

Focus on the Kingdom

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Biblical Agency: “Of the Greatest Importance to New Testament Christology”

by Carlos Xavier

The quote in the title is from one of the top biblical scholars of the 20th century, G.B. Caird. Here is his full statement:

“So completely is the ideal Davidic king identified with the purposes of God that he can be dignified with the titles of God himself [e.g., Ps. 45:6]. **This practice of treating the agent as though he were the principal is of the greatest importance for New Testament Christology.**”¹

The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion defines the biblical principle of agency (Heb. *shaliach*):

“The main point of the Jewish law of agency is expressed in the dictum, *a person’s agent is regarded as the person himself* (Ned. 72B; Kidd, 41b). Therefore any act committed by a duly appointed agent is regarded as having been committed by the principal.”

In the Bible we find many examples of this law of agency.

Human Agents of Other Humans

Gen. 43-44: The steward of Joseph is treated by Joseph’s brothers as if he is Joseph himself.

Luke 7:6-10: The friends of the centurion speak as the centurion and are addressed by Jesus as if they are the centurion himself:

“**The centurion sent friends** to say to [Jesus]... ‘I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.’ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed **at him**. Then **the men who had been sent returned** to the house and found the servant well.”

John 3.22 says Jesus was baptizing people, yet the next chapter says, “Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were” (John 4.2).

Philemon 17: Paul tells Philemon to welcome the runaway slave Onesimus “**as though he were me**” (lit. “as me”).

Human Agents of YHWH

In Deuteronomy 29 Moses speaks as God in the first person, as “I”!

“Moses summoned all Israel and said to them.... ‘I have led you forty years in the wilderness. You have not drunk wine or strong drink, that you may know that I am the LORD your God. You are standing today, all of you, before the LORD your God’ (Deut. 29:2-6).

The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges says about this passage: “**here the speaker’s personality is merged in that of the Deity.**”

Joshua is also treated as if he is YHWH Himself: “YHWH your God is the one who will pass before you.... Joshua is the one who will pass before you” (Deut. 31:3).

Joshua 24.1: “Joshua assembled all the tribes [and] they **presented themselves before God.**”

And of course King David is an agent of YHWH:

Ezekiel 37:24: “My servant David will be king over them. And they will all have one shepherd.”

Zechariah 14:9: “YHWH will be king over the entire earth. And on that day He will be one and His name will be one.”

New Testament Christology

In the New Testament, so completely is Jesus identified with his God and Father as His agent that the writers can use “YHWH texts” from the OT and apply them to the Son without confusion. They never imagined some mysterious “plurality of Persons” within the one God of Israel.

So we find Mark opening his Gospel by applying Old Testament texts including Isaiah 40:3 to Jesus in Mark 1:3: “Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.” Similarly, Paul uses Joel 2.32a in Romans 10.13: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

In John 5:30 Jesus says, “I can do nothing on my own authority. As I hear I judge, and my judgment is fair, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of the One who sent me.”

The IVP Bible Background Commentary says about this verse, “Jesus is thus a faithful *shaliach*, or *agent*; Jewish law taught that **the man’s agent was as a man himself** (backed by his full authority), **to the extent that the agent faithfully represented him.**”

¹ *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, 1988, p. 181

Summary

According to the noted Catholic scholar Raymond Brown, “much of the equivalence between Father and Son [in John] is phrased in language that stems from the Jewish concept that the one who is sent (*shaliach*) is completely the representative of the one who sends him. This idea has now been admirably developed by P. Borgen. He points to the rabbinic...legal principle...‘[An agent] ranks as his [master’s] own person.’ **Because Jesus is an agent who is God’s own Son**, John deepens the legal relationship of agent and sender to a relationship of likeness of nature (**still not in philosophical terms, however**).”²

Brown mentioned Norwegian scholar Peder Borgen, who is the expert on this topic. Borgen wrote:

“The basic principle of the Jewish institution of agency is that **‘an agent is like the one who sent him.’** This relationship applied regardless of who was the sender. Thus for example, ‘the agent of the ruler is like the ruler himself.’ Consequently, **to deal with the agent was the same as dealing with the sender himself**: ‘...Then said the king to them, you have not spoken concerning my servant but concerning me.’ (Siphre)

“The saying in **John 12:44** is a very close parallel to the saying by the king in the quotation from Siphre [an ancient Jewish rabbinic study]:

“John: he who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me;

“Siphre: you have not spoken concerning my servant but concerning me.

