

Focus on the Kingdom

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Do Not Misunderstand Paul's Emphasis!

by Kenneth LaPrade, Texas

Personally, as a long term “dispensationalist” (for some thirty or more years), I had been, effectively, an enthusiastic, staunch “Paulist” who sadly misunderstood the key emphases of Paul himself — while tragically neglecting Jesus’ actual teachings! Upon finally becoming aware of the current relevance of Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:1, 14-15) and the vital nature of Jesus’ words (John 12:44-50), I began slowly but surely to **stop** separating Paul’s keen emphasis from Jesus’ foundational Gospel focus. At any rate, it is not too late for anyone to re-evaluate any past misunderstandings of pertinent Scriptural truths and experience the joy of embracing Jesus’ one, clear Gospel of the coming Kingdom of God!

The saddest “dispensational” misunderstanding in my practical life was, perhaps, the subtle separation of Jesus from his own “new covenant” words, strangely leading to the dismissal of Jesus’ vibrant teachings as if they were the bygone relics of a previous “dispensation” (or period of time), in which Jesus supposedly instructed certain Jews about truths **only** relevant to folks before the Day of Pentecost. How wrongly and **dangerously** (Matt. 7:21-27) we (as a dispensational group) misconstrued the currently vital essence of Jesus’ life-giving (John 6:63) words!

We were unfortunately stuck in the pathetic **irony** of boldly confessing “Jesus is lord” with our mouths (Rom. 10:9 — used as an easy, automatic formula), while incongruously **refusing** to heed the lord Jesus’ very own **words** (Heb. 5:9) in practical living! Sadly, stark warnings like this declaration in Luke 6:46 were totally lost on our iron-clad dispensational ears: “Why do you call me, ‘lord, lord’ but don’t do what I tell you to do?”

We “dispensationalists” compounded our grievous error of disregarding Jesus’ words (as if they were “not addressed” directly to Christians) by wrongly portraying Paul as the key presenter of a “new gospel” (of sheer “grace”) which had somehow **replaced** Jesus’ outdated Kingdom emphasis. According to our twisted theories, literal “Kingdom” realities were already decisively “**held in abeyance**” until some future restoration of promises, exclusively to Israel, but they had **nothing** to do with Christians during the current “administration” (or dispensation) of grace!

Nevertheless, despite our mostly nineteenth-century misguided theoretical model (sort of an adaptation of the

theology of E.W. Bullinger), solid biblical evidence speaks loudly to a very different view of Jesus, the four gospels, Paul, and Paul’s writings! I am overwhelmingly thankful, by God’s grace and mercy, to have begun a **corrective** relearning process of Paul’s preaching and teaching — after many years of having adamantly embraced a highly defective **twisting** of “the Gospel of grace”!

The book of Acts solidly and consistently demonstrates that Paul himself continued to be an avid “Kingdom of God” preacher throughout the era when he wrote most of his letters (designated as “Scriptures” in 2 Peter 3:15-16). The book of Acts extends some thirty years beyond the events of the Day of Pentecost, and it repeatedly emphasizes Kingdom of God truths until the end of Acts 28 (despite the dubious theories of modern “dispensationalists”).

Paul himself had clearly **equated** “the Gospel of God’s grace” **tightly** with the continuous “preaching of the Kingdom” in Acts 20:24-25! On top of that bold truth, after extreme, previous suffering in southern Galatia (Acts 14:1-20), Paul and Barnabas were “strengthening the hearts of the disciples, and urging them to remain in the faith. They warned them that getting into **God’s Kingdom** would mean considerable suffering” (Acts 14:22). Paul had also **persuaded** believers **about the Kingdom of God** at Ephesus (Acts 19:8). Without controversy, one does not bother to **persuade** others about the mere historical tidbits of currently outdated norms!

