

Focus on the Kingdom

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The Promise to Abraham That He Would Be Heir of the World (Rom. 4:13)

“If you are Christians, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the Promise” (Gal. 3:29).

The Christian world in general does not understand the ultimate purpose for being a Christian. That purpose is also the basis for “justification” — being “right” rather than “wrong” with God. Churchgoers seem reluctant to believe Paul’s clear teaching that the destiny of Christians is closely related, in fact identical, to the destiny of Abraham.

Along with his fellow Jews, Paul, a leading exponent of Christianity, knew well that God had promised Abraham that he would eventually come into possession of the land of Israel and consequently of the whole world. The certainty of the coming inheritance of the world formed the basis of Israel’s national hope of participation in the covenant promise God had made with “father Abraham.”

According to Paul, however, only *Christian* believers, Jews and Gentiles alike, become at conversion and baptism (Acts 8:12) potential participants in the very same inheritance of the world promised to Abraham (Rom. 4:13). Paul says this so plainly that only the force of a contrary tradition can account for the unfamiliarity of this basic New Testament teaching.

In Galatians 3:29 Paul makes one of his determinative statements for the whole Christian faith: “If you are Christ’s [i.e., if you are a Christian], then you count as Abraham’s descendants, and are heirs according to the promise [made to Abraham].”

In Romans 4:13 Paul’s illuminating definition of the promise reveals what the future had in store for Abraham and all his spiritual descendants: **“The promise made to Abraham and his descendants that he would be heir of the world.”**

Combining this information with Galatians 3:29, the truth becomes apparent that the promise to Abraham and to all true Christians is *that they will be heirs of the world*.

This staggering fact, one would think, would be trumpeted constantly from every Christian pulpit, involving as it does a divine statement about the future of our earth and the ultimate control of the world. To be heir, of course, is to look forward to possession — in the case of Christians, possession of the world. Could any challenge be more calculated to stir the hearts of believers, cause them to live in gratitude and humility

before God and Jesus, and drive them onwards to their ultimate goal?

Once grasped, this basic truth of the Bible will throw light on numerous parallel passages referring to the destiny of believers: We are “joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17), “God’s heirs” (Rom. 8:17), “heirs, because we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:17).

Heirs of what? Supplying the data from Romans 4:13, we see that Christians are “God’s heirs to the world,” “joint-heirs to the world with Christ,” “heirs to the world, because we are the children/sons and daughters of God” (Rom. 8:17). Paul made exactly the same point when he wrote to the Galatians: “For if the **inheritance** [of the world] is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise, but God granted it [the inheritance of the world] by means of a promise...And if you belong to Christ then you are Abraham’s descendants, and heirs [of the world] according to the promise” (Gal. 3:18, 29).

The Teaching of Jesus

Jesus, of course, appointed Paul, and Jesus had taught the same Gospel. Jesus’ teaching is virtually a commentary on the momentous information about God’s plan and promise revealed to Abraham. This is to be expected since Paul described the whole ministry of Jesus as a confirmation of “the promises made to the patriarchs” — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David (Rom. 15:8). It will therefore be impossible to understand Christianity if we are unclear about the promises made to Abraham.

The New Testament cannot be grasped without an understanding of the central message of the Old Testament. God had initiated a Plan for the restoration of mankind when he invited Abraham to leave his native land of Babylon and take up residence in the land of Canaan (Israel) (Gen. 12:1-4). By covenant oath he promised to give possession of the land of Canaan to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 13:14-15; 17:8). Long after the Israelites had entered the promised land under Joshua, it was clear that the **ultimate acquisition of the land** by the patriarchs still lay in the future, for Abraham had never owned a square foot of the territory promised to him. All who reckoned themselves as Abraham’s descendants would share in the same inheritance. To this compelling goal every pious Israelite looked forward with the eyes of faith. Despite every national setback the “covenant” or “word” spoken by God to Abraham served as a rock-firm guarantee of the eventual triumph of the faithful and their possession of the land (see Ps. 105:8-15).

As is well known, Jesus constantly promised his followers that in the future they would **inherit the Kingdom of God**. It is a very simple matter to deduce from this that “inheriting the world” (Rom. 4:13) and “inheriting the Kingdom of God” mean exactly the same thing. Christians, therefore, are heirs to the world and heirs to the Kingdom of God. This is the heart of the Christian Gospel, because both Jesus and Paul preached it.

