

Focus on the Kingdom

Vol. 15 No. 5

Anthony Buzzard, editor

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22nd Theological Conference May 2-5, 2013

Simpsonwood Conference Center, Norcross, GA

Once again we urge all of our readers to join us in beautiful Georgia (the weather is spectacular in May) for the 22nd annual Theological Conference. Do not be alarmed at that particular title. This is a gathering of fellow biblical unitarian and Gospel of the Kingdom believers, many of whom will not before have encountered each other face to face. These are Christians of the “radical reformation” belief system. Your presence there, and your personal faith story, have provided the highlights of this event for the past 22 years. You will bless others immensely by your presence at this conference. There will be more formal presentations to instruct and encourage. We plan to have Kermit Zarley with us, author of the significant book on *The Restitution of Jesus Christ*. I am hoping that he will share his very interesting insights on prophecy. We are hoping that Ray Faircloth of the extensive website biblicaltruthseekers.co.uk will be with us. We hope for updates on the growing number of scattered brothers and sisters who are now in contact with each other, thanks to the tireless work of Robin Todd. If there is a demand for this, we will offer a post-conference two-day extra Bible instruction with Anthony. Just let us know at 800-347-4261, please, if this would be of interest to any of you.

To register for the conference please call Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261 or 678-833-1839 or mail the form on the back page by **April 19**. The non-refundable deposit is \$50 per individual or couple.

Registration deadline: April 19

Conference Cost

Includes 3 nights, all meals, snacks, conf. fee, and tax

Single	Couple Rate	Double (per person)	Triple (per person)	Quad (per person)
\$357	\$550 per couple	\$285	\$262	\$235

Transportation (Judy: 678-485-8492)

We will provide transportation between Atlanta airport and Simpsonwood for \$25 round-trip or \$15 one-way, at the following times:

Airport to Simpsonwood		
Thurs, May 2	1:00 pm	3:30 pm
Simpsonwood to Airport		
Sun., May 5	1:00 pm	

Please arrange your arrival time on Thursday early enough to catch one of the two shuttle runs. On Sunday, May 5, we will provide 1 shuttle run. In order to allow you enough time to catch your return flight, we suggest you **not book your return flight prior to 3:30 p.m.**

The conference begins with registration at 4 pm on Thursday and ends with lunch on Sunday. Driving directions to Simpsonwood Conference Center are at www.simpsonwood.org The address is 4511 Jones Bridge Circle NW, Norcross, GA 30092.

The Invitation to Repent and Believe (Mark 1:14-15)

His divine Majesty King Jesus, father of the coming New World order on earth, and Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:5-6) desires to hear from anyone willing to assist him in the world government to be established by him at his forthcoming return to the earth. Applicants for royal position will undergo immediate rigorous training in preparation for executive administrative office under the King of Kings. Candidates will be required to give up their existing political attachments which might interfere with the single-minded concentration necessary for preparation for servant rulership in the coming Kingdom. The highest ethical ideals will be required in each prospective ruler. Reference should be made to the Sermon on the Mount which lays out the entrance qualifications for participation in the coming new government. Before embarking on their training candidates must be willing to repent of their former ways and thinking, sacrifice all for their new career, be baptized in water, and surrender their lives if necessary.

In Revelation 22:16 and Romans 15:12 Jesus is said to be “the **root** [Greek *riza*] and offspring of David.” “Root” here is used in a Hebraic sense, to mean a sprout, shoot, metaphorically a descendant.

Defined in lexicons:

“After the use of the Hebrew שֹׁרֵשׁ (‘shoresh’)...*a sprout, shoot*; metaphorically, *offspring, progeny*: Rom. 15:12; Rev. 5:5; Rev. 22:16 (Isa. 11:10).”

“That which springs from a root, a shoot.”

