

Focus on the Kingdom

Volume 7 No. 7

Anthony Buzzard, editor

April, 2005

When Jesus Became God

Dr. Richard Rubenstein, author of the celebrated work *When Jesus Became God*, will deliver a lecture on the conflict which produced the doctrine of the Trinity, Sat. Apr. 30th, 9 a.m. Is the doctrine of the Trinity biblical? Who did Jesus claim to be? Most churchgoers are unaware of the post-biblical developments by which Jesus was turned from Son of God to God the Son. Call 800-347-4261 for info. This event is part of the annual Theological Conference of Atlanta Bible College, April 29-May 1. Full details can be found on the back page of this issue of *Focus on the Kingdom*. **Please register before April 14.**

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God The Essential Foundation of the Message of Salvation as Jesus Preached It

We invite our readers to give thoughtful attention to the following contemporary and other quotations which refer to the Kingdom of God in relation to the Christian Gospel. Our point is this: To demonstrate that there is something seriously amiss with definitions of the Gospel which do not have the Kingdom (as well, of course, as the death and resurrection of Jesus) *as their throbbing heart and center*. If the Kingdom of God is absent from the Gospel, then so is Jesus, because we dare not separate Jesus from his teaching/Gospel/words.

Jesus said, "He who *hears my word/Gospel* and believes Him who sent me has the life of the age to come. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24).

We have these severe apostolic warnings: "Anyone who goes ahead and **does not remain in the teaching of Christ does not have God**; he who remains in that teaching of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching," do not welcome him (II John 9, 10). "If anyone teaches otherwise and **does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ**...he knows nothing" (I Tim. 6:3, 4).

Why then does a prominent evangelical say: "Many people today think that the essence of Christianity is the teaching of Jesus, but that is not so"? (D. James Kennedy, *Truth Notes*, Nov. 17th 1989).

Now note the comments of leading evangelicals:

Michael Green (author, evangelist and theologian), speaking at the Lausanne Conference on

Evangelism, 1974, said: "How much have you heard here about the **Kingdom of God**? Not much. **It is not our language but it was Jesus' prime concern.**"

Peter Wagner (famous church planter and author) wrote: "I have **never preached** a sermon on the **Kingdom of God.**"

Professor of Evangelism, Dr. Taber: "I was dismayed and amazed that none of the nine writers on 'What is the Gospel?' mentioned the Kingdom of God" (Letter to *Christianity Today*, April, 2000).

Alvin Reed, *Introduction to Evangelism*: "There are over 40 accounts in the Gospel of Jesus' personal evangelism...**Jesus** also practiced mass evangelism or evangelistic preaching. He **preached the Gospel of the Kingdom to the masses**. The message of Jesus was succinct. Repent and **believe the Good News of the Kingdom** (see Mark 1:14, 15). The Kingdom of God, the rule of God over all creation, has received little emphasis by evangelicals."

The Kingdom is not just the "rule of God over all creation." This is much too vague! The Kingdom of God is *firstly* the rule of God in the world to be inaugurated at the second coming (Luke 21:31; Rev. 11:15-18). The power of the Kingdom is to be tasted in advance through the spirit. But *future* Kingdom verses outnumber so-called "present Kingdom" verses by about 7 to 1 in the New Testament (see our article, "The Kingdom of God, Present or Future?" at www.restorationfellowship.org)

The same point about the absence of the Kingdom in evangelicalism is made in the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, "Salvation": "Christ as teacher and prophet becomes an enduring pattern also. In himself, as well as in his message, was light. It may be queried whether in consequence of the strong inclination of Evangelical Protestantism to exalt the priestly work of our Lord as central, **that this prophetic mission has not been relatively too much ignored.**"

Prof. Jim Packer, author of *Knowing God*, in his chapter on "The Heart of the Gospel" makes not a single reference to the Kingdom of God.

C.S. Lewis wrote: "The Gospel is not in the gospels."

