

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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A Key to Successful Prayer

Jesus was a master of prayer. His level of communion with the Father is a model for his followers. In John 15:7 he made this statement: “If you abide in me and *my words* abide in you, you will ask what you want and it will be granted to you.” Such a *carte blanche* promise needs to be understood. The key, plainly stated, is the condition presented by Jesus: “If you abide in *my words*...” “If and only if...”

It is wise to examine ourselves in the light of Jesus’ insistence that we must remain within the sphere of *his words*, i.e., his teachings, his Gospel. It should not be assumed automatically that our church training places us within that indispensable, desired realm of his words. Jesus did not address God as a member of the Triune Deity. He addressed his Father as “the only One who is truly God” (John 17:3). Jesus did not come before the Father as a coequal member of an “eternal God-Family.” He did not think of God as a “Triune Essence.” He knelt before the One God of Israel knowing himself to be *not* God, but His uniquely begotten Son — coming into existence in the womb of Mary (Matt. 1:20, “*begotten*,” Luke 1:35, “the child to be *begotten*...”). Jesus never instructed his disciples to seek “heaven” when they died. He never once said that any of the faithful had “gone to heaven.” He urged his students always to look forward to the Kingdom of God coming on a renewed earth at the return of the Messiah (Acts 1:11). Jesus taught a strictly non-violent lifestyle. He urged separation from the world’s paganized religious practices. He took no part in the politics of present nation-states. He spoke, in the critically important Sermon on the Mount, of a “fulfillment of the Law,” and went beyond the Law of Moses, as he introduced the New Covenant in view of his death. He knew that his blood was essential for ratifying the New Covenant, making it the only covenant now acceptable to God.

Jesus taught that communion with the Father must be based on a knowledge of the truth. “God is seeking people who will worship Him in spirit and truth” (John 4:23, 24), that is to say, people informed about Truth and able to approach God in a frame of mind shaped and instructed by the Truth as Jesus taught it. Religious zeal, uninformed by Truth, was not enough for Jews in Paul’s day. Paul acknowledged the

undoubted zeal for God among his countrymen, but lamented the fact that it was “zeal without knowledge” (Rom 10:2-4). He then set out to save his fellow Jews from their destructive ignorance.

“If you abide in me and my words abide in you, then you may ask God freely and expect answers.” The word of Jesus is summed up in what the New Testament calls *the Gospel about the Kingdom of God*. Those who seek to commune with God in a way which is productive should concentrate first and foremost upon grasping the mind and spirit of Jesus, his teachings and words. “Seek first the Kingdom of God,” he urged. Consider the Kingdom the pearl of incalculable value. Give up whatever is necessary for the only possession which has real and permanent significance — an understanding of the Gospel of the Kingdom, which is the word or Message of Jesus. Be a Son of the Kingdom, a disciple of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:38, 52). Become a member of the royal family of Israel in training. Set out on the road which leads to immortality by taking into your heart the spark of indestructible life imparted by the “Word/Gospel of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:19), as Jesus offers it to all who will listen.

If we remain constantly within the words and teachings of Jesus (Col. 3:16), we can “ask what we will and it will be done for us.” By thinking like Jesus and being taught by his spirit (Acts 16:7) our wills — our agendas — become conformed to his. This is a process which demands that we abandon the mistaken teachings we may have received in our ignorance and embrace the truth of Jesus’ Gospel and all the truths associated with that Good News. Ignorance alienates us from God and frustrates successful prayer (Eph. 4:18). Paul instructs us all to stop being “tossed to and fro, driven here and there by every wind of doctrine, by the craftiness of men and their cunning strategies with which they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14).

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To be a disciple of Jesus is to learn what he taught, to absorb the content of his words. **To receive Jesus means to believe Jesus**, *what he said*, not just confess that he died and rose. A Jesus without his words/Gospel is a “shell” of a Jesus, a Jesus without a heart. His words are the expression of his heart. Let Jesus impart *his* heart to you via his words. In this way the crucial condition of John 15:7 will be fulfilled: “*If you abide in my words...you will ask what you will...*”✧

The Word or Gospel of Jesus: The Golden Key which Church Tradition Buries

A learned commentator on the Bible wrote: “The dogmatic theology which understands its vocation will be neither more nor less than a theology of the Kingdom in all the force of the word...The idea of the Kingdom of God is the golden thread which runs through all Scripture; of this Kingdom the Bible is the document.”