Counter Teaching

Believers in the Bible must make a conscious effort to rid themselves of the well-entrenched idea that their destiny is to “go to heaven,” “get to heaven,” “gain a home in heaven,” “gain a kingdom beyond the skies,” etc. These phrases are without a shred of biblical support. They have the unfortunate effect of dismantling Paul’s assertion that Christians are going to *inherit the world*, as promised to Abraham and Jesus, and rule the world with Jesus (cp. Rev. 5:10; 2:26; 3:21; 20:1-6; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30; Luke 19:17; 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Cor. 6:2; Dan. 7:22, 27).

Romans 4:13, therefore, should be a primary text in the thinking of those who seek to follow biblical teaching. The point needs to be emphasized: the promise of “heaven” is nowhere offered to believers. In New Testament times, unlike today, “The thought of Christian inheritance of the Kingdom [or the world, Rom. 4:13] was evidently well enough established in the churches known to Paul, so that he has no need to be more explicit.”¹ Today the all-pervasive use of the word “heaven” confuses and contradicts God’s promise to us.

With nearly two thousand years of non-biblical tradition working against them, Bible readers must take time to meditate on the above passages and adjust their thinking and language to the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. Jesus, after all, could not have made himself much clearer! “Blessed are the meek, for they are destined to inherit the **earth**” (Matt. 5:5). This is simply a restatement of the promise made to Abraham — a promise repeated six times in Psalm 37:9, 11, 18, 22, 29, 34, and written long after the death of Abraham: “Those who wait for the Lord will inherit the land...The meek will inherit the land...The Lord knows the days of the blameless, and their inheritance will be forever...For those blessed by Him will inherit the land...The righteous will inherit the land and **dwell in it forever...Wait for the Lord and keep His way, and He will exalt you to inherit the land.**” The land is the future Kingdom of God, the core of the Christian Gospel (Mark 1:14-15).

True to his Israelite heritage, Jesus reiterates and confirms the Abrahamic promises of Psalm 37 with his famous dictum that the “meek will inherit the land [or

earth]” (Matt. 5:5). We could not wish for a less ambiguous statement about the Christian destiny. The difficulty is that what we know as Christian literature is thoroughly steeped in unbiblical language about “heaven” (“when I get to heaven,” “I’ll fly away,” etc.). Passages like Matthew 5:5 are no longer “heard” in their original context. Their meaning is “blocked” by conflicting and confusing tradition. They will therefore require close attention, especially in relation to their Old Testament background, in order for the necessary shift in thinking to occur. Preachers who continue with language about “heaven” should be encouraged to give clear expository sermons on Romans 4:13, Matthew 5:5 and Revelation 5:10, plus the numerous texts which plainly describe the Christian goal as the inheritance of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Revelation 5:9-10 is a precious text which amplifies the original promise to Abraham, confirmed in Christ: Christ purchased for God with his blood “men from every tribe and people and nation, and you have made them to be a Kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign **on the earth.**” How utterly confusing, then, to talk about “going to heaven”!

The Promise to Abraham and His Children

Romans 4:13 connects the promise to Abraham closely to the promise to all believers. What then was that promise?

Paul calls it “the inheritance of the world” (Rom. 4:13). Jesus refers to it as the inheritance of “the earth” (Matt. 5:5). Only Christian *tradition*, which differs radically from the Bible, talks confusingly of the Christian future as “heaven.”

The details of the promise to Abraham, well understood by the New Testament church but often unknown to contemporary churchgoers, are laid out in Genesis:

Genesis 12:7: “The Lord appeared to Abraham and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this **land** [Israel].’”

Genesis 13:14-17: “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the **land** which you see, I will give it to you and your descendants forever...Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.”

Genesis 15:18: “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I have given this **land.**’”

Genesis 17:7-8: “I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you **the land** of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an **everlasting possession**; and I will be their God.”

¹ James Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Romans, p. 463.

We have seen that all Christians are reckoned as spiritual children of Abraham (Gal. 3:29) and that with Abraham they are “heirs of the world” (Rom. 4:13). This is because the covenant promise given to Abraham (texts just above) guaranteed him **the land** forever.

It is obvious that God initially promised part of the earth to Abraham, certainly not a home in “heaven.” He was invited to inspect his future inheritance by walking up and down in it and by looking to the four points of the compass — not upwards to heaven! (Gen. 13:14-15). Thus modern commentaries recognize properly that “the idea of ‘inheritance’ was a fundamental part of Jewish understanding of their covenant relationship with God, above all, indeed almost exclusively in connection with *the land* — the land of Canaan, theirs by right of inheritance as promised to Abraham.”² But why call this “Jewish” since it is now offered to all Christians?