“Another saying which expresses the same idea, that dealing with the agent is the same as dealing with the sender himself, is found in all four gospels (see Matt. 10:40; cf. Matt. 18:5, Mark 9:37 and Luke 9:48). The Johannine version occurs in 13:20:

‘he who receives any one whom I send receives me; he who receives me receives him who sent me.’”³ ✧

Carlos will debate online:
“Was Jesus Involved in the Genesis Creation?”
 Sunday, March 20 at 7 p.m. EST.
 See kogmissions.com

The Logos: A Plan, Then a Person

by Stanley Paher, Nevada

John 1:1 records that “In the beginning was the word (Greek *logos*), and the word was with God, and the word was God.” Defining *logos* in this verse has long been contested. A word always has a habitat in which it lives. No Bible verse hangs out in thin air without a defining backdrop, the “story behind the text.” Coupling it with the “story in front of the text” brings about a complete picture.

Scholars translate *logos* as speech or writing, book, narrative, a matter or reason, question, purpose, saying, conversation, gospel, wisdom — in all, more than a score of ways, about 260 times throughout the New Testament. A sole exception is a statement in which *logos* is applied in Revelation 19:13 to Jesus.

Logos is inseparable from God’s personality as is a thought from the mind thinking it, the dance instructor’s chart from the dancer. *Logos* is also similar to a play script which becomes embodied in the actor who speaks the part, as did Jesus in obedience to God’s longstanding, all-encompassing oral and written plan to redeem man. In the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4) Jesus became his Father’s earthly human spokesman (John 1:14). Understanding fails if we confuse the dance or the actor with the written script, or imagine that Jesus personally was alive before Genesis.

***Logos* is what was originally in God’s mind.** Thus, the *logos* of John 1:1 expresses the highest of all that is exalted, obtainable and existing — namely, God’s Great Mind, His Creative Plan, His Word/Gospel. *Logos* towers far above all earthly things and embodies a spiritual purpose, a wisdom which was initially set forth by the creative acts of Genesis 1. *Logos* supplies the understanding behind God’s mighty deeds.

If the person Jesus were the eternal *logos* of John 1:1-2, insuperable difficulties arise. As reported in the Gospel of John in Jesus’ own words, Jesus did not reflect his own will but that of his Father (4:34), could do nothing of himself (5:19), judged *only* as directed by his Father (5:22), and possessed *no* authority arising from himself (5:30, 8:28). His work was fully determined by his Father (5:36), his teaching was *not* his own (7:16), he was *lesser* than his Father (14:28), and he was subordinate to the Father in about twenty other ways throughout the Gospel of John.

Hebrews 2:17 declares that Jesus “was made like his brothers and sisters in **every** respect.” All of his brothers and sisters were members of the human race, as also shown in verse 18 where Jesus is described as “tempted”

² *The Gospel According to John*, p. 632.

³ Peder Borgen, “God’s Agent in the Fourth Gospel,” in Neusner, *Religions in Antiquity*, 1968, p. 138.

or “tested.” But God cannot be tempted (James 1:13). Hebrews 7:14 states that Jesus is a descendant of Judah, a son of David, thus a man as in Acts 2:22, 1 Timothy 2:5, and in ten other New Testament occurrences. His self-designation in John 8:40 is emphatic: “a **man** who has told you the truth.” Jesus is therefore not a **personal** eternal *logos* in John 1:1-2. Fundamentalists improperly inject that doctrine into the passage. It does not say, “In the beginning was the Son.”

Logos in Multiple Contexts

To find the meaning of *logos* in John 1:1-2, it is also essential to consider its extra-textual contexts such as the literary and the social, or else proper understanding fails. To verify usage over time, historical development is also indispensable. *Logos* was a familiar literary term at the time Jesus lived and John wrote, and in John 1:1 the Gospel employs *logos* without explanation. This is most significant.