Why Do You Believe in the Trinity When Jesus Didn't? (for you and all your friends)

"It must be admitted by everyone who has the rudiments of an historical sense that the doctrine of **the Trinity formed no part of the original message**. St. Paul did not know it, and would have been unable to understand the meaning of the terms used in the theological formula on which the Church ultimately agreed" (Dr. Matthews, D.D., D. Litt., *God in Christian Experience*, p. 180).

"The Trinity is a contradiction, indeed, and not merely a verbal contradiction, but an incompatibility in the human ideas conveyed. We can scarcely make a nearer approach to an exact enunciation of it, than of saying that one thing is two things" (A.H. Newman, Sadler's *Gloria Patri*, p. 39).

"The evolution of the Trinity: **No responsible NT scholar would claim that the doctrine of the Trinity was taught by Jesus** or preached by the earliest Christians or consciously held **by any writer of the NT**. It was in fact slowly worked out in the course of the first few centuries in an attempt to give an intelligible doctrine of God" (Dr. A.T. Hanson, Professor of Theology, University of Hull, *The Image of the Invisible God*, SCM Press, 1982).

"It might tend to moderation and in the end agreement, if we were industrious on all occasions to represent our own doctrine of the Trinity as wholly *unintelligible*" (Dr. Hey, *Lectures in Divinity*, 2, p. 253).

"The NT does not contain the developed doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible lacks the express declaration that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are of an **equal essence** and therefore in an equal sense God himself. And the other express declaration is also lacking, that God is God thus and only thus, i.e., as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These two express declarations, **which go beyond the witness of the Bible**, are the twofold content of the church doctrine of the Trinity (**Karl Barth, CD 1, 1 437**)...**That God and Christ** belong together and that they are distinct, are equally stressed, with **the precedence** in every case due to God, the Father, who stands above Christ...There is no strict dogmatic assertion...All this underlines the point **that primitive Christianity did not have an explicit doctrine of the Trinity such as was subsequently elaborated in the creeds of the early church**" (Dr. J. Schneider, Prof. of Theology in Berlin, *New International Dictionary of NT Theology*, "The Trinity").

"But for Israel there was only one God and sole devotion to this One God was a paramount essential. To serve or follow other gods was a **cardinal offense**,

emphasized particularly in Deut. and Isa. 40-55...The NT follows this tradition by taking for granted the established monotheism of Judaism...In the NT the monotheistic convictions [the all-essential Shema, he has just said] of Judaism **are taken for granted**...The first of all commandments **according to Jesus** is the *shema*, the affirmation of the oneness of God (Mark 12:29). Jewish opponents are not represented as criticizing Christianity for abandoning monotheism. The close association of Jesus with God seems to lead towards the seeing of monotheism in a different way [John 17:3 and Mark 12:28ff contra!]. The implications of this are not yet worked out within the NT" (Dr. James Barr, distinguished prof. at Vanderbilt, *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, p. 701, 865).

"The explicit doctrine of the Trinity was thus formulated in the **post-biblical period**, although the early stages can be seen in the NT. Attempts to trace the Trinity origins still earlier to the OT cannot be supported by historical critical scholarship" and these attempts are readings back...The formal doctrine of the Trinity as defined in councils of the 4th and 5th centuries *is not to be found in the NT*" (Thomas Longstaff, Colby College, Maine, *Harper Collins*, p. 1179).

"Because the Trinity is such an important part of later Christian doctrine, it is striking that the term does not appear in the NT. Likewise the developed concept of three coequal partners in the Godhead found in LATER creedal formulations **cannot be clearly detected within the confines of the canon**" (Daniel Showalter, Prof of Religion, Carthage College, WI, *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, "Trinity," 1993, p. 782).

"The word Trinity is not found in the Bible...It did not find a place formally in the theology of the church until the fourth century" (*Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, part 3, Intervarsity Press, 1980, p. 1).

The Trinity "is not directly and immediately the Word of God" (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967, Vol. XIV, p. 304).

