Jews’ challenge: “What sign do you show us, seeing that you do these things?” Jesus’ cryptic comment was “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again” (John 2:19). After this encounter Jesus’ activity did not escape the eagle eye of the religious watchdogs.

The Messiah had nevertheless continued his regular teaching in the Temple although “the chief priests, scribes and principal men sought to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do for all the people hung on his words” (Luke 19:47, 48).

Those who believe Jesus to be primarily a teacher of ethics with a new religious slant, and a Savior who came mainly to die for our sins, have overlooked the dynamic message with which he challenged the nation of Israel. It was about a new Kingdom freed from Roman control. The Kingdom of God would eventually gain political supremacy over the world. It was the Kingdom which Israel’s ancient prophets had repeatedly predicted (Dan. 2:44; 7:18, 22, 27; Zech. 14:9, etc.). Contemporary biblical historians have captured the real essence of Messiah Jesus’ message. It announced a spectacular turn of events for the nation of Israel and the creation “of a new world order.” Peter Jennings’ recent ABC production about the “Irresistible Story of Jesus” featured leading scholars who attested to the obvious fact that “Kingdom of God,” the heart of the Gospel, is a thoroughly *political* term. One of these, Professor N.T. Wright, Canon Theologian at Westminster Abbey, had written:

“Jesus was announcing a message, a word from Israel’s covenant God...He was a herald, the bringer of an urgent message that could not wait, could not become the stuff of academic debate. He was issuing a public invitation, like someone setting up a new political party and summoning all and sundry to sign up and help create a new world order. The old picture of Jesus as the teacher of timeless truths, or even the announcer of an essentially timeless call for decision, will simply have to go. His announcement of the Kingdom was a warning of imminent catastrophe, *a summons to an immediate change of heart*” (N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, pp. 172, 173).

Until this basic fact about the Christian Gospel is recognized the true picture of Jesus is fatally obscured. For many who are unaware of what Jesus was really about, his actions are largely consigned to irrelevance in this modern age.

“I must give the Good News of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, *for that is what I was sent to do*” (Luke 4:43). With this formal purpose statement Jesus provided us with a clear description of his Messianic agenda. But how could his explosive action in the Temple benefit his Kingdom mission? This man, with a not uncommon name of Jesus (*Yeshua*), born into a working class family who felt at ease with the less than elite, was viewed as a potent

political threat to the establishment. The sheer dynamism of his personality and the politically-charged content of his message addressed to an occupied nation inevitably caught the imagination of his audience.

There can be no doubt: Jesus was perceived as a threat to the religious and political establishment. Mark 11:18 records the desire of the Temple authorities to kill him: “The Chief priests and the scribes heard of this [the Temple cleansing] and looked for a way to bring about his death; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching.” His miracles appeared to authenticate his mission in contrast to the failure of previous would-be Messiahs. But why, *at this time*, after viewing the abuse of the temple throughout his ministry, should he engage in a provocative act that could only hasten his death? His violent intrusion in the Temple must have had a meaning far beyond that of a frustrated reformer acting in an emotional frenzy. What lay behind his dramatic interference with the heart of Israel’s worship, the hub of the nation’s service to God?

This article is written to suggest answers to these questions — answers with far-reaching implications for the way we understand Christian faith today. In Jesus’ time one problem was obvious. Israel had failed dismally under the existing religious system. A new message going to both Israel and all nations was needed. That new Message involved a definite break with Moses. We invite your careful open-mindedness as you weigh the evidence (Acts 17:11).

Matthew, Mark and Luke place Jesus’ temple-cleansing near the end of the Messiah’s ministry on earth. All four gospel accounts describe his triumphal entry as Messiah as the culminating event of his career. From the complete picture we conclude that these incidents were deliberately planned. They were Jesus’ most powerfully symbolic acts, driving home the point of his royal Messianic agenda.

Jesus had gathered a large following from the surrounding countryside. This crowd had earlier wanted to make him king (John 6:40). A mass of Jews were supportive of Jesus’ claim to be the long-promised Messiah, though only an inner circle understood how the Messianic program was to be worked out. Jesus’ public march to the Temple was at the season of a national Holy Day, insuring maximum exposure. He had taken with him the celebrated, resurrected Lazarus as part of his entourage. Lazarus had also been marked for assassination by the Temple authorities (John 12:9-19).