Logos is evidently not a person; it is an idea representing God’s mind and grand eternal purpose to redeem man, His plan of redemption formulated before Genesis. Fundamentalism sees the *logos* of John 1:1 as a distinct person, Jesus, directly fused with verse 14, “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.” It is wrongly assumed that since Jesus is what the *logos* became in verse 14, then verse 1 must refer to Jesus. But we must not read Jesus *back into* verse 1.

John 1:5 uses the neuter noun “light” as a non-person, as an “it” (*auto*). As Jesus bore witness to the light (vv. 7-8), it became a person (*auton*, him) in verse 10. Thus, the word “light” in verse 5 came to be personally the man Jesus in verse 10.

The structure of the noun “light” in John 1:5-10 parallels the arrangement of *logos* in John 1:1, 14. “Light” frames John’s prologue (vv. 1-18). It shines in darkness (v. 5), enlightening every person (v. 9). In the following verse 10 the light becomes masculine singular, which introduces Jesus’ ministry in verses 11-13. Presented grammatically, Jesus is the light originated in God’s *logos*, but he is not yet the *logos* in John 1:1-2.

A commentary on John 1:1 and *logos* is found in the introduction to the epistle of 1 John. There, in 1:1-2 the author wrote five times “what” (or “that which”) the disciples had seen. It was a *what* not a *who*, which existed with God (cp. John 1:1b). What was “with God” (*pros ton theon*) is “the life” mentioned in 1 John 1:2a which was with (*pros*) God. To translate that phrase “face to face” with God does not reflect the original language properly.

Logos in John’s Gospel is also in accord with the biblical model of working from the general to the specific, such as in the statement, “The law and the prophets were until John [the Baptist]; since John the good news of the Kingdom of God is preached” (Luke

16:16). The longstanding annual Passover meal foreshadows the truth that Jesus *is* our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). The righteousness of God became embodied in Jesus as our righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). In Galatians 3:25 faith is seen as embodied in Jesus: “now that faith has come.”

Throughout history there have been many ways that God’s will has been displayed, and from the first century onward it bears witness to the Son (Heb. 1:1-3). Moses furnished Torah, but now the obligation of covenant people is to “**listen to him**,” Jesus (Matt. 17:5). Similarly, the *logos* of John 1:1 refers to God’s great redemptive plan of salvation, His Gospel, which in verse 14 became visibly the person of Christ Jesus. Further, in Mark 9:7 God did not say, “This is My beloved *logos*,” but rather “My beloved Son.” ✧

Blasphemy!

by Lonnie Craig, Arkansas

I have heard this question posed on several occasions in the past: Why do you never hear people use the name of Hitler or Stalin as a swear word, yet you hear the name of Jesus being used on the same level as dung?

I am not innocent in this, as I have used my fair share of bad language in the past, and it still comes out of me from time to time today. This is why I have told every church congregation that I have had the privilege to speak to, to forgive me if a word slips during one of my messages (there’s a story behind that; maybe I’ll tell it another time). And yes, I have sadly used God’s name and title as a swear word, and have done the same thing that so many today have done — put the name of Jesus Christ, the name above all names, on the same level as (to quote the evangelist Ray Comfort) a four-letter filth word to express disgust.

It is especially weird to hear those who don’t believe in God do this. They are the ones who say that God doesn’t exist, that Jesus is a sham and a liar and such, so if there is one group of people who you would think would not bother with using such names as swear words, it would be the atheists (or, at the very least, the village atheists; there is a BIG difference between an ordinary atheist and a village atheist). It is on a fundamental level no different from using Barbie and Ken as a swear word, because they don’t exist either, do they? Sure, you can go to the toy store or shop online for one of their dolls, but neither Barbie nor Ken are real people. Yet the person who says that Barbie and Ken and God don’t exist will never use Barbie and Ken’s name as a swear word, but have no qualms about using God’s name or title as one. I don’t know about you, but I find it really odd. But hey, maybe I’m just stupid, right?

Or is there something else at play here? Is there a reason why even those who deny God's existence still use His name in such a manner? I think there is, and the answer is much simpler than we may think. It is because blasphemy only works if the thing that is being blasphemed has any power. Hitler and Stalin have no power, because they are dead. Barbie and Ken have no power because they are fictional dolls. Jesus is alive, and therefore has power.