At the end of Acts, some thirty years **after** the Day of Pentecost, Paul was also **still** engaged in very **persuasive** Kingdom dialogues with some leading Jews at Rome (Acts 28:23-24) as well as with all who came to visit him (Acts 28:30-31) during two whole years! “He announced **the Kingdom of God** and taught the things about the lord Jesus the Messiah with all boldness and without restriction” (Acts 28:31). (If one wants to view more of Luke’s Kingdom emphasis in Acts, see Acts 1:2-3, 6-7 and 8:12.)

When Paul, in Galatians 1:6-9, 11-12, reflects on **one, true Gospel message**, he speaks of an untwisted (and non-perverted) Gospel which he had received directly (by revelation) from the lord Jesus! Carefully consider Acts 26:14-16 about what Jesus **would reveal** directly to Paul, which obviously would have included the precise understanding of the one, true Gospel (Gal. 1:12). It is abundantly clear that the Gospel of the Messiah must be the Kingdom Gospel which Jesus

himself declared regarding **our salvation** (Mark 1:1, 14-15, Heb. 2:3). Very far from regarding Jesus' words as outdated or irrelevant to Christians, Paul highly esteemed Jesus' wholesome, healthy words as dynamically **pertinent** to Christian believers: "If anyone teaches other doctrines and does not agree with the health-giving words, namely the teachings given by our lord Jesus Messiah, and thus with the teaching that promotes godliness, he is conceited, understanding nothing" (1 Tim. 6:3-4a).

Even if there is a beautiful truth that we were not at the start "saved" (or initially connected to Jesus: John 15:1-11) by previously done "good works" — so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:4-10) — Paul **never, ever** teaches that "faith" means **doing nothing, in stark contrast** with "works" as meaning "doing stuff"! He never implies that good, fruitful actions are **optional** or not even required (see Eph. 2:10). Such popular but damaging (easy "grace") misconceptions are a wild distortion of Paul's true emphasis on the "obedience of faith" (or genuine **faithfulness**), which clearly brackets the whole book of Romans (Rom. 1:5; 16:26-27; also see again Heb. 5:9).

Before closing this brief study, it might be wise to consider a couple of simple examples of how Paul does, in fact, boldly display some of the "repentance" (Gospel of the Kingdom) truths announced by his lord Jesus! First of all, it is important not to misunderstand the term "repentance" (*metanoia*) itself, which should not be thought of as an antiquated, "religious" designation for perpetually feeling bad or feeling **guilty** (even though one might undergo feelings of remorse while **determining to change** from corrupt, misguided ways and thoughts).

Some translations embed a concise definition of the word "repent" in Mark 1:15: Jesus said, "The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is near. **Change your mindset and lives** [change the way you think and act; change your hearts and minds], and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15).

Even though Paul **does** a few times use such **repentance** terminology (in this same basic sense of **decisive change**) in very few uses (Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:9-10, 2 Tim. 2:25), he often communicates the reality of "repentance" (mental change) using different vocabulary. For example, consider the obedience truths of **deliberate change** taught in Romans 6:11-14 (within the whole context of chapter 6):

"So too consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Messiah Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its lusts, and do not present any parts of your body to sin as evil instruments. Instead present yourselves to God as alive from the dead, and the parts of your body as instruments doing what is right to God. For sin is not to have mastery over you, because you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:11-14).

If one obeys this first commandment given in the book of Romans (6:11), and mentally considers himself (or logically concludes concerning himself) **dead** to sin but alive to God in Messiah Jesus, what has one logically done? He (or she) has **changed** his/her mind (or "repented") toward God and away from sin! If one then determines behaviorally to stop presenting any body parts to sinful tendencies and habits, but instead to commit one's actions to doing what is right before God, what has one done? He/she has **changed behaviorally** (repented) with a mindset and disposition to keep on believing and obeying God! Interestingly, such thoughtful, acted-upon, **repentant, obedient change** (as clearly commanded) is not at all associated with the concept of legalistically trying to "earn one's salvation by frivolous 'works,'" but it **is** linked closely to being **under grace** (v. 14) instead of being under the Mosaic Law!

