

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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29th Theological Conference

April 2-5, 2020

Calvin Center, Hampton, GA

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1. Online at theologicalconference.org
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Airport Transportation

We will provide transportation between Atlanta airport and Calvin Center for \$30 round-trip or \$15 one-way, at the following times:

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Thurs. April 2	2:00 pm	4:00 pm
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Please arrange your arrival time on Thursday early enough to catch one of the two shuttle runs. On Sunday, April 5 we will provide **only 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 pm.

The conference begins with registration at 4 pm on Thursday and ends with lunch on Sunday. Driving directions to Calvin Center are at calvincenter.org. The address is 13550 Woolsey Rd., Hampton, GA 30228.

A Gospel Without a Future

An identifiable malaise has struck the theological enterprise. It has to do with the content of the Gospel itself. From the Jesus Seminar to evangelical tracts, a common failure to define Jesus by his Kingdom message is obvious. Theology at all levels continues to express its unease over the Jewish Jesus who preached a Gospel about a coming Kingdom and judgment on earth.

Members of the much-publicized “Jesus Seminar” have determined by vote that most of what Jesus is reported to have said in the Gospels never actually passed from his lips! Rather, they say, his over-enthusiastic biographers attributed to him their *own* ideas and turned him into the bearer of Good News about the coming Kingdom. The *real* Jesus of history — so these scholars say — should be thought of in the category of wisdom-teacher, a figure much too calm and collected to have said anything alarmist or apocalyptic about a future Kingdom.

Evangelicals pride themselves on their firm grasp of the essentials of the Gospel of Jesus. But an examination of their writings shows that almost without exception, they steer away from the awkward fact that Jesus preached as *Gospel* much more than a message about his death and resurrection. The statistics look like this: There are 25 chapters of Gospel preaching (Matt. 3-15; Mark 1-7; Luke 4-8), during which Jesus and the Apostles take *the Gospel* to the public, in which not a single word is said of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Gospel, on this evidence, stands *at that stage* without the inclusion of any fact about the sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus. The case can be made even more impressively if we add that throughout Jesus’ entire historical ministry the disciples, even when told, did not understand what was entailed in the death and resurrection of Jesus (see Luke 18:31-34). It follows then that the Gospel was from the start a message about the coming Kingdom of God (97% of the synoptic Kingdom texts plainly have to do with the inauguration of the Kingdom at the Parousia, Second Coming) and not about the death and resurrection of Jesus. These latter facts were rightly added, after they happened, to the existing foundation of the Kingdom Gospel. Thus in Acts 8:12 the content of the Gospel put to the convert was “the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.” Converts always needed to understand the Kingdom of God, before they got baptized.

While the Jesus Seminar tames and eliminates the Kingdom-oriented Jesus by the use of the critical axe

and the consequent murder of Jesus' Gospel of the apocalyptic, future Kingdom texts, evangelicals who cannot espouse the "scholars'" technique of denying the sacred documents arrive at a similar wrong result by a different method. They decide to define the Gospel of salvation on a carefully worked selective basis. By setting together certain isolated texts, mostly from the letters of Paul, or from one of Peter's sermons in Acts (2:22-29), they ignore the massive quantity of Gospel-data provided by the three accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus. In this way Paul is made to appear the *real author of the Gospel*, and the significance of Jesus is reduced to his death and resurrection. Jesus came, says a popular evangelist in a widely distributed tract, "to do three days' work — to die, to be buried and to be raised." But this is obviously not true! It is a serious misrepresentation of the Savior's own sense of his purpose. He declared in Luke 4:43 that he had come to "preach the Gospel about the Kingdom of God: that is the reason why I was commissioned." This is Jesus' mission statement and it must be yours too. It was even possible for Jesus to say, before the crucifixion, that he had "completed the work" which the Father had assigned him (John 17:4). This work was the transmission of the Father's Kingdom Gospel-Word to the disciples who were now charged to preserve and pass it on to others (John 17:6, 8, 20).