Martin Luther, a prominent source of evangelical doctrine, also avoids the Gospel as preached by Jesus: "**Luther** created by a *dogmatic criterion* a canon of the gospel within the canon of the books [i.e. he chose some

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 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

Luther, in other words, replaced one dogmatic system with another, making the Scripture submit to his own process of selection! He should have said that Jesus is the best of all evangelists.

Tracts of all sorts, following Luther and the Reformation, which offer “the Gospel” and salvation **never mention the word Kingdom once. Something is terribly wrong!**

What Does the New Testament Say?

The Bible has at its center the teaching of the Savior Jesus, as well as his sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection. **Jesus never reduced the Gospel to facts about his death and resurrection, vital as those facts, of course, are in the Gospel.**

If we pay attention to the Gospel missionary preaching of Jesus himself, our model evangelist, we learn: Intelligent understanding of and **believing the Gospel about the Kingdom** is a condition of repentance and forgiveness leading to salvation:

BBE² Matthew 13:19: When **the word of the Kingdom comes** to anyone, and **the sense of it is not clear to him**, then the Evil One comes, and quickly takes away that which was put in his heart. He is the seed dropped by the wayside.

BBE Luke 8:12: Those by the side of the road are those who have given hearing; then the Evil One comes and takes away **the word** from their hearts, so that they may not **have faith and get salvation.**

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

²Basic Bible in English.

NAU³ Mark 4:11: And he was saying to them, “To you has been given **the mystery of the Kingdom of God**, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and **not understand, otherwise they might return [repent] and be forgiven.**”

NLT⁴ Mark 4:11: He replied, “**You** are permitted to **understand the secret about the Kingdom of God.** But I am using these stories to conceal everything about it from the outsider so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: They see what I do, but they don’t perceive its meaning. They hear my words, but they don’t understand. **So they will not turn from their sins and be forgiven.**”

The Gospel of salvation from John the Baptist and Jesus to Paul at the end of Acts always has the Kingdom of God as the *first item* on its agenda:

NJB⁵ Matthew 3:1: In due course John the Baptist appeared; he **proclaimed** this **message** in the desert of Judea: “Repent, for the **Kingdom of Heaven** is close at hand.”

NJB Matthew 4:17: From then onwards **Jesus** began his **proclamation** with the message, “Repent, for **the Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.**”

ASV⁶ Matthew 4:23: And **Jesus** went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and **preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom**, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people.

ASV Matthew 24:14: And **this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached** in the whole world for a **testimony** unto all the nations; and then shall the end come.

NAU Matthew 26:13: Truly I tell you, wherever **this Gospel is preached** in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken in memory of her.

ASV Matthew 9:35: And **Jesus** went about all the cities and the villages, **teaching** in their synagogues, and **preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom**, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness.

ASV Mark 1:14, 15: Now after John was delivered up, **Jesus** came into Galilee, preaching **the gospel of God**, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the **Kingdom of God** is at hand: repent, and believe (in) the gospel.”

NJB Luke 4:43: But he answered, “I must **proclaim**

³New American Standard Version Updated.

⁴New Living Translation.

⁵New Jerusalem Bible.

⁶American Standard Version.

the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other towns too, because **that is what I was sent to do.**"

NJB Luke 8:1: Now it happened that after this he made his way through towns and villages **preaching and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God.** With him went the Twelve.

NJB Luke 9:2: And **he sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God** and to heal.

RSV⁷ Luke 9:6: And they departed and went through the villages, **preaching the gospel** and healing everywhere.

NRS⁸ Luke 9:11: When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and **spoke to them about the Kingdom of God,** and healed those who needed to be cured.

NAB⁹ Luke 9:60: But he answered him, "Let the dead bury their dead. But **you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of God.**" (How well have we been doing with this command?)

NAS¹⁰ Luke 10:9: And heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, "**The Kingdom of God has come near to you.**"

NAU Luke 16:16: The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time **the gospel of the Kingdom of God has been preached,** and everyone is forcing his way into it.

NAU Acts 8:12: But when they believed **Philip preaching the good news about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ,** they were being baptized, men and women alike.

