

Focus on the Kingdom

Volume 3 No. 7

Anthony Buzzard, editor

April, 2001

FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

If, as you teach, Jesus the Son of God came into conscious existence only in the womb of his mother, how do you explain Jesus' words when he said in John 13:3, 16:28 and 20:17: "I am leaving the world and going back, returning to the Father"? Surely this is a proof that Jesus had a pre-human existence?

This is an interesting question. The problem is that there is no Bible verse which says that Jesus was going *back* to his Father or returning to his Father. (Equally, there is no verse which says that Jesus asked God to give *back*, restore a former glory to him). If you are reading the New International Version (NIV) which is very popular these days, I simply have to tell you that you have been taken in by a misleading translation in those verses. Now I hasten to add that the vast majority of Bible verses have been well translated in nearly all of the many available versions, but in those verses (John 13:3, 16:28 and 20:17) you have been offered not a translation but an inaccurate paraphrase which tries to push you into believing something John did not write. It is a most valuable lesson — to realize the somewhat stunning truth that translators are not always fair with the text. When it comes to issues affecting the definition of God and the Son, translations are sometimes driven by what the translator thinks the text *ought* to say.

The remedy for this unfortunate situation is to compare those verses with the King James Version (which we do not usually recommend since its very old English does not always communicate well to us in the 21st century) or the New King James Version. You will see that what Jesus actually said was this: I am going to my Father (John 13:3; 16:28) and I am ascending to my Father (John 20:17). There is a great difference between going to England and going back to England. If you have access to an interlinear which prints the Greek text above a word-for-word translation in English, you can easily verify these facts. John speaks of "going again" when he means going back, returning (see John 11:17; 10:40; 18:38; 20:10). The NIV correctly translates with the words

"going back" in John 11:8. The Greek there says "going again." Now here is a very interesting and instructive fact: The NIV translates the word "go" in different ways, all of which are justified by the context, but on only three occasions does it render the Greek words for "go" or "go up" as go *back* or return (John 13:3; 16:28; 20:17). That misrendering of the Greek is a result of the translators' expecting and thus forcing the text to say what it does not in fact say. Such is the power of tradition — a tradition which diminishes the humanity of Jesus by making him the creator of heaven and earth in Genesis, a claim which he never made for himself and which would have contradicted many verses, notably Isaiah 44:24 and Mark 10:6. In the latter verse Jesus said, "God made them male and female." He was not talking about himself. It was God, not the Son of God, who rested at creation (Heb 4:4). The NIV creates further misunderstanding in John 20:17 by rendering the Greek word ascend (*anabaino*) by the English "return." Nowhere else did they so translate that word. It is obvious that "ascending" to the Father does not include the idea of *returning* to the Father. So we conclude that Jesus went to the Father after his resurrection. He did not go *back* there. If this prompts further questions, you may be interested to learn that John 17:5 does not say "Give me back" or "Restore to me the glory I had..." as some paraphrase versions tell you. One must read John's gospel with great care. What sort of glory did Jesus have in mind? John 17:22, 24 provide the context for John 17:5, and in 17:22 and 24 you will find that you (see verse 20) as a disciple living now also "had been given" the same glory which God had given to Jesus (v. 22). That glory was given to Jesus because God loved him before the creation of the world. The disciples of all ages are going to see that glory in the future, yet it is the same glory which *had been given* to Jesus and *has already been given* to you! (vv. 20-22).

In This Issue

That Word "Everlasting" or "Eternal" ...	3
According to Jesus	6
Comments	7

Can you solve the riddle? It is not difficult within the very Jewish framework of John and the New Testament. Things which are going to be given in the future may be said to be *already in your possession* — you “have” them — before you are born. Thus Jesus asked for that future glory (John 17:5), the same glory as had been given to you before you were born (v. 22), the glory which you will see in the future and which Jesus asked God to give him in the future (John 17:1).

Paul said in II Corinthians 5:1 that Christians already “have” (present tense) a body in the heavens. Is that literally true? Of course not. What is meant is that God has prepared a new spiritual body (I Cor. 15:44-46) and promises to give it to you in the future at the resurrection (I Cor. 15:23).