It ought not to be possible to claim the Great Commission as one's marching orders and then to propagate a Gospel deprived of its most fundamental element — the Kingdom of God. But this appears to be what evangelicals have done. No sooner have they read Matthew 28:19-20, the Great Commission, than they leap to their favorite verses in Romans and Galatians, forgetting that Paul in his letters assumes a lot of Gospel information already held by his audience, for whom he was not presenting the Gospel for the first time.

A much sounder procedure would be to consult Luke's account, in Acts, of what Message Paul brought to the unconverted world — and here the testimony is more than clear. Paul, faithfully carrying out the mandate of the Great Commission to take the very Kingdom Gospel-words of Jesus to all nations, proceeded to enter the synagogue and continually speak out boldly, "reasoning, arguing and persuading about the Kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). Summarizing his life's work for the Ephesian elders, Paul recalled that he had everywhere urged repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus (Acts 20:21). He then supplied a concise definition of what this means. It was a solemn testifying to the "Gospel of the grace of God," in other words "**the proclamation of the Kingdom**" (Acts 20:24-25).

In an effort to impress upon the world forever the nature of Paul's saving Gospel work, Luke leaves us with a final portrait of Paul and his typical preaching of salvation. Paul "solemnly testified about the Kingdom of

God and tried to persuade them about Jesus," using the text of the Hebrew Bible, "from dawn till dusk" (Acts 28:23). The very same Kingdom Gospel of salvation was then taken to the Gentiles where Paul expected better results. We leave him in Rome "heralding the Kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered" (Acts 28:31).

Paul, then, did not just rehearse a few of his own sayings from the epistles in order to convey the saving Message. He deliberately imitated **the Gospel preaching** of the historical Jesus in fulfillment of the Great Commission. In fact, just as Jesus had "welcomed the people and begun speaking about the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:11), Paul "welcomed all who came to him and heralded the Gospel of the Kingdom" (Acts 28:30-31). The same cannot be said of modern evangelists who have dropped the phrase "Gospel of the Kingdom" from their vocabularies. This is an alarming loss of Gospel content.

There is a very great danger that major elements of the Gospel can be eliminated if we rely on condensed statements from Paul's epistles. The method is flawed and the Gospel is distorted. Elements of the Gospel which do not fit into the "received" account of the Gospel ("what we have always preached") are quietly ignored and discarded.

As if to anticipate the catastrophic loss of Jesus' own Gospel, Matthew, when he uses the noun "Gospel" (*evangelion*), always qualifies and defines it as the "Gospel about the Kingdom" (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14). In a verse designed before all others to lay out the quintessential Gospel, Mark records that Jesus urged the public to "Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom" (Mark 1:14-15). This is a programmatic summary of the Christian faith as Jesus taught it. Luke records from the lips of Jesus that the Gospel concerns the Kingdom of God. It is this Message which summarizes the Son's preaching career (Luke 4:43; 16:16; cp. Acts 8:12; 28:23, 31). The "Roman Road," which falls for the trap of thinking that the Gospel message can be gleaned from a few verses in the epistles, should be scrapped and replaced by "the Jesus' method" of evangelism, the announcement of the very Hebrew-based Gospel of the Kingdom coming. This, of course, will involve a much overdue rediscovery of the Hebrew prophets of Israel, for whose hope Paul, the Christian, was on trial (Acts 24:14; 26:6-8).

God's Gospel is the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 1:14-15). Condensed, shorthand references to "the Gospel" need to be related always to the "parent" definition of the Gospel provided by the early chapters of the synoptic Gospels. But that is an area of Scripture which evangelicals and the Jesus Seminar dismiss, the latter by critical excision and the former by an uncanny avoidance of the plain, simple and obvious.

It seems most odd to raise the banner of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 where Jesus says “Preach my Gospel” to everyone, Jew and Gentile, and then to skip the beginning of the teaching of Jesus entirely and take a gospel from individual verses in Paul, neglecting the critically important Gospel definition provided by Paul (in Acts 20:24-25). If the Christian church is serious about following Jesus and teaching everything he commanded, it would be common sense and sound theological method to turn over one page from Matthew 28:19-20 and seek out the very first command of Jesus: “Repent and believe God’s Gospel about the Kingdom” (Mark 1:14-15) — a message which at that stage contained not a word about the death and resurrection of Jesus, added later.