NAB Acts 19:8: Paul entered the synagogue, and for three months **debated boldly with persuasive arguments about the Kingdom of God.**

NJB Acts 20:25: "I now feel sure that none of you among whom **I [Paul] have gone about proclaiming the Kingdom** will ever see my face again" [exactly equivalent to the "Gospel of the grace of God" in the verse before, v. 24].

NAB Acts 28:23: So they arranged a day with him and came to his lodgings in great numbers. From early morning until evening, **he expounded his position to them, bearing witness to the Kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus** from the law of Moses and the prophets.

NAS Acts 28:30, 31: And Paul stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him. He was **preaching the Kingdom**

of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ without fear, and no orders were given that he was not to do so.

Paul's last command: NRS 2 Timothy 4:1, 2: In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and **in view of his appearing and his Kingdom,** I solemnly urge you: **proclaim the message;** be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.

Confirmation of Our Findings

The *Augsburg Commentary on Acts* (28:23): "The missionary Paul made a day-long concentrated effort **testifying to the Kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus** both from the Law of Moses and the prophets. Paul's witness is a concise summary of the total teaching of Luke-Acts. The subject **of the Kingdom of God** forms brackets around the book of Acts. It is **what Jesus taught** after the resurrection (1:3; cp. 1:6) and before the resurrection (Luke 4:43, etc.) and **what Paul taught** in Rome at the end of Luke's story (28:23, 31; cp. 8:12, 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; Luke 9:2). **Preaching or testifying to the Kingdom of God refers to the Christian message** which is in continuity with the Apostles, with Jesus and with the Old Testament."

Peter O'Toole, SJ: "Preaching about the Kingdom of God summarizes the ministry of Jesus and that of his followers. Jesus says to the people: 'I must preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God. I was sent for this purpose.' A similar summary of Jesus' activity is found in 8:1. In much the same words Jesus assigns their ministry to the Apostles: 'He sent the twelve out to preach the Kingdom of God and heal' (Luke 9:1-2; v. 6). And to the disciples, 'Heal the sick in it and say to them, the Kingdom of God has come near to you' (Luke 9:10; cp. v. 11 and 9:60). Paul in his speech to the Ephesian elders recapitulates his ministry as 'to testify to the gospel of the grace of God, and now behold I know that all of you among whom I have gone preaching the Kingdom will see my face no more.' Preaching about the Kingdom of God, then, sums up the ministry of Jesus, the Apostles, disciples and Paul.

"It is no secret that Luke uses any number of expressions for the Christian message. Often when Jesus or one of his Apostles or disciples is said to preach, Luke designates the activity further only as the Kingdom of God (4:43; 8:1; 9:2, 11, 60; 10:9, 11 16:16; Acts 1:3; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). Luke adds 'the Kingdom of God' to Mark 1:38, 'that I may preach there also,' and in 9:11. He adds to Mark 6:34, 'he

⁷Revised Standard Version.

⁸New Revised Standard Version.

⁹New American Bible.

¹⁰New American Standard Version.

began to teach them many things.’ Luke has ‘he welcomed them and began to speak to them about the Kingdom of God.’ Through the introduction (4:43; 16:16) or use (Acts 8:12) of *evangelisesthai*, ‘to preach the gospel,’ Luke explicates the gospel dimension of ‘the Kingdom of God.’ **Therefore the Kingdom of God stands not infrequently for the whole Christian message.** At times Luke has introduced it into Mark’s thought and uses *evangelisesthai* to tie the Kingdom of God more closely to the gospel message.”¹¹

When did you last hear the phrase Gospel of the Kingdom? Is this clearly the Message of your church? Is the Kingdom your magnificent obsession and that of your church friends, as it clearly was of Jesus and Paul?

Luke 24:47, 48: “Repentance and forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed [as gospel] in his [Christ’s] name among all nations [=Matt. 24:14 and 28:19, 20], beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” The Messiah’s death and resurrection are here *added to* the Gospel’s content. Repentance precedes forgiveness, and repentance is a change of mind which involves understanding and believing the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 4:11, 12).