"In Scripture there is yet no single term by which the Three Divine Persons are denoted together. The word 'Trias' (of which the Latin 'Trinitas' is a translation) is first found in Theophilus of Antioch about 180 AD...Shortly afterwards it appears in its Latin form of 'Trinitas' in Tertullian" (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1912, Vol. 15, p. 47).

"Hasty conclusions cannot be drawn from usage, for [Tertullian] does not apply the words [which were *later* applied to Trinitarianism] to Trinitarian theology" (Michael O'Carroll, *Trinitas: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Holy Trinity*, 1987, p. 208).

"We must never forget that **Christianity was built upon the foundation of Jewish monotheism**. A long providential discipline had secured to the Jewish people

their splendid heritage of faith in the one and only God. ‘Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God is the one and only Yahweh, and you are to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your might’ (Deut. 6:4). This was **the cornerstone** of the religion of Israel [and of Jesus]. These were perhaps the most familiar of all sacred words to the ears of the pious Jew [including Jesus]. They were recited continually. **Our Lord himself had them frequently in his mind** (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:28-29; Luke 10:27). That Jesus thought of God always as the supreme One is unquestionable. Indeed the very idea of fatherhood, which with our Lord, is the characteristic conception, and which is capable of being presented in a way which might weaken or injure a true monotheism, becomes **in his teaching absolutely monotheistic** because absolutely universal (Matt. 5:45, 48; 7:11; 8:11; 10:29; Luke 6:35; 13:29-30). To the Jewish mind the sovereignty of God was the natural and characteristic thought. In our Lord’s teaching the divine fatherhood overshadows and also transforms the divine sovereignty but never threatens to dissolve **the pure and splendid monotheism** of the original doctrine...

“**God is the universal Father.** He is, in a very intimate and special way, the Father of the disciples of Jesus. He is in a highest and unique sense the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“We find then that **the teaching of our Lord Jesus and of the Gospels concerning God is the union of a true and unwavering monotheism**, with a great doctrine of mediation, according to which God and man enter into very close relationship in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (“The Revelation of God in the Gospels: the Father,” *Hastings Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, Vol. 2, p. 761). ✧

^{NIV} **Philippians 3:14** “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

The NIV is misleading here (as in John 13:3; 16:28; 20:17: “returning” is false). The call is certainly “upward” (no mention of “heaven”), but it is false to suppose that Christians are called to “go to heaven” the moment they die! The doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul is from Greek philosophy, not from Jesus. We are to shed our former pagan ideas. Christians will certain “meet the Lord in the air” at his Second Coming in order then to escort the royal personage, the Messiah, in the direction in which he will be going — i.e. to the earth to take up his lawful position on the throne of David. There is no way to be “with the Lord Jesus” except by this process (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Do You Understand the Words “One” and “Only”?

“There is **only one judge** and law-giver, even he who has the power of salvation and of destruction; but who are you to be your neighbor’s judge?” (James 4:12).

“Let deacons be husbands of **one wife**, ruling their children and their own houses well” (1 Tim. 3:12).

“Now a mediator is not for one *party only*; whereas **God is only one**” (Gal. 3:20).

Amplified Version: “God is [only] one person.”

“Do you not see that in a running competition all take part, **but only one** gets the reward? So let your minds be fixed on the reward” (1 Cor. 9:24).

“Then stopping, and looking sadly at him, one of them, named Cleopas, said to him, Are you **the only man** living in Jerusalem who has not had news of the things which have taken place there at this time?” (Luke 24:18).

“But there is **only one hour’s work, one thing** that is essential. Mary has chosen the right thing, and it won’t be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42).

Jesus said, “Why do you ask me about what is good? **There’s only one who is good.** If you want to enter eternal life, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19:17).

“Then *ADONAI* will be king over the whole world. On that day *ADONAI* will be **the only one**, and his name will be **the only name**” (Zech. 14:9).