Let Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom be “A.” Let the sacrificial death and resurrection be “B.” What business do evangelicals have substituting a part for the whole, separating “A” from “B” instead of adding “B” to “A” (as in Acts 8:12), and then *starting* with “A”? The only true Gospel for us all is found in the words of Jesus: “**This** [well-known] Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). ✧

Another Jesus? A Different Good News?

by Kenneth LaPrade, Texas

“I’d be glad if you would bear with me in a little bit of foolishness. Yes: bear with me, please! I’m jealous over you, and it’s God’s own jealousy: I arranged to marry you off, like a pure virgin, to the one man I presented you to, namely the Messiah. But the serpent tricked Eve with its cunning, and in the same way I’m afraid that your minds may be corrupted from the single-mindedness and purity which the Messiah’s people should have. For if someone comes and announces a different Jesus from the one we announced to you, or if you receive a different spirit, one you hadn’t received before, or a different gospel [good news], one you hadn’t received before, you put up with that all right” (2 Cor. 11:1-4, Kingdom New Testament).

It is worthwhile to consider how Paul’s solemn observations here compare to the vivid warnings of Galatians 1:6-9: “I’m astonished that you are turning away so quickly from the one who called you by grace, and going after another gospel — not that it is another gospel, it’s just that there are some people stirring up trouble for you and wanting to pervert the gospel of the Messiah. But even if we — or an angel from heaven! — should announce a gospel other than the one we announced to you, let such a person be accursed. I said it before and I now say it again: if anyone offers you a gospel other than the one you received, let that person be accursed.”

It is clear from Acts, within its wider Scriptural contexts (Acts 14:22; 20:24-25; 24:14-16; 28:20, 22, 23, 30, 31; Eph. 5:5-6; Col. 1:12-13; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5, and many other pertinent references), that Paul had fully expounded the authentic, gracious gospel message of the coming Kingdom of God, as previously preached and embodied by the Messiah — Jesus himself. It is also quite evident that Paul had been instrumental in specifically introducing the **true good news in Corinth** (Acts 18:1-11 and 1 Cor. 4:14-15) and southern **Galatia** (in cities like Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe: Acts 13:14; 14:20) **before** writing the warning passages cited above (in 2 Cor. 11 and Gal. 1). So, those particular believers who were given solemn “wake-up calls” in Corinth and Galatia had heard the honest, pure Gospel first; they later needed serious reminders *not* to drift into a subtly twisted version of it, and thus to accrue the negative curses involved in following “another Jesus” and “a different gospel” promoted by bogus instructors.

A reversal of sorts in this situation (concerning the 1st-century scenario of Corinth and Galatia) might need to be urgently understood by many (or maybe even most) 21st-century folks involved in modern Christian efforts. Many of us, nowadays, might have been introduced to a level of “Christian” thinking through “a different” (perverted or incomplete) version of “good news,” which effectively has heralded “another Jesus” in our lives **before** we became exposed to the genuine Gospel of the coming Kingdom of God! If that is the case, far from needing to *get back* to the message we originally heard, we desperately need to *move away* from the “original” false message previously embedded in our psyches (and in our former habits), in order to eagerly embrace the corrective influence of bona fide Kingdom of God priorities!

Naturally, for those of us who have been familiar with a biblical, monotheistic understanding that carefully distinguishes God from His unique Son, the popular package of unscriptural vocabulary which includes “God the Son,” “the God-man,” the Nicene Creed, *homoousios* (of the same essence or substance), the Trinity, pre-human existence, “God became a man” etc., is altogether a blatant red flag that “another Jesus” has long been imported into traditional Christendom. But what about a more subtle version of “another Jesus” that might even deceive biblical unitarians? Could committed, unitary monotheists be badly seduced like the serpent enticed Eve? What is going on when folks lightly and jubilantly adhere to a Jesus who is somehow divorced from his own words?