You could on this basis pray in the future: “God, please give me now the body which I ‘had,’ as you promised me in your plan from the beginning.” So Jesus prayed in John 17:5. The glory he asked the Father for was the glory promised by God long before the birth of Christ. In the same way Rev. 13:8 (NIV) speaks of Jesus being crucified before the foundation of the world — that is in God’s intention, not actually.

As the rabbis said, all the great things and figures of the future exist in God’s plan before they come into actual existence. Thus in Jewish writings even Moses existed in God’s plan long before his birth. But Moses became a conscious being only at his birth. That is what it means to be a human being. Jesus was also a human being, “the man Messiah Jesus” in contrast to the One God (I Tim. 2:5; I Cor. 8:4, 6).

If it is true that the Messiah is not God, but the Son of God, why is it that the Messiah is given the divine title for God, Adonai, in Psalm 110:1? I read that this is so in the NASV marginal note to Acts 2:36.

I am sorry to have to point out that there is a serious factual mistake in what you read in that source. You may have to ask someone who knows Hebrew, but the word for the Messiah in Psalm 110:1 is not in fact Adonai (the Lord God in all of its 449 occurrences) but the different word adoni which always means a superior who is not God. *Strong’s Concordance* unfortunately does not let you see the important difference between Adonai (rhymes with El Shaddai) and adoni (pronounced in Hebrew “adonee”). Adoni is never used as a title for God. It designates human superiors of all types (father, king, owner, etc.) and sometimes angels — but never God. So Psalm 110:1 is a most precious testimony to the truth that the Messiah is not God Himself but the Son

of God, David’s son and David’s superior, lord. The RV, RSV, NRSV and the 1973 version of the NASV read correctly, “the Lord said to my lord...,” using the lower case “l.” The Knox translation reads “the Lord said to my Master.” One modern paraphrase version helpfully writes in Matthew 22:43-45 (note the small “l’s”): “He said to them, ‘How is it that David in the spirit calls him lord, in the words, “The Lord said to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand till I put your enemies under your feet’”? If then David calls him lord, how is he to be his son?’” (The Bible in Living English, Steven F. Byington).

This Psalm (110:1) wins the prize for being the most popular text quoted from the Old Testament in the New. Deservedly so, since it beautifully tells us that there is One God, the LORD, and one Messiah who is not God, but the supreme human being. When this divine oracle about the Messiah is read with attention to the detail found in the word “lord,” it becomes clear that the Messiah and God are two separate individuals and that only one of them, the Father, is fully God. Jesus is the man Messiah, the perfect, sinless agent of the One God.

I have heard that the Gospel is strictly facts about the death and resurrection of Jesus. This seems to be true based on Paul’s words in I Corinthians 15:1-3: “Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the Gospel which I preached to you and tell you what it means. You stand firm in it; you are being saved through it, that is, if you hold fast to my account of it, and if your belief in it was not meaningless. I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...”

Let us think most carefully about this issue of what the Gospel consists of. The most fundamental fact of all is that Jesus preached the Gospel and he called it the Gospel about the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; Mark 1:14, 15; Matt. 24:14; 4:23; 9:35, etc.). So the first and foremost subject matter of the Gospel is God’s coming Kingdom and how to prepare for it. It is equally obvious that Jesus was not talking at that stage about his death and resurrection. How do we know this? Simply because it was only late in his ministry that he for the first time began to tell them of his death and resurrection (Matt. 16:21). But Jesus had been preaching *the Gospel* and actually sent out the twelve and the seventy to preach “the Gospel” before he had said a word about his death and resurrection (see Luke 9:1, 2, 6; 10:1, 9, 11). As those

disciples went out preaching the Gospel they certainly said nothing about the death and resurrection of Jesus, because even as late as Luke 18:31-34 they did not themselves even understand or believe that Jesus was going to die and be raised! It is an utter impossibility, therefore, that the Gospel can contain facts only about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The simple facts are that the information about the death and resurrection were later added to the rock-foundation of the Gospel which is knowledge and understanding of the Kingdom of God. Thus Paul, like Jesus (Luke 4:43), always preached the Gospel about the Kingdom of God (Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). If he had not done so, he would have put himself under a curse for preaching “another Gospel.” The Great Commission provided the clear marching orders for Christians. They are to announce exactly what Jesus announced — “teaching them to observe everything I commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). Jesus’ first command which summarizes his whole mission was this: “Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom” (Mark 1:14, 15). In I Corinthians 15:1-3 (cited earlier) Paul did not contradict his own words in Acts 20:25 and his constant practice, described in Acts 19:8; 28:23, 31, of preaching the Gospel of Jesus about the Kingdom of God.