We need to remember one important premise concerning the spirit of the age: it wants to be independent of God and His law. It wants to question what God said, whether what God actually said is good or not, and then proceed to make up its own rules, using its own authority as the basis for its rules: "Did God really say, 'You shall not commit adultery'? Well, that's such an unfair and unjust law, isn't it? I mean, love is love, right? So if you want to commit adultery, or not, that's fine. Just do what YOU want to do. You are your own god, you are your own authority, and you can dictate what is right and wrong for yourself. So if you don't want to commit adultery, or if you want to say that it is 'wrong,' go ahead. No one is stopping you except yourself."

One way that the sinful mind, which is hostile to God (Rom. 8:7), can establish its own autonomy, its own authority over itself, is through blasphemy. This is not a perfect analogy, but it is a lot like what I heard was the purpose and origin of "Pollack jokes." Remember them from when you were growing up? "How many Pollacks does it take to repair a basement window? Four — one to fix the window, and three to dig the hole so they can put the ladder in it and climb up to the basement window." I remember reading that Pollack jokes came into existence in Germany in the 1930s as a way to get the German people to laugh at Polish people, because if you can laugh at a particular group of people and get enough people to laugh at them, eventually you won't be as shocked or outraged when the authorities come along and exterminate them. "After all, they are just animals, those dumb Poles! I mean, did you hear the one about the Pole who finished last in the Indianapolis 500? He had to make a hundred pit stops just to ask for directions! How stupid of them!"

See how that works? Laugh at them, demean them, ridicule them, look at them as being less than human, and then you can do anything you wish to them. No one cares about a lion devouring an antelope, or a boot that steps on an ant, right? So who cares about what happens to the Jews or the Poles or any other group of people, if they get sent to the gulags and poisoned? And what about those crazy Christians? They sure are idiots as well, aren't they, praying to an imaginary unicorn in the sky! Let's put them away as well like the animals they are!

So if you use God's name or title as a swear word, if you use Jesus's name as a substitute for fecal matter, you are doing the same thing as those who ridiculed and insulted people groups did. You are taking the most serious being in the universe, and the son of the most serious being in the universe, who are not at all to be trifled with (see Psalm 2), and making them into jokes, and really wicked jokes as well. If you make them into jokes, well, you don't have to take them seriously. "Did God really say, 'Do not commit murder'? Who is this God, this imaginary being, to tell ME what to do? This 'God' of yours is a joke, right?"

In effect, blasphemy is a power play, an attempt to make God into a spectator rather than the ruler. Do this, and you can get God to do anything you wish, and you can get His followers to do anything you wish.

This is why you don't hear people blaspheme the name of Hitler. Hitler is dead. Hitler cannot do anything here and now. People cannot do anything to express their dominance over Hitler because they *already* are dominant over Hitler! The living, after all, are better off than the dead (as the Teacher once said, a live dog is better off than a dead lion, Ecc. 9:4), and the dead have no power whatsoever (no, you don't have to worry about a zombie apocalypse; the dead are dead and outside of the trumpet call of God, they aren't coming back).

But our God is alive, and so is His Son. May I suggest that we don't treat His holiness or character as a joke? May I suggest that while we are called to live joyously and to be happy, that we are called to do those things within the confines of God's holiness. If we don't treat the name or title of God, or the name or title of His Son, with the due reverence and honor it deserves, we run the risk of blasphemy.✧

Not in God's Name

by Barbara Buzzard

Lonnie's excellent article compels me to write as well. The ubiquitous "OMG" is heard everywhere and by all peoples. That is not surprising. What is surprising is that it is said by Christians as well! I am always tempted to ask: "Is that the One God of the universe that you are referring to?" Or "Is that the God Who we are to reverence?" Somehow we are not making the connection between the One God we profess to worship and what comes out of our mouths. The opposite of reverence is desecration. Are we not vandalizing God's name by using it in a flippant, thoughtless way?

The disconnect between the use of "OMG" and "Hallowed be thy name" cannot be plainer.

"Thy name" includes everything about the character of God, what He stands for, Who He is. It is not simply a reference to the proper name of God.