The “Jesus” separated from his very words might take on varied iconic forms, as expressed with diverse catch phrases, but can “he” really be the Anointed One (the Messiah), the Jesus of Scriptures? Whether one has been indoctrinated subtly or boldly into the ideas that

“the gospels do not contain the gospel,” or “Jesus came to do three days of work,” or “Jesus didn’t really teach anything new,” or even the stark dispensational claims that Jesus’ teachings are “**not addressed** to Christians,” and that “the four gospels properly belong in the Old Testament”; sadly, “another Jesus,” other than the Jesus of Scriptural integrity, **must** be in play!

Powerfully and ironically, in light of the fallacious, clever-sounding phrases and ideas mentioned in the paragraph above, the great emphasis of the biblical Messiah’s very purpose and mission, in prophecy beforehand and in his actual ministry, **cannot** fit with a man totally divorced from his very own words! What did Moses prophesy about him?

“From among yourselves, from among your own brothers, Yahweh your God will raise up a prophet like me; you will **listen to** him. This is exactly what you asked Yahweh your God to do — at Horeb, on the day of the Assembly, when you said, ‘Never let me hear the voice of Yahweh my God or see this great fire again, or I shall die’ [Exod. 20:19]. Then Yahweh said to me, ‘What they have said is well said. From their own brothers I shall raise up a prophet like yourself; **I shall put my words in his mouth and he will tell them everything I command him. Anyone who refuses to listen to my words, spoken by him in my name, will have to render an account to me**” (Deut. 18:14b-19).

Centuries later, Jesus himself reiterated the vital, required nature of heeding his uniquely life-giving words in ways so precisely similar to the prophecy of Moses: “If anyone **hears my words** and doesn’t keep them, I’m not going to judge them. That wasn’t why I came. I came to save the world, not to judge it. Anyone who rejects me and **doesn’t hold on to my words has a judge. The word which I have spoken will judge him on the last day. I haven’t spoken on my own authority. The father who sent me gave me his own command about what I should say and speak. And I know that his command is life of the coming age. What I speak, then, is what the father has told me to speak**” (John 12:47-50).

“It’s the spirit that gives life; the flesh is no help. The **words that I have spoken to you — they are spirit, they are life**” (John 6:63).

“My teaching isn’t my own,” replied Jesus, “It comes from the one who sent me! If anyone wants to do what God wants, they will know whether this teaching is from God, or whether I’m just speaking on my own account. Anyone who speaks on his own behalf is trying to establish his own reputation. But if what he’s interested in is the reputation of the one who sent him, then he is true, and there is no injustice in him” (John 7:16-18).

“But the one who sent me is true, and I tell the world what I heard from him.”...So Jesus said to them, “When you’ve lifted up the son of man, then you will know that

I’m the one, and that I never act on my own initiative; I **say** exactly what my father taught me. And the one who sent me is with me. He hasn’t left me alone because I always do what pleases him” (John 8:26b, 28, 29).

One might want to keep in mind that, according to the prologue of the gospel of John, Jesus was the embodiment of God’s ultimate purpose and plan (*logos* – “word”) which He (God) had in mind from the beginning; hence, Jesus, since his conception and birth, was “the **word**,” the previously foreknown message made flesh (John 1:14). His own “mission statement” in Luke 4:43 links him inseparably to his **words**: “I must tell the good news of God’s Kingdom to other towns,” he said. “That’s what I was sent for.” The first Christians did not fail to make these vital connections. They never separated Jesus (the prophet of Moses’ Deut. 18 prophecy) from his essential **words** commanded by his Father God!

According to Peter’s discourse, “Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me, one from among your own brothers; whatever he says to you, you must pay attention to him. And everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be cut off from the people’...When God raised up his servant [Jesus] he sent him to you [Israelites] first, to bless you by turning each of you away from your wicked deeds.” (Acts 3:22, 26). Our Christian salvation (according to Heb. 2:3) was first declared by the lord Jesus and was later confirmed by those who heard him directly; so, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a rescue?

Thus, to sweep away Jesus’ words as obsolete relics of prior times under a hazy dispensational theology, or to embrace misguided evangelical zeal to fit all of “salvation” truth within a vague, minimalist “nutshell” can very well foster “a different gospel” presenting “another Jesus.” Sure, the real Jesus is the one who died for our sins and was resurrected from among the dead; nevertheless, to divorce those magnificent accomplishments from the required, repentant response of **obeying his words** is to court certain disaster.