In I Corinthians 15:1-3 he is concerned with that part of the Gospel which announced the resurrection of Jesus and he thus addresses that problem head-on. What he said was that the death and resurrection were preached “among things of first importance” (v.3). Paul did not say that the *only* facts in the Gospel were that Jesus had died and risen again. As Henry Alford says in his commentary on I Corinthians 15:1-3, “The death and resurrection were among the most important elements (*en protois*) in the Gospel.” ✧

That Word “Everlasting” or “Eternal”

Platonism has unfortunately wormed its way into most standard translations of the Bible. It appears there in the unfortunate rendering of the Greek word *aionios* (=“belonging to the age”). *Aionios* does not mean strictly in itself “lasting for ever.” Most Bible readers recognize at once the expressions “everlasting” or “eternal life” (*zoe aionios*). What then is the meaning of that adjective “eternal”?

As long ago as 1889 the Rev. A. Carr of Oxford and Wellington College, UK was instructing the

young students of the Bible in England in the celebrated set of commentaries, *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge University Press). He provides a most enlightening and instructive gem of information in his comment on Matthew 25:46:

“The same Greek word (*aionios*) is translated everlasting (punishment) and (life) eternal. In each case the adjective in the Greek text follows the noun — the place of emphasis. The adjective *aionios* (eternal) = of or belonging to (1) an aion or period, past, present or future or (2) to a succession of aions or periods. **It does not therefore in itself = ‘unending’**” (p. 196). Professor Carr goes on to point out that in the case of the Life of the Age to Come (“eternal life”), that life will be in perpetuity. It will be bestowed when the age to come of the Kingdom of God on earth arrives with the return of the Messiah. But note that the unending life which is the Christians’ destiny is elsewhere clarified as “immortality.” In the case of the punishment of the wicked, on the other hand, we repeat, “*aionios*, eternal, does not in itself mean unending.” The reader of the Bible will find an enormous relief in learning that the God of infinite compassion will not express his wrath by inflicting on the wicked “unending punishment.”

That exaggerated notion, which attributes a supreme cruelty to God, has been read into the text under the pressure of adherence to ancient tradition, related to the Platonic belief in the innate immortality of the soul. Firstly, then, in the Bible there is no “immortal soul” existing in the wicked (or for that matter in the righteous) which God will torture for endless ages without cessation forever. What Jesus did say was that the wicked who refuse his authority as God’s supreme agent, the Messiah, will suffer the penalty of “the punishment which belongs to the age to come,” “that age,” as Jesus said, when the faithful will by resurrection attain to the Kingdom of God (Luke 20:35). Secondly, the punishment which will fall upon those who reject the words of Jesus must be defined more fully from other passages of the Bible. Matthew 25:46 tells us no more than that it is a punishment to be meted out when the age to come arrives. It is, we might say, “supernatural punishment,” and it will exclude the wicked from the glory of the millennial Kingdom age to come.

There is further excellent evidence for the fact that *aionios*, used in connection with punishment, does not require us to believe in “eternal torment.” Jude 7 speaks of the “eternal” (*aionios*) fire which destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and the

neighboring towns. The fire in question struck those cities in the form of sulfur rained from heaven. It was no man-made conflagration. It was fire “belonging to the age to come” (Jude 7), fire as a warning to the wicked of the future, but it was not fire which burned endlessly. Having achieved its destructive effects by burning up the cities and their inhabitants, it ceased to burn. The fire was not quenched. It came to an end when the objects for which it was prepared were consumed in smoke. In the same language the Psalmist spoke of the destruction of those who oppose God: “The wicked will perish; the enemies of the Lord will be as the fat of lambs: they are consumed. In smoke they are consumed away” (Ps. 37:20). *The Cambridge Bible for Schools* comments: “Smoke is the natural figure of speedy and complete disappearance, as in Hosea 13:3: ‘[The wicked] will be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew which passes away, as the chaff which is driven by a whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.’” The same picture of the fate of the wicked appears in Obadiah: “Shall I not in that day, says the Lord, destroy the wise men of Edom... everyone in Mount Esau will be cut off by slaughter... you will be cut off for ever... the heathen will be *as though they had never existed*” (Obad. 8-10, 16). In another passage an opponent of God “will be ruined forever” (Ps. 52:5). The idea is of a destruction in perpetuity with no prospect of reconstruction. So also in Psalm 92:7, 9: “When the wicked thrive they are like grass, and when all the evildoers blossom, it is to be forever destroyed... Your enemies, Yahweh, will perish.”