Before the time of Jesus and Paul the promised inheritance of the land had been understood to include not just Israel but the whole world. This was based on a legitimate reading of many passages in the prophets and Psalms, which expected the Kingdom of God to extend across the earth. The following texts from various Jewish writings document this concept and throw light on Paul’s and Jesus’ thinking about the Christian’s future:

Ecclesiasticus 44:21: “Abraham, the great forefather of a host of nations, no one was ever his equal in glory. He observed the law of the Most High, and entered into a covenant with him...The Lord therefore promised him on oath to bless the nations through his descendants, to multiply him like the dust on the ground, to exalt his descendants like the stars, and to give them **the land** for their inheritance from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth” (quoting Ps. 72:8).

Jubilees 22:13-14: “May the Most High God give you all the blessings with which he has blessed me [Abraham] and with which he blessed Adam and Noah...May he cleanse you from all sin and defilement, so that he may forgive you all your transgressions, and your erring through ignorance. May he strengthen you and bless you, and may you **inherit all of the earth.**”

Jubilees 32:19: “And I will give to your [Jacob’s] offspring all of **the land** under heaven, and they will rule in all nations as they have desired. And after this all of the earth will be gathered together and they will inherit it forever.”

I Enoch 5:7: “But to the elect there will be light, joy and peace, and they will **inherit the earth**” (cp. Matt. 5:5).

IV Ezra 6:39: “If the world has been created for us, why do we not possess our **world** as an **inheritance**? How long will this be so?”

The Christian’s Destiny

Both the Bible and extra-biblical Jewish writings are filled with the promise to the faithful of future possession of the world.

Psalms 2:8 invites God’s Messiah to “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as your **inheritance**, and the very ends of **the earth** as your possession.” This is simply the ultimate form of the promise to Abraham of the possession of the world (Rom. 4:13).

The meaning of this astonishing fact about the destiny of the faithful is appropriately brought out by the *International Critical Commentary on Romans*. The verse is paraphrased and explained in a way which beautifully expounds the mind of Paul:

“The promise made to Abraham and his descendants of worldwide Messianic rule...The promise is that through Christ Abraham should enjoy *worldwide dominion*...the right to universal dominion” (pp. 109, 111). That promise is extended to all who accept the terms of the Gospel (Acts 8:12).

Throughout the New Testament believers are said to be “sons of God” and, as such, heirs of the “worldwide Messianic rule” promised to Abraham and his children. As James Dunn says, “Integral to the national faith was the conviction that God had given Israel the inheritance of Israel, the promised land. It is this axiom which Paul evokes and refers to the new Christian movement as a whole, Gentiles as well as Jews. They are the heirs of God; *Israel’s special relationship with God has been extended to all in Christ.*”³

Inheriting the Kingdom

The standard New Testament term for the world dominion promised to Abraham and all the faithful in Christ is simply “the Kingdom of God.” The inheritance or possession of the Kingdom is something which believers await. The same promised inheritance appears under another name as future “glory” — glory being a well-established alternative term for “Kingdom”:

Mark 10:37: James and John request of Jesus, “Grant that we may sit, one on your right and one on your left, in your **glory.**”

Matthew 20:21: The mother of James and John requests for her sons: “Command that in your **Kingdom** these two sons of mine may sit one on your right and one on your left” (cp. “Yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory,” Matt 6:13).

So Paul in Romans 8:18 speaks of “the coming **glory** to be revealed as ours.” In Romans 5:2 he describes Christians as exulting “in the hope of the **glory** [or Kingdom] of God.” James has exactly the same prospect in mind when he speaks of Christians as “**heirs of the Kingdom** which He promised to those who love Him” (James 2:5).

² Dunn, *Commentary on Romans*, Vol. I, p. 213.

³ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

Elsewhere the Kingdom of God is repeatedly offered to believers as their future reward, with dire warnings about types of conduct which will result in exclusion from the promised Kingdom:

1 Corinthians 6:9-10: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will **inherit the Kingdom of God.**”

1 Corinthians 15:50: “Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot **inherit the Kingdom of God.**” The Kingdom is therefore the great event of the future which can only be inherited by resurrection or transformation at the return of Jesus. Christians in their present state of frailty cannot yet inherit the Kingdom. But we must prepare for it with all urgency.