“If you do not make my dream clear to me there is **only one fate** for you: for you have made ready false and evil words to say before me till the times are changed: so give me an account of the dream, and I will be certain that you are able to make the sense of it clear” (Dan. 2:9).

“Son of man, those who live in the ruined cities in Israel are saying, ‘**Abraham was only one person**, and he was given the land. But we are many. Certainly the land has been given to us’” (Ezek. 33:24).

“A ten-acre vineyard will **produce only six gallons of wine**, and two quarts of seed will produce only four quarts of grain” (Isaiah 5:10).

“Then the children of Joseph said to Joshua, Why have you given me **only one part** and one stretch of land for my heritage? For through the blessing given to me by the Lord up to now, I am a great people” (Josh. 17:14).

“Esau said to his father, ‘Do you really **have only one blessing**, Father? Bless me too, my father!’ And Esau wept loudly” (Gen. 27:38).

Now try this one: Jesus defined God by saying, “Life in the age to come is this: that they come to know You, [Father], **the only one who is true God**, and Jesus Christ whom You commissioned” (John 17:3). Do you believe it? ✧

The Real Jesus of the Bible

Will the real Jesus step forward from behind the mists of church tradition which have shrouded him in obscurity?

In *post*-biblical tradition he arrives, avatar-like, from the sky, from a previous existence. This is the stuff of legend, but it has been forced into John's gospel by improper capitalizing of *logos* (Word) which should be "word," the expression of the One God (John 1:1).

The word "pre-existence" is thrown around, but what content does the word have? We all understand that if you sign up for insurance and you already have a disease, you have a "pre-existing" condition. But how does a person, a self, preexist? What does this mean? If Jesus preexists, what is the object of the verb preexist here? Jesus preexists what? Himself? He preexists himself? How can you do that? How can you *be* before you are? Let the exponents of "preexistence" tell us what they really mean, and in so doing, they may find themselves at a loss for clear understanding. This will lead to a change of mind.

There is a perfectly good word "preexist" in the Greek even of the NT but it is never, ever referred to Jesus!

What really is meant by this foggy term "preexist"? Is it that there is a person (according to the theory the Son of God or God the Son) who really never gets begotten (brought into existence) in the womb of his mother? How can he really begin to exist (since to be begotten means to **begin to exist**), if he *already* exists? So then, if the Son of God antedates his own conception and begetting, you are being invited by the Church to believe the impossible! Luke and Matthew say Jesus *begins* to exist in the womb, not that he already existed! Can you *begin* to exist if you already exist?

Thus on the theory of preexistence the Son does not have a beginning of existence (i.e. is not brought into existence = begotten in Mary), because on the theory he already exists.

So what hides behind this fog language is really a theory of "transformation" from one form of existence to another. The Son of God would be in transit from a non-earthly existence to another form of existence. But if he is *already* in existence before he exists, it seems that his coming into existence = being begotten, is in fact imaginary, a non-event. You can't begin to exist if you already exist.

A friend, urging the Trinity, said, "Remember your Church creed: 'begotten not made.'" But a much better procedure would be: remember the Scripture: begotten *and* made. To beget is a form of creation, making, procreation. Luke, working out of Isaiah 9:6, spelled all this out — astute doctor and historian that he was,

privileged, talented and erudite enough to write more of the NT than any other writer!

In Isaiah 9:6 the Hebrew text says, "To us **a child has been begotten**, to us **a son has been given**." The well-recognized rules of Hebrew parallelism tell us that the two bolded statements reinforce each other. They say the same thing twice for emphasis and clarity. The **being begotten of the child** is equivalent exactly to **the gift of a Son**.

The "being begotten" (passive form) has no subject and we naturally infer that this is what grammarians call a divine passive, i.e. God is the subject. God is the one who caused the child to be begotten, brought into existence, and God is the one who gave this Son. This is exactly "God loved the world in this way: that He gave His uniquely begotten Son" (John 3:16).