If Jesus had wanted to commit a public act by which the weakness and vulnerability of the Temple

could be established, now was the time. His popular appeal showed he was no longer to be considered a harmless preacher with merely a new slant on established religious principles. Jesus was a charismatic powerhouse whose Message threatened the controlling base of the political and theological “ins.” As with any religious shrine, the Vatican of Catholicism, the Mormon Temple of the followers of Joseph Smith, or Mecca, the holy city of Islam, the Temple was the center of all that symbolized the Jewish faith. Those in charge of this shrine were threatened with a loss of control over the minds of the people.

Jesus calculated that something new and dramatic must be introduced. A change of religious heart could not be achieved by the mere sprucing up of the ancient system. Jesus’ major point was this: Restoration to personal and national freedom could not be gained in the way Israel had been directing its energies. Militant messiahs had repeatedly failed to remove the Roman boot from their neck. A free Israel would not arise through political intrigue or insurrection.

God had given Israel a brilliant set of laws — a moat of protection against the lure of rampant paganism, the treacherous pull of surrounding nations and their own self-destructive natures. Every segment of Israel’s life, agricultural practices, personal hygiene and diet were subject to divine legislation. A priesthood was in place to administer those laws, which set standards as well as penalties for misconduct. To keep them in constant remembrance of the presence of God in their midst a truly magnificent Temple had been erected and a set of annual Holy days enacted to preserve Israel’s awareness of her unique national calling to be the light of the world and model state.

Despite the divine brilliance of the system, human weakness had undermined its effectiveness to produce the desired result. With the coming of the Messiah, however, a new program was revealed. Jesus made this quite clear with his classic statement: “The Law and Prophets were until John. *Since that time* the Kingdom of God has been preached” (Luke 16:16). A new era had dawned with John (Matt. 3:2) and Jesus (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14, 15). A message previously hidden from the world at large was to reveal a divine scheme for reshaping the world, “to be put into effect when the time was ripe” (Eph. 1:10). The new plan was revolutionary. It meant that both Jew and Gentile could share *equally* in the promises given to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-4; 13:14; 15:18; 17:7, 8, etc.). But how was this to be accomplished? The Mosaic system had

failed even with the chosen nation. How could the hostile Gentile world be expected to conform to the will of the God of Israel?

It was into a decaying system of flaunted laws, injustice, political intrigue, religious confusion and national captivity that Jesus was born. As the promised Messiah he was the bearer of a new political Message about saving the nation and the world from ruin. Tragically, as we now know, the Message and the warning to Israel went largely unheeded. The Jewish people as a whole disregarded or resisted the “upstart” Messiah (John 1:11). What followed was the destruction of the Jewish Temple in AD 70 and the dispersion of the people among the nations of the world. The Temple and the ideals it stood for had been so badly misused that its symbolism was now a hindrance to what God had planned. Jesus, predicting the tragedy about to befall his people, lamented: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, city that murders the prophets and stones the messengers sent to her! How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not let me. Look! There is your temple, forsaken by God and laid waste.” The time of the Temple’s usefulness and the Mosaic system which it promoted was *at an end!* (Matt. 23:37-38).

To further his message of renewal and hope Jesus built a power base away from the population centers and in the area of northern Galilee. He issued a new set of standards to be met by those invited to kingship in his coming kingdom. The old Mosaic system divinely proclaimed at Mt. Sinai, was inappropriate to the new Kingdom agenda.

Aware (like all genuine reformers) that his message would be misunderstood, Jesus reassured his audience with the words: “Do not suppose that I have come to abolish the law but to fulfill it... Truly I tell you, so long as heaven and earth endure, not a letter, not a dot will disappear from the law until all that must happen will happen. Anyone who sets aside even the least of the *law’s demands* and teaches others to do so will have the lowest place in the Kingdom of heaven.” Heaven and earth still endure, and the Torah, in *its heightened sense as taught by Jesus* — as “filled full” of new meaning — is still very much in force. But note that the “*law’s demands*” were of a different order from those given to Moses and interpreted by the leaders of Israel. “I tell you, unless you show yourselves far better than the scribes and Pharisees, you can never enter the Kingdom of heaven.” So Jesus warned (Matt. 5:17-20).