We will close this brief study by considering a fabulous **Kingdom** passage in Paul's writings, which beautifully exhibits the pinnacle of Christian hope — without directly using "Kingdom of God" vocabulary. We should pause at times, slowly considering this marvelous section before rushing on to the exciting "more than conquerors" conclusion of Romans, chapter 8:

"For I am convinced that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the coming glory which is going to be revealed in us. The creation is eagerly waiting for the public revelation of the children of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from the bondage of decay and share the freedom of the glory of God's children. For we know that the whole creation is groaning and suffering birth pains together until now. Not only creation, but we ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan within ourselves as we wait for God to give us sonship, the redemption of our whole selves. For we were saved in hope. Yet hope which is seen is not hope at all, for who hopes for what they already see? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it and persevere" (Rom. 8:18-25).

We could (without twisting any Scriptures) offer the following question: "Why should we wait eagerly (with perseverance) for the arrival of the Kingdom of God (and the vast transformation of all creation, in perfect ways), if the Kingdom were already here?" ✧

"When Paul talks about faith, he means an obedient faith. Many have stumbled through Romans without ever recognizing the fact that Paul makes that plain in the very beginning of his letter" (Rom. 1:5).

(R.L. Whiteside, *A New Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Saints at Rome*, 1945, p. 83).

The Stalled Mission to Eliminate Hell

How Truth Is Buried

by Barbara Buzzard

It was Edward Fudge who jump-started the debate as to whether eternal conscious torment in hell was a biblical teaching. He asked: “What if the biblical foundations thought to endorse unending conscious torment are less secure than has been widely supposed?”¹ This was nearly 40 years ago!

And for various reasons hell just isn’t as popular as it once was. One reason is this: “A conundrum...continues to tug at the conscience of some Christians, who find it difficult to reconcile the existence of a just, loving God with a doctrine that dooms billions of people to eternal punishment.”²

One noted scholar who has thought this through concurs: “Everlasting torment is intolerable from a moral point of view, because it makes God into a bloodthirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for victims whom He does not even allow to die.”³

As you might imagine, some traditionalists are pushing back, calling this heresy. Some even view it as emotional weakness or sentimentality.

What exactly is being labeled “heresy”? It is the view (biblical, I believe) that after death God will resurrect to immortality those who He recognizes as His by virtue of their allegiance to His Name and to His Son (Heb. 5:9). This view is known as Conditional Immortality and maintains that there is no such thing as innate immortality.

National Geographic in 2016 finds that the once taboo subject of hell is now openly debated by scholars and writers. However, it hasn’t yet progressed to the pews, and we must reckon with the paralyzing power of tradition and the desire of those in power to maintain tradition at all cost.

This fascinating insight in the *National Geographic* article is one of the reasons for my title for this article: “My prediction is that, even within conservative evangelical circles, the annihilation view of hell will be the dominant view in 10 or 15 years.”⁴ I fervently hope his prediction may prove to be correct.

In 2011 a third edition of *The Fire that Consumes* was released with a foreword by Richard Bauckham who had rejected the traditional view of hell as unending torment.⁵ During the 29-year span from the first edition to the third, seventeen leading defenders of the

traditionalist view wrote *twelve* books in opposition to Fudge’s thesis. **Note:** these books regularly quote Bauckham as to why church-goers have abandoned the established view of hell **but they never “fess up” to the fact that Bauckham himself rejected that view!** That is serious misconduct, I should think.

And so it is that this topic which cries out for serious Bible study must be kept “in house” or otherwise under lock and key from the very ones who are to be shepherded by their pastors. All too often pastors function as “thought police.” Truth seekers, tragically, feel the need to ‘back off’ when met with resistance or warnings from their pastors not to “go there.” There is always a price to pay for cowardice, whether it be from the pew or the pastor, and it brings into play the *spirit of error*. That is one reason that Scripture puts such a high priority on Truth.