P.E. More describes the New Testament view of the Gospel, although he himself does not think we can believe it today! “The Kingdom and Repentance: Above all there was a need for liberty from doubt and the summons to repent is equivalent to a command to have faith: Repent and believe (have faith in) the Gospel. Repentance leading to belief demanded such a purging of the mind as would prepare the convert for the advent of the Kingdom of God: ‘Faith is the giving of substance to things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.’ Very soon, at any moment, the heavenly world was to break in visibly upon the present order. God would reveal Himself and no longer hide His omniscience in the clouds. What now seems a miracle, at the Parousia, would be nature and only those in whose souls a like transformation had taken place would be at home in that transfigured world, or could endure its glory.

“The expectation of a visible descent of heaven upon earth was the form in which religious faith had become petrified among the Jews and in which it presented itself to Jesus. Inevitably the otherworldliness of the gospel proclaimed in Palestine 2000 years ago was involved in a mythology which

belonged to that special time and that peculiar people; we can see how vividly that myth dominated the mind of Paul in the first generation of the church; and there is an element of truth in the theory that the whole inner history of the church turns on the procrastination of the Parousia and on the effect wrought in the mind of believers by the continual disappointment of their hope: the growth of religion has been the slow ‘de-eschatologizing’ of Christianity.”¹²

There is no doubt at all that the Gospel of the Kingdom forms the dynamic of New Testament evangelism:

A.J. Mattill (*Luke and the Last Things*) speaks of “Luke’s Magnificent Obsession for Proclaiming the Kingdom”: “Luke’s eschatological zeal is also exhibited by his obsession with proclaiming the Kingdom of God. It is possible that Luke was ‘the brother who is highly respected in all the churches for his work in preaching the Gospel’ (II Cor. 8:18). Certainly the man who could write the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts must have been an eloquent preacher. Cp. Acts 16:10, ‘God has called us to preach the Gospel.’ But whether or not Luke was this particular brother, this interest in preaching the Kingdom is reflected repeatedly in his writings.

“Gabriel announces the Kingdom which will have no end (Luke 1:33). Jesus must preach the Good News of the Kingdom, for he was sent for this purpose (Luke 4:43). He went throughout cities and village preaching the Kingdom (8:1) and telling his disciples the mysteries of the Kingdom (8:10), explaining that it is like a mustard seed (13:18-19) or leaven (13:20-21), a realm which belongs to the childlike (18:16-17). Jesus sent out the twelve to preach the Kingdom of God (9:2) and himself spoke of the Kingdom (9:11). Jesus instructs a would-be disciple to let the dead bury their dead (Luke 9:60; Matt. 8:22) but he is to proclaim the Kingdom (9:60). Jesus warns that he who keeps looking back toward old interests and ways is of no use for the Kingdom (Luke 9:62). The seventy are to warn that the Kingdom of God is at hand (10:9, 11). From John the Baptist onwards the Gospel of the Kingdom of God is preached (16:16). The risen Lord speaks for 40 days about the Kingdom (Acts 1:3). Philip preaches the Gospel about the Kingdom of God (8:12) as does Paul (19:8; 20:25; 28:23; 29:31).

“All in all, there are some 39 explicit references to the Kingdom in Luke and 8 in Acts, most of them peculiar to Luke/Acts. We thus see how Luke brings the

¹¹ *The Kingdom of God in 20th Century Interpretation*, ed. W. Willis, p. 153, 154.

¹² *The Formation of Christianity*, Princeton University, 1924, pp. 82, 83. For “myth” read “truth”!

concept of the Kingdom to the foreground, so much so that the Kingdom becomes Luke's key theological concept, 'the leading category' of Luke's gospel, a term which 'retains its primary meaning of **the reign of God which is to close and supersede the present world order**' [Creed, *Luke*, p. lxxii]. Likewise in Acts the Kingdom of God is not less apocalyptic than in the synoptics. 'That the third evangelist shared in general the apocalyptic outlook of his age cannot be gainsaid' [Cadbury, *the Making of Luke-Acts*, p. 284]. Luke has even been accused of being on 'an apocalyptic jag' [spre, drinking bout] (pp. 9-11).¹³ He was, we might say, "intoxicated" on the Kingdom!