The calamity predicted by Jesus in Matthew 7:13-27 is aimed at enthusiastic ones in future judgments who sincerely call him “lord, lord” while giving “spiritual” evidence of their confident claims, but they will be rejected for not accompanying their “hearing of the word” with mandatory obedient actions. If “Christians” nowadays can read this section of Matthew 7 with smug self-confidence, while assuming “done deal” “born again” status, not based on Jesus’ **words** (and with no God-fearing reverence whatsoever toward Jesus’ **real words** of warning), they are cruising for a bruising! Their effervescent “faith” might be in the iconic “Jesus” of a quick, easy, “feel-good” symbolic ticket out of the threat of annihilation, but it is not true faith in the authentic Jesus who **must not be separated from his words!** “Another Jesus,” a false one of the easy-going

“broad way” is obviously being promoted and sought by the world’s tricky agenda.

I write these few observations as one who underwent decades of gradual, but severe wrestling matches — to finally break free from the dispensational tentacles of OSAS (once saved, always saved) presumptuousness. In that setting the idea of obeying Jesus’ words was boldly disregarded, as having **nothing** to do with achieving salvation! I do not hate or bash anyone for staying deceived in such an unscriptural, formulaic paradigm (often mislabeled in modern times as “grace” pitted in contrast with “works salvation”), but I lovingly offer these “wake-up call” considerations.

Paul did not fail to “hold firmly to the **words of our lord King Jesus**” which he equated with “the teaching which goes with piety” (1 Tim. 6:3). He never stated or implied that Jesus’ words were to be downplayed, as if they were later replaced by his (Paul’s) words.

Why not do the following, in agreement with Jesus’ words and all the consistent new covenant (NT) writings, starting with the four gospels? Swallow your pride (like I did), and absolutely determine to stop trusting formulaic ideas rooted in divorcing Jesus from his vital words!

Repent, but not as a lightweight activity of mental assent; decide to have a genuinely decisive change of thinking and life direction. Choose assertively not to go with the flow of previous sinful habits — including the old presumptuous thoughts of misguided religion! Make a devoted pledge of loyalty, from and for a good conscience (to accompany such deep repentance “from the heart”) by getting baptized in water (Matt. 28:19; 1 Pet. 3:20-22; Acts; and Paul’s letters).

Stay the course of making proactive choices according to the parable of the sower and the parable of the vine and the branches, with great confidence that obedient actions will produce godly fruit. Keep Jesus’ direct teachings, his very own words, as the foundational understanding of all new covenant standards. Read and reread his words in context, and then practice them! Continually ask God and Jesus to help you stay on track, as you stay focused on the goal of the arrival of the Kingdom of God. If you make mistakes and get sidetracked by inadvertent sins, confess your sins, while being humbly confident in God’s exceedingly fair, trustworthy love, as He constantly forgives you all sins and cleans you deeply from all wrongdoing (1 John 1:5-2:2). Prayerfully trust God to help you grow day by day (2 Pet. 1:3-11), and never give up (Col. 1:23.) Resolve to “hang in there” no matter what current obstacles crop up. Help others to be “doers of the word” in the same way you go in by the narrow gate — and avoid the distortions of false prophets! Such continual efforts to live God’s authentic love, according to Jesus’ indispensable words, will not prove to be in vain! ✧

Jesus’ Mission Statement (Lk. 4:43)

I suggest that the **Kingdom of God** in the Gospel teaching of Jesus is firstly the vision of an ideal “Jewish” state, to be restored (Acts 1:6; Luke 24:21; Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:29: “I covenant to give you a Kingdom as my Father covenanted to give it to me”). Calvin (beware!) said that there are as many errors in that question in Acts 1:6 (“Is this the time for you to restore the Kingdom to Israel?”) as there are words! He did not understand the Gospel of the Kingdom! He also murdered Servetus, the unitarian.

