

Focus on the Kingdom

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An Invitation

Atlanta Bible College and the *Journal from the Radical Reformation* will host our ninth annual Theological Conference at Atlanta Bible College, Morrow, Georgia, from 1:00 p.m. on Friday, February 11th, 2000 until 12:00 noon, Sunday, February 13th.

Friday afternoon will be devoted to a discussion between scholars representing an evolutionary point of view versus belief in divine intelligent design. Other sessions will explore aspects of the Kingdom of God, the resurrection as historical fact, and the meaning of the phrase “obedience of faith.”

Readers of “Focus on the Kingdom” are cordially invited to attend. Program details may be obtained by phoning Atlanta Bible College at 1-800-347-4261.

The schedule of our continuing radio program may be found on the last page of this magazine. We remind our readers that the program may be heard daily on the Internet (www.acn-network.com at 2p.m. EST), and on February 7 we will begin broadcasting over India via shortwave (15715 khz, 7:15-7:30 p.m. India time).

Creating a Confusing Distinction

Contact of ours was offered the following explanation of the Kingdom of God/Heaven in answer to his inquiry:

“First there is a difference between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God. Christ offered the Kingdom of Heaven to Israel in the Gospels but they refused to accept it and crucified him. Christ withdrew the offer and instead turned to the Gentiles. The Kingdom of Heaven will again be offered to those living in the millennium. It is a physical Kingdom with Christ as its King reigning from Jerusalem. The

Kingdom being offered now is the Kingdom of God which is a spiritual Kingdom with a spiritual King, Christ... the Kingdom of Heaven is not being offered at this time.”

May we respectfully point out that what appears above is entirely false to the Bible and creates complete confusion for anyone attempting to understand the words of Jesus and his saving Gospel. The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God have exactly the same meaning. They are different titles for the same Kingdom. The difference is only one of terminology, as in the difference between “the USA” and “the States.” The fact that Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven are synonyms is proven by this simple fact: *Only Matthew uses the term Kingdom of Heaven.* Mark and Luke refer to the same entity as the Kingdom of God.

Mark introduces the ministry of Jesus by stating that he presented the Kingdom of *God* as the Gospel (Mark 1:14, 15). Luke likewise reports that Jesus came to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of *God* (Luke 4:43). Matthew reports precisely the same fact by saying that Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of *Heaven*. There are numerous examples of the *very same saying* of Jesus being reported by Matthew as a saying about the Kingdom of Heaven and by Mark and Luke as a saying about the Kingdom of God. For example, Matthew records Jesus as saying “Allow the children to come to me: of such is the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 19:14). Mark and Luke write, “Allow the children to come to me: of such is the Kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16).

The distinction drawn in the letter we quoted above, between a “physical” and “spiritual” Kingdom, is also not found in the Bible. It is true that

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Jesus came preaching first to Jews, and he summoned them to repentance and belief in his Gospel about the Kingdom of God/Heaven. That Kingdom is indeed the Kingdom promised by the prophets, a political Kingdom which will operate from Jerusalem when Jesus returns. But the alternative name for the same Kingdom — Kingdom of Heaven (“Heaven” was substituted for “God” by Jews and Matthew reflects that custom) — also designates the Kingdom to be established on the renewed earth when Jesus comes back. There is only one Gospel and it is the Gospel about the Kingdom of God/ Heaven.

The letter above actually divides the *one* Gospel into two different messages and thus destroys the unity of the teaching of Jesus and of the New Testament. After the death and resurrection of Jesus the apostles continued to preach, to Jews and Gentiles alike, exactly the same Gospel of the Kingdom which Jesus had preached (Acts 1:3; 1:6; 8:12; 19:8; 20:24, 25; 28:30, 31). This is hardly surprising, since Jesus in his famous commission to the church ordered that “everything I have taught you” be taken to *all* the nations (Matt. 28:19, 20).

No Bible verse ever says that there are “two Gospels,” one for Jews and another for Gentiles! There are not “two forms of the Gospel.” There is one Gospel, one hope and one faith. The one and only Gospel is the Gospel about the Kingdom of God, also known as the Gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24, 25). It is the News that God is inviting all who respond with intelligent acceptance of the Message of Jesus to receive forgiveness for their sins and the promise of taking part in the Kingdom which Jesus is preparing to establish on earth at his Second Coming.

The dividing of things which belong together and the creation of artificial distinctions is responsible for the hopeless confusion current among different and competing systems of Bible teaching (illustrated for example by the so-called Dispensationalist and Reformed “schools”). Our desire is to call students of Jesus and the Bible back to believe in the one and only “Gospel of the Kingdom and the Name of Jesus” (Acts 8:12) which was first preached by Jesus himself (Luke 4:43, etc.) and then taken to the wider world at Jesus’ command. Acts 8:12 provides an excellent, straightforward definition of the content of the Gospel around which the presently differing factions could unite. This would mean a return to Jesus himself, who always preached the Gospel about the Kingdom and mandated the preaching of the

Kingdom gospel as his Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20; 24:14). ✧

Responding to Jesus

It appears to us that very little attention is paid in church circles to how Jesus preached the Gospel. Radio waves and popular literature are replete with invitations to “accept Jesus in your heart,” to “accept the Lord,” or “pray the sinners’ prayer.” But how did Jesus make his evangelistic offer of salvation?