Another biblical expert noted: “The Kingdom of God is the central topic around which all other doctrines logically arrange themselves.”

This being so, are you confident that the Kingdom of God is at the heart of all you know and practice as a Christian? It may be that your church tradition has not equipped you to think as Jesus did about the supreme purpose of God for you and for the world — the Kingdom of God.

It may be that you have not been invited to “repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom” (Mark 1:14, 15) and to receive forgiveness on the basis of your willingness to understand and accept the Gospel-word of the Kingdom as Jesus announced it (Matt. 13:19; Mark 4:11, 12). When he invited his audience to embark on the journey which leads to salvation, Jesus, the model evangelist, always began by teaching on the Kingdom (Luke 4:43; Luke 9:11; cp. Acts 28:30).

If you are a member of a Protestant church your tradition owes much to the reformer Martin Luther. How well did he reflect the Gospel teaching of Jesus?

“Luther’s remarks and hesitancy concerning the book of Revelation are attributable to a preconceived opinion of the Kingdom and to his ‘not thoroughly understanding the doctrine of God’s Kingdom on the earth.’”

Did you know that Luther said of the book of Revelation that “Christ is neither taught nor in it”?

The Protestant Version of the Gospel

Protestants have inherited a Gospel from their Protestant heritage. The question is, does this Protestant Gospel accurately reflect the Gospel as Jesus preached it? Does the offer of salvation put to the public in a mass of tracts and evangelical books do justice to the Bible’s and Jesus’ definition of the Gospel? (Heb. 3:2)

Scholars who trace the history of Gospel preaching and teaching have noted some (we think disturbing) facts about how the Protestant reformer Luther understood the Gospel. What they have observed is that Protestants, while nervous about Roman Catholic dogmas, have in fact nodded in approval of equally dogmatic assertions from the founding fathers of Protestantism.

A Protestant Dogma

Luther decided arbitrarily to define the Gospel by taking texts from John and Paul and ignoring the accounts of Jesus’ ministry. The first casualty of this procedure was the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, Jesus’ Gospel.

“Luther created by a *dogmatic criterion a canon of the gospel within the canon* of the books [i.e., to define the Gospel he chose some NT books and ignored others]. Luther wrote: ‘Those Apostles who treat oftenest and highest of how faith alone justifies, are the best Evangelists. Therefore St. Paul’s Epistles are more a Gospel than Matthew, Mark and Luke. For these [Matt., Mark, Luke] do not set down much more than the works and miracles of Christ; but the grace which we receive through Christ no one so boldly extols as St. Paul, especially in his letter to the *Romans*.’ In comparison with the Gospel of John, the Epistles of Paul, and I Peter, ‘which are the kernel and marrow of all books,’ the Epistle of James, with its insistence that man is not justified by faith alone, but by works proving faith, is ‘*a mere letter of straw, for there is nothing evangelical about it.*’ It is clear that the infallibility of Scripture has here, in fact if not in [Luther’s] admission, followed the infallibility of popes and councils; for the Scripture itself has to submit to be judged by the ultimate criterion of its accord with *Luther’s doctrine* of justification by faith.”¹

Consider those words most carefully. Luther replaced one dogmatic system, that of Roman Catholicism, with another, making the Scripture submit to *his own process of selection*. This is a

¹Moore, *History of Religions*, Scribners, 1920, p. 320.

serious charge. In the matter of defining the Christian Gospel it appears that Luther put himself in the driver's seat. He imposed on the Bible his own opinion that the Gospel is primarily to be found in Galatians and Romans — and not in the words of Jesus recorded in three parallel accounts by Matthew, Mark and Luke. We repeat: The casualty in this arbitrary decision-making of Luther was the words of Jesus recording and defining the Gospel as the Gospel about the Kingdom (Matthew, Mark and Luke, and John, when properly understood).