Luke unpacked this in greater detail, working out of this grand prophecy of the Messiah, who is to be begotten, though no human father is mentioned (Isa. 9:5-6). That is beautifully clarified in Luke 1:32-25. God is the procreator, begetter of the Son by miracle in Mary and "for that reason exactly [and for no other] the Son so procreated, to be begotten, will be the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Of course! The story is entirely coherent if you know your Old Testament prophecies. Of course, too, the text in Isaiah 7:14 spoke of a sign by which a virgin would conceive and bear a child and call him "with us is God" (Immanuel). The child indeed would embody the activity of God who worked in and through him. "God was IN Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Not "God WAS Christ," making, horror of horrors, two GODs.

Psalms 2 had made a similar, spectacular prophecy when it spoke of an oracle directed to a Son of whom it would be said: "You are my Son. Today I have begotten you" = brought you into existence = caused you to begin to exist. Nothing at all about the Son being in existence or alive before he began to exist (was caused to exist)!

The people of Israel would have been severely deceived if they were meant to gather from these sublime, beautiful prophecies that there was a **pre-human** Son who underwent a transformation into a human Son. After all, what had Israel been taught to look forward to as Messiah? When they protested that they did not want to hear the voice of YHVH literally again, God granted their request. In place of God's literal voice, they were promised, "I will raise up **a prophet like Moses originating from the family of Israel**" (see Deut. 18:15-19). All quite straightforward and clear, as prophecies need to be if they are to have a coherent and recognizable fulfillment.

Many have noted that the Church has had a tendency to be anti-Semitic. How true! What is the greatest act of anti-Semitism? It is surely to reject the God of Abraham,

Isaac, Jacob and of the Jewish Jesus and replace him with a strange triune God. This would be the greatest possible slur against the Jewish people. "Salvation is from the Jews," Jesus observed (John 4:22), and surely the Jewish definition of God would be the only valid one, the one guarded by the Jews "to whom the oracles of God were entrusted" (Rom. 3:2). Jesus agreed entirely with the Jewish, Hebrew view of God as One Person (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29).

Is it credible that the Jews, as custodians of and faithful adherents to the unitary monotheistic creed of Israel, could have sanctioned a switch to a Triune God? Jesus certainly never envisaged such a monumental shift. He is on record as agreeing wholeheartedly with a fellow Jew that the greatest of all commands is "Listen, Israel, the LORD our GOD is one LORD." How could this be a three-in-one Lord? Could the Jew so have understood Jesus, when he echoed back the words of the Master: "You have well said that HE is one and there is no other than HE" (He-three?). But are we listening? Or has our cherished tradition made us deaf to the words of Jesus? Was that not the constant complaint of Jesus, that it is possible to be "in error, not knowing the Scriptures..."?

Every historian of the Bible knows that Jesus here confirmed the One God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the only true God. In John 17:3, not contradicting the rest of John of course, Jesus uttered these stupendous and clear words: "This is the life of the age to come, that they come to know you [Father], the only one who is true God."

This, we submit, is a very plain unitary monotheistic definition of God, following the whole of Israel's heritage and history. And Jesus, who asserted that "salvation is from the Jews," confessed and instructed us to believe in that one God of Israel, his own God.

Shocking indeed is the subsequent history, as a new definition of God replaced Jesus' own definition. The church fathers displayed a lamentable anti-semitism when they admitted that in defining who God is they "rejected the Jewish error" (Jesus' view of God as unitary!) and put in its place an "improved" version of who God is. Church father Gregory of Nyssa, one of the architects of the detail of the later Trinitarianism, explained that in place of the Jewish error they preferred a midway or mean between the two extremes. One extreme was the Jewish error (a unitarian view of God — Jesus' view!) and the other was the tritheism or polytheism of the pagan world. The Trinity was touted as **being the ideal between the two positions**, rejecting the "coldness" of the strict monotheism of Israel and favoring the "warmth" of paganism with its concept of God as community. In fact it was a blatant compromise with paganism, and a clever one! ✧

What Is a Cult?

by Pastor Sidney Hatch

Everywhere we turn we are confronted by literature, films, or lectures on the cults. Perhaps, then, I shall be excused if I indulge in a few general observations on the theme, what is a cult?