Here is a fine definition of the Kingdom: 2 Chronicles 13:8: “The Kingdom of the Lord in the **hands** [not the hearts!] of the sons of David.” This is a brilliant verse, and so is its counterpart in Revelation 11:15: “The kingdoms [empires] of this world have [at the future seventh trumpet] become the Kingdom [empire] of our Lord God and His Messiah.” The Devil does his best to rid the world and the church of that verse, which means his *future* demise and arrest at the beginning of the millennium. The Devil opposes the destiny of the faithful, to rule with Messiah (Rev. 20:6).

The parable of the sower, Jesus said, is the one parable which underlies all the parables (Mark 4:13). Mark 4:11-12 shows that one cannot repent and be forgiven until one grasps the revelation (mystery) of the Kingdom. That is why Jesus begins his **Gospel** teaching (Mark 1:1) with: “The Kingdom of God is coming. Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom” (Mark 1:14-15). People think of various things to repent of, but Jesus says, “**Stop not** believing in the Kingdom” — your destiny and the destiny of the world.

Adam failed to rule for God and Jesus reversed that. Man is supposed to be God’s landlord. Jesus modeled it. Hence his amazing **mission statement** in Luke 4:43, almost unheard of in sermons!

Luke 8:11-12 is another power-packed verse! “When anyone is exposed to the secret of the Gospel of the Kingdom [the word about the Kingdom, Matt. 13:19], the Devil is ready to snatch away that word of the Kingdom, so that a person cannot believe it and be **saved**.” The Devil hates the idea that a human person would embark on the road to immortality (2 Tim 1:10). The Gospel of the Kingdom reveals the secret of living forever and ever! Billy Graham alas reduced and shrunk the Gospel to what he called the “three days’ work” which Jesus came to do — to die, be buried and rise again! That is a major tragedy for the church. The same attempt of Satan is found in Revelation 12:4. The Devil wanted to destroy Jesus.

Luke 17:21 was mistranslated in the KJV to put the Kingdom just in the heart: “within you.” Another horrible mistranslation is 2 Timothy 2:15 in the KJV: “rightly dividing the word of truth.” This allowed people to separate Jesus from Paul and lose Jesus in the process! ✧

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, as a doctrine, formed no part of the original message**. St. Paul knew it not, and would have been unable to understand the meaning of the terms used in the theological formula on which the Church ultimately agreed."¹

"The Mystery of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity is 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 that of saying that one thing is two things."²

"**No responsible New Testament 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 in the New Testament.** 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."³

"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**."⁴

"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 Spirit are of **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)...The two facts, 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...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**."⁵

"But for Israel there was only one God, and sole devotion to this one God was a paramount essential. To

¹ Dr. W.R. Matthews, *God in Christian Experience*, p. 180.

² *Select Treatises of S. Athanasius with Notes* by J.H. Newman, p. 515.

³ Dr. A.T. Hanson, Professor of Theology, University of Hull, *The Image of the Invisible God*, 1982, p. 87.

⁴ Dr. John Hey, *Lectures in Divinity, Delivered in the University of Cambridge*, Vol. 2, p. 253.

⁵ "God," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2, p. 84.

follow or serve 'other gods' was a **cardinal offense**, emphasized particularly in Deuteronomy and in Isaiah 40-55...The NT follows this tradition in **taking for granted** the established monotheism of Judaism...The first of all the 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. Nevertheless the close association of Jesus with God seems to lead towards the seeing of monotheism in a different way [against John 17:3 and Mark 12:29!]....The implications of this are not yet worked out within the NT."⁶

"The explicit doctrine [of the Trinity] was thus formulated in the **post-biblical period**, although the early stages of the development can be seen in the NT. Attempts to trace the origins still earlier (to the OT literature) cannot be supported by historical-critical scholarship, and these attempts must be understood as retrospective interpretations [reading the Trinity back into the OT]...The formal doctrine of the Trinity as it was defined by the great church councils of the fourth and fifth centuries **is not to be found in the NT**."⁷

"Because the Trinity is such an important part of later Christian doctrine, it is striking that the term does not appear in the New Testament. 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**."⁸

"The word Trinity is not found in the Bible...It did not find a place formally in the theology of the church till the 4th century."⁹

"In Scripture there is as 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 AD 180...Afterwards it appears in its Latin form of *trinitas* in Tertullian."¹⁰

"Hasty conclusions cannot be drawn from usage, for [Tertullian] does not apply the words [which were *later* applied to Trinitarianism] to Trinitarian theology."¹¹

"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, Jehovah our God is the one Jehovah; and

⁶ *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, 1996, p. 865, 701.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1179.

