

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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Death and Immortality

by Nigel Page-Jones, England

The church had always taught me that at death Christians go to heaven and non-Christians go to hell. I had no reason to question this until the latest article from a blog which I was following arrived in my mailbox. I scanned the first few lines. My finger hovered over the delete button as it often does especially when heresy is concerned. I had heard about these types before. They could not deal with what the Bible said about eternal torment and wanted to make God soft on sin. However, the word in the email which caught my attention was “reformers.” Apparently, some reformers did not believe the traditional view of life after death, and as I had some respect for the reformers my finger did not land on the button. I read the article further, and understood that two different but related views were being proposed. First, we die completely until the resurrection. Secondly, hell was not eternal torment. I was open minded to the first view but not so much to the second. However, the mention of reformers intrigued me.

It was with some hesitancy that I started researching this subject. It felt wrong to question the church’s teaching; in fact to be honest it felt very heretical. I remembered the famous Anglican theologian John Stott who had announced towards the end of his life that he no longer believed in eternal torment. This caused an uproar in some church circles at the time. I discussed this with a friend soon afterwards. We both wondered how a gifted theologian could have allowed himself to be so deceived after such a distinguished career. Of course, we both knew better, or so we thought. Yet the truth was that personally I had never even looked into the issue from a biblical perspective and had instead only relied on teaching from the pulpit.

During my initial research various accounts came to mind of people going to heaven and even to hell which were quite common in the Charismatic Church. Some were even first-hand accounts and one particular testimony from the 1990s had made a significant impact on my faith, seemingly anyway. I had felt a connection with many of these people who talked about their experiences, especially as their lives seemed to have genuinely changed as a result. I will not speculate about such testimonies any further, but suffice it to say that after studying this topic for only a brief period of time I became completely convinced that the only man who has ever gone to heaven is Jesus. And hell does not exist in the way we have been taught.

As I read about this topic in the Bible it was clear that at death we return to the dust of the ground. It is a consistent message throughout the Old Testament, and the Hebrew mindset never contemplated anything different. This picture of death is continued in the New Testament. Death is described several times as sleeping in Christ until the resurrection when believers are given immortality, something which does not belong to any of us by nature. It is only Greek influence which has successfully superimposed a secondary interpretation of the ideas of immortality and eternal torment on to a minority of passages from the New Testament. I hope to deal with some of these constructively in this article.

First though, and as a word of warning, many are put off this topic when they soon discover that so-called “cults” such as Seventh Day Adventists hold to this same view of death. Clearly, it does not look good for one’s credibility to be associated with such organisations, but I suggest that we need to abandon any such concerns and look only to the Bible as the source of truth concerning this important topic. Personally, I would not describe the Seventh Day Adventists as a cult although I would disagree with some aspects of their doctrine. I would also question the appropriateness of the word “cult” when even in the traditional church there are countless various doctrines amongst its many denominations.

Asleep in Christ

The topic of what happens at death is a strange one in the church. Funeral services highlight this dilemma particularly well when, in an attempt to bring comfort to the relatives, ministers often talk about the deceased “passing away” or being “in a better place.” While this may bring some consolation, it is ultimately misleading because the Bible never talks about death in this way.

The Old Testament is clear that when we die we return to the dust of the earth (Gen. 3:19). We die completely. Nothing could be simpler. The Hebrew word for soul (*nephesh*) means the complete person and not some part which is separated at death. However, due to the influence of Plato and other Greek philosophers, we have been taught that our souls are immortal and that they somehow drift off into all of eternity, whether that be in heaven or in hell.

This false doctrine is a Trojan horse which entered the early church in order to bring Christianity in line with every other religion. It has continued to bear bad fruit ever since. Without this false doctrine in place, the Catholic Church would not have been able to mislead the

public on such a grand scale with its idolatrous worship of Mary, its prayers to the saints and the threat of purgatory or even hell. Neither would the new age movement have been successful in enticing so many with its promises of reincarnation and finding the immortal “god within.” Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam make similar promises. Indeed, at the heart of every false religion is the mistaken claim that our souls live on after death. Unfortunately, the Christian church embraced the same claim from the fourth century AD onwards due to the introduction of unbiblical church creeds and pressure from authorities. This one topic alone should differentiate Christianity from every other religion, but it does not.