In order to understand the nature of a cult we must recognize first that there are two great principles of revealed truth: the unity of God and the mortality of man.

Moses, Jesus, and Paul unite in their testimony that "God is one." There is one God who is one in person and being (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29; Gal. 3:20; 2 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6). And Genesis 2:7 and 3:19 tell us clearly that man is a material and mortal being. "The first man is of the earth," Paul says. He is "corruptible" and "mortal" (1 Cor. 15:47, 53, 54).

Yet traditional "orthodoxy" tells us that God is three and man is immortal.

"Mainstream" Christianity speaks of "Trinitarian monotheism" and would have us believe that God is a three-in-one Being. But all this is like talking about "round squares" or "square circles." Such things are not legitimate objects of knowledge, and are beyond even the omniscience of God. The idea of "Trinitarian monotheism" is a paradoxical invention of theologians.

So also, we are told that man is "dichotomous," that he is in two parts. One part, his body, is mortal and returns to dust. But the other part, his "soul," is immaterial, and lives on after death.

But this is to attribute to man a form of natural immortality. It violates the second great principle of revealed truth, the mortality of man, and has no scriptural basis except the words of the serpent, "you shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4).

No doubt some will oppose what I write here with the objection, "but almost everybody believes that God is a triune Being, and that man has a soul!" Yes, "almost everybody" does, and that is the problem! Has it ever occurred to "almost everybody" that they may be a cult?

Today's "historic" or "mainstream" religion came from the days of Constantine. For political reasons, and the unity of his empire, this fourth-century Roman ruler metamorphosed Christianity. He took it over, and changed all its standards.

Constantine and his successors could not have accomplished this feat, of course, had it not been for the inclusion of false doctrine into the church. The so-called "Apologists" arose, men whose goal was to blend Christianity and Greek philosophy. They said that although God was one, He was also three Persons. They taught also that "soul" and "body" were separate things, the "soul" being immortal. Thus Christianity became virtually a Christianized Greek philosophy.

What Constantine accomplished was political and doctrinal. The “Apologists,” however, provided the philosophical prerequisites.

In the sixth century the Emperor Justin made it a crime to deny the doctrine of the Trinity and also the doctrine of infant baptism. To deny either one was a capital offense — a crime punishable by death!

Thus was established the cult of Constantine! It could take the name “Christian,” but it was a far cry from the clear monotheism of the New Testament: one God, and Jesus the Messiah, the virgin-born Son of God. Compare 1 Corinthians 8:6 where Paul says: “but to us Christians there is but one God, the Father.” Jesus, as the “one Lord” (*kurios*) is God’s anointed ruler for the earth. He is the one “my lord” of Psalm 110:1. *Adoni* is never, in all of its 195 occurrences, a title for Deity.

Evidence that this new empire-church was a cult was not only its departure from the Bible but also its impact upon society and history. It produced, not the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22), but more than 1000 years of violent persecution against its opponents. Europe sank into the dark ages.

A cult, then, is any movement or system of teaching which denies the unity of God’s nature and the mortality of man’s nature. God is one and man is mortal. These are the two basic principles of biblical revelation. They transcend all other truth, and all other truth is related to them in some way. For example, “the man Christ Jesus” is, as Paul says, the “one mediator between God and man” (1 Tim. 2:5).