It is a shocking fact that he did not begin and end by offering his death as atonement for sins. Certainly the death of Jesus and his resurrection are fundamental elements in the Gospel of salvation. But that is not all. Listen to the master teacher in his final evangelistic statement and appeal.

John 12: 44: “Jesus raised his voice and said, ‘The person who believes in me does not just believe in me but in the one who commissioned me. I came into the world as a light so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in darkness. And if someone *hears my message* and does not respond to it, I do not judge him: I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one *who refuses to listen to me* and will not *receive my words* has one who judges him. The word which I spoke — that is what will judge him at the last day, because I did not speak from myself, but the Father who sent me, He gave me a command as to what to say and speak. And I know that His command means eternal life...’”

It is perfectly plain from these climactic words of Jesus that our salvation depends on believing in Jesus: “The one who believes in me does not just believe in me but in the one who commissioned me.” But Jesus clarifies what he means by “believing in” him. This fact is mostly overlooked by Bible readers. Jesus goes on by way of explanation: “If *someone hears my message/gospel/word* and does not respond to it...” So, then, what Jesus demands for salvation is a response to his preaching. The crucial factor is intelligent, positive reaction to what Jesus *said*, not just to the facts of his death and resurrection. Jesus repeats this vital point with a different phrase: “The

one who refuses to listen to me and will not *accept my words*...will be judged by my message.”

We have here a brilliant summary from John, who personally witnessed the ministry of Jesus, and understood what is involved in salvation. Jesus states, as he constantly did, that he came to save the world. But how is the world to be saved? By listening to and accepting *Jesus' word or words*. Those who fail to respond to his word and words do not become disciples of the Lord Jesus.

It is a matter of concern and alarm that in current preaching nothing is made of *the word/words/message* of Jesus. Only his death and resurrection are put to the public for belief.

But this is to cut the Gospel in half. The fact is that there are 25 chapters of recorded Gospel preaching by Jesus, the twelve and the seventy in which there is no mention yet of his death and resurrection. The Gospel preaching of Jesus, his word/words/message, centered entirely and exclusively on the matter of the Kingdom of God. An examination of Matthew, Mark and Luke shows that Jesus preached as *Gospel* much more than a message about his death and resurrection. The statistics look like this: There are 25 chapters of Gospel preaching (Matt. 3-15; Mark 1-7; Luke 4-8), during which Jesus and the Apostles take *the Gospel* to the public. But in these 25 chapters there *is not a single word said of his death*. It was not until Matthew 16, Mark 8 and Luke 9 that Jesus “began to tell them” about his death and resurrection. But note well: the accounts make it quite clear that he had been preaching *the Gospel* prior to that moment. It follows, then, that the Gospel is firstly about the Kingdom of God and also about the additional facts of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Why is this so important? We have seen above (and the point is repeated throughout the teaching of the whole New Testament) that salvation comes by response to what Jesus *said and taught, not just to what he did on the cross*. Jesus raised his voice in John 12:44 to insist on this central truth: “He who refuses to listen to my words...He who does not accept *what I say*...” remains lost in darkness.

Professions of belief in Jesus are hollow until we allow Jesus and the Bible to define what it means to “believe in” him. The most personal and intimate aspect of Jesus is *his words*. His words declare his mind. So it is through intelligent acceptance of his words that a relationship is made with him, *in*

addition to acceptance of his sacrificial death. Jesus did much more than die. He was a saving *teacher* as well as being the crucified, risen Savior.

Bible readers should earnestly question the foundation of their belief system and ask what those “cliché-like” phrases such as “accept the Lord,” “open your heart to Jesus” really mean.

The true disciples of the Bible are those who have “listened to” Jesus' Kingdom Gospel. They are those who have received the *words* which God has given through Jesus. Jesus reported to God: “the words which you gave me, I have given to them and they have accepted them” (John 17:8). The born-again sons of God are those who receive Jesus by “believing in his name,” that is, everything he revealed in his preaching and teaching as well as his death and resurrection (John 1:12).