Amazingly the celebrated C.S. Lewis seems to reflect the very same tendency. He does not think that *Jesus* preached the Gospel! Neither would you think, reading evangelical tracts (try this sometime), that Jesus preached the Gospel. C.S. Lewis says this:

“The epistles are for the most part the earliest Christian documents we possess. The Gospels [Matthew–John] came later. They are not ‘the Gospel,’ the statement of the Christian belief. In that sense *the epistles are more primitive and more central than the Gospels* — though not of course than the great events which the Gospels recount. *God's Act* (the Incarnation, the crucifixion, and the Resurrection) comes first: the earliest theological analysis of it comes in the epistles: then when the generation which had heard the Lord was dying out, the Gospels were composed to provide the believers a record of the *great Act* and of some of the Lord's sayings.”²

What about Jesus' *saving gospel* of the Kingdom? Luther and C.S. Lewis rather skillfully bypass the gospel according to Jesus. But can one be centered in Christ while avoiding the Gospel as Jesus preached it?

Now a comment from a historian of Christianity. As a historian he has less of a theological ax to grind. He recognizes that the teaching of Jesus recorded in the gospels is absolutely essential for the new birth:

“The idea that the entrance into the new and higher life, the immortal life, must be by a spiritual or intellectual rebirth, or rather regeneration, meets us often in the mysteries [mystery religions], and especially in the intellectual mysticisms of the age. *Anagennasthai* (to be born again) and *paliggenesia* (rebirth) are familiar terms in them. In John it is the *sine qua non* [absolute essential] of salvation. Flesh breeds flesh; spirit alone can engender spirit, and only he who is begotten by the divine spirit can enter the ‘Kingdom of God’ (John 3). In the thought of the time spirit was not only the principle of divine life but of

the higher knowledge; so Paul conceives it (e.g. I Cor. 2:14). In John [recording Jesus] the two are inseparably connected, or rather they are the same thing.”³

Knowledge and spirit are closely linked. Knowledge of the Gospel of the Kingdom is the key to the reception of the spirit, which is the mind of Jesus himself (I Cor. 2:16). What then would be the results of following Luther's and Calvin's arbitrary demotion of Jesus' Gospel? Could any teaching more savagely attack the Bible than the concept that Jesus did not really preach the Gospel?

It is reasonable to ask why the Kingdom of God features so little in modern evangelism. The answer is to be found in this longstanding de-emphasis on the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, dating from Calvin and Luther. An unconscious offense at the Messianic Jewish Jesus caused these two Protestant leaders to express a curious preference for the Gospel of John (and for Paul) over the other three Gospels. Luther, writing the preface to his translation of the New Testament (1522), stated: “John's Gospel is the only Gospel which is delicately sensitive to what is the essence of the Gospel, and *is to be widely preferred to the other three and placed on a higher level.*”⁴

There is the fateful dogma of the Protestant Luther! He was followed by Calvin in this opinion. Calvin even ventured to suggest a different order for Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, making John the ideal introduction to his three fellow reporters of the life of Jesus:

Calvin wrote: “The doctrine which points out to us the power and the benefit of the coming Christ, is *far more clearly exhibited by John* than by the [synoptists]. The three former [Matt., Mark, Luke] exhibit [Christ's] body...but John exhibits his soul. On this account I am accustomed to say that *this Gospel is a key to open the door for understanding the rest...*In reading [the four Gospels] *a different order would be advantageous*, which is, that when we wish to read in Matthew and others that Christ was given to us by the Father, we should *first* learn from John the purpose for which he was manifested.”⁵

Wow! On whose authority did these church leaders relegate the precious Gospel of Jesus recorded by the first three Gospels to an inferior position? Christians should awake to the fact that their various

³Moore, *History of Religions*, p. 142.

⁴Cited by D. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, p. 160.

⁵Foreword to Calvin's commentary on John.

²Introduction to J.B. Phillips' *Letters to Young Churches*, Fontana Books, pp. 9, 10.

traditional systems, claiming to be based on Scripture, have not served them well. Scripture nowhere says that John's Gospel is to be preferred over Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is sheer dogmatism to declare that John is a better representative of the Gospel than Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is dangerous to move one inch from the teachings of Jesus. Note the impassioned warning in 2 John 9: "No one has God who goes beyond the teaching of Christ and does not keep within it. He who keeps within the teaching of Jesus has both the Father and the Son."