“Eternal punishment” and “eternal fire” in the New Testament require translation into the idiom of the New Testament’s Jewish background. Thus Dr. Nigel Turner in *Christian Words* (T & T Clark, 1980, pp. 452, 455, 456) says: “It would be imprecise to translate *aionios* as ‘eternal’... [It means] ‘belonging to the future age or dispensation.’” This important information which bears on a major biblical doctrine — the fate of the wicked — was offered to the public nearly a century earlier in the *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*: “The adjective *aionios* occurs 70 times in the NT... Three passages should be examined: ‘through times eternal’ (Rom 16:25), ‘before times eternal’ (II Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2); in these uses it is clear that ‘eternal’ and ‘everlasting’ are not interchangeable. This agrees with the LXX [Greek version of the Old Testament], in which *aionios* is used to describe the rites and ceremonies of Judaism which are abolished in Christianity (Ex. 12:24; 29:9; 40:15; Num. 8:19 and others)” (Vol. 1, p. 540). The

author of this important entry on “eternal punishment” goes on to oppose the translation of *aionios* as “aionian” or “age-long.” He rightly also rejects “eternal” as the correct rendering. This is because the New Testament speaks of time “before times eternal” (*aionios*). Time before eternal time is a logical impossibility. You cannot have time existing before eternity! Correctly rendered, however, the Bible speaks of times before specific “ages of time.” There was in other words time before “the time of the ages,” “time marked out by ages.” Rev. W.H. Dyson goes on to clarify the meaning of *aionios* like this: “Eternal [*aionios*] Life is the Life of the Kingdom... ‘Eternal punishment’ is the antithesis of ‘eternal life,’ the penalties upon all unrighteousness inseparably bound up with the Kingdom... As a working principle, then, ‘eternal’ [*aionios*] may be accepted as descriptive of things belonging to, essentially bound up with the Kingdom, and it almost equivalent to ‘Messianic’... These deeper meanings of *aionios* should serve to remove the question of the time element in future punishment from the unsatisfactory basis of merely verbal interpretations.”

This information is vitally important for a sound appreciation of the fate of the wicked. The punishment with which they are threatened is not a punishment which lasts for ever. That false impression is conveyed to readers of the English Bible by a mistranslation of the word *aionios*. *Aionios* appears often in the Old Testament as a word descriptive of limited periods of time. It comes into the New Testament as descriptive of the great Age to Come of the Kingdom of God — “that well-known age,” as Jesus described it (Luke 20:35). The proper translation of *aionios* as “belonging to or pertaining to the Age to Come of the future Kingdom” will bring into focus a number of expressions now mistakenly translated by the adjective “eternal.” “Eternal” brings to the mind of the average reader the concept of timelessness, a largely meaningless idea. However, God deals with us in terms we can grasp. Jesus wanted us to understand that the goal of salvation, the inheritance of the Kingdom of God in the future, is not a timeless concept. The Second Coming will happen at a specific moment of future history. Jesus will not introduce the “end of the world,” another mistranslation in some versions, but “the end of the age” (Matt. 24:3; 13:39; 28:20). The end of “the present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) will mark the beginning of the New Age of the coming Kingdom. Calendar time will continue in that coming age. Christian hope is based on a grasp of that promised future. It is a future

to be enjoyed during the coming age. For the believer it implies also, of course, immortality. For the wicked the penalty is “destruction which excludes from the coming age of the Kingdom.” It is a destruction beyond reconstruction. Rev. Dyson made the point well in the article we have been citing:

“The characteristic teaching of Jesus as to the penalties of sin is bound up with his Gospel of the Kingdom. Jesus spoke of the incomparable value of the Kingdom of God as the ‘richest treasure’ and ‘pearl of great price’ (Matt. 13:44, 45). The supreme quest of the Kingdom is to be the first duty and sovereign wisdom of life (Matt. 6:33). [The converse of all this] is the incomparable loss which the rejection of the Gospel will entail. This is the supreme penalty — exclusion from the Kingdom, to be cast into the ‘outer darkness’ (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30), denied by the Lord (Matt. 7:23; 10:33; 25:12; Luke 13:25-27), shut out from the glad presence of the King (Matt. 25:41). The use of the figures ‘weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth’ in the sentence of exclusion clearly indicates that remorse is one element in future retribution (cp. Luke 16:25: ‘Son, remember’)...In the parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24ff.) and the drag-net, the ultimate overthrow, and as the terms would seem to imply, the final destruction of evil are decisively declared.”

“Eternal fire” does not mean a fire which burns throughout endless ages. It is the “fire of the age to come,” the lake of fire to which the Beast and False Prophet are dispatched at the coming of Christ to inaugurate the first stage of the Kingdom of God, the thousand-year reign (see Rev. 19:20 and compare the destruction of the leader of Assyria as prophesied in Isa. 30:31-33). “Eternal punishment” does not mean a punishment which continues to inflict pain endlessly. Again, the article on “eternal fire” in the *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* is helpful:

“In many OT passages, even where it is said that the fire is unquenchable, and will burn forever, material fire is undoubtedly meant, for fire is one of the physical agents which God commonly employs in His temporal judgments and its burning forever must refer to *the lasting destruction which it effects*. Sodom and Gomorrah and Edom are given as examples of places on which the doom of eternal fire fell, and they still bear its proof marks...In Sodom and Gomorrah, Edom (Isa. 34) we have examples of what is meant by ‘suffering the doom of eternal fire’ (Jude 7). But this does not mean that ever since the fire destroyed the cities, their inhabitants have been enduring the pains” (Vol. 1, p. 536).

The New Testament happily defines “eternal” fire when it describes the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude used the expression “eternal fire” to define the nature of that punishment. It should be obvious to any reader that “eternal,” as we have pointed out above, conveys the wrong sense in English. That fire is not still burning. It is not “eternal.” It was in fact an example of the devastating and destructive “fire of the coming age.” It will be inflicted at the return of Jesus (II Thess. 1:7-9, and following the second resurrection, Rev. 20:10).

“Undying worms” (immortal maggots?!) are no evidence of a perpetual conscious punishment for the wicked. The maggots will help to consume the carcasses of the wicked. But no one imagines that the maggots will live forever. Nor will the carcasses exist after they have been “consumed in smoke” (Ps. 37:20). At that point the wicked will be “as though they had never existed” (Obad. 16), a pile of ashes under the feet of the righteous. “The coming day will burn [the wicked] up...and they will be ashes under your feet” (Mal. 4:1-3). “Burning forever,” “everlasting burnings” (Isa. 33:14) describe the consuming fire of destruction which will put an end to the wicked forever. The effects of that punishment will be beyond reversal. They will last forever. Thus in Revelation 18 the city of Babylon will undergo the same final punishment. It will be a sudden tormenting and torturous destruction by burning. It will be all over in one day. “Her plagues will come in one day and she will be burned up, utterly burned with fire” (Rev. 18:8). Onlookers will watch “the smoke of her burning” (v. 9) and “will stand at a distance for fear of her torture,” a process lasting “one hour” (v. 10). “In one hour the city is laid waste” (v. 19). The city of Babylon, by this process of torture (vv. 10, 15) resulting in “smoke which rises into the ages of the ages” (19:3), will cease to exist, “be found no more” (18:21). We should note carefully the exact sense of the word “torment” (18:10, 15). It produces a condition of non-existence. It means “violent overthrow by fire” (see 18:21). To be “tormented” is to be “utterly burned up with fire” (18:8). The smoke of the fire, as the indicator of the fire’s destructive work, goes up “into the ages of the ages” (19:3). This does not lead us to understand that the city will continue to experience an endless process of punishment. The Old Testament has taught us to understand that in the Day of God’s wrath “the land of Edom will become burning pitch. It will not be quenched night nor day. The smoke will go up for ever. The land will lie desolate from generation to