There is no way around this by excusing yourself because you didn't say "Oh, Jehovah" or "Oh, Yahweh."

Stop and ask yourself if you say "OMG." If so — STOP IT! Since I find it offensive, I cannot even imagine how very offensive it is to God. Reverence for God (and therefore for His name) should be a marked characteristic of a Christian.

Hearing "OMG" is utterly predictable. People say it when they are surprised, when they are frightened, when they are delighted, when they are met with tragedy, or with triumph. They say it about hamburgers, about scenic wonders, about unfolding events and about goofy things. They say it casually, formally, and at all times in between, for failure and for success. (Do atheists say it? You bet!) Are we so dumbed down that we can think of no other words to say? Are we so failing at self expression that we can only copy what is said millions of times a day by unthinking people? Are our vocabularies so impoverished that we have no other words?

We should be helping our children to cope with ideas, events and life's surprises with a more intelligent approach than the "OMG" one. Teaching children to have reverence for their Maker is one of the wisest courses of action we could take.

Bonus point: you will sound much more intelligent if you don't say "OMG." ✧

Matthew 28:19

"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the holy spirit."

That is how Matthew 28:19 reads in all existing manuscripts. This text is so well-attested that Bruce Metzger in his *Commentary on the Greek text* doesn't even mention it as showing any sign of corruption. Yet some still deny this reading. "There is no manuscript support for their contention" (NET Bible).

The *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* summarizes the issues:

"It is often affirmed that the words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost are not the *ipsissima verba* [exact words] of Jesus, but...a later liturgical addition...On the other hand, **the words are found in all extant manuscripts**...It may well be that the true explanation...is that the words of 28:19 **were not originally meant by our Lord as a baptismal formula**. He was **not giving instructions about the actual words**

to be used in the service of baptism, but...was indicating that the baptized person would by baptism **pass into the possession of** the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. There is good evidence that the Greek idiom *eis to onoma* ('into the name' not 'in the name') could convey this meaning."⁴

Everett Ferguson agrees: "in Matthew it too may be **descriptive rather than formulaic**. If Matthew 28:19 is **not a formula**, then there is no necessary contradiction to the description 'in the name of the Lord' in Acts and Paul."⁵

The scholars who argue that we don't have the original reading of Matthew 28:19 often cite Eusebius (d. 340 AD). Eusebius sometimes quoted the passage as: "Go, and make disciples of all nations in my name."⁶ But the fact is that Eusebius also sometimes quoted the verse as "Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."⁷ He cited it in both the long and short forms. And Eusebius commonly shortened passages when quoting Scripture.

As Everett Ferguson writes, "Consideration of Eusebius' method of citing Scripture (omitting phrases he counted irrelevant and blending phrases from other passages he counted pertinent) deprives the argument for a shorter text of any validity."⁸

The existing form of the verse in all manuscripts does not describe Trinitarian doctrine. It certainly does not say, "God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, and these three Persons are one God." It is by no means a Trinitarian proof-text.

If Matthew 28:19 is the best example of the Trinity in the New Testament, we may confidently agree with the Trinitarian scholars who admit that "there is not even one proof text, if by proof text we mean a verse or passage that 'clearly' states that there is one God who exists in three persons!"⁹ And "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 of the New Testament."¹⁰

In other words, **Matthew 28:19 is neither Trinitarian nor a formula!** ✧

⁴ *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, I, p. 275.

⁵ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 2009, p. 136.

⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Oration of Emperor Constantine*, 16, 8; *Church History*, 5, 2.

⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Letter on the Council of Nicea*, 3; *Against Marcellus*, 1; *Ecclesiastical Theology*, 3; *Theophania*, 4.

⁸ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 2009, p. 134.

⁹ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 89.

¹⁰ Hanson, *The Image of the Invisible God*, p. 87.

Spirit, Mind, Word, and Regeneration

The parallel between “heart” and “spirit” in the Hebrew Bible points strongly to the spirit as the very self of God operating in our hearts, the heart of the Christian providing a residence for the creative activity of God — His spirit (2 Cor. 1:21-22). How very much more personal is the idea that God shares His very heart with us, rather than simply His power. The latter, without further definition, sounds cold and impersonal and brings nothing of the warmth and intimacy conveyed by the “heart.” The God of Israel put His heart in the Temple (1 Kings 9:3). He shares the plans of His heart with every generation (Ps. 33:11).