Another popular but perilous evasion of the teaching of Jesus goes like this: "Jesus preached a Jewish Message up to the cross; whereupon Paul then took a *different* Message of grace to the Gentiles." The New Scofield Bible, read by millions, says that a "strong legal and Jewish coloring is to be expected up to the cross."⁶ On Revelation 14:6 Scofield diverts attention away from the saving Gospel of the Kingdom, and thus from Jesus himself.

We are at the crux of the problem which afflicts current versions of the faith. A false distinction and division is being created by the so-called "dispensationalist" school. The teachings of Jesus do not remain at the center of the scheme of salvation proposed by dispensationalists. John Walvoord says that the Sermon on the Mount "treats not of salvation, but of the character and conduct of those who belong to Christ...That it is suitable to point an unbeliever to salvation in Christ is plainly not the intention of this message...The Sermon on the Mount, as a whole, is not church truth precisely...It is not intended to delineate justification by faith or the gospel of salvation."⁷

Rather ambiguously he adds that it should not be relegated to "unimportant truth."⁸ ✧

The Loss of the Kingdom/Land Promise

The 77% of our Bible which is the Old Testament has been detached from the New Testament. We have forgotten that God preached the Gospel to Abraham (Gal. 3:8) and that the New Testament Gospel preaching by Jesus is based on the covenant made with Abraham. God promised the land to Abraham

⁶ *New Scofield Bible*, p. 987. The fact is that the whole New Testament faith is Jewish in character and consistently makes strong demands for obedience.

⁷ *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, Moody Press, 1984, pp. 44, 45.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

and to his seed. Jesus, as the promised seed (Gal. 3:16-19), guaranteed the land to Christians (Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10).

The "murder of the [Old Testament biblical] text"⁹ by critical scholarship has been equally responsible for the suppression of the covenant-hope of "life in the land." Fragmenting the Hebrew Bible in the interests of a theory of composition, scholarship lost sight of what James Dunn has called the Pauline presupposition about the authority of Scripture, "that a single mind and purpose [God's] inspired the several writings [the Bible]."¹⁰ After nearly two thousand years of uncomprehending Gentile opposition, the promise to Abraham of progeny, blessing, greatness, and *land* must be reinstated in the churches' teaching as the coherent and unifying theme of biblical faith in God and Christ and the essential core of the Christian Gospel about the Kingdom of God. There could be no greater rallying point for fragmented Christendom. No other theme than that which ties together all of divine revelation can provide the churches with the unified Message they so desperately need. What they need is nothing other than Christ himself as expressed in his Gospel of the Kingdom, the whole purpose of his ministry (Luke 4:43).

As James Dunn says, "The idea of '**inheritance**' was a fundamental part of Jewish understanding of their **covenant** relationship with God, above all, indeed almost exclusively, in connection *with the land* — the land of Canaan theirs by right of **inheritance** as **promised** to Abraham...[This] is one of the most emotive themes in Jewish national self-identity...Central to Jewish self-understanding was the conviction that Israel was the Lord's inheritance...Integral to the national faith was the conviction that God had given Israel **the inheritance of Palestine**, the promised land. It is this axiom which **Paul evokes and refers to the new Christian movement as a whole, Gentiles as well as Jews**. They are **heirs** of God. Israel's special relationship with God has been extended to all in Christ. **And the promise of the land has been transformed into the promise of the Kingdom...**That inheritance of the Kingdom, full citizenship under the rule of God alone, is something **still awaited by believers**."¹¹

⁹ *The Gospel and the Land*, p. 48. Cp. Jesus' observation that apostate Israel had murdered the prophets (Matt. 23:31).

¹⁰ *Commentary on Romans*, Word Books, 1988, p. 202.