Death is final. If God had not resurrected Jesus from the grave then he would still be dead today, completely dead, non-existent. Likewise, when we die we also cease to exist. We cannot short-circuit the process of death somehow by going to heaven. It is only God who can bring us back to life and so once dead we are wholly dependent on the resurrection. The Bible describes death as being “asleep in Christ” in verses such as 1 Corinthians 15:18: “Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.” For the Christian, sleep is an apt description of death, because despite being dead in every sense of the word we can have full confidence that we will be brought back to life at the resurrection, just as we have the certainty of waking up from a natural sleep. Common terms used to denote this view are the “sleep of the dead,” “soul sleep” or “conditional immortality.” By nature, we are mortal. We become immortal only on the condition that God awards immortality as a gift by His good pleasure.

During the reformation men such as Luther and others initially leaned towards this view of the sleep of the dead. However, Calvin strongly disagreed and instead taught the doctrine of the intermediate state, which became more generally accepted and is still dominant in the traditional church today. This is the idea that although the body dies, the soul goes to heaven in a disembodied state. It neatly accommodates the proposal of being dead in the dust of the earth but being alive in heaven at the same time. It is not logical in any sense, but let us consider some biblical passages used in its defense.

The Souls Under the Altar

The souls under the altar as seen by John in Revelation 6:9 are often quoted in support of the intermediate state, the implication being that here is a scene prior to the resurrection where souls already exist in heaven. But it is simply a picture of God declaring that He will not forget those who have been martyred for His name’s sake, similar to the picture in Genesis 4:10 where Abel’s blood “cries out” for justice. Also in Hebrews 12:24 Jesus’ blood “speaks” better than Abel’s blood. Obviously in neither of these pictures was blood literally

crying out or speaking, and so in this scene from Revelation we should not conclude that these are “immortal souls.” Besides, souls without a body would not be visible to John, presumably. Further on in Revelation 6:11 John is told that these souls (i.e. persons) must sleep a little longer. We know that death is often referred to as sleep, so John is being told here that these martyrs will remain dead for now, despite God’s clear intention to avenge their murderers. John sees a similar picture of the martyrs in Revelation 20:4, but this time, when the millennium is about to begin, John sees the souls (persons) come to life. This is significant. A soul cannot come to life if it is already alive.

Absent from the Body

Another popular passage used as evidence for the immediate state is found in 2 Corinthians 5. Verse 8 is often misquoted as “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord,” but this is an incorrect reading. Instead, the verse says that Paul “would prefer to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord,” which introduces a very different sense. Paul wishes to be absent from the body. Paul also wishes to be at home with the Lord. He does not deny a period of death in between. The clear scriptural witness is that the dead sleep and know nothing until the resurrection. Verses such as 1 Corinthians 15:53 testify to this. We read that “this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality,” reminding us that it is only when we receive spiritual bodies that we inherit life and immortality.

In this passage from 2 Corinthians 5 Paul plainly describes three states. The first state is our earthly tent (or earthly body) as in verse 1. The second state is our unclothed state (or death state) as in verse 3 and 4a. The third state is our clothed state (or resurrection state) as in verse 4b. Paul does not suggest that we receive a heavenly body directly after death. On the contrary, he alludes to the reality of death, or being unclothed, in verse 4a as something that none of us want but is inevitable for most. His point is that by dying to this world he may be unclothed (or dead) and therefore one step closer to the certain resurrection promised by God.

We know from Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10 that the dead know nothing. Therefore, although we do not wish to be dead, it is at least comforting to rest in the assurance that we will know nothing of it until our next conscious thought at the resurrection.

The Thief on the Cross

Let us consider the thief (or criminal) on the cross in Luke 23:32-43 with parallel accounts in other gospels. The thief asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his Kingdom. The traditional reading is that Jesus assures him that they will both be in paradise that same day.