I have observed that much of today’s anti-cult material is produced by people who believe that God is three and man is dichotomous (or trichotomous). It never seems to occur to such people that they may be a cult — the oldest and biggest cult of all, that cult whose influence penetrates to the farthest reaches of Christendom. (Reprinted with permission from *Brief Bible Studies* for July-September 1984). ✧

The Wise Words of Dr. Henry Alford on Colossians 2:16-17

“The substance, of which the other [holy days, new moons and Sabbath day] is the shadow, belongs to Christ (i.e. the substantial blessings which these legal obligations *typified*, are attached to, brought in by, found in union with Christ; see on the whole figure Heb. 8:5; 10:1). We may observe that if the ordinance of the sabbath had been *in any form* of lasting obligation on the Christian church, it would have been *quite impossible* for the Apostle to have spoken thus. The fact of an obligatory rest of one day, whether the seventh or the first, would have been directly in the teeth of his assertion here; the holding of such would have been still to retain the shadow, while we possess the substance. And no answer

to this can be given by the transparent special pleading that he is speaking of *only that which is Jewish in such observances*, the whole argument being general, and the axiom of v. 17 being of universal application” (*Comm. on Col.* p. 225). We must guard against being “in the teeth of” Paul the apostle! ✧

Passing the Meridian of Life

by Clark R. Barefoot, Colorado

The psalmist expressed my feelings as he said, “I give thanks to Yahweh with all my heart” (Ps. 111:1). How beautiful are the words of David and other psalmists when they praise our Father in heaven. They, like all other Scripture writers sleeping in death, in the dust of the ground, yet speak to us through their written words. So even though “the dead cannot praise Yahweh, nor those who sink into silence, we, the living shall bless Yahweh henceforth and forever” (Ps. 115:17-18). Their written words give us hope. This is especially so since the Son of God, the son of David, now holds the keys of death and Hades.

I recently read an article by Sidney Hatch which gave so much encouragement and a unique view of Yahweh’s wisdom and love and of Jesus’ obedience. It incorporated some statements of the famous 16th-century scientist and biblical unitarian preacher Joseph Priestley. Priestley’s life, his unitarian biblical beliefs, scientific achievements, and friendships with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson are well chronicled in chapter 19 of the book *Out of the Flames* by Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone. My first knowledge of Priestley was from that book and this influenced me to have deep respect for him. However, the quotes from Priestley’s writings to a friend are in the aforementioned short article by Sydney Hatch entitled, “The Wisdom of Death.” To me that title at first created a negative impression, but not as I read the article’s logic. Its highlights go like this: Was God “wise” to ordain death? Was it necessary for Him to decree death for all men? If we question the wisdom of Yahweh for a moment, consider the alternative that could have been: “And now lest he, man, put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever...” (Gen. 3:22). Sidney Hatch points out that God never finished that sentence. Hatch wrote, “We have here a figure of speech called sudden silence. The purpose was emphasis. Better to leave unsaid what was in the mind of God, and which would be too appalling even to consider.” An eternity of sin, sickness, and evil would have been the lot of the whole human family. Interestingly, J.B. Rotherham has a footnote to the unfinished sentence. “God was in haste to act, and avert danger.” So Yahweh stationed cherubim to guard the tree of life.

The Lord God by His action was not going to let Satan’s words “you will not surely die” come true. God’s

words were quoted: “In the day you eat of the tree of knowledge, you shall surely die” and “For dust you are and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 2:17; 3:19). Yahweh did not let His Word return to Him void.

Priestley reminded a friend that they were both now past “the meridian of life.” “We must,” he said, “submit without reluctance to that temporary rest in the grave which a wise Creator has appointed for all men — our Savior not excepted.” With the hope of the Kingdom of God in mind Priestley wrote to his friend, “Let us delight in the evening of our lives. That is, anticipate with joy the glorious morning of the resurrection when we shall meet our Savior.”