Introducing the words of the New Covenant

(according to Matthew in five blocks of instruction), Jesus taught his disciples that the “*law’s demands*” would put one in a right relation with God and man. Under the new system mercy, justice and faith would reign. This ideal the Mosaic pattern had not been able to achieve because of human weakness. Consequently there needed to be a *change* in the priesthood and the law, as well as in the hearts of the people — not the abolition of all law but a *change!*

Five times early in his ministry in Matthew 5:21ff. Jesus makes a clear case that the Mosaic law was not the ultimate guide. Jesus was advocating a new direction in view of what was to be a charter for the whole world. He said, “You have heard (from the forefathers)...but I tell you this...” “Moses allowed you to divorce for the hardness of your hearts, but *I* say...” This was an explicit switching from the Mosaic prescriptions to his own pattern of grace and truth (cp. John 1:17, for the contrast between Moses and Jesus; also Matt. 19:12 for Jesus’ non-Mosaic view of eunuchs; Deut. 23:1). Jesus now takes the place of Moses: “*I* am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except by *me* [not Moses]...If you love *me* obey *my* commandments”(John 14:6, 15). This is not to deny that the Mosaic system had been divinely instituted, but if God saw a need for change, He was free to do this. The change agent in this case was the new Mediator, the ultimate “Moses,” the man Messiah Jesus (I Tim. 2:5), man as he was divinely intended to be.

The changes were dramatic. Jesus bypassed the established Temple sacrificial system when he declared that *he* had the power to forgive sin. Not surprisingly this claim caused consternation among the Temple representatives. “This man is blaspheming,” they cried, when Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.” Jesus’ reply to their charge was simply to tell the man, “Stand up and walk, take your bed, and go home.” Addressing the professional theologians, the scribes, he said, “To *convince you* that the Son of Man has authority on earth *to forgive sins* I will heal this man” (Matt. 9:2-7). Recognizing this implied revolution as an intolerable threat to traditional practice, the scribes remained unconvinced and hostile.

Note another of Jesus’ *changes* in the law regarding purification. “On another occasion he called the people and said to them, ‘Listen to me, all of you

and understand this: nothing that goes into a person from outside can defile him; no, it is the things that come out of a person that defile him.’ His disciples didn’t understand. He chided them: ‘Are you as dull as the rest? Do you not see that nothing that goes into a person from outside can defile him, because it does not go into the heart but into the stomach and goes out into the drain?’ *By saying this he declared all foods clean*”(Mark 7:14-20).

It required a compelling vision in Acts 10 to help Peter erase life-long indoctrination. He had to come to grips with the fact that the Message was now open to the Gentile world, and laws of clean and unclean food were unsuitable for the new conditions. The Gospel message about the Kingdom would be greatly inhibited if the Gentile world were obliged to follow Mosaic food laws. Such restrictions would be impossible in some parts of the world. Paul, facing new believers’ reservations about food, wrote in his letter to the church at Rome: “All that I know of the Lord Jesus convinces me that nothing [referring to food] in itself is impure; only if anyone considers something impure, then for him it is impure...All things are clean” (Rom. 14:14, 20). Paul negates the distinction between the common (*koinos*) and the clean. He dismisses the impure (*akarthatos* — “unclean by nature”) by maintaining that “all things are now pure (*katharos* — “pure by nature”). It is a matter not of law but of conscience. To insist that the Apostle was a staunch promoter of Jewish food laws seems a travesty of his plain words here. Paul has taken both words used in the Old Testament to describe the “common” and the “unclean” and negated both. (Here we appeal to our friends in the various Sabbath-keeping groups to reconsider some of their bases, lest they be found muddling two incompatible covenants.) (*To be continued...*)✠

Comment: “The Restoration Fellowship you founded is titled quite appropriately. Restoration. Five centuries ago the world witnessed Reformation. Not good enough. Was it really a reformation of Christianity? No. Of Catholicism. Without a “revolution” to bring back to the minds the Truths of God’s Scripture, both in practice and belief, a great many will remain trapped in a Christianoid form of worship which does not stand true upon the original foundation of Christ’s Church....I realized some time ago that most books written on the topic of God and Jesus support a non-biblical view of their relationship. I am so thankful for your account of the One God and the Messiah in *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self Inflicted Wound.*”