¹¹ *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 213, 463, emphasis

Again we must insist on the direct link between early Christianity and the covenant with Abraham. As Dunn says:

“The degree to which Paul’s argument is determined by the current self-understanding of his own people is clearly indicated by his careful wording which picks up four key elements in that self-understanding: the covenant promise to Abraham and his seed, the inheritance of the land as its central element...It had become almost a commonplace of Jewish teaching that the covenant promised that Abraham’s seed would *inherit the earth* [cp. Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10]...The promise thus interpreted was fundamental to Israel’s self-consciousness as God’s covenant people: It was the reason why God had chosen them in the first place from among all the nations of the earth, the justification for holding themselves distinct from other nations, and the comforting *hope* that made their current national humiliation endurable . . .

“Paul’s case reveals the strong continuity he saw between his faith and the fundamental promise of his people’s Scriptures...Paul had no doubt that **the Gospel he proclaimed was a continuation and fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham [cp. Gal 3:8]**. But he was equally clear that the heirs of Abraham’s promise were no longer to be identified in terms of the law. For Genesis 15:6 [“Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”] showed with sufficient clarity that the promise was given and accepted through faith, quite apart from the law in whole or in part.”¹²

“The first task of exegesis [explaining the Bible] is to penetrate as far as possible inside the historical context(s) of the author and of those for whom he wrote. So much of this involves the taken-for-granted of both author and addressees. Where a modern reader is unaware of (or unsympathetic to) these shared assumptions and concerns it will be impossible to hear the text as the author intended it to be heard (and assumed it would be heard). In this case, a major part of that context is the self-understanding of Jews and Judaism in the first century and of Gentiles sympathetic to Judaism. *Since most of Christian history and scholarship, regrettably, has been unsympathetic to that self-understanding, if not downright hostile to it, a proper appreciation of Paul in his interaction with that self-understanding has*

added.

¹²*Commentary on Romans*, pp. 233, 234.

been virtually impossible [cp. Peter’s warning about the danger of misunderstanding Paul!].”¹³

Canon H. Goudge

The replacement of Jewish ways of thinking (the ways the Bible writers thought) by Gentile ideas has been a disaster affecting the denominations.

“[After New Testament times] the great people of God’s choice [the Jews] were soon the least adequately represented in the Catholic [universal] Church. That was a disaster to the Church itself. It meant that the Church as a whole failed to understand the Old Testament and that the Greek mind and the Roman mind in turn, came to dominate its outlook: From that disaster the Church has never recovered either in doctrine or practice. If today we are again coming rightly to understand the Old Testament and thus far better than before the New Testament also, it is to our modern Hebrew scholars and in part to Jewish scholars themselves that we owe it. God meant, we believe, the Jews to be His missionaries; the first great age of evangelization was the Apostolic age, when the missionaries were almost entirely Jews; no others could have done what they did. If today another great age of evangelization is to dawn, we need the Jews again.”¹⁴✧

Jesus Died for Us

by Bill Wachtel

The covenants earlier ratified by the blood of animals were designed to point forward to the New Covenant which would be ratified by the blood of God’s Son (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20).

The writers of the Greek Scriptures saw in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 the inspired meaning behind what Christ had accomplished in his death on the cross. Paul refers over and over again to Christ’s sufferings and death as having been made vicariously for his people — as Isaiah declares so vividly!

“He was wounded for OUR transgressions, he was bruised for OUR iniquities...with his stripes WE are healed” (Isa. 53:5). “The LORD hath laid on HIM the iniquity of us all...for the transgression of my people HE was stricken” (53:6, 8). God made Christ’s “soul” — his being, his person — an offering for sin.

¹³ *Word Biblical Commentary, Romans 1-8*, Dallas: Word Books, 1988, pp. xiv, xv, emphasis added.

¹⁴ “The Calling of the Jews” in the volume of collected essays *Judaism and Christianity* (London: Shears and Co., 1939), quoted by Lev Gillet, *Communion in the Messiah*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1942, p. 194.

God caused him to bear “their iniquities.” He bore the sin of “many.”

If these inspired descriptions do not teach the substitutionary and vicarious sacrifice of Christ for the sins of mankind, it is hard to imagine what words would be needed to express such a teaching! It is no wonder, then, that Paul and Peter stress the importance of the blood of Christ as poured out in sacrifice for sin and sinners — mentioning this in numerous texts scattered throughout their writings. ✧

Do You Understand What This Means?

“The Son of God Was Begotten, but He Had No Beginning”

I can imagine a day coming when Jesus reviews the work and the words of those who have claimed allegiance to him. As James said, teachers of the Bible will be liable to the most searching scrutiny. How well will you fare? If you are a Protestant or Roman Catholic the church you belong to subscribes to the amazing idea that the Son of God was “eternally begotten.” Do you know what that means? Will you be able to justify holding that sort of creed, when your work is reviewed by the Master Rabbi? Did Jesus ever teach such a thing? Does the Bible teach it anywhere? Do the words “eternally begotten” carry any recognizable meaning? Are they perhaps a regrettable instance of theological “church-speak,” liable to confuse and distort the picture of the true biblical Son of God?

It will not do to brush these questions under the carpet. Each of us is committed, when we enter a church and become a member, to a set of beliefs. Primary amongst the items of that creed is the declaration that the Son of God *had no beginning*. He has always been in existence. He was “eternally begotten.”

Try basing that proposition on the words of Scripture! Open up the New Testament and see if the Son of God had no beginning. Matthew 1:1, 18 announce the “genesis” (RV margin “generation”) of Jesus Christ. This surely points to a beginning of existence. Could language be clearer? Some forty times in this chapter we are exposed to the word “begat.” Generation followed generation as so and so “begat” a son. Sometimes that begetting of a son — the bringing into being of a son — is given further detail. We are told in four cases that the procreation of a new personality was effected “out of” (*ek*) his mother, Thamar (v. 3), Rahab (v. 5), Ruth (v. 5), the

wife of Uriah (v. 6). When we come to Jesus things are different in one particular. We do not read that Joseph begat Jesus but that Jesus *was begotten* “out of” (*ek*) Mary (1:16). Begotten by whom? The divine passive tells us: “begotten by God” through the action of His creative activity, His spirit. More detail is given in Matthew 1:20. The reassuring words of the angel inform Joseph that his wife’s unexpected pregnancy is supernatural, “for what has been *begotten* in her” results from the action of the holy spirit (see v. 20). “Begotten” describes the action of the Father. We are reading here about the generation or beginning of the Son.

Luke 1:32-35 repeats the story with complete clarity. Gabriel has informed Mary of the begetting of “the Son of the Highest One” (v. 32). How is this to happen? “Holy spirit will come over you [Mary] and the power of the Highest One will overshadow you. For that reason precisely the one to be begotten will be called Son of God.”

Creeds of the churches attempt to persuade you, nevertheless, that the Son of God was “*eternally begotten*.” He had no beginning! Such language is not fit to be called rational language at all. It has strictly speaking no meaning. “Eternity” implies “beyond time.” Begetting has to do with a bringing into existence *in time* — in the case of the Son of God, Jesus, the time was six months after the conception of his cousin John (Luke 1:26). This is calendar time as plainly as language can express it. There was no begetting in eternity!

The term “son,” as all should know, always implies a beginning of life. A son is derived from his father and is inevitably younger than his father. They cannot be of equal age. To beget is to procreate, to bring into being, to give existence to a new person. All this is plainly taught by the gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke. It is confirmed in the writings of John. In 1 John 5:18 we find further “begetting” language with reference to Jesus, the Son of God. A fascinating statement from John tells us that the Son whom God *begat* keeps his brother Christians safe from Satan. “Everyone who has been begotten/born from God does not continue in sin, but **the one who was begotten from God** preserves him, and the Devil does not touch him.”

Remember that the creeds of organized Christianity are committed to a begetting of the Son *outside of time*. We submit that that extraordinary, not to say incomprehensible notion is contradicted by the texts we are examining. Here in I John 5:18 John specifies the begetting *in time* of the Son of God,

Jesus. The verb describing the begetting, coming into existence, procreation of the Son of God appears here in the aorist tense (*gennethis*). Everyone familiar with the aorist tense in Greek knows that it informs us that an event has happened in past time. It is the equivalent of what we might call the simple past tense of the verb. The Son of God *was begotten*, says John. Luke 1:35 and Matthew 1:20 are in complete harmony with John: The begetting of Jesus was effected by God in the womb of his mother around 2 or 3 BC.

This teaching of course means that the Son of God is a human being, deriving existence supernaturally and created as a fetus in the womb of his mother. That is the Son of God of the Bible records, and any other claimant to that title must be considered a case of mistaken identity. **There is no such person as “the eternally begotten Son” in the New Testament.** The phrase “eternal begetting” appears nowhere in Scripture and anyway makes no logical sense in terms of the definition of words in their dictionary (Greek or English) sense.

The celebrated Adam Clark, author of a much respected commentary, expressed his concern at the impossible concept of “eternal Son” or “eternal generation”: “The doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ, is in my opinion, antisciptural and highly dangerous. I have not been able to find any express declaration of it in the Scriptures... To say that he was begotten from all eternity is absurd, and the phrase ‘eternal son’ is a positive self-contradiction. ‘Eternity’ is that which has had no beginning, nor stands in any reference to time. ‘Son’ supposes time, generation, and father, and time also antecedent to such generation. Therefore the conjunction of these two terms ‘Son’ and ‘eternity’ is absolutely impossible, as they imply essentially different and opposite ideas.”¹⁵

And yet without the “eternal generation” of the Son there is no doctrine of the Trinity.

J.O. Buswell, D.D., former Dean of the Graduate School, Covenant College, St. Louis, MO, examined the issue of the begetting of the Son in the Bible and concluded with these words. He wrote: “The notion that the Son was begotten by the Father in eternity past, not as an event, but as an inexplicable relationship, has been accepted and carried along in the Christian theology since the fourth century... We have examined all the instances in which ‘begotten’ or ‘born’ or related words are applied to Christ, and we can say with confidence that the *Bible has nothing whatsoever to say about ‘begetting’ as an eternal*

relationship between the Father and the Son.”¹⁶ So much for an eternal Son!

Why does a leading Roman Catholic scholar admit that Luke 1:35 (above) is an embarrassment to orthodox scholars? **“Luke 1:35 has embarrassed many orthodox theologians, since in preexistence [Trinitarian] theology a conception by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb does not bring about the existence of God’s Son. Luke is seemingly unaware of such a Christology; conception is causally related to divine sonship for him.”**¹⁷

Traditional dogmas are not as well-founded in the Bible as millions of uninformed churchgoers suppose. If our work is to be acceptable to God and His Messiah, we owe it to ourselves to find out where the Truth in these crucial matters lies. The Bible is packed with warnings about the danger of traditions, carelessly accepted “on authority.” Christians need to be sure about which Son of God they choose to place their faith in. Can your “Son of God” be identified with Luke’s, Matthew’s and John’s? ✧

Comments

“Wow! The articles in the April 2002 issue of *Focus* are the best I believe I have read in a long time. The one on ‘the Law of Christ or the Law of Moses’ is one that could be expanded on, i.e., a booklet. What a great article, clear, concise and to the point. It is something I can use when communicating with others in the Messianic community.

“I think that articles such as this are vital to show people the truth, so that they will not be caught up in a ‘works’ orientation. Satan will use any means to deceive, targeting now this rapidly growing Messianic movement. Already he has a lot (not all) Messianic Jews believing in the doctrine of the Trinity, so they are giving up belief in the One God in the same way that they went after Baal and Ashteroth, etc.

“We need to do all we can to counter false teachings by false teachers whomever and wherever they are. I believe articles like those in the April edition go a long way in doing so. They are much appreciated in this quarter.” — *Canada*

“I continue to access your website regularly, and wait anxiously for each new monthly installment of your *Focus on the Kingdom* magazine. Being raised in a traditional evangelical home, I’ve discovered nothing in the Word over these four years that contradicts your position. I still struggle to sit through an evangelical sermon, without being too critical. But the errors and contradictions abound and nobody sees it.” — *Saipan*

¹⁶A *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, Zondervan, 1962, p. 110.

¹⁷Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 291.

¹⁵Commentary on Luke 1:35