More Confirmation of the Kingdom Gospel

Good News According to Mark, Eduard Schweizer: "Mark 1:14, 15: Mark gives a brief summary of the preaching of Jesus. Preaching and Good News are Mark's favorite expressions. The call of Jesus is accurately summed up in 1:15, where the association of repentance and faith reveals the language of the church (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 20:21). Mark's concern is to make clear that in this preaching Jesus continues to go forth into the world and this call, therefore, is being directed also to the one who reads this Gospel today. Consequently this section [1:14, 15] serves as **a caption to the whole gospel** (cp. the epilogue).

"The Kingdom of God. When Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom of God is near, he is adopting a concept which was coined in the OT. Although it denotes God's sovereignty over creation (Ps. 103:19; 145:11ff) it refers primarily to God's unchallenged sovereignty **in the end time** (Isa. 52:7)...Judaism spoke of the reign of God which comes **after the annihilation of every foe and the end of all suffering**...In the NT the Kingdom of God is conceived first of all as something *in the future* (Mark 9:1, 47, 14:25; Matt. 13:41-43; 20:21; Luke 22:16, 18; I Cor. 15:50, *et al*) which comes from God (Mark 9:1; Matt. 6:10; Luke 17:20; 19:11). Therefore it is something man can only wait for (Mark 15:43), seek (Matt. 6:33); receive (Mark 10:15; cp. Luke 12:32) and inherit (I Cor 6:9ff; Gal. 5:21; James 2:5), but is not able to create it by himself...In the acts and words of Jesus the future Kingdom has come upon him already. It is decided at that very moment whether or not he will ever be in the Kingdom...**Repentance is nothing less than a whole-hearted commitment to the Good News**" (pp. 45, 46, 47).

Luke uses *different expressions* for the Gospel.

R.N. Longenecker, "Foundational Conviction of New Testament Christology" (*Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ*): "Long ago in his quasi-popular English lectures *The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul* (1923) A. Deissmann attempted to mark out the path that scholars should take in dealing with the various theological terms in Paul's letters. So, for example, when speaking of Paul's teaching on justification, Deissmann wrote:

'According to my conception, justification is not the quintessence of Paulinism, but one witness among others to his experience of salvation. Justification is one ancient picture-word. Alongside many others, justification is one note, which, along with many others — redemption, adoption, etc. — is harmonized in the one chord that testifies to salvation'" (p. 271).

The Kingdom is another main category. Acceptance of Jesus means, therefore, acceptance of his Gospel of the Kingdom. It is acceptance of Jesus *by accepting his Gospel of the Kingdom*, which contains within it of course also the facts of his death and resurrection.

Is the Kingdom of God clearly the Message of current evangelism? If not, where is the Gospel as Jesus, Paul and all the Apostles preached it?

Jesus commands us "to repent — change our minds — and to **believe the Gospel of the Kingdom**" (Mark 1:14, 15). Then we can gain forgiveness and a place in the Kingdom, if we endure to the end (see Mark 4:11, 12; Matt. 24:13).

The death and resurrection of Christ are as everyone knows *also* centrally important elements of the Gospel (I Cor. 15:1-3), but they are not its foundation. Jesus and the Apostles preached the Gospel for years without yet including his death and resurrection (Matt. 16:21).

What About I Corinthians 15:1-3?

The above information is not contradicted (the Bible does not contradict itself) by the remarks of Paul in I Corinthians 15:1-3: "Paul declared that he received *en protois*, as one of the fundamental tenets of the Apostolic faith, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."¹³

"For I delivered to you among the most important things (*en protois*) that which I also received."¹⁴

David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* "It seems sometimes to be

¹³ *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, I, p. 377, "Covenant."