Galatians 5:21: “I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things [immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, v. 19-20] will not **inherit the Kingdom of God.**”

Ephesians 5:5: “This you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an **inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God.**”

Matthew 21:38, 43: “When the vinegrowers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his **inheritance**’...Therefore I say to you, **the Kingdom of God** will be taken away from you [hostile Jews] and given to a people producing the fruit of it.”

Matthew 5:3, 5: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the **Kingdom of Heaven**...Blessed are the gentle, for they will **inherit the earth.**” Inheritance of the earth is equated with gaining the Kingdom of Heaven (a synonym for Kingdom of God).

Titus 3:5: “Being justified by His grace we would be made **heirs of eternal life** according to hope.”

The well-known phrases “eternal life” and “everlasting life” represent a single phrase in the original Greek of the New Testament. The literal meaning of these terms is “life in the coming age (of the Kingdom).” This is exactly equivalent to participation in the coming worldwide Messianic rule on earth. There is no essential difference between the promise of “eternal life” — “life in the coming age” — and the promise of the Kingdom of God or the land/earth. Permanent life, immortality in the future Kingdom will be possessed by all true believers.

The future of the world is inextricably bound up with the future of believers, because at the time when Jesus reappears, “creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory [or

Kingdom] of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). This is the worldwide Messianic Kingdom of the children of God (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27: “serve and obey them”).

To be continued next month.

Will the Theologians Please Sit Down by David Bercot

Book Review and Critique by Barbara Buzzard

Professor Bercot’s premise is this: “When Christianity was young, the focus was on Jesus Christ and His kingdom — not theology.”⁴ He makes the point that the things now considered essential to the faith have grown to a long list, many of these unknown to the early Christians. The story as he sees it is this: “Theologians took over the church. Once the theologians took over, the emphasis changed from godly *fruit* to ‘orthodox’ theology...It was primarily the religious authorities who opposed the kingdom of God in Jesus’ day, and it has been that way ever since.”⁵ And so Bercot considers today’s theologians an elite class who have set themselves up as interpreters of Scripture but deny this right to others; and worse: they create a war of words and use them to fight against the “children of the kingdom.”

The Leaven of the Theologians

Bercot denounces Jewish theologians because he sees them as trying to create a way to God that didn’t require godly fruit. “They had corrupted the Law and had taken away ‘the key of knowledge’ from the common people. The theologians had made the people totally dependent on them for access to the Scriptures and to the knowledge of God. But then they blocked the way to the kingdom. They produced no kingdom fruit themselves, and they hindered others from producing fruit as well.”⁶ The removal of the key of knowledge was the devastating removal of the key of the kingdom.

Bercot places much blame on the Pharisees and Sadducees as he believes that they missed the whole purpose and spirit of the Law and thereby negated God’s commandments and took the Scriptures away from the people. “The sum total of the scribes and Pharisees’ human commandments, commentary, interpretations, hypocrisy and spiritual elitism constituted the leaven Jesus told us to beware of. The weight of the theologians’ leaven crushed the whole spirit and purpose of the Law. The Scriptures in themselves became useless, because they only meant whatever the theologians said they meant...For in the end, the Jewish theologians had made the Scriptures invalid because of their traditions. The theologians controlled what the

⁴ David Bercot, *Will the Theologians Please Sit Down*, p.

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⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

people learned about God and His dealings with man. Yet, they were themselves in utter darkness.”⁷

The Major Turning Point in Christian History

This event was the Council of Nicaea. And why was it even more momentous than the Reformation or the events of Acts? Because it was there decided that “the Scriptures were simply inadequate. The council must go *beyond* Scripture if it was going to force the Arians out of the church...But to do this, he had to insert language in the creed that is not found in Scripture.”⁸

“So the winners at Nicaea were saying that Scripture alone is not adequate to settle disputes. They were also saying that the Bible doesn’t fully explain or define certain matters that we *need* to know...The word heretic — which originally meant a schismatic person — now came to mean a person who held to a defined theological error. And heretics were painted as the embodiment of evil. In short, Christianity had become Doctrinarianity.”⁹ This is a clever saying, but would it be just a step too far to say that this is the Christianity that isn’t? We can see its flaws clearly; we can see where it went wrong. We can tell by its persecutory impulse that it is not following Jesus. So why do we continue to regard it as the real thing?

And so began a time of theologians ruling — by language bullying, and by the creation of an elite class of official Scripture interpreters. And so began group think and herd mentality within the Church. And so began heresy hunting. And so we have inherited a system which blended Christianity and Greek philosophy, a system that the early church would not even recognize. Bercot emphasizes over and over again that it is by our fruit that we will be judged, and yet *the system* says that unless you say this, unless you subscribe to this formula (though non-Scriptural) you are not a Christian. How very interesting to note that after Nicaea when people were tortured, burned alive, imprisoned, etc. it was never because their lives displayed *bad fruit*, but because they had *beliefs* which were contrary to *the system*.

Us and Them

“Please note that Jesus didn’t tell His disciples that some of *you* will put your fellow Christians to death, thinking you’re doing God an act of service...So it is never the disciples of Christ who do the killing. They are the ones being killed...Real Christians are the ones who are persecuted. They’re never the ones who do the persecuting (Phil. 1:29).”¹⁰ This is a wonderful and useful truth to have in your arsenal — to be activated when in doubt about who’s who. And perhaps we should

be reminded of this on a daily basis, with cult hunters on the lookout and name-calling prolific.

“From the very beginning, Christians had always renounced war, violence, and killing of every sort. However, within a few years after Nicaea, Christians began joining the army. At first, ‘Christians’ only warred against pagans, but before the century was over, ‘Christians’ were slaughtering fellow ‘Christians.’”¹¹ I wonder why Bercot doesn’t recommend using this as a test (or at least one of) to see where the real Christians are. This would be most enlightening to his readers and perhaps to himself as well, i.e. what group of believers actually follow Jesus on this issue?

Gutting the Sermon on the Mount

“By the time these theologians got through with the Sermon on the Mount, the radical teachings in it had become meaningless [for example, Christians *should* go to war; *don’t* turn the other cheek]...Imagine! With their lips the Nicene theologians exalted Jesus as highly as possible. But in reality, they gutted His teachings, corrupted His kingdom, murdered others, and altered the historic faith handed down to them.”¹²

If anyone wants an education regarding Luther, this is the book. Bercot calls him a sheep in wolves’ clothing. “Luther’s real zeal was not a zeal for the kingdom of God. Rather, it was a zeal for doctrines — his doctrines.” Bercot charges that Luther’s zeal murdered the person of Christ — by murdering Christ’s brothers. “If anyone would teach that Christ is not God, but a mere man, and like other prophets, as the Turks and Anabaptists hold — such teachers should not be tolerated, but punished as blasphemers. For they are not mere heretics, but open blasphemers.”¹³

“Here Luther surpassed in audacity every theologian who had preceded him. He said a Christian can know ‘all that is necessary and good’ about Christ without ever reading the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Really?”¹⁴ (Odd since those Gospels contain the bulk of his teachings!) But, says Luther with outrageous arrogance, go to Paul. This would have stunned the second-century Christians, but Luther got away with it as is shown by the fact that many follow his pattern today — of placing Paul above Jesus.¹⁵ Both Calvin and Luther were control freaks and bullies, says Bercot. Those who try to defend them find that they can’t trace the doctrines of these men back to the Apostles.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 24, 25.

⁸ Ibid., p. 71.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 73,74.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 82.

¹² Ibid., pp. 86, 89.

¹³ Martin Luther, *Exposition on Psalm 82*.

¹⁴ *Will the Theologians Please Sit Down*, p. 105.

¹⁵ Luther wrote prefaces for each book in the NT, telling his readers what the writer was “really saying” and trying to skew their opinions.

Blinding Danger Where You Never Imagined It

“From the very beginning, study Bibles have always worked to obscure the kingdom of God and the teachings of Christ. Sometimes they’re subtle, and at other times they make a bold frontal attack on the kingdom. The Geneva Bible hid the kingdom of God by telling its readers that *Jesus instituted nothing revolutionary with His teaching*. According to the Geneva Bible, *there is no difference between Christ’s moral teachings and the Law of Moses*.”¹⁶ And by this method we were blinded to the radical teaching of Jesus and the radical revolution it inspired and ignited. Calvin and Luther taught that we are still under the same moral law as that of the Old Covenant, failing to see the obvious contradictions between those teachings and the teachings of Jesus. Who *were* these men who *missed* Jesus and his radical and unlike-any-other message?

“What about loving our enemies? Calvin skillfully wiped out this teaching of Jesus as well: Calvin: ‘It is obvious, as I have already said, that *Christ does not introduce new laws*.’” Thus Calvin sidestepped what Jesus said, and used the excuse that war was allowable under the Law and therefore was still allowable to Christians. Surely this poses a profound dilemma to searching Christians who must ask themselves: Who am I listening to/following?

Bullying Is as Old as the Pharisees

And by illustration of the plea in Bercot’s book title he says that “Christian theologians have an even worse track record than the scribes and Pharisees.” Bercot actually entitles one of his chapters “Learning to Stand Up to Theological Bullies.” He says, “In the end, the theological bullies have largely had their way. From what I’ve observed, we kingdom Christians often are weak when it comes to evangelism. That’s because keeping quiet has been deeply etched into our collective psyche. We’ve thrown out the bulk of our forefathers’ teachings and replaced them with the doctrines of those who have bullied us. When a person reads the typical doctrinal textbooks of today’s Anabaptists, Moravians, Brethren, and other kingdom Christians, he or she finds that they basically teach the doctrines of Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin — with mere additions of nonresistance, free will, and the head covering.”¹⁷

Anyone honest about Luther must admit that there was a very dark side to him. Consider this example: “I, Martin Luther, slew all the peasants in the rebellion, for I said that they should be slain. All their blood is upon my head. But I cast it on the Lord God, who commanded me to speak in this way.”¹⁸ *Luther’s orders were followed, slaughtering up to 100,000 peasants without mercy.*

¹⁶ *Will the Theologians Please Sit Down*, p. 107, emphasis added.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁸ Dollinger, *The Reformation*, Vol. 1, p. 289, quoted in

Once Saved, Always Saved

“Luther’s murderous and hate-filled spirit was the fruit of his own teaching. He vainly imagined: ‘No sin can separate us from Him, even if we were to kill or commit adultery thousands of times per day.’”¹⁹ This thinking and this man were enemies of the Gospel Jesus preached. Tragically, this “once saved, always saved” doctrine continues to blind and distort and poison minds.

And Calvin ordered the torture and death of many who opposed him, singularly Michael Servetus who was burned alive. These men who are guilty of monstrous deeds are still hailed by the Church as heroes. This alone should cause one to shudder.

Fact or Fiction?

We have all been taught that there are three Greek words for love (*eros*, *philia*, and *agape*) but that one of them has a special meaning — that *agape* love is the *highest* form of love, unconditional love that comes from the holy spirit alone. It turns out not to be true! This claim that *agape* (used 283 times from Gen. to Rev.) is a higher selfless love can be shown to be fictitious:

- “Then make me savory food, such as I *love*” (Gen. 27:4).
- “How long will you *love* what is worthless?” (Ps. 4:2b)
- “Those who hate me *love* death” (Prov. 8:36).
- “Shame on you Pharisees! For you *love* the best seats...” (Luke 11:43).
- “They *loved* the approval of men” (John 12:43).

Plus many more examples in Scripture. Bercot maintains that theologians are often copycats; thus it is that error survives and is promoted as truth.

Even as I write this an email has just arrived stating: “**Agape**: This Greek word is used to describe a high form of love. Similar to the Hebrew *hesed*, *agape* is often used to refer to the covenantal love between God and His people. *Agape* love is an unconditional, universal and unbreakable love that will be there regardless of changes in circumstances or feelings.”

If this were true, *agape* could not be used in the examples given. Someone has not done their homework. May we all spy the lie.

Kingdom Christians, Kingdom Gospel, But Not a Kingdom Hope

“The kingdom gospel was the mainline predominant gospel in the second and third centuries...Although the theologians shoved the kingdom gospel out of the mainstream of institutional Christianity in the fourth

Schaff.

¹⁹ *Will the Theologians Please Sit Down*, p. 180. Note that Bercot softened Luther’s language here as it is too vulgar to print.

century...The kingdom gospel can be traced back to the beginning because it's truly the historic faith."²⁰

"With their lips the Nicene theologians exalted Jesus as highly as possible. But in reality, they didn't hesitate to contradict His very words. They gutted His teachings, corrupted His kingdom, murdered others, and altered the historic faith handed down to them...Christianity was so thoroughly corrupted that it bore only a faint resemblance to the Christianity of the apostolic age."²¹

"When I say that most theologians are clueless when it comes to historic Christianity, I mean they are totally out of touch with what Christianity originally represented...Let me suggest that it's not the unlettered and ordinary Christians who lived so close to the apostles who got things mixed up. Rather it's today's church and its theologians who have things mixed up."²²

Two all-pervading questions Bercot puts to his readers: *What common ground is there between Jesus and your beliefs, your church, your favored theologians? And how and where have we been deceived?* I fear that ordinary churchgoers are not used to being challenged in this manner. But the wise will heed. I think that all pastors should read the book, if only to be aware of the fragile and tenuous link to Jesus that orthodoxy has. And all lay people should read it so that they can make a wise choice as to who to believe.

But as with anything, we must proceed with caution. After Bercot introduces us to so many thought provoking and challenging ideas for which I am enormously grateful, it is with much perplexity and sadness that I must add the following caveat: Bercot speaks of kingdom living, kingdom principles, being a child of the kingdom, and especially kingdom fruit, all of which we must do and have. Yes, in a sense we enter the Kingdom once converted. And yes, it is good to be reminded of the sort of lives we are meant to lead. Tragically, though, he does not see the Kingdom as a future event in any way. This destroys our Kingdom Hope and wipes out the Scriptures that promise that Jesus will inaugurate the Kingdom at his return. By far the vast majority of Kingdom references (perhaps as many as 95%) refer to that future great event, our blessed hope. And it is *because* of that blessed hope that we can run the race. "This hope is our spiritual anchor; it is both certain and reliable" (Heb. 6:19).

We know that Joseph of Arimathea (who asked Pilate for Jesus' body) was still waiting for the Kingdom to come (Mark 15:43). And we know that Jesus is not sitting on the throne in Jerusalem. We know that Satan is not bound and that he continues to deceive the entire world. We know that the saints are not ruling the world as they are destined to do (1 Cor. 6:2; Dan. 7:27). All of

that is yet to come with Jesus' arrival to restore, to rectify, to bless and to heal (Acts 1:6; 3:21). All of the "until" texts in Scripture will be fulfilled in this long awaited and longed for coming of our Messiah to usher in his Father's Kingdom. ✧

Comments

"I've finished reading Greg Deuble's book *They Never Told Me This in Church!* I loved Greg's book, just as I loved yours, *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian*, and Kegan Chandler's book *The God of Jesus in Light of Christian Dogma*. I finished *The Amazing Aims and Claims of Jesus*. You are right that churches do not teach about God's Kingdom, so *Aims and Claims* is an answer to my prayers for a book that explains God's plans to finish what He started. I've bought a couple of extra copies to give away when I have the opportunity (I'm keeping one in the car just in case)." — *Illinois*

"Thank you very much for the article 'Our Destiny and the World's Destiny' (August). It was upbuilding for me. Barbara's article on environmental issues was, in my opinion, very well thought of and written. I appreciate all your efforts in the ministry and I'm confident our Heavenly Father will continue to bless you. Another thank you for mentioning Tracy's trip to Europe in a previous article. This enabled some of us to meet in London. I always look forward to the comments from other readers." — *England*

"Yesterday I presented what is meant by 'the faith of Abraham' and also in short what your booklets contain to a couple of people, and they found all of this very interesting. I even loaned two of the smaller booklets since one wanted to read those two fully." — *Finland*

"I really appreciate the August edition of *Focus on the Kingdom*. There is so much there. That our hope is not as a disembodied spirit. Anthony's reference to 2 Timothy 1:9-10 practically brings me to tears. The calling and hope we have in Messiah Jesus, given by God to us 'before time of the ages,' and now manifested in the appearing of Messiah Jesus, who brought life and immortality to light. There seem to be strong similarities in those Pauline verses to John's prologue. Barbara's article on the earth is equally stimulating. Psalm 115:16 is such a good reminder of God's purpose and our destiny. When Barbara mentioned the significance of trees from start to finish in the biblical narrative, I also couldn't help but think of the 'Oak of Moreh' which the inspired writer mentioned when YHVH promised land to Abram and his descendant(s) (Gen. 12:6, also Deut. 11:30)." — *Tennessee*

"*Focus on the Kingdom* is a treasure house of truth. I can't express enough in words my appreciation of this magazine. I read a few issues, and I am in the process of downloading all past issues to feast on them as time permits. Praise His Holy Name for such blessed work." — *Egypt*

²⁰ Ibid., p. 172.

²¹ Ibid., p. 89.

²² Ibid., pp. 166, 167.