How wonderfully united the Bible writers were on this crucial issue of what it means to “accept Jesus as Savior.” Matthew and Luke record Jesus' precious words about how the Gospel of the Kingdom is received or refused by various ones who are exposed to it. “When anyone hears the word/Gospel about the Kingdom and does not understand it, the Devil comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart, so that he cannot *believe it and be saved*” (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:12). This is the essence of the Christian Gospel and how it must be received in faith. The critically important factor in salvation, says Jesus, is intelligent reception of the “word about the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:19). Since the Devil knows well that this Message of the Kingdom is his greatest threat, he does all he can to remove it and suppress it. On no account does the Devil want the Gospel as Jesus preached it to be heard. The Devil wants the world to remain in darkness. Only the preaching of Jesus can dispel that terrible night of confusion and error. In Luke 8:12 Jesus said that those who hear his Gospel-word are the objects of the Devil's attention. The Devil, Jesus said, is bent upon taking that Gospel away from the heart of the potential Christian, “so that he may not believe it [the word/message/gospel of the Kingdom, Matt. 13:19] and *be saved*.” It is of the highest significance that Jesus is talking here expressly about how to be saved, and yet at this point in his preaching career he has not yet mentioned a word about his death and resurrection! (see Luke 18:31-34).

The evidence is entirely clear. Jesus' concept of salvation is this: An intelligent reception of his

Gospel of the Kingdom as well as the related information about his death and resurrection are essential for the saving process to get underway.

You may ask, “What is the Kingdom of God?” The answer is that it is the hope of all the prophets of Israel. It is the Kingdom which will supersede all present national governments at the time of the resurrection of the dead (Rev. 11:15-18). This is the moment to mention another devastating confusion which has hit some systems of Bible teaching. It is sometimes said that the Kingdoms of this world have *already* become the Kingdom of God and of His Messiah. This is fundamentally untrue. It is only when the seventh angel sounds the resurrection trumpet to summon the dead from the graves that the rulership of the present world passes fully into the hands of Jesus. Revelation 11:15-18 is an absolutely sure anchor of truth in relation to the Kingdom, the heart of the Gospel.

The Kingdom of God is in fact the heart of the new covenant which Jesus ratified in his blood by dying for the sins of all men. Just as Moses in Exodus 24 rehearsed all the words of the covenant in the presence of the people, and then poured blood on the document containing the covenant and on the people, so Jesus as the ultimate Moses laid out his Kingdom/Gospel/words before the people and then in the presence of those who had accepted it he prepared to pour out his own blood to ratify and seal that new covenant. What specifically is the content of the covenant? Jesus made it more than clear. “Just as my Father covenanted with me to give me *the Kingdom*, so I now covenant with you to give you the Kingdom, and you will be seated on twelve thrones to administer the tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29, 30). There is the heart of the Gospel and the heart of the covenant. Everything Jesus taught focused on the Kingdom and the invitation issued to us all to take part in that Kingdom and in its administration of the world — the world as it will be renewed at the great restoration promised in Acts 3:21: Jesus must be retained in heaven, said Peter, “until the time comes for the restoration of all things as declared by the prophets.”

To that great moment Christians are to look forward in joyful anticipation. The distress of the present time “cannot be compared with the glory which will be revealed in the Sons of God” (Rom. 8:18), immortalized at the resurrection and presented

to Jesus as co-heirs and rulers of his coming Kingdom. ✧

More on What Happens When We Die

We offer the following survey of the history of traditional teaching about “heaven at death.”

The celebrated *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*: “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 (pp. 148, 149): “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.”

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

Companion Bible by E.W. Bullinger, on II Corinthians 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 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 the Resurrection (which is the subject of the whole passage) as though it were unnecessary; and as though ‘*present with the Lord*’ is obtainable without it.”

Law and Grace, by Professor A.F. Knight (p. 79): “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."

Families at the Crossroads, by Rodney Clapp (pp. 95, 97): "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."

Martin Luther: "I think that there is not a place in Scripture of more force for the dead who have fallen asleep, than Ecc. 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."

"Heaven in the Bible is nowhere the destination of the dying" (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.'" ✧

Do Souls Go to Heaven?

While the Jehovah's Witnesses and other adventists are 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.

Did the early 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 the question of its *immediate location* following death.)

Here are the words of **Irenaeus** of the mid-second century (*Against Heresies*, Bk. 5): "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]...*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."

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 protest of Justin Martyr against what later became orthodoxy, and remains so to this day, is no less incisive (*Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 80): “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?”*

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 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 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.

Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho:

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 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 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

¹A 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.

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, *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, Eerdmans, p. 239).

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. Now although Christ is God, yet, being also man, ‘He died according to the Scriptures (I Cor. 15:3) and ‘according to the same Scriptures was buried.’ With the same law of His being He fully complied, by **remaining in Hades** in the form and condition of a dead man; *nor did He ascend into the heights of heaven before descending into the lower parts of the*

earth, that He might there make the patriarchs and prophets partakers of Himself. [Nothing is said in the Bible about Jesus altering the condition of the Patriarchs while he was in Hades,] 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 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**, but not in the same place with the unrighteous...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). ✧

(To be continued...)