

# Focus on the Kingdom

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“The intelligent study of Christianity is impossible without knowledge of Greek and Roman religion. We generally assume that there is an unbroken line of continuity between the religion of the Jews and our own, and that there is none between paganism and Christianity. But the opposite is the truth. The Catholic Church was the last creative achievement of classical antiquity; it owes far more to Greece and Rome than to Palestine...Christian ethics are a blend of Platonic and Stoic teachings about the good life” (W.R. Inge, *Lay Thoughts of a Dean*).

*The author of this quotation does not lament this confusing mixture of Hebrew thought and pagan philosophy so characteristic even of contemporary Christianity. But we doubt whether Jude who called for a return to the faith once and for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) could possibly have approved of Plato masquerading as or mixing with Jesus. The whole scheme of Christianity inherited from the Roman Catholic Church, modified but not radically changed by Protestantism, needs to be de-Platonized. This will happen when God is recognized, following Jesus, as One and no more (certainly not Three!) and when the Kingdom of God, not “heaven for disembodied souls,” is taught as the objective of the faith. The love of Truth is an indispensable ingredient of our service of Christ who preached, died, rose and is coming again.*

## Jesus and His Formula for Immortality

Many churchgoers are not without reason unclear about what the Christian Gospel is. The point has been established repeatedly by polls and surveys. Ask the average churchgoer to give an account of the saving Gospel and the answers are liable to be vague and uncertain. Some have been trained to produce a neat cluster of verses in Romans (but why start with Paul instead of Jesus?). Almost no one seems inclined to use the language of Jesus (and Paul) by turning to the beginning of the ministry of Jesus and declaring that the Gospel is **the Gospel about the Kingdom of God** (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Luke 4:43; Mark 1:14, 15; cp. Acts 20:24, 25; 28:23, 31, etc.).

We suggested above that such uncertainty is not without reason. Our point is simply this: Bible readers have not been trained to recognize the many

synonymous expressions in the New Testament which all equally point to the one saving Message/Gospel — the formula for salvation and immortality (not “in heaven”) but in the coming Kingdom of God on a renewed earth.

Imagine someone giving a lecture on “the USA” and his audience not knowing that this is shorthand for “the United States of America.” How much sense would the audience make of that lecture? Suppose I delivered a talk on “cars” and the audience, being foreigners, happened to know the word “automobile” but had never heard the word “car.” Confusion would prevail. They might well complain that I had said nothing about “automobiles.” Well, I had, but I just chose to use a synonym.

So it is with the New Testament. Not to connect the synonyms — the interchangeable expressions for the same entity — results in a confusing fragmentation of the precious information designed to teach us the way to indestructible life, immortality in the Kingdom (I meant the same thing by those two phrases).

The immortality formula — the Gospel of salvation (again, I mean the same thing by those two phrases) — appears like this in the New Testament writings: Firstly it is important to know that Jesus is the pioneer and career presenter of the Gospel of salvation. (Strictly speaking, John the Baptist preceded him with the same Gospel proclamation, Matt. 3:2; cp. Matt. 4:17, 23). Hebrews 2:3 states that it would be perilous for us to neglect or ignore the great salvation Gospel=Message “which had its beginning in the preaching of the Lord Jesus and was confirmed to us by those who heard him.” This is a vitally important biblical fact. While many keep appealing to Paul as almost the “inventor” and founder of the faith, the New Testament says nothing like that. Paul would have been horrified at such a notion. In words of extreme urgency, he declared that “if anyone does not consent to the sound words — those of the Lord Jesus Christ — he is ignorant as well as conceited...” (see I Tim. 6:3). Paul desired that the “word/Gospel of Christ dwell in you richly”

### In This Issue

<b>A Word to the Wise from a Pastor in Search of Truth ...3</b>
<b>Immortality: The Irresistible Offer.....6</b>
<b>Our Gathering in Atlanta .....7</b>

(Col. 3:16). John the Apostle wrote, again with a white hot urgency, to warn that “if anyone comes to you and does not bring the teaching of Christ,” watch out! The antichristian spirit itself is threatening to destroy you.

Clarity on the Gospel is the *first* requirement of sane Christianity. The Gospel has a fundamental label, as found constantly on the lips of Jesus, and derived from it there are a number of synonyms which describe the same Kingdom/Gospel of salvation with other phrases. Thus:

Word of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19) = Mystery of the Kingdom = Gospel of the Kingdom = Truth = **word of Truth** = Spirit of Christ = Spirit of Truth = Seed = Word = word of God = word of the Promise (made to Abraham) (**Cp. Jesus’ words: “Your word is Truth” and “You are clean through the word I spoke.”**)

The process of becoming a Christian is described as: “coming to the knowledge of the Truth,” “being born again by the word of the Truth,” or by the seed, or spirit, or by “the word preached as Gospel.” To become a believer is to be “born of the spirit/promise,” to become the spiritual seed of Abraham. A Christian is one of whom Jesus says: “To you has been given the knowledge of the Mystery of the Kingdom” — what Paul calls coming to a knowledge of the Truth. The same Christian group Jesus described as “sons of the Kingdom,” royal family. Paul called them “heirs of the Kingdom,” “co-heirs of the Messiah,” destined to rule the world with the Messiah at his return in glory to this earth.

The synonyms continue: To “receive the word” (as in the parable of the sower) = “receive the Kingdom like a child” (Luke 18:17) = to receive Christ or come to Christ, to respond to his initial command to “Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom,” “God’s Gospel” (see Mark 1:14, 15).

Now imagine what an extreme loss of vital information would occur when only a tiny fraction of these information-packed descriptive titles of the Gospel were ever aired publicly. What a disaster would happen if Jesus’ own favorite Gospel descriptor were to disappear from churches. Even a superficial reading of the accounts of Jesus’ saving mission reveals clearly the heart of Jesus immortality agenda: **The Gospel (not about “heaven”) but about the Kingdom of God** (Luke 4:43; Mark 1:14, 15, etc.). Is it unreasonable to urge believers in the Messiah to copy his language? Would that not be a first step towards recovering his mind, which Paul calls the spirit? (I Cor. 2:16). After all, as Job asked: “Whose

spirit are you expressing with your words?” (Job 26:4). That is the question for us all, now and on judgment day. Whose mind is reflected in our words? Whose spirit do we advertise when we talk? Which Gospel are we espousing and teaching?

To have moved around with Jesus during his itinerant missionary work would have been to hear a man obsessed with the Kingdom of God. To mingle with believers today is to witness very near to a deafening silence in regard to the Kingdom. And it is to note a very puzzling substitution of “heaven” for *Kingdom of heaven/Kingdom of God*.

Can we really afford, as Christians, not to sound like Jesus and speak always as he (and Paul) did about the Kingdom of God? Perhaps the bracelet should read not only WWJD (What would Jesus do?) but WWJS — what would Jesus say, or even WWJPAG — what would Jesus preach as Gospel?

Repentance and belief in the Kingdom of God Gospel is the starting kit provided by Jesus as the Master evangelist (Mark 1:14, 15). The announcing of the Kingdom of God was the driving, purposive force of his whole mission (Luke 4:43).

To remove the Kingdom word from the Gospel must then be to leave an empty shell of a gospel.

To be forgiven is to be cleansed of the past, but it implies in the teaching of Jesus forsaking all in order to become part of his Kingdom-Gospel mission. We are saved *from* sin in order to take on the task of Kingdom work on behalf of the Messiah (Col. 4:11).

The rich variety of vocabulary which appears in the New Testament to describe the Gospel is no more complex than the variety of biblical vocabulary which designates Jesus — Savior, Prophet, Son of God, Prince of Peace, Son of Man, Holy One, etc.

The crowning significance of the Kingdom of God as the object of belief is found in the parable of the sower. Here Jesus makes an intelligent reception of his saving Kingdom formula a prerequisite for repentance and forgiveness. Here are his remarkable words: Mark 4:11, 12: “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom, but to those outside everything is in parables...*If* they *did* understand and learn [the mysteries of the Kingdom] they would return and be forgiven.” The Devil, knowing this well, does his utmost to block access to the Kingdom Gospel of Jesus. Luke 8:12: “When anyone hears the word/Gospel, the Devil comes and snatches away the word sown in their heart **so that they cannot believe it and get salvation.**”

The triumph of the Kingdom of God to which Jesus and Paul directed us is described in Jesus’

revelation to John. That book of Revelation which naturally develops the themes of Jesus' teaching and particularly the matter of the Kingdom in Daniel, tells us exactly what we would expect from our study of Daniel 7. First the Beast is slain in Revelation 19:20 by being thrown into the lake of fire (cp. Dan. 7:11). This event happens when the rider on the white horse appears as a warrior king accompanied by the armies of heaven (Rev. 19:11-15). His arrival in these verses is, as all agree, his second coming which, of course, has not yet happened. He comes in fact to "rule [i.e. set up the Kingdom over] the nations with a rod of iron" (Rev. 19:15). This same event is the one also described in Revelation 11:15-18, when "the Kingdoms of the world will become the Kingdom of God and Christ." This happens at the 7th trumpet, the trumpet announcing the resurrection of the faithful dead (cp. 1 Cor. 15:52). If this has not yet happened, then obviously the Kingdom of God has not yet arrived.

This sequence of events — first four Beasts (Rev. 13:1-2), culminating in final anti-Christ, then the Second Coming of Jesus to establish the Kingdom — is exactly the sequence laid out by Daniel 7, as we have seen.

The idea that the Kingdom was established at the ascension of Jesus contradicts this whole body of information about the Kingdom given by Daniel and confirmed by Jesus (and the standard Bible lexicons).

Much confusion about the Kingdom could have been spared if attention had been paid to the background to Jesus' teaching in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially Daniel 7 (and Dan. 2:35, 44).

We note one very important fact in Acts 1 which precisely confirms our findings. The last question Jesus' trained Apostles asked before Jesus left was: "Has the time now arrived for you to restore the Kingdom to Israel?" They wanted to know when the Kingdom was coming. Now notice Jesus' reply. Did he say, "The Kingdom of God is coming in a few days time, when I ascend to heaven and pour out the spirit?" Absolutely not! He said, "The time for the coming of the restored Kingdom is not to be known to you." It was to be *in the future*, at a time neither Jesus nor the Apostles knew (nor do we). On the other hand, "within a few days from now," "not many days hence" (Acts 1:5), the spirit was to come at Pentecost.

I trust the reader will not miss the point. The coming of the Spirit was to be "within a few days." But this event, the outpouring of the spirit, is clearly not the coming of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Kingdom was to be at a time unknown.

This must prove conclusively that the Kingdom of God did not come at Pentecost. This is only to say what Daniel had said. The Kingdom of God comes only after the destruction of the four Beasts (Dan. 7:3, 18, 22, 27).

This is basic Bible teaching and has to do with the Gospel, which is the Gospel about the Kingdom of God. We cannot afford to misunderstand the Gospel. Daniel 7 will help us not to distort the words of Jesus. ✧

## A Word to the Wise from a Pastor in Search of Truth

by Greg Deuble

There is a generally held view that the apostolic "faith once delivered to the saints" built a strong Church that beat paganism back into the dark recesses of the then-known world.

C.S. Lewis imaginatively captured this retreat in one of his novels by having the great magician Merlin imprisoned in a block of ice. Christ is on the throne; the Devil and all his works are more or less under control. At least that's the theory.

But what if instead of being so banished, paganism was actually absorbed into the Christian faith? What if the pure apostolic faith firmly rooted in Jesus the Messiah was already subject to early winds of change? The well-known dictum of Canon Goudge who considered that the infiltration of Roman and Greek ideas into the Christian church represents "a disaster from which we have never recovered, either in doctrine or practice" is well worth pondering.

It is the contention of many scholars and historians that the faith of Jesus of Nazareth was indeed soon corrupted and embellished. The historic Jesus of Nazareth was himself paganized and a "God-Man" emerged. "And because the concept of Jesus as *the Messiah* too closely linked Jesus with the ordinary world of *Jewish* life and politics, he was the first to go" (Douglas Lockhart, *Jesus the Heretic*). Note here the obvious tendency to anti-Semitism.

John sounded the alarm towards the end of the first century: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses the Jesus Christ [Messiah] who came in the flesh [i.e., the human, historical Messiah] is from God; and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world" (I John 4:1-3).

Apostolic Christianity is quite dogmatic on this point: Jesus the Christ was a real “flesh and blood” man, a literal descendant of the biological process traced from real ancestors such as Abraham and David in “the book of the genealogy” of the Jews (see Matt. 1:1).

To confess this fact is to affirm that Jesus was a member of the Jewish race who belonged to a definite culture in a definite period of time. Specifically, it means Jesus was a man supernaturally begotten in history not in eternity. (The Bible has nothing at all to say about an “eternally begotten Son” — a curious “square circle” phrase with no recognizable meaning). It is not irreverent to ask questions such as did Jesus ever twist an ankle? Did his breath ever smell bad after a spicy meal? Did he ever get cuts and bruises on his feet? Did insects ever bite him? And what about women...was he ever affectionately attracted to them?

In 1965 the Jewish author Dr. Hugh Schonfield released a controversial book called *The Passover Plot*. His thesis was that the Jesus of faith had virtually eclipsed the Jesus of history. That is, the human called Jesus had disappeared beneath a theological overlay of awesome proportions. By a process of embellishment and embroidery the man Jesus had been mercilessly etherealized, to the point where we have now arrived at an idealized, less-than-human Jesus.

The result? If we are ever to know the Jesus of history we must cut through centuries of theological accretions to release him from the layers of Christological construction. Even at a most basic level many Christians seem unaware that the title “Christ” is simply a Greek translation of the Hebrew title “Messiah”; they somehow think it refers to the second Person of the Trinity. However, the word “Christ” simply means “Messiah,” one chosen and anointed by God. Jesus had never heard of a triune God.

Christianity has created the problem of a “double-natured Lord” by ignoring the Jewish man who is Messiah and by theologially working the “Christ” up into something extra-Biblical. The Jesus of theology, the Jesus of faith, the Jesus legislated into being by Constantine and the Councils as “fully God,” obscures the Jesus of history, the Jesus of flesh and blood who lived a real human life as Israel’s promised Messiah.

By ignoring the Jewish background of the Gospels, we have transposed Jesus into a Being suspended between fact and fantasy, a hybrid.

Many examples can be given to show that Jesus was a man limited by his human boundaries. Even at the climax of his life in Gethsemane Jesus is proven to

be the Son of Man. As a flesh and blood man he is utterly shaken by what is before him. He quakes so much that he sweats great drops of blood. If we start from a position of later “orthodoxy,” suggests Lockhart, his prayer in Gethsemane is full of doctrinal errors, mistakes in self-interpretation which would have earned him the stake a few hundred years later! The biblical Jesus is distinctly unorthodox by our traditional standards.

It is obvious that Jesus does not consider himself God made manifest in the flesh, a member of a Trinity. The Messiah he certainly is, the One chosen to offer the supreme sacrifice for Israel and the world, but at base he is seen in Gethsemane as flesh and blood and no more. “All things are possible to *You*,” he prays, implying that all things are not possible to him. And then, “not what I desire, but what *You* desire,” indicating submission to God, and not the completion of a purpose of his own making. We see here the Son of God submitting to God, not God submitting to God.

On the cross his words, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” further divorce him from the philosophic creation that he was wholly God: For how could Jesus as God forsake himself?

How then did we get to the later developments at the time of Athanasius who declared the true Catholic faith, “That we worship One God as Trinity, and Trinity in Unity — neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance — for there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost, but the Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal”? Yet, even Athanasius it seems had trouble with his own definition, for he later wrote that concerning the divinity of the Logos, “the more he thought the less he comprehended; and the more he wrote the less capable was he of expressing his thoughts” (T.D. Doane, *Bible Myths*).

To enforce this piece of incomprehensible verbalism the Council of Nicea attached an anathema to it, so making it binding on the whole church: “The Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes those who say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, and that before he was begotten, he was not, and that he was made out of nothing, or out of another substance or essence, and is created, or changeable, or alterable.”

As Lockhart comments, “All in all, a tight little package which set the inevitable ball of heresy rolling, the flames rising, the cries and screams of innocent human beings into the fetid air of dank prisons.

Because a Church Council composed of people like Athanasius had said so, Jesus was no longer the Jewish Messiah, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the Archetypal man...he was the alien Jewish God shoe-horned into a physical body and let loose as a refurbished pagan deity of monstrous proportions" (p. 131).

I remember as a lad of 17 years of age traveling overseas for the first time. I landed in Hong Kong and the culture shock was huge. One image will always stay with me. On a church wall high up on a mountain near the Chinese border was painted the Christ. He was Chinese — with full pig-tail and traditional Chinese dress!

We humans are quite adept at constructing a Jesus in our own image. God's ancient complaint still stands: "You thought I was altogether one just like you!"

Yet Jesus even in his resurrected and exalted status is still the Son of Man. Rev. 1:13: "one like a son of man," i.e. human being. Dan. 7:13: "the Son of Man came up to the Ancient of Days." Jesus testified after his resurrection that he still has hands and feet of real "flesh and bone" (Lk. 24:39; see also 1 Tim. 2:5, the man Messiah. There is a glorified Jew in heaven).

It seems obvious that the Church Fathers developed a pagan iconography of Christ to meet certain political pressures. As Lockhart again suggests, at the bottom of it all was the Hellenistic philosophy of kingship: "As God was to the cosmos, and the king was to the state, so the divine Logos indwelt the king and in turn became a king by association. The king, acting in a Godlike manner, and as a shepherd to his people, was seen as a kind of incarnate God, a link between heaven and earth, and the divine Logos as incarnate God was promoted to universal cosmic Emperor who understandably enough, validated his almost divine deputy's every action. A neat little package which quickly bestowed dignity and privilege, dress and insignia upon the Church's chief ministers, and in turn allowed the king to parade himself as God's earthly representative. Borrowing extensively from court ritual, these chief ministers of the New Creation Order successfully buried Jesus the Jew for a second time" (Lockhart, p. 27).

It is easy to see how the Roman Catholic system took form. For not only Jesus suffered such metamorphosis but even his followers. Mary his mother is now promoted to the status of "Mother of God" and the saints are intercessors.

Thus under the influence of such Hellenism this pagan iconography of Christ climaxed in the time of Constantine as a new Jesus formally emerged under the pressure of political expediency and theological fantasy.

This development had disastrous consequences for the Biblical testimony to the unity and uniqueness of God. Don Cupitt remarks that once this doctrine of the Incarnation of a preexisting Son of God was created the cult of the Divine Christ actually put Deity itself into the background, for when God the Father was reaffirmed, He was envisaged simply in anthropomorphic terms. The door to paganism had been unwittingly reopened.

Fair comment. For however well-intentioned, the focus of worship had been shifted from God to man. This shift would eventually legitimize the cult of humanism. Deity would slide into the background. The otherness of God would be lost — or as the theologians call it, the transcendence of God. His "awesomeness" would become manageable and comfortable.

Does it follow that this very failure to confess Jesus the Messiah as "come in the flesh" has fostered in some kind of an inverted way the rampant secularism of our age? For the Almighty God has assumed human form and the ultimate mystery and unity of God has collapsed into a concept of agreeable human proportions — our little "self." In making Jesus fully God, did we make man God?

This trend can be observed in the development of art from the fourth century onwards. The taboo against depicting God in any way was forgotten. The result was a focusing of attention on Jesus and away from the great mystery of God's otherness. Our sense of awe in worship, that which should take our breath away, so to speak, was severely compromised.

It also appears that Christian art prior to Constantine was hesitant but after him it became elaborate and aesthetically pleasing. Don Cupitt goes so far as to say that Christian art was emerging as part of a complex process by which Christianity was very extensively paganized in its faith, worship, organization and social teaching (*The Myth of God*, p. 142-3).

The Church has made Jesus more than he ever wished to be. Promoting the Son of God involved demoting his Father. It is time for the truth to emerge once more. It is time to confess Jesus the Messiah as "come in the flesh." Jesus the God-Man in a Trinitarian sense must be laid to rest. Only in this way can we disengage the Biblical faith from its later

additions and mythologies. Armed with the creed of Israel, Christians can attract the attention of the world of unitarian Jews and Muslims. ✧

## Immortality: The Irresistible Offer

### Reflections on Talking about What Happens When We Die

The task of producing a daily fifteen-minute radio program seemed daunting. The computer screen needed to be filled four times over for every broadcast. One just had to sit down and produce script — 15K per day.

What I learned is the value of intense Bible study. Starting in Genesis I rehearsed the monumental fact that mankind — you and I — are mortal, but on probation for immortality. For what? Yes, immortality. I began to see what was at stake. “If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” I was overwhelmed with this impression: How utterly compelling were the words of Jesus. Who else ever went about offering the public life — life in perpetuity? “If you would care to live for billions of years, follow me. I will begin to teach you now, and if you complete the struggle, I will one day pull you out of the grave and make you death-proof forever.” Some deal!

I saw again the stark fact that both man and the animals share the same spirit of the breath or energy of life (Gen. 7:22); that our fate was the same in terms of frailty and death. Both man and animal were taken from the dust and both must return to dust (see Ps. 104:29, 30). I was struck again by the beautiful consistency of the Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible) teaching about my condition five minutes after I die. “The dead do not know anything” (Ecc. 9:5). “There is no activity, no wisdom nor knowledge in Sheol where you are going” (Ecc. 9:10). David, Job, and Hezekiah understood it perfectly. The blackness of death made the hope of resurrection shine all the brighter. Again and again I was driven back to Daniel 12:2: “Many of those who are asleep in the dust of the ground shall awake, some to life in the Coming Age.” There it was again, the doctrine of the sleep of the dead, and the doctrine of the only way out of death — by resurrection of the whole man at Jesus’ return.

A trip to the local bookstore informed me that to hold such a “negative” view of death was to have a regrettable, cult opinion. Readily available were books designed to set me straight. The Jehovah’s Witnesses and others were sharply reprimanded by “orthodoxy” for daring to agree with David, Job, Daniel and Jesus

about what happens when we die! How can this be, that sincere Bible readers miss out on such a simple teaching? “Many of those who are asleep in the dust will awake...” That tells you *what* the dead are doing, sleeping, and where they are doing it.

To speak of “heaven” the moment you die is to introduce Plato into the Bible. He is not welcome there and has caused untold confusion.

My (at that time) five-year-old Heather seemed to have no difficulty with Daniel 12:2. But then she has not had the “benefit” of a Platonic training about immortal souls leaving their bodies at death, about “passing away” or rewards at death rather than at the future resurrection. Heather never has believed that while John Brown’s body lies a-moldering in the grave, his soul goes marching on, consciously. No. She understands with Daniel that when you are dead, you’re dead. That makes the future resurrection a really powerful doctrine. Doctrines, you see, are not theological dead wood. They are dynamite because they are truths taught by Spirit. The Spirit-words of Scripture are power-words (John 6:63). The doctrine of the resurrection promises you and me that death is not the end. We can live again after being dead (a different concept from *continuing* to live the moment we die).

There *is* death after life (although listening to my competitors on radio, you would never think so). What Jesus taught was that there is also life after death, but only on God’s terms, and only by resurrection. Seventy times in the New Testament resurrection is described as a “waking up from sleep.” (Get the feel of this by substituting “woke up” and “was woken up” for “rose” and “was raised” in I Corinthians 15.)

Jesus was the great exponent of the doctrine of the sleep of the dead. Mary had read Job, David, and Daniel to him from early childhood. In John 11 — that wonderful chapter giving us the “mechanics” of death and resurrection — Jesus pronounced Lazarus dead and sleeping (John 11:11, 14). My *International Critical Commentary* pointed out that Jesus’ view in John 11 was the sleep of death found also in Job 14. Of course. I cannot see why Christians of all stripes do not rush to follow their master and agree with him that the departed are sleeping, not conscious in bliss or tormented in hell.

The trouble is that Plato is calling the shots in many church circles. When faith in the coming of Jesus to raise the dead wanes, Plato’s fiction about the immortality of the soul steps in to fill the void. It is comforting. And people want to be comforted. But why shouldn’t we take comfort in the words of Jesus?

Church history testifies to the truth that heaven-going at death was not the mainstream Christian view in 150 AD. Justin Martyr's famous saying should jolt us back to reality: "If you meet some who deny the resurrection and who say that their souls, when they die, go to heaven, do not think that they are true believers" (*Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 80).

Little known to the Bible-reading public is the fact that souls-going-to-heaven-at-death was promoted not by the Bible but by the Gospel of Nicodemus, an apocryphal work circulating in post-Biblical times. The legend was that when Jesus went to Hades — the grave — he released all the Old Testament saints and moved them to a state of blessedness. The idea caught on. It seemed much more attractive to suppose that you could bypass the resurrection and make it to glory the moment you die.

The protest of Martin Luther and William Tyndale, both of whom believed in the sleep of the dead, could not prevail over the public taste for immediate survival at death. Plato won out and still wins out. When Jesus challenged the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection, he did not brush aside their ignorance as harmless. "You are badly mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God." When Paul encountered men in the church who proposed that the resurrection was passed already, he sounded the alarm (II Tim. 2:18). So today, it is necessary in the name of Jesus to remind the public that Job did not say, "If a man dies, will he go on living?" but "If a man dies, will he live again?" (Job 14:14).

But then Job did not have to compete with Plato as we "conditionalists" must. (Conditional immortality is the doctrine that immortality can be gained only by resurrection when Christ returns.)

With sixty-five programs and two hundred and fifty pages of script behind me, I feel renewed and refreshed that there is power in truth. The spirit after all is according to John "the spirit of the truth."

Jesus abolished death and brought immortality to life. The dead can and will live again. Christianity is unique in its claim to offer endless life to those who seriously follow Jesus. "Jesus is the author of salvation [i.e., rescue from death] to all those who obey him" (Heb. 5:9).

It beats me that anyone could ignore a man who offers them immortality. Yet the world goes on its merry way, largely unaware that Jesus has the secret of endless life. After all, he has been appointed as the one who can bring you up out of the grave for your second, permanent life. That is why we must start life

over again even now, so that we can obtain immortality in the resurrection. That second life is forever. The alternative is the second death, extermination, annihilation by fire (Ps. 37:20). Is there anyone who is not for immortality? Choose life — billions of years of life. ✧

*The 65 radio programs on death and resurrection can be heard at our website [www.focusonthekingdom.org](http://www.focusonthekingdom.org)*

## Our Gathering in Atlanta

A record number of believers assembled at Atlanta Bible College for our twelfth annual Theological Conference. Topics presented and discussed ranged from the important connecting links between the pagan Neo-Platonist Numenius (second century) and the Church Father Justin Martyr to the early history of the Church of God (Abrahamic Faith). There were investigations of the future Antichrist in connection with the Assyrian figure described by Isaiah, Micah and Psalm 83. We proposed that the Reformation needs further reform if we are genuinely to reflect the Jewish Jesus and his Hebraic non-neoPlatonic outlook. Another presenter raised the fascinating issue as to whether we have imagined God to be more inflexible than He in fact is. Does God limit His own knowledge deliberately, to allow for human choice? Water baptism as a simple act of obedience to the Lord Jesus received full coverage. The vital connection between the Word of the Kingdom Gospel and the Spirit of God received penetrating treatment from another of our invited speakers. Our London group provided an exciting account of the challenge to Christianity by the Muslims who now outnumber (in terms of their buildings) the state Church of England, and a welcome visitor from Israel spoke of his work to promote the God of Israel and of Jesus. A Newtonian scholar brought us fascinating material on Sir Isaac's radical anti-Trinitarianism.

And there was time for the "faith stories," delivered this year with the usual spontaneity as various participants described their journey of discovery of biblical truth. Atlanta Bible College is grateful to all who made the trip to Atlanta. We invite you all to come next year (exact dates to be announced soon) and bring your friends. We are expecting more visitors from abroad, seasoned truth-lovers who are spreading the word of the Kingdom. They have also graciously translated our books into German, Russian and other languages.

The proceedings were captured on film and we invite you to request the videos. We suggest a price of \$6 per video to help us with costs. You may name the particular topic(s) you are interested in. Give us some time to process the film and transfer it to video, please. ✧