¹⁴ *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, I, p. 472, "Gospel."

assumed that the Gospel that Paul preached was something like I Cor. 15:3, 4, that is a brief declaration of the fact that Jesus died and rose for our salvation. But it is certain that I Cor. 15 is only an extremely compressed summary of **some of the main points** that Paul preached, quite probably also a **selective summary focusing on the point at issue** in I Cor. 15, namely Jesus' resurrection."¹⁵

Henry Alford, *Commentary on the Greek New Testament*: "I declare to you...(I Cor. 15:1) the whole Gospel, not merely the death and resurrection of Christ **which were *en protois* parts of it.**"

In the light of all this evidence, we urge a return to the Gospel preaching of Jesus, who offered salvation on the basis of our intelligent response to his missionary announcement of the Kingdom of God. ✧

Playing Games with Words

How Jesus Was Turned into God!

Jesus is the begotten Son of God. What does that important word "begotten" mean?

One of the fixed ground-rules of all Bible interpretation is that God has spoken to us in intelligible words. It is obvious that if God can mean white when He says black, the whole idea of the Bible as an intelligible revelation to man is undermined and derailed. None of us could possibly know what God has said, unless He uses words intelligibly. We are "language people," and it is essential for God to communicate with us in terms we are capable of understanding.

Words used by God to convey meaning to us must carry a consistent sense, a sense confirmed by the overall use of the word in Scripture and in the Greek or Hebrew language, as detailed by lexicons.

The Greek word *ginomai* (Greeks today pronounce it "yinomay") means "to come into existence." It is related to our word generate which means "to cause to come into existence." The Greek word for "to cause to come into existence" is the causative form of the word *ginomai*. That causative form of *ginomai* is the verb *gennao* ("yenna-o"), which is used hundreds of the times in the Bible to mean "to generate, to father, to beget."¹⁶ It is used over and over again to describe the act of producing, giving existence to someone who did not previously exist.

¹⁵ p. 403. So also Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 114.

¹⁶ The Hebrew equivalent of *gennao* is *yalad*. The Hebrew word for son, *ben*, is the most frequently occurring noun in the Hebrew Bible, and all sons are begotten.

There is no possible doubt that the word *gennao* means firstly to initiate someone's existence, to beget, to become the father of a son, or daughter. Check the word in any lexicon or dictionary.

This is precisely the word used in the Bible of the Son of God, who, according to "orthodox" views of Jesus, *has no beginning of existence!* If God intended to tell us that His Son had no beginning of existence, why does He use the word "to cause to come into existence" when describing His own Son's origin?

What is so striking is that church members are, without explanation, expected to understand that the meaning of the word "beget" is to be abandoned when it comes to the Son of God!

How can God communicate intelligibly to us if we arbitrarily decide to give a meaning to a word which it never elsewhere has? On what basis is it playing fair to give up the ground-rule of all intelligent Bible study and propose a meaning for a key word which it cannot possibly have — and nowhere else in all of Greek literature, in and out of the Bible, ever has?

In I John 5:18 we read that the "one who was begotten"¹⁷ keeps or guards the Christian. The reference is to the Son of God who was begotten and thus came into existence from non-existence. In Luke 1:35 the one who is begotten or to be begotten¹⁸ in Mary is the Son of God. More expressly, Gabriel says, he is to be recognized as the Son of God *precisely because of (dio kai)* this begetting, i.e. this coming into existence in Mary. Gabriel provided a perfect explanation of what it means for Jesus to be the Son of God. But the creeds of the Church contradict him.

Matthew 1:20 tells us that what is *begotten*¹⁹ (the verb is a form of *gennao*) in Mary is a product of the creative spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. God is his Father because he is begotten. Matt. 1:18 speaks of the *genesis* or generation, beginning or origin of the Son of God. This word is of course directly related to the verbs *ginomai*, "to come into existence" and *gennao*, "to cause to come into existence."

Furthermore the Old Testament (Ps. 2:7) says in an oracle about the Son of God that "*today*" God has brought him into existence — begotten him. The LXX

¹⁷ The aorist of *gennao*. The aorist tense in Greek points to a moment in time. The King James Version is wrong here. Modern translations have corrected the mistake.

¹⁸ A participle of the verb *gennao*, to cause to come into existence, to beget, to father.

¹⁹ "Conceived" is a strange mistranslation. Matthew wrote "begotten," the action of the Father. See the original.

of Psalm 110:3 speaks of a *begetting* of the Messiah from the womb.

Paul in Acts 13:33 applied the moment of the begetting of the Son to the “production” of Jesus. God “raised him up,” which means put him on the scene of history. Verse 34 by contrast describes the subsequent *resurrection* of Jesus. Note the important statement of F.F. Bruce: “The promise of v. 23, the fulfillment of which is described in v. 33, has to do with the sending of the Messiah, *not his resurrection* (for which see v. 34). Verse 34 adds ‘from the dead’ and thus differentiates the word ‘raise up’ in v. 33 from ‘raise from the dead’ in v. 34.”²⁰

Hebrews 1:5 similarly sees the begetting of Jesus as the moment at which God became the Son’s Father. A second quotation is added from II Samuel 7:14 — “I *will be* his Father and he *will be* my Son”— and makes the same point about the begetting of the Son by God.

Would supporters of the Trinity and the “eternal generation of the Son” explain how it can be right to abandon the demonstrable meaning of the word *beget* when referred to the Son of God? Not only does *beget* mean to produce or give existence to, here in Psalm 2:7 the time element is expressly given us in the word “today.”

Yet the Church says that “today” means without beginning, or in eternity! And the Church says that God’s uniquely *begotten* Son had no beginning of existence. Yet we all should know that the word “beget,” used in connection of father and son, means to bring into existence. “Eternal begetting” is therefore a nonsense phrase, without meaning.

A lot is at stake. The doctrine of the Trinity depends on a belief in the *eternally generated Son*. Many scholars over the years have complained that this is incomprehensible, humpty-dumpty language. You cannot be eternally generated. This would mean a beginningless beginning, which is illogical by any standards. Such abuse of language violates the integrity of Scripture and bars God from speaking to us intelligibly or revealing Truth to us.

If God wanted to tell us that His unique Son had a beginning of existence, what words are available to Him to express this idea? Clearly the terms which constantly express that very idea, *gennaō*, to cause to come into existence, to give existence to, and “genesis” (Matt. 1:18), a beginning, origin. These are in fact the very words God *has used* to tell us about

the nature of His Son. The use of the terms Father and Son always imply that one is derived from the other, and the further use of the verb *gennaō* simply confirms this in a most natural way. The notion that a Son is not derived in time from his Father entails abandoning the first rule of sound Bible study — that God has graciously communicated truth to us in precious words, refined seven times as David said.

May we respectfully ask Bible students to consider whether it is any way a fair treatment of the holy words of God to deny the Almighty the right to mean what He has said, by obliterating the obvious meaning of a key word like *gennaō* which appears in relation to the origin of His Son. The Bible says of the Father, “from everlasting to everlasting You are God.” So God knows how to express eternal, unbegotten existence and He uses clear words to tell us. But He never said His Son had no beginning.

How in the world are we supposed to understand of the Son that he has no beginning, that he is eternal, when he is said to be begotten, brought into existence by the Father? What can be said in apologetic defense to this objection (which has been raised by many scholars over the years)?

Those of us who are convinced that the Son of God began — was begotten — in the womb of his mother, and is thus a human being, are as passionately in search of truth and honesty as holders of other views. Our question goes to the very heart of biblical revelation and the legitimate use of language to disclose divine Truth. We who teach are going to be judged strictly for what we have taught as biblical interpretation. ✧

Comments

“How good it was to talk with you a few days ago. Let me again express my deep appreciation for *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound*. Seldom do I read a book like yours that covers so much ground and find myself in agreement throughout. By my checking out of your statements, I found myself still in agreement and you have added to my knowledge. Many thanks for your careful work.” — *Virginia*

“The last *Focus* (March, 2005) was really the best ever! ‘What Must I Do to Be Saved?’ It reminds me of my former days in a denomination in which their plea was only ‘be baptized,’ pleading in song and with tears: ‘Come to Jesus, come today, why not tonight?’ But there was no reference to the Kingdom of God. And often people who were baptized were never seen again. The core of the Gospel was missing.” — *Missouri*

²⁰ *Commentary on the Greek Text of Acts*, p. 269, 270.