Spirit and mind are also most interestingly interchanged, telling us again that God transmits to us the center of His being. When Paul marveled at the divine Plan, he quoted Isaiah 40:13: “Who has directed the spirit of the Lord or as his counselor has informed him?” Paul was happy to cite the verse as the LXX had rendered it. Spirit had been translated as “mind” (see Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 2:16). The equation of spirit and mind is found also in Paul’s illuminating discussion of the spirit in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 where spirit and wisdom are interchanged and the passage comes to its climax with Paul’s joy over the Christian possession of “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16).

Spirit and mind are again closely related when Isaiah speaks of the time coming when “those who erred in mind [lit. spirit] will know the truth and those who criticized will accept instruction” (Isa. 29:24). The absence of “holy spirit” led to a failure of understanding. They will receive indeed a new heart and a new spirit dramatically affecting their power to reason and grasp truth. John’s preference for “the spirit of the truth” as the designation of the holy spirit/counselor reminds us that truth is the essential characteristic of the holy spirit, which is the mind, heart and character of God as His operational presence with believers.

“Word” is intimately linked with spirit. Just as breath carries the audible voice, so words transmit the spirit and the thought of God. “To whom have you uttered words and whose spirit was expressed through you?” asks Job (26:4). Words are the audible form of the spirit which inspires them. Likewise in Proverbs 1:23 Wisdom declares; “I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.” The words are the words of the spirit, recalling Jesus’ striking statement that “the words I speak to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63). Indeed it was the unparalleled measure of the spirit in Jesus which enabled him to “speak the words of God”

uniquely (John 3:34; cp. 2 Sam. 23:2). In the Bible, therefore, we have a collection of “spirit-words”: indicators of the very life and thought processes of God Himself, imparting His very being to us. All Scripture, written words, is “inspired” by God (2 Tim. 3:16).

This fundamental biblical terminology is nowhere more critically important than in the definition of regeneration, the doctrine of Christian rebirth. It is here that the Bible dictionaries often fail to root the vital facts about rebirth in the teaching of Jesus, with whom this central doctrine originates. The parable of the sower is given immense prominence and space in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and Mark reports Jesus as saying that this parable is the basis of all parables (Mark 4:13). It is also the most important passage for understanding the process of regeneration. The spirit is not mentioned in the parable but the activity of the spirit is implied in the “word” which must lodge in the human heart, just as seed germinates in the soil.

In the world of the Bible the spirit is the life of God communicated by a “word.”¹¹ The word is the medium of the spirit, and the word in Jesus’ parable about regeneration is expressly said to be “the word about the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:19). No other word will do. The spirit as the character and mind of God is planted in the human heart and understanding when receptive minds grasp the saving Gospel of the Kingdom.

To miss this point is virtually to miss the intention of the whole of our New Testament. One can discuss at length (as Bible dictionaries do) the teaching of Peter that it is the “seed” of the Gospel which causes the believer to be born again (1 Pet. 1:23-25). One can speak of John’s account of Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus in which the spirit is the agent of the rebirth. One can refer to James’ discussion of regeneration through the “word of Truth” (James 1:18) and to John’s allusion to the vital “seed of God” as the indispensable factor in the new life (1 John 3:9).

But little progress in understanding is achieved if the Gospel as Jesus taught it, on which the Apostles depend, is omitted from the discussion. Yet this is precisely the case in much contemporary teaching about regeneration: The “seed-word of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:11) provides the initiating spark of life on which the new creation depends. No wonder that Jesus observed that “when anyone hears the word of God [the Gospel of the Kingdom, Matt. 13:19], the Devil comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart, so that he cannot believe it and **be saved**” (Luke 8:12). When delivering this marvelous teaching, Jesus would customarily raise his voice for maximum emphasis (Luke 8:8).