generation; no one will pass through it forever and ever... No one will be there" (see Isa. 34:8ff.). This picture of "endless fire" (cp. Jude 7) does not require us to understand that the people or the city will remain in conscious punishment. They and the city will be destroyed. It will be an irreversible destruction which lasts into the ages of the ages. Such final destruction is called "torture by fire." The city of Babylon will suffer such "torture." The Devil and his cohorts will likewise experience "torture into the ages of the ages" (Rev. 20:10). Taken in isolation from the rest of Scripture this one verse may well be read (or at least in English it will be so heard) to mean an endless conscious punishment. But since "eternal fire" (Jude 7) is really the destructive "fire of the coming age" (*aiionios* fire), and since the wicked will be "destroyed for ever" (Ps. 52:5; 92:7), Revelation 20:10 should not be made to control the rest of the biblical evidence. "Torture," as we see, means "sudden destruction by a consuming fire," with endless results. It was "torture" which caused the sudden ruin of Babylon (Rev. 18:8-10). It will be "torture" which destroys Satan and his supporters forever. Based on the biblical usage of the word for "torture" in connection with sudden, violent irreversible ruin of the city, it is fair to take Revelation 20:10 in the same sense: The Devil will suffer a torturous destruction by fire, with endless, irreversible results. Words in the Bible must be allowed the nuance given them in the context of the original languages. The sense of "torment" or "torture" in the Greek of Revelation is not necessarily quite that of the English. This is shown by the use of "torment" to describe the demise of a city (Rev. 18:10, 15), a usage that is really quite inappropriate in our language. Full allowance must be made for this important linguistic fact.

The fate of the wicked in Revelation 14:11 is depicted in the same language. The smoke of their torturous death goes up ever. There will be no possibility of reprieve day and night forever. The wicked can look forward to no future beyond destruction in the second death — death meaning in the Bible *the absence of conscious existence* (Ecc. 9:5, 10, etc.). Death in the Lake of Fire is death with no prospect of recovery.

There is not a single text in Scripture which allows us to imagine that the second death is a kind of purgatory from which a man can reemerge and be saved. Such is the illusion of "universalism" that cannot bring itself to believe that God actually puts the wicked out of existence forever. The annihilation of the wicked, via a torturous destruction, provides the

starkest possible warning to humanity. With that warning the New Testament consistently calls us all to repentance and belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom as Jesus preached it (Mark 1:14, 15). Forgiveness of sins is provided in the atoning death of the Messiah for the sins of the world, but forgiveness is contingent on repentance. And repentance means **responding with intelligent belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom** (see **Mark 4:11, 12; Luke 8:12**). Repentance and forgiveness are two sides of the same coin. One without the other has no meaning. And sin is expressly defined by Jesus as **failure to believe him and his words** (John 16:9; 5:47, Matt. 13:19, etc.). Hence the critical importance of defining the saving Gospel as Jesus did, so that repentance can follow in response to the command that we "believe the Gospel about the Kingdom" (Mark 1:14, 15). Water baptism in the New Testament followed upon the convert's intelligent grasp of the Gospel about the Kingdom and the Name of Jesus (all that Jesus stands for) — Acts 8:12. All this was in compliance with Jesus' marching orders to the Church until the end of the age when he returns to set up his Kingdom in a renewed earth (Matt. 28:19, 20). ✧

According to Jesus...

According to Jesus, God is strictly one Person, not three. Christians who value Jesus as the supreme revealer of truth should consider his classic words, uttered in a final prayer. "You, Father, are the only one who is truly God" (John 17:3). He defined salvation as belief in that One and only true God, and in himself as *the Messiah* (John 17:3).

It is a serious hijacking of the words of Jesus if one *adds to* Jesus' creed. For Jesus, his Father is "the one who alone is truly God, the only one who is truly God, the one true God" (see also John 5:44 and Mark 12:29).

Those utterances are more than clear. They are without a hint of ambiguity. Yet they have been abandoned by the church bearing the name of Jesus. The church has for centuries, since post-biblical times, defined God as *three* Persons. Jesus defined God as *one* Person, the Father. There is a very great difference. That difference calls for extensive rethinking and reform. We cannot risk fragmenting God. Jesus believed and taught strict unitary monotheism. He had never heard of the Trinity — or if he had he rejected it. So should his followers.