We should first stop and reflect on the nature and timing of Jesus' Kingdom. Jesus never understood paradise to be a realm of the dead but as a reference to the new world, his future Kingdom, which is to be established on earth at the end of this age with Jesus as King. We read in the gospels that Jesus preached about the future Kingdom on earth. He constantly stated the phrase quoted in Mark 1:15: "The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel." The Gospel (good news) of Jesus is that a new Kingdom is coming. This new Kingdom is still not here today but will come one day in the future. The Old Testament alludes to this future, earthy Kingdom repeatedly as a place where all things will be renewed as described so strikingly in books such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, the Psalms and elsewhere. Revelation 11:15 speaks of the time when this Kingdom will finally be awarded to the Lord Jesus and the saints: "The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and he will reign forever and ever" (see also Dan. 7:27).

For the meantime the world is still in the hands of Satan. The key point here is that Jesus did not come into his Kingdom on the day that he died on the cross. First, he died completely until he was brought back to life three days later at his resurrection. Secondly, Jesus' inheritance of the earthly Kingdom is a future event. Therefore, the traditional interpretation of this passage makes no sense. Jesus knew that he was going to be in a state of death on that day so he could not possibly make a promise to the thief that they would both be in paradise on that same day. Something is amiss. The culprit is the placement of a comma which did not exist in the original Greek. The verse can perfectly be equally read as "I tell you today [a common idiom of the time], you will be with me in paradise" which, given what we know about the finality of death and the timing of Jesus' future Kingdom, is undoubtedly the intended meaning behind this often-misunderstood verse. See also Acts 20:26: "I tell you today..."

Enoch

Genesis 5:24 may suggest that Enoch was taken to heaven without dying when it states that "God took him." The verse is later referenced in Hebrews 11:5 which speaks of Enoch being taken up so he would not see death. It is possible that Enoch was simply taken away to a safe location out of harm, but the language is not clear. However, we know for sure that Enoch died the usual death because Hebrews 11:13 reminds us that all the people listed, including Enoch, "died in faith." Enoch died like everyone else.

Elijah

Many believe that Elijah was taken up to heaven in 2 Kings 2:11. The Hebrew word for heaven here (*shamayim*) can just as well be translated as "sky,"

suggesting that Elijah may have been simply moved to a different location through the sky just as Philip was in Acts 8:39. Following Elijah's ascension Elisha speaks to King Jehoshaphat in 2 Kings 3:13 so we know that King Jehoshaphat was alive after Elijah's ascension into the sky. Yet 2 Chronicles 21:12 states that Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram received a letter from the prophet Elijah. This is conclusive evidence that Elijah lived beyond his ascension. He was not taken to heaven as is commonly believed. This is confirmed in John 3:13: "No one has ascended into heaven."

The Witch of Endor

The story of the witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28 describes Saul's attempt to communicate with the dead through a medium (v. 7). Few Christians today believe a medium is able to summon the dead, and so we should not conclude that Saul's medium was capable of anything different. This was a case of demonic impersonation. Saul consulted a demon through the medium, who confirmed this by saying that she saw a divine (spiritual) being coming out of the earth in verse 13. The dead are dead and know nothing. Saul was deceived as many are similarly deceived by mediums still today.

The Transfiguration

In Matthew 17 we read of Jesus' transfiguration, a scene of Jesus in his resurrected, spiritual body talking with Moses and Elijah. This is clearly a **vision** (Greek *oroma*, Matt. 17:9) of a future event because Jesus did not receive his spiritual body until after his resurrection. Moses and Elijah will remain dead until they receive their spiritual bodies when Jesus returns. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18). Nobody was resurrected to immortality before him, and nobody has been since. God's intention in this vision was to encourage and strengthen Jesus by giving him a glimpse of his future inheritance as he approached the most atrocious stage of his earthly mission. Moses and Elijah, representatives of the law and the prophets, had undergone some of the hardships which Jesus was soon to undergo. Jesus was reminded of what he had read about these two great men in the Scriptures. The transfiguration was a vision of Jesus' future Kingdom, a prophecy of his exalted state as clarified in 2 Peter 1:18-19: "We ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word made more sure."