As my dear wife and I are past the meridian of life, we must submit, as Joseph Priestley so eloquently and humbly said, to that temporary rest, sleep, in the grave which a wise Creator has appointed to all men. But until God’s beloved Son, the chief agent of life, returns at his Second Coming or we fall asleep with our fathers, we will sing praises to Yahweh God, King of eternity and His blessed Son, the lamb, so long as we have breath. ✧

Eric H.H. Chang’s excellent book *The Only True God* is available to read online at no cost at www.theonlytruegod.org Eric Chang fell asleep in death in January, 2013.

Comments

“I enjoy immensely your monthly *Focus on the Kingdom*. As a (former) ‘3 Gods’ believer for more than sixty years, and a ‘retired’ minister of the Salvation Gospel, I find that I have been misled all these years by the mainline Pentecostal organizations. I find your articles in your *Focus on the Kingdom* to be refreshing and entirely ‘on key.’” — *California*

“We so enjoy getting *Focus on the Kingdom*. We’ve learned so much of God’s word. How could we have not seen it before? We were just ‘following a preacher’ before, but now we realize we must look into God’s word as the Bereans did. Thank you for encouraging people to do that! God’s coming Kingdom, the dead sleeping until the resurrection, living in a worthy manner to inherit the earth and be in the Age to Come are all coming into focus for us as we read the Bible. Again, how *could* we have missed it before? We’ve been supposed Christians all our lives, but amazingly haven’t noticed the Gospel as Jesus proclaimed it until now! Lord, help us to apply what we are learning with grace, love and sincerity. We see much more clearly now, how wicked the issues of our hearts are, which is painful, but necessary in order for us to repent (turn around!). Love to all who are the brethren.” — *Washington*

“I am originally from South Korea. I cannot express how happy I am to have found you through the web. For

the first time, I heard your ‘The Human Jesus’ documentary from Youtube. Today (January 9th, 2013), I praise the Lord who gave us internet. I found the right person who can speak with the right heart from our God to this generation. It was an eye-opening, clear expression that I wanted to hear about Christianity. Most of us mindlessly believe. I hope and pray that I can speak with you or meet you in person one day. May you be blessed and have good health throughout your life.” — *Florida*

“I’m an ex JW, and, having a hard time finding *any* other church I can feel OK about going to because of the Trinity, immortal soul issues. I really do agree with your view on these things, and would like to associate with Christians who do as well. Are there any churches in my area, Tampa, Florida, which you know of who lean towards biblical unitarian views, rather than orthodox nonsense? I’ve even considered moving to your area just be able to be a part of a congregation again. I don’t like being out here on my own, and feel a great push inside me to get back to associating with Christians. Thank you for your time, and keep up the good work.” — *Florida*

“I want you to know that I appreciate the newsletter *Focus on the Kingdom*! I attend a Pentecostal church but I am a convinced Biblical unitarian. I also am in complete agreement with you as to what happens when we die. It’s kinda like one of those trick images where something is hard to see at first, but once you see it you can’t look at it without seeing it! I see anti-Trinitarian statements on almost every page of the New Testament! And if 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 doesn’t convince one that the majority view on those who have fallen asleep is wrong then I’m afraid they don’t want the truth.” — *Georgia*

“I was reading your *Coming Kingdom of the Messiah* book today and had a serious ah-ha moment. When we leave out the Kingdom from the Gospel, we lose focus on the fact that Jesus is our King! We lose sight of the fact that we need to listen to him and obey him! You couldn’t disobey an earthly governing body and expect to be rewarded, so why would it be any different in Jesus’ kingdom — especially when he rules and will rule with righteousness and justice!? I was a bit cloudy on the concept of Messiahship. Now I fully realize just how political the concept of the Messiah really was! I understood that we were to obey Jesus because he was the Messiah, but somehow I didn’t make the connection with Kingship. Ah, so much deception clouds the thinking but praise God He is freeing me as I seek Him! Anyway, just wanted to let you know I was very blessed by your book and am now even more excited about the Kingdom! It just becomes more and more real to me as the lies and misconceptions are untangled! Truth is amazingly freeing.” — *Atlanta Bible College student*

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