⁸ "Trinity," *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 1993, p. 782.

⁹ "Trinity," *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1980, Part 3, p. 1597.

¹⁰ "The Blessed Trinity," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1912, Vol. 15, p. 47.

¹¹ Michael O'Carroll, *Trinitas: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Holy Trinity*, 1987, p. 208.

thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy 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 12:29-30; Luke 10:27). That He 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 (see 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 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."¹²

Commentators seem unable and unwilling to believe that Jesus agreed with his fellow Jews about how to define the one single, non-Trinitarian God. Referring to Mark 12:28-34, Craig Evans in the *Word Biblical Commentary* on Mark says, "It is difficult to understand how and why Jesus' affirmation of the Shema ["Hear, O Israel!], *which is neither remarkable nor specifically Christian*, would have been created by an early Christian prophet...Exalting the Jewish Law is hardly what one would expect an early Christian to do (especially if Jesus had not)" (p. 261).

Think about this! Commentators say that Jesus' own definition of who God is, is "not Christian." So then, they imply, the teaching of Jesus is not the basis for our belief in Jesus! This is the ultimate error warned against so strongly in 1 Timothy 6:3 and 2 John 7-9. I hope that our readers understand that the words and teachings of Jesus must mean everything to us! Truth saves. Error does not.

Jesus said constantly that accepting him as Savior is achieved by *accepting his words/teachings* (John 12:47-50). ✧

Comments

• "I've just been reading the January newsletter and it occurred to me the connection between the two articles — the one by Anthony about the Wider Hope and the one by Barbara on abortion. The wider hope for the aborted babies is very comforting to think about. How many babies were *alive* in the womb of their mother and did not get a fair chance to hear the gospel message? God is good and desires that *all* hear the message of the future Kingdom even when those chances are selfishly taken from them." — *email*

• "I want to thank you for your wonderful books that you have sent me. You have helped me tremendously! I share them with my brothers in Christ here at the prison. I feel the same as you as far as all those creeds and strange doctrines. I don't need any creed. I have my Bible. My Bible is God's testimony. I don't need anything added, thanks. We have all seen what happens when we add to what God says. You have changed the way I read my Bible for the better. Mark 12:29 is my creed, and Acts 1:6 concerning the coming Kingdom. I cherish these things in my heart as I fellowship with my brothers in Christ here at the prison. I share what I've learned when they are receptive." — *North Carolina*

• "I support your work to reach people as you have been doing so many years with *Focus on the Kingdom* and your many books. Often I read the *Focus* the day it arrives. I enjoy Barbara's articles also." — *Nebraska*

• "Today I received the January *Focus on the Kingdom*. Please keep them coming. They are valuable weapons of preaching the true Gospel of Christ — correcting the errors of Churchianity and churches of today. I am most grateful to you for all these very edifying writings and your own helpful writings and those of Barbara and other contributors that I have read over the years." — *Nigeria*

• "When I was a Trinitarian, two verses that always caused me concern were in Philippians 2 as to how God could exalt Yeshua if he was actually God; and in John 20 where he tells Mary that he has not yet ascended to his God and Father. If he is God in the flesh already, then how is that possible? Sadly, in hindsight now, I never once even entertained the idea that Yeshua was not God in the flesh, not once. I had never heard of the word 'unitarian' before reading Greg Deuble's book. When Greg's book showed up in my sidebar on YouTube, I immediately ordered it and am now in my 24th reading of this book. I am grateful that God honoured my request for the truth because I have found peace with God and the peace of God that the truth has afforded me. The difficult part is holding onto the joy of the truth in the face of the opposition it brings, especially with those who once were my 'spiritual family.' Many rejected what I had come to understand from the Hebrew perspective when I took these findings to them." — *email*

¹² "Trinity," *Hastings Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, Vol. 2, p. 761.