¹¹ Cp. Ps. 33:6; 51:11; 104:30; 139:7; 2 Sam. 23:2; Prov. 1:23

Apparently, according to Jesus' illuminating intelligence report, there has been a dramatic theft of the vital seed of regeneration provided by the Gospel of the Kingdom as Jesus preached it. Bible dictionaries and "theologies" of the NT, valuable as they are in so many ways, attest to that loss. They fail to tell us that without the intelligent reception of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, no planting of the divine seed takes place, and no spirit of new life is communicated. When this tragedy occurs the very self of God, His spirit, is denied to the potential convert. As E.F. Scott says so well:

"A word in the Bible is something real and active...a vehicle of living power. Through His word God communicates some part of Himself. His energy passes over into matter previously dead or into human souls, which are then awakened to newer and higher activities. A similar quality is ascribed by John to the words of Jesus."¹²

For Jesus the key issue is our responsiveness or non-responsiveness to the life-imparting "word of the Kingdom," the saving Message (Matt. 13:19; Mark 1:14-15). Nothing else ultimately matters. ✧

Paul and the Parable of the Sower

"In Col. 1:6 Paul speaks of **the word of the gospel** bearing fruit and growing...from the day you heard it.' The phraseology is reminiscent of Jesus' **parable of the sower**, especially as the parable is interpreted in the Gospels in terms of 'the word' [of the Kingdom] that is 'heard' and 'bears fruit'...Other possible echoes of the parable are in 1 Thes. 1:6 and 2:13. Paul speaks in 1:6 of the Thessalonians as 'imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit' and in 2:13 of them accepting 'the heard word' (literally 'the word of hearing') as the word of God. **The similarity to the parable of the sower, as it is interpreted in the Gospels, is notable.** We find in common:

- the theme of 'the word,' that is, the word of God [of the Kingdom] at work in people,
- an emphasis on 'hearing' (cf. Rom. 10:14, 17),
- the idea of 'receiving' the word, and
- an association of hearing with both 'joy' and 'tribulation,' the same Greek words being used in 1 Thessalonians and the synoptics.

"The parallels are such as to make it possible, at least, that Paul is echoing the parable of the sower in Col. and 1 Thess., and it could be that Paul's general emphasis on the saving word of the gospel is associated with the parable" (David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* p. 86-87).

Comments

• "Thank you very much for sending me *Focus on the Kingdom*. I assure you that I have been receiving and reading them. In Tanzania we are getting on well." — *Tanzania*

• "Just finished reading your last edition of *Focus on the Kingdom*. Always good to hear Kingdom truths and the true faith that is the gospel (Good news) in our day, which prayerfully will change soon to realization. Barbara's article 'Unmasked' gave extra light. I knew that judging meant something different than what most teach today, but Barbara expressed it in a lot better way. And it does bring out an element that is very important, that judging be done with the right motive, that of discerning and not condemning. Then her opening quotation: 'It is now possible in this country to carry on the expected work of a Protestant congregation with no reference to the Bible whatsoever.' Wow, where has it all gone to. Not that this is surprising to me for the evidence is everywhere. For them to openly admit that, it is telling that they evidently must know that they've so successfully blinded the people that the people don't realize what was just said. Or they just don't care. 'I'm saved you know, so what's the difference,' seems to be the attitude. Mercy, from sola Scripture to NO Scripture, a complete turnaround. Rightly did Jesus say, in Luke 18:8 'When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?'" — *Canada*

• "I've been a Jehovah's Witness for 40 years, always having doubts. Now I am completely out and searching for something that makes sense and is Bible based. I think I have found it. It is the high control of the Witnesses that is bad. I shunned my 2 older children for 15 years because I thought it was the right way to please Jehovah. I will continue following your teachings and will be like a Berean. I do not want to be thrown off again." — *Canada*

• "I continue to learn reading the magazine. The Greater Glory will come one day. That is the hope of believers." — *New Jersey*

• "I am writing to you to receive your newsletter. I am of the unitarian faith, the monotheistic faith of the Lord Jesus (Mark 12:29). I am in prison and when trying to be a witness or spread the true biblical faith it is hard without much material. I believe the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity is a false religion that violates all sound doctrine of Scripture and the life and teaching of Christ, and the holiness of the Eternal God." — *North Carolina*

¹² "Word," *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, 1917, Vol. 2, p. 838.