The Old Testament contains various references to the dead returning to the dust of the earth after death. In 1 Kings 2:10, we read that David went to sleep with his ancestors. Psalm 13:3 talks about sleeping the sleep of death, and Job 14:12 states that a dead person does not rise from the sleep of death prior to the resurrection. There are many other such passages. The concept of

going to heaven at death was entirely foreign to the Hebrews, who firmly believed that they were destined to return to the dust of the earth just as God said in Genesis 3:19. In Daniel 12:2 we read that one day the dead will be resurrected to everlasting life: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt."

This theme of the dead sleeping until the resurrection is continued throughout the New Testament as we read in verses such as 1 Thessalonians 4:16: "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ will rise first." And Revelation 20:4: "I saw the souls of those who [those persons who] had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they **came to life** and began to reign with Christ for a thousand years."

Either the dead are dead or they are not dead. They cannot be both dead and alive in heaven. The truth is plain and simple once we step back from tradition and allow the Scriptures to speak for themselves. God wants us to know what happens when we die. It should not be clouded in mystery. Our only hope is in the resurrection which will take place when Jesus returns. Claiming that we are somehow alive in heaven before the resurrection only devalues the incredible significance of the resurrection as our only great hope. If, however, we really do die at death then the resurrection is truly our one and only hope, which explains its constant emphasis and anticipation throughout the New Testament. Even for Jesus, there was no shortcut to life after death. Jesus' only hope of life after death was resurrection, and so it is for us. ✧

Mark 7:19: "The effect of this saying is to render all foods clean."

"Although it may not seem so now, this passage, when it was first spoken, was well-nigh the most revolutionary passage in the NT...No wonder the disciples were amazed. In effect, Jesus was saying that *things* cannot be either unclean or clean in any real religious sense of the term. Only *persons* can be really defiled; and what defiles people are their own actions, which are the product of their own hearts. This was new doctrine and shatteringly new doctrine. Jews had, and still have, a whole system of *things* which are clean and unclean. With one sweeping pronouncement, Jesus declared the whole thing irrelevant and that uncleanness has nothing to do with what people take into their bodies but everything to do with what comes out of their hearts."

— William Barclay, *Mark*, p. 199-200

The Crucifixion

by Jesse Acuff, Georgia

There are dozens of movies about the crucifixion of Jesus that have been, at best, halfhearted attempts at the truth. However, they are meaningless in terms of the real mental and physical suffering endured by our Savior, because the producers and directors have not thoroughly researched the biblical account. Consequently, they present a false picture of Christ and his most worthy sacrifice for the remission of our sins. Seemingly, no one has believed the true report. Isaiah prophesied of his true condition prior to the crucifixion in chapter 53:

"Who has believed our report?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

For he grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground;

he has no stately form or splendor
that we would look at him,

nor an appearance that we should desire him.

He is despised and forsaken by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with sickness;

and we hid, as it were, our faces from him;
he was despised and we did not esteem him.

Surely he has borne our sicknesses
and carried our pains;

Yet we assumed that he had been afflicted,
crushed by God, and humiliated.

But he was pierced through for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;

the punishment for our peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

All of us like sheep have gone astray;
each of us has turned to his own way;

and the Lord has laid on him the wrongdoing of us all.
He was oppressed and he was afflicted,

yet he did not open his mouth;

he was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,

so he did not open his mouth.

He was taken from confinement and judgment...

he was cut off from the land of the living;

for the transgressions of my people he was stricken.

And they made his grave with the wicked,
but with the rich at his death,

because he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him;

He has put him to grief...

he poured out his life unto death."

In virtually every instance where the face and body of Jesus is shown in a movie, the flesh is not severely torn, and his facial features are completely recognizable.

But this is not what the Bible pictures. Just as Isaiah says, he was crushed, bruised, lacerated and murderously beaten to within an inch of his life before he was ever lifted up between heaven and earth on that cursed tree! We read in Isaiah 52:14, "His appearance was marred beyond that of a man, and his form beyond that of the sons of men." Jesus Christ was beaten to a bloody, pulpy mass of livid, swollen and dying flesh! Matthew 26:67 says that "they spat in his face and beat him with their fists; and others struck him with the palms of their hands [margin: *or rods*]." But it did not end there! In Matthew 27:30 and Mark 15:19 is the word *tupto*. This word denotes repeated, strong, bone-shattering blows. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines a cudgel as "a short, heavy club."

When the Roman soldiers beat Jesus, they did it with short heavy clubs, laying on blow after blow, after blow! But before they did that, they flogged him. Luke 22:63 says they "mocked him and beat him." The word "beat" is *dero* and means "properly, to flay, i.e., by implication, to scourge." The instrument used to scourge Jesus was a cat-o'-nine-tails. The cat-o'-nine-tails, scourge, or flagellum, according to Peloubet, was "made of cords or thongs of leather fastened to a handle. Usually there were three of these thongs in each scourge, and they were often reinforced with bits of metal, which tore the skin and flesh. The principal places where the word is used is 1 Kings 12:11, 14; 2 Chronicles 10:11, 14...and in the New Testament in the accounts of the scourging of Christ" (*Peloubet's Bible Dictionary*, p. 596).

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states that the scourge was "a Roman implement for severe bodily punishment. It consisted of a handle to which several cords or leather thongs were attached, which were weighted with jagged pieces of bone or metal, to make the blow more painful and effective. The victim was tied to a post (Acts 22:25) and the blows were applied to the back and loins, sometimes even, in the wanton cruelty of the executioner, to the face and the bowels...So hideous was the punishment that the victim usually fainted and, not rarely, died under it...It usually preceded capital punishment" (Vol. IV, p. 2704).

The popular crucifix that hangs in many Catholic homes displays an intact body with only a small trickle of blood oozing from the area of the left, lower breast where the Roman soldier thrust the spear into Jesus' side. What a farce! This does not even begin to picture what he looked like. Jesus Christ was hurtled headlong into a horribly repugnant, death-dealing beating! He was maligned, illegally incarcerated, spat upon, mocked, beaten with clubs, scourged, and hanged out to dry, as it were, like a piece of raw meat to be cured in the hot sun. After the scourging was administered, his body was so badly mutilated that his ribs were plainly visible through the bloody, horribly flayed flesh that had been literally torn from his chest and back. His facial features were

completely altered by stinging, bone crushing blows from clubs wielded unmercifully by the Roman soldiers, until they were no longer recognizable. His nose was probably broken and mutilated, his lips swollen and puffy, and his eyes were swollen shut and livid as a result of repeated blows from the fists of his tormentors. As he struggled blindly toward Golgotha bearing the heavy beam upon which he was crucified, he was, for all practical purposes, a dumb, senseless beast being led to the slaughter.

How must he have felt? How would you feel having suffered the way he did, knowing that you would soon hang on a wretched tree to be harangued by the religious leaders of the day, and suffer the ignominy of dying like a common criminal, having committed no crime?

The beating he had just taken, though horrible and agonizing, was just a prelude to the real suffering he would face on Golgotha during the next three hours. He would undergo the crucifixion that the Jews had cried so loudly for in the early morning hours. The suffering and death of your Savior and mine by crucifixion was excruciatingly intense, especially in the heat of the day. Severe local inflammation, combined with bleeding of the jagged wounds, caused by the scourging, produced traumatic fever, which was aggravated by the exposure to the heat of the sun, the strained position of his body, and an insufferable thirst. His wounds swelled around the holes made by the rough nails that were driven mercilessly into his wrists and feet, and the torn and lacerated tendons and nerves only added to the excruciating agony. A terrific, throbbing headache likely ensued. His mind was confused and filled with anxiety and dread. He literally died a thousand deaths.

Usually the victim of a crucifixion contracted tetanus and the rigors of the attending convulsions would tear at the wounds adding to the burden of the pain, till at last the bodily forces were exhausted and the victim succumbed to unconsciousness and death. The length of this agony was wholly determined by the constitution of the victim, but death rarely came before thirty-six hours had elapsed. Death was sometimes hastened by breaking the victim's legs and by a hard blow, delivered under the armpit, before crucifixion.

Mercifully, God spared Jesus the added suffering of the convulsions, the breaking of the legs, and the agony that thirty-six hours on the stake would have brought. He saw to it that Jesus died quickly because He could not stand to see His Son suffer more than needed to pay for our sins. How must God the Father have felt when Jesus cried out in deep agony and despair with his last mortal breath, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Each time you take the Lord's Supper, I want you to think deeply about what you have just read. Ask yourself, "Could I have done the same thing?" Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29:

“Therefore whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord **in an unworthy manner** [irreverently] will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a person examine himself, and in this way let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For the one who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not properly recognize the Lord’s body.”

Each time you take the Lord’s Supper, ask yourself, “Do I place faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the suffering he underwent for the forgiveness of my sins?” If you exercise this kind of faith, take your problems, sins, and sicknesses and cast them before Christ and God and, believing, thank them for forgiveness. And last but not least, ask yourself how you can keep from taking the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner. Here is a short list of ways to avoid the irreverent eating of the bread and drinking of the cup.

1. Do not take the Lord’s Supper in envying and strife (1 Cor. 11:18).
2. Do not take the Lord’s Supper to commemorate it as a mere historical fact, as the Jews celebrated the Lord’s Supper (v. 19).
3. Do not take the Lord’s Supper with excess and drunkenness (v. 21-22).
4. Do not take the Lord’s Supper in irreverence to God and His church (v. 22).
5. Do not take the Lord’s Supper in disrespect to the poor and the needy (v. 22).
6. Do not take the Lord’s Supper in unbelief, not realizing its true significance, and not discerning the Lord’s body and blood to receive the benefits by faith (v. 27-30).
7. Do not take the Lord’s Supper as an unsaved person with sin in your life, and without making proper confession and acknowledgment of personal needs (v. 27-30).
8. Do not take the Lord’s Supper without judging yourself so as to escape chastening from God and His church (v. 31-32).

After you have examined yourself as to whether you are in the faith, think again about what your Savior did for you, and think about this:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, we must get rid of every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and run with endurance the race that is set before us, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Think of him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you do not become weary and discouraged in your

souls. You have not yet resisted to the point of bloodshed in your struggle against sin” (Heb. 12:1-4). ✧

James Yates, *A Vindication of Unitarianism*, 1850

“The Unity of God, as one individual person, is denoted throughout the Bible by the almost constant use of *singular pronouns*, whenever any thought, action, attribute, or condition is ascribed to the Supreme Being. In all languages the personal pronouns of the singular number are understood to apply only to one person. Thus, if I were writing a letter, by employing the pronouns of the *first* person and singular number, *I, Me, My*, I should confine my assertions to myself as one individual person....By introducing the pronouns of the third person and singular number, *He, Him, His*, I should denote that it was one person only I was speaking of. If, on the contrary, I were writing a letter in conjunction with any other intelligent being, we should use the pronouns *We, Us, Our*...and if I were writing anything of more than one person, I should say *They, Them, Their*.

“Such being the universal application of pronouns, it is evident, not only to those who have studied Greek and Hebrew, but to all who know the use and meaning of human speech, that throughout the whole Bible God is almost uniformly mentioned as one person, this being implied in the almost constant use of singular pronouns...

“In stating the scriptural evidence for the unity of God, I observed that that doctrine is implied in every passage in which the personal pronouns of the singular number are used to denote the Supreme Deity. In opposition however to the thousands and tens of thousands of passages which imply, by the use of *singular* pronouns, that God is one person, the Trinitarians have collected together as many as *three*, which by the use of *plural* pronouns are supposed to indicate a plurality of persons in the Godhead...

“By bringing forward these passages [my opponent] acknowledges the validity of the opposite argument of the Unitarians...**He acknowledges that the number of persons in the Godhead is indicated by the personal pronouns employed in speaking of the Godhead.** His argument proceeds on the supposition that the use of a *plural* pronoun in speaking of God intimates that **there is in God a plurality of persons**; of course he will admit that **the use of a singular pronoun in speaking of God denotes that God is one person only**. As a Unitarian, there is nothing which I more desire than the concession that **the number of persons in the Godhead may be inferred from the use of pronouns in the Sacred Scriptures**” (p. 58-59, 136).

Jesus Was High Priest from the Womb!

by Carlos Xavier, Georgia

Under the Old Covenant there were many purification laws prohibiting the touching of certain things considered unclean, e.g., the sick, women, the dead (Num. 5; 9.14; Lev. 15.19-24). But in the New Covenant, which Jesus was operating under in the Gospels, he could touch and heal the sick (including women) and even raise the dead (Mar. 5.39-41; 14:3; Luke 8.43-48).

This last example leads into one of the strongest arguments for showing how the Law of Moses was rendered ineffective *not only* at the cross, the death of Jesus, but *by the teachings and practice of Jesus before the cross*.

Hebrews 7:12 says “when the priesthood is **changed**, the Law must by **necessity** also be **changed** as well.” According to verse 15 this happened when Jesus made his public appearance: “another priest like Melchizedek appears” (see also v. 11).

The Hebrews writer goes on to say that “Christ **appeared** as the high priest” (Heb. 9:11: *paraginomai*, “to arrive or to come on the scene,” *Wuest’s Word Studies, Vine’s NT Word Pictures*).

This is yet another fulfillment of OT prophecies like the all-important Psalm 110 where the LXX renders verse 3 as the *begetting* (i.e. *procreation*) of the human Son of God from the womb. Hence, God makes the following promise about His uniquely procreated human Son: “You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek” (cp. Heb 7:17).

The point is that just as Jesus was already the human Messiah, Son of God, *from the womb* (Luke 1:30-35), he was also *High Priest from the womb*.

As a result, the covenant Jesus *made* before the cross (Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20) was eventually *ratified* by his death on the cross. “For where there is a covenant, there must of necessity be the death of **the one who made it**” (Heb. 9:16, NASB). ✧

Comments

- “I greatly appreciate all your work in promoting the Kingdom (or Empire) of God and exposing the deeply misleading teachings of the counterfeit Christianity that covers the earth. Your writing, as well as others’, have helped me in writing booklets that are, from time to time, advertised in local magazines, as well as a newspaper, which so far has brought no response, but I’ll continue as long as I can.” — *England*

- “We corresponded a few months ago. I was having difficulty with a stressful situation of leaving the religion I was raised in, the organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Even though the battle continues, and I am still undergoing some unpleasant ordeals for the sake of our

Lord (in terms of facing the consequences of leaving the JW’s), I can do nothing but praise God for these trials. In some sense it is very depressing to lose your parents and wife and friends for leaving the religion, but in another sense it is truly invigorating and freeing to serve God the way we know is right. Your videos and the livestreams of ‘Focus on the Kingdom’ on YouTube have been a great source of knowledge and serenity for me. I also enjoy reading the books you have written, and I’m currently reading *Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven*. It truly shows there is an unfortunate lack of understanding in the public in regards to what the Kingdom of God is, as our Scriptures reveal.” — *email*

Romans 10:14-15

“‘How shall they **believe him** whom they have not heard?’ **There is no need to insert the preposition ‘in’ before ‘him’**...A striking feature of this clause is that Christ is represented as being heard in the gospel when proclaimed by the sent messengers. The implication is that **Christ speaks in the gospel proclamation**. It is in this light that what precedes [including Rom. 10:9-10!] and what follows must be understood. The personal commitment which faith implies is coordinate with the encounter with **Jesus’ own words in the gospel message**.”

John Murray, *Romans, New International Commentary*, 1965, p. 58

“Ask any hundred New Testament scholars around the world, Protestant, Catholic, or non-Christian, what the central message of Jesus of Nazareth was, and the vast majority of them — perhaps every single expert — would agree that his message centered in **the Kingdom of God**. Such unanimity of opinion may seem rare among biblical experts these days, when so many conflicting ideas are voiced about most issues. Yet such is the case...The modern investigators agree: The ‘good news’ which Jesus announced had to do with God and his kingdom...”

“But today when we hear about Jesus’ message of the Kingdom of God, it sounds strange to our ears and prompts a multitude of questions...There is a tremendous danger for modern men that Jesus’ teachings and message, as they are heard read in little snatches in church on Sundays...will seem isolated from each other and atomistic. An item here, a ray of light there, a truth somewhere else, but seldom anything to integrate **all of Jesus’ teachings into a whole that makes sense as a totality**...That is why it is so important to see that Jesus had a central message, and that it was about God’s kingdom. For it is **this theme of the Kingdom which integrates all of Jesus’ words and deeds**.”

John Reumann, *Jesus in the Church’s Gospels*, 1968, p. 142-144