Eternal Conscious Torment: How Error is Compounded

As one good thing may lead to another, so too the reverse is true. In order for an everlasting hell to exist, there would have to be everlasting lives to put into it. No problem. But whom do you believe:

Augustine: There is a literal lake of fire, where the damned can live “in burning without being consumed, in pain without dying, by a miracle of the most omnipotent Creator.”⁶

Irenaeus: The soul is not inherently immortal. Christians will have immortality through the resurrection of Jesus, and the wicked will be destroyed. “It is the Father of all who imparts continuance forever and ever on those who are saved.”⁷

“The need to correct the traditional doctrine of hell also rests upon considerations of the divine justice. *What purpose of God would be served by the unending torture of the wicked except sheer vengeance and vindictiveness?* Such a fate would spell endless and totally unredemptive suffering, punishment just for its own sake. *Even the plagues of Egypt were intended to be redemptive for those who would respond to the warnings.* But unending torment would be the kind of utterly pointless and wasted suffering which could never lead to anything good beyond it. Furthermore, it would amount to inflicting infinite suffering upon those who have committed finite sins. It would *go far beyond* an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. There would be a serious disproportion between sins committed in time and the suffering experienced forever. The fact that sin has been

¹ Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 1982. Note that F.F. Bruce wrote the foreword to the 1st edition.

² Mark Strauss, “The Campaign to Eliminate Hell,” *National Geographic*, May 2016.

³ Clark Pinnoch, “The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent,” *A Journal from the Radical Reformation*, 1992, 2:1, p. 15.

⁴ Preston Sprinkle, co-author of *Erasing Hell*.

⁵ A full-length feature movie, *Hell and Mr. Fudge*, was released in 2012. Also see rethinkinghell.com

⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. 21, ch. 9.

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.34.3

committed against an infinite God does not make the sin infinite. The chief point is that eternal torment serves no purpose and exhibits a vindictiveness out of keeping with the love of God revealed in the gospel.”⁸

This exercise — not to examine God but to examine *what is said* about God — is so very healthy. We are free to think and to consider and to deny that which makes no sense scripturally. We are allowed to be outraged at the picture which Jonathan Edwards paints of God dangling a sinner over the flames of hell as if he were a loathsome spider.⁹ How is it honoring to God if we are not outraged? How is it honoring to God if we indulge in uncritical following? Believing the lie of the immortal soul? Or *perpetual* torment? This would have to fall into the category of something worse than death.

The practice of our critical faculties within the scope of Scripture is what God requires (Heb. 5:14). This training and practice may well stand us in good stead when in the last days some are being taken in by the peace and prosperity brought by the antichrist. How are we doing in our ability to recognize the counterfeit when we are willing to attribute to God heinous behavior which maligns His character?

John Stott on Hell

Another more modern dissenter to traditional hell is the famous John Stott who said: “I question whether ‘eternal conscious torment’ is compatible with the biblical revelation of divine justice. Fundamental to it is the belief that God will judge people ‘according to what they have done (e.g. Rev. 20:12), which implies that the penalty inflicted will be commensurate with the evil done.”¹⁰

Author Preston Sprinkle says that in his younger days in seminary when he heard that John Stott was an annihilationist, he thought that Stott couldn’t be a Christian and believe that. “I was just reciting, like a parrot, the evangelical narrative regarding anybody who doesn’t toe the line.”¹¹ Years later when he studied the subject of hell himself he was shocked at how little biblical support there was for the traditional view.

In fact Stott ran into not a little opposition. When he was asked if he was going to write anything more on the subject of hell, he replied in essence that he certainly wouldn’t as he had never received so much hell from anything else he had ever written.