Centuries later, after church councils had invented iron-clad creeds and imposed them on the faithful, Augustine came face to face with Jesus'

definition of God as the “only one who is truly God.” What was he to do? The church by then had lost Jesus’ creed. It propagated everywhere belief that God was *three* Persons. That innocent sentence in John 17:3 stated that God was a single Person, not three Persons. Here is Augustine’s “solution.” He wrote: “The proper order of the words is ‘that they may know You *and Jesus Christ*, the only true God” (*Homilies on John*).

One can have the words of Jesus on this great issue, *or* the words of the post-biblical creeds. It is hard to see how one can have both at the same time. Following Jesus means believing his teachings. Jesus’ teaching about how many Persons are the One God is really not difficult: “You, Father, are the only true God.” Jesus is the Lord Messiah (Luke 2:11; Ps. 110:1), the *Son* of God (Matt. 16:16), but not the One True God. The word “one” should be clear to all.

If anyone has any question about this, let him consult the thousands upon thousands of singular personal pronouns used for God in the Bible. “I,” “Me,” “Mine,” “Myself,” “Thee,” “Thy,” “Thine,” “Thyself,” “He,” “Him,” “His,” “Himself.” All these words, as well as God’s proper name Yahweh followed by singular verbs (6700 times), ought to convince the open-minded that God is one Person, not more. And monotheism — belief that God is one — is, according to Jesus, of critical importance (Mark 12:29).

Jesus, the Son of God, is the perfect human reflection of the One God, his Father. But he is not God. He is the sinless second Adam and the “prophet to be raised up from the house of Israel” (Deut. 18:15-18). Created and begotten in the womb of his mother under the power of God’s spirit, he is designated “Son of God” (Luke 1:35). The idea that he is “eternally begotten” not only has no recognizable meaning in language, but it is false to Scripture. “*Eternal generation*” contradicts the important biblical fact that the Son of God was begotten “today,” not in eternity (Ps. 2:7; cp. Acts 13:33, referring in the latter text to the birth of Jesus. ✧

Comments

“I want to express my gratitude for your website. I have spent most of the day reading the various articles. There is a group of saints who meet every Friday and Sunday night in Kansas City, MO to discuss Kingdom aspects. We have been doing so for the past three years. We have learned to chuck traditional theology, and believe what the Scriptures say.”— *Missouri*

“I came across your marvelous article on the promise made to Abraham that he would be heir of the world and couldn’t agree more. I have been teaching this concept for years and have been greeted by vacant stares.” — *Arkansas*

“Much of what I was taught and believed I am reexamining. I have realized that I was viewing much of the Scripture through a filter that blinded me from seeing the truth, turning my heart and eyes away from all that was Jewish and thereby excluding over 75% of the Bible, i.e. the Hebrew Scriptures. How surprised I was to learn of Luther’s attitude toward Jesus and the Jews with the making of his own Canon. It amazes me that I too lauded Paul’s epistles over Jesus’ words in the Gospels. Now I understand that Paul was in total agreement with Jesus’ teaching of the Kingdom of God and not in contradiction.”

— *Connecticut*

“It is hard for me to explain the impact your teaching is having on my life and ministry. I have always had a desire for Truth and for the last year or so I have prayed more and more for wisdom in order to be able to teach God’s people more perfectly. Never did I imagine that the answer would come this way. Never did I dream that we could have been so mistaken about so many things. I see now that the whole basis of our belief has not been correct. It is as though we need to wipe the slate clean and start all over. I know that it is the kindness of God that shows us where we need correcting.

“My 12-year-old daughter asked the other day why Jesus had not simply told the man who came to him how to get saved — by believing that Jesus would die for his sins and be raised from the dead again. She wondered why Jesus did not even mention those things. This is one of the things you have been pointing out that has been so amazing to me. While Jesus preached *the Kingdom*, yet our tradition has been proclaiming his death and resurrection as the whole Gospel — which it obviously is not!”

— *Missouri*

“I wouldn’t have believed it, but I did hear this on one of the Bible-answer programs last night. The question was about the timing of the rapture and Jesus’ return. The Bible expert amazingly warned his listeners not to take what Jesus said in Matthew 24 as a basis for understanding the order of events at the end. He advised only consulting the epistles!” [This reflects a widespread rejection of Jesus in favor of a misunderstood Paul — ed.] — *California*