Stott offers this thoughtful perspective: “The fire itself is termed ‘eternal’ and ‘unquenchable,’ but it would be very odd if what is thrown into it proved indestructible.”¹²

In 2003 *The Times* (London) said of N.T. Wright: “Durham’s new Bishop abolishes Heaven and the soul.” Which is to say that he abandoned the *traditional* view of heaven and the soul. N.T. Wright says, “We have been fooled, not for the first time, by a view of death, and life beyond, in which the really important thing is the ‘soul’ — something which, to many people’s surprise, hardly features at all in the New Testament.”¹³

Please pause to consider this which commonly passes for Christianity: the *existence of eternal conscious torment would require the existence of an eternal conscious TORMENTOR*.

Critical Information

What about unquenchable fire?¹⁴ That unquenchable fire is not burning today. It went out when there was nothing more to burn. What about undying worms? (Are these immortal worms?) The reference is to maggots which don’t die until they have completed their work (just like the fire). What about “eternal fire”?¹⁵ Since Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by “eternal fire” but are not burning today, we know that eternal refers to the *results* of that fire. Everlasting fire would be the fire of the age — the age to come. Everlasting destruction would be complete and total destruction, not *continuous* destruction which is impossible. The word “destruction” means being destroyed.

“Those three words — *die*, *perish*, and *be destroyed* — are the very words that New Testament writers use most often to describe the final end of the wicked. Isn’t it interesting that most modern believers think they are sure that those who go to hell will *not* die, will *never* perish, and certainly will *never* be destroyed?”¹⁶

Why such a huge issue? What is the driver? “The doctrine of ‘Hell’ was once a vital tool in scaring people into making a decision for Christ during the ‘Great Awakening’ of the eighteenth century...The nineteenth century advances in the disciplines of science, philosophy and religion loosened the grip of tradition from searching minds; finally, hundreds of years of tradition looked set to be overturned. Yet, on both sides of the Atlantic it was *strangely suppressed* by those obsessed with conformity to tradition rather than a commitment to...biblical truth.”¹⁷

Yes, “strangely suppressed,” or stalled, or prevented, or even just excused as we do not require that our clergy “come clean” once they change their views.

“Traditionalists remain steadfast in their belief that ECT [eternal conscious torment] is a pillar of evangelical faith, and some worry that weakening it threatens to

⁸Clark Pinnock, “The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent,” p. 16.

⁹J. Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”

¹⁰John Stott, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*, 1988.

¹¹“The Campaign to Eliminate Hell,” *Nat. Geo.*

¹²Stott, *Essentials*, p. 316.

¹³N.T. Wright, *For All the Saints*, 2003, p. 31.

¹⁴Jer. 17:27; 52:13.

¹⁵Jude 7.

¹⁶Edward Fudge, *Hell, A Final Word*, p. 135.

¹⁷Afterlife.co.nz, emphasis added.

bring down the entire edifice.”¹⁸ They are right, in my estimation, about the threat to and probable toppling of the system, because were it not for the building block of the first lie — the immortal soul — this second lie of eternal hellfire would make no sense and would not be possible. One lie *enables* another.

“Belief in the natural immortality of the soul which is so widely held by Christians, although stemming more from Plato than the Bible, really *drives* the traditional doctrine of hell more than exegesis does. Consider the logic: if souls must live forever because they are naturally immortal, the lake of fire must be their home forever and cannot be their destruction...I am convinced that the hellenistic belief in the immortality of the soul has done more than anything else (specifically more than the Bible) to give credibility to the doctrine of the everlasting conscious punishment of the wicked.”¹⁹

The other side maintain that this doctrine’s lack of proportion should raise a red flag; they say that sin of any nature would merit burning forever. Never mind that Jesus never mentioned unending torment.

“Emotionally, I find the concept (of eternal torment) intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain...As a committed Evangelical, my question must be not what my heart tells me, but what does God’s word say? And in order to answer this question, we need to survey the Biblical material afresh and to open our minds (not just our hearts) to the possibility that Scripture points in the direction of annihilationism, and that ‘eternal conscious torment’ is a tradition which has to yield to the supreme authority of Scripture...I also believe that the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their eternal conscious torment.”²⁰

Hell Hath No Fury: A Little Story About a Big Lie

Not so fast! It is just not that simple. Although one might think that a sincere Truth seeker, when he discovers this Truth, would expect from his superiors and fellows the same blessed relief and rejoicing that he experiences — such is *often not* the case. There is tradition to uphold and proper protocol to be followed. Tradition cannot just be casually challenged or set aside. New Truth or newly seen Truth has to go through the proper channels where it can be harmonized, diluted, re-worked. Where is the “yielding of tradition to the supreme authority of Scripture”?

According to Preston Sprinkle we have a very fear-driven evangelical culture in which you get shunned

unless you toe the party line. He finds it scary. So do I. Especially as it includes the clergy. We have seen this naked fear demonstrated in a non-stance against abortion, much to the detriment of church members, and surely to the disappointment of God.

“I want to repudiate with all the vehemence of which I am capable the glibness, what almost appears to be the glee...with which some Evangelicals speak about hell. It is a horrible sickness of mind or spirit.”²¹

“Surely the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is no fiend; torturing people without end is not what our God does. Does the one who told us to love our enemies intend to wreak vengeance on His own enemies for all eternity?”²²

What should be our role in the face of all of this? Love is not confined to praise and worship but would also dictate defense of Truth, and most importantly the defense of the One we say we love. God’s character is being charged with unbelievable cruelty, even torture. We know that Satan is the accuser of the Christians; he is also the one who accuses God.

What is the reason for the stalled mission to face the truth about hell? Where are the former hell-believing pastors who have embraced Truth and offered this Truth to their congregations? Do we not rejoice when making new discoveries in other fields? Do we, the people, not deserve to know? As you can well imagine, church leaders are fearful that admitting being wrong on this important point of doctrine would cause people to wonder what else might be wrong, and the system would be in danger of collapsing rather like dominoes.

When considering the importance of the truth on this matter, should we not wince in disbelief at the answer of a Reformed (Calvinist) Christianity spokesperson who insists that godly people should find great pleasure in reflecting on the agonies of the damned? May we recoil in horror and not be placid about such viewpoints as his: “Even now, while the evangelical is singing the praises of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, he knows that multitudes are suffering the torments of the damned...The true Christian, aware of this, is happily, exuberantly, gladly praising the Judge of the Last Day, Jesus Christ, who has sentenced to such merited damnation millions of souls.”²³

Such a mindset is abhorrent. The idea that godly people should find great pleasure in knowing of the supposed agonies of the damned should stir us into actively rescuing others and introducing them to the surprising Truths of the Bible. ✧

¹⁸ Strauss, “The Campaign to Eliminate Hell,” *Nat. Geo.*

¹⁹ Pinnock, “The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent,” p. 13-14.

²⁰ John Stott, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Pinnock, p. 8.

²³ John Gerstner, *Repent or Perish*, 1990, p. 32.

My Story

I was born and raised in the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. For 28 years I considered myself loyal to their teachings and to the "Faithful and Discreet Slave," the minds that published them. I was content with the way of life and the focus on the "works that lead to salvation," eagerly waiting for the "conclusion of the system of things" as the Witnesses fervently preached was right around the corner.

I had no reason to question the theological teachings and interpretations. After all, who else in the whole world was as organized as this religion? Who else had uniformity in the teachings? Who else taught the clear truths which I was raised on in the Bible? I had no reason to leave my comfortable life which was surrounded by friends and family I love dearly, and a new wife whom I had just married 6 months prior.

Considering myself studious, and a lover of truth, I had had many questions over the years of studying Scripture. However, my first serious doubts began to set in when I was about 23. A good friend of mine left the organization and was disfellowshipped (shunned) for having a change in his interpretation of the Scriptures. To my unpleasant surprise, he joined a local Calvinist church and began a fervent belief in the Trinity, an idea contrary to the Witness' belief of the unity of God, and a topic which we had discussed (in complete agreement) many times before.

According to a rule of the org, I could no longer speak to my friend. His change of beliefs meant denial of the obvious truths I believed the org taught. However, I could not leave my friend to the wolves of the world, and so, ignoring the rule, I reached out to him. Over the course of a couple weeks, he and I went back and forth, engaging in heated debate over the issue. I had to "save" my friend from this madness.

We would debate verse after verse, and my main arsenal of rebuttal came from the publications of the org that used certain Scriptures to back my Arian-like beliefs. But there were certain questions he raised, certain ideas and concepts which the org either had surface layer reasonings for or made no mention of at all. I then ignored a second rule of the org; I went outside the publications of Jehovah's Witnesses in search of a better understanding. I then became obsessed with the idea of the Trinity, reading everything I could find, and fervently studying and meditating over the doctrine. And then, what began as a quest to "save" my friend soon became a realization of one of the most surprising discoveries in Christology I had ever found — not only was Christ not part of a Trinity, but I discovered he did not even pre-exist at all, as I had been thinking my entire life!

For five years I kept this discovery to myself. I reasoned that either I had more studying to do, or that it was a concept that didn't matter in the end in regard to

salvation. As time passed, and as it became a favorite concept of study, the idea became more and more obvious in Scripture. It wasn't until about February of this year, 2021, that I truly began to "wake up" and connected the truths of Scripture from one to the next. I realized I was living in an organization that did not have the truth.

A great help in this understanding, besides fervent prayer and meditating on the Scriptures, was works by Sir Anthony Buzzard, as well as the plethora of videos on YouTube channels such as Restoration Fellowship, 21st Century Reformation, Brother Kel, and others. The spirit of truth soon set in, and I had woken up, realizing God had indeed called me to be His son, offering me His hand out of the religion.

However, this was all kept to myself for the time being. I knew the repercussions of drama that would ensue if my wife, my family, and the elders of my congregation found out I was reading and watching other material. This hiding of truths was wishful thinking however, and drama ensued when I couldn't contain the beautiful truths that were revealed to me.

One night, my wife found my copy of Buzzard's book *Our Fathers Who Aren't in Heaven* in my nightstand by the bed. After some unpleasant dialogue over my "new-found beliefs," she took the book and began to rip it up in front of me, claiming Satan the Devil was in its words. When I stood firm in my faith, and her words couldn't refute me, she resorted to physical violence and abusive name calling.

I knew all I wanted to do in that moment, and the others that came after, was try to emulate our Lord, and speak with love and with patience, but remain firm in these convictions. So when my parents found out, and more heated discussions came out, tears were shed, and fear closely followed. Accusations of "having the Devil inside me," of having a "selfish and stubborn spirit," of behaving like a fool, and many more were thrown my way. But what stressed me the most was that I knew, according to the teaching of disfellowshipping, I was going to lose my relationship with my family.

I am still undergoing great stress. My wife has chosen to leave me and my parents have chosen to shun me. However, I know that for Christ, "no one has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel, but will receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

The hope of eternal life, when Jesus returns to the earth, ruling with him and all my brothers and sisters, and meeting Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, Paul and many more heroes of faith, in the age to come, brings me great joy. Then the whole world will be filled with the knowledge of God. ✨

Christians Will Be Richly Rewarded

Christians will be vindicated. God loves justice: “For I, the Lord, love justice...I will faithfully give them their recompense and make an everlasting covenant with them. Then their offspring will be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples. All who see them will recognize them, because they are the offspring whom the Lord has blessed” (Isa. 61:8-9). “The Lord has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep His commandments. He will set you high above all nations which He has made, and you will receive praise, fame and honor; you will be a consecrated people to the Lord your God, as He has spoken” (Deut. 26:18-19). “You have been distressed by various trials. The testing of your faith, which is more precious than gold which is perishable, will bring you praise, glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:6-7). ✧

John 14:13-14: “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

“Whatever the disciples ask in His name Christ will do. **This does not mean simply using the name as a formula.** It means that prayer is to be in accordance with **all that the name stands for.** It is prayer proceeding from faith in Christ, prayer that gives expression to a unity with **all that Christ stands for,** prayer which seeks to set forward Christ Himself. And the purpose of it all is the glory of God. Yet notice that this glory is ‘in the Son.’ The two are inseparable, as throughout this paragraph. **That is why prayer may be addressed to either.** It is a characteristic Johannine thought that **the Father and Son are so intimately related that what one does the other does also.** We should not overlook the importance of the fact that Christ says that **He Himself will answer prayer...**

“The true text appears to be ‘if you shall ask me anything in my name.’ **Prayer may be addressed to the Son as well as to the Father.** But it is still ‘in my name.’ The basic condition is the same. Some object to the idea of praying to Christ in His own name, but there is good Old Testament precedent for this in that the Father is appealed to ‘for his name’s sake’ (e.g. Ps. 25:11; 79:9).”

— Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 646

Comment

• “I am stimulated by the description in the August *Focus on the Kingdom* of the truly horrific nature of crucifixion. What perplexes me is how modern worship songs can contain lines such as ‘On the cross when Jesus died, The wrath of God was satisfied.’ To my eyes and understanding this is one of the most misconceived views of Calvary ever written down, and yet condemning this has caused no amount of castigation from other Christians. I have been told I have blasphemed the Holy

Spirit and that Jesus will not accept me at the end of time. This is simply because I refuse to believe that in order to placate this unnaturally angry God of theirs it was necessary to torture to a shockingly inhuman degree His only begotten Son.” — *England*

“Only on the assumption of a **corpus of doctrine which was accepted as authoritative and binding** can we explain the Christian consciousness of the Church’s being a distinct entity in the world over against the Jews and Gentiles (1 Cor. 10:32), and the Church’s missionary zeal in proclaiming the Gospel which was *not* offered as a tentative suggestion to be entertained along with other attractive possibilities but as **God’s unique truth**, without rival or peer, and demanding a full and unreserved commitment...**‘The truth of the Gospel’** was clearly a doctrinal standard to be jealously preserved (see Gal. 2:14) and the **‘law of Christ’** (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21) was a moral directive to be honoured and obeyed...In New Testament times, a **corpus of distinctive doctrine was held as a sacred deposit from God.** The references to such a **web of saving truth** are set forth with a fulness of description and variety of details, although the evidence must not be pressed to suggest that there was anything approaching **the later creeds which are couched in a style and language different from the New Testament.** The following places will show how many terms were used by the early Christians:

- ‘The apostles’ teaching’ (Acts 2:42)
- ‘The word of life’ (Phil. 2:16)
- ‘The standard of teaching’ (Rom. 6:17)
- ‘The words of faith and good doctrine’ (1 Tim. 4:6)
- ‘The pattern of sound words’ (2 Tim. 1:13)
- ‘Sound teaching’ (2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:9)
- ‘The faith’ (Phil. 1:27; Eph. 4:5; Col. 2:6-7; 1 Tim. 6:20-21)
- ‘The truth’ (Col. 1:5; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:18, 25; 4:4)
- ‘The apostolic traditions’ (1 Cor. 11:2; 15:1ff; Gal. 1:9; Col. 2:6; 1 Thess. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:15)
- **‘The Gospel’** (Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 1 Cor. 15:1ff.; Phil. 1:7, 27) [**Mark 1:1, 14-15**]

“Of this doctrinal formulation the following things are said. First of all it is to be held fast, especially in time of doubt and when the tendency to apostasy and denial of the faith is marked...Then, **the deposit of the faith** is to be cherished and handed on to the succeeding generation of believers (2 Tim. 2:2)...In the third place, **the body of doctrine...** is to be utilized in the public proclamation of the Christian message (e.g. 2 Tim. 2:15 **‘the word of truth’**).”

— Